How might interculturality be developed in an Australian primary school?

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University
January 2019
Abstract

In multicultural Australia, intercultural understanding and capability are included in national and state education policy and curriculum as a means of understanding cultural diversity and contributing to social cohesion (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008; Scarino et al., 2009; Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [ACARA], 2012; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, [VCAA] 2013a). The concept of interculturality, that is the processes by which such understanding and capability are developed and are evident in practice (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Koegeler-Abdi & Parncutt, 2013; Dervin, 2016), was investigated in this study through an examination of the practices of principals and teachers in one school.

The study is set in Ackenham Primary School, a small inner-urban school in Melbourne, Australia. The school was established to provide for the educational needs of newly arrived refugees and migrants. Most of the students’ families at the time of the study were from countries in the Horn of Africa, predominantly Somalia. The study was marked by the tenure of three principals, the introduction of a new Australian Curriculum, and a shifting education policy landscape. Furthermore, the school was staffed by a comparatively high number of early career teachers.

The Theory of Practice Architectures (Kemmis, 2009; 2012; Kemmis & Mutton, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014) and the concept of the Education Complex (Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015; Kemmis et al., 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014) were employed as the theoretical lenses. Theory of Practice Architectures posits the idea that a school is a social form ‘held in place by the combined effect of social practices’ and shaped by the practice arrangements, practice traditions and the practice landscape (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 2-5). The introduction and success of a large-scale reform in schooling, therefore depends on influencing and transforming local practice arrangements or ‘practice architectures’ to support the reform.

The findings, based on field observations, interviews with principals and teachers, student and teacher focus groups and text analysis, show that the interculturality is likely to be present in practice architectures that fosters school community solidarity for inclusion and justice, is based on agreed values and educating for the common good i.e. shared moral purpose. It is also when the principals and teachers see themselves as intercultural learners.
and work cooperatively, using complementary practices that test their assumptions about themselves and their identities that they move beyond just knowing about the differences towards interculturality, that is a state where engagement, open-mindedness, reflexivity and shared cultural expression are present in every-day practices. While in this case the development of interculturality was influenced by the site, challenging student behaviours and the commitment and ability of leaders and teachers, ill-conceived and poor education policy, and a broader context of ongoing and grinding structural disadvantage and made this aspiration more challenging to implement. Furthermore, for small schools like Ackenham catering for newly arrived refugees and migrants, an emphasis on performativity and standards in schooling can be both exhausting and demoralising, particularly when coupled with prevailing negative discourses about refugees and the conflation of culture and religion.

This thesis argues that while interculturality is likely to contribute to the practical and cultural pluralism towards which many schools strive, the implementation of curriculum aspirations such as intercultural understanding and capability are conceptually and pragmatically underdeveloped. While such findings are consistent with other studies (Halse et al., 2015), the use of the Theory of Practice Architectures, within a site-based approach shows promise as a way of developing interculturality.
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Acknowledgements

Thank you to the principals, staff and students of Ackenham Primary School who generously contributed to this study. Schools are exceptionally busy and complex places. Ackenham is more complex than most and I don’t underestimate the privilege I was afforded through this research. Thank you.

To my supervisory team who were a great support and maintained a positive and optimistic outlook throughout. Thank you to Christine Halse, who walked into the then Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in mid-2012, with a research proposal that initially struggled to gain traction. She refused to say no and her determination resulted in the Doing Diversity project, which gave me the opportunity for this study. Christine got me started, kept to a monthly meeting schedule and encouraged and guided me at the beginning. She also gave me some hard lessons in research and academic writing along the way which I appreciate much more now than I did at the time. To Joanne O’Mara who has been there throughout the process, who met with me regularly, provided invaluable feedback, and to whom I am truly indebted. Thank you to my associate supervisors, Catherine Hartung, who also gave me so much encouragement at the beginning and to Michiko Weinmann and Ben Whitburn who read and critiqued my drafts and generously provided their insights and expertise in the later stages of this study.

I have been fortunate enough to have two great sets of colleagues along the way. First the wonderful academics from the Doing Diversity team, including my fellow ‘PhDers’, who helped shaped my thinking and so willingly involved me in the research and scholarly development. I am also indebted to my fantastic colleagues at the Department of Education and Training who have patiently supported me along the way. To my managers, Alan McLean initially, and then Connie Andreana who allowed me to be part of the Doing Diversity research, a rare and precious opportunity, and then along with Jodie Eden-Jones, supported my study leave over five years while working full-time. To my other Department colleagues who have encouraged me and had to pick up my work along the way, I am truly grateful.

The practical implications and study process have been felt by my wife Johann more than anyone else. Most of the reading and writing was done in the early morning, on weekends and holidays which have impacted severely on our time together. Most of our plans were put
on hold and I truly appreciate her patience and support during what was a particularly difficult
time for her.

My children David and Siobhan, daughter-in-law Hayley and mum, Patricia who always gave
me gentle reassurances and confidence. Also, to my grandson, Sam who has so enriched me
since he was born in 2017 and provided a new sense of purpose and pride.

I would also like to acknowledge my father Don, who passed away in 2004. He left school in
Year 8 but put a lot of value in learning and passed this on to me. He is still an inspiration for
me and would have been very proud of what has been achieved.

Thank you all.

Gary
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List of Acronyms

ABS — Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA — Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ARC — Australian Research Council
AITSL - Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership
DEECD — Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DET — Department of Education and Training
DEST – Department of Education Science and Training
DPC – Department of Premier and Cabinet
CALD — Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
ICU — Intercultural Understanding
LBOTE — Language Backgrounds Other Than English
MCEETYA — Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAPLAN – National Assessment and Performance in Literacy and Numeracy
SES — Socio-economic Status
VASSP – Victorian Association of Secondary School Principals
VIT – Victorian Institute of Teaching
VCAA - Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCEF - Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission
VRQA - Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority
Chapter 1  Introduction

Work in progress  Interculturality in Australian schooling

Cultural and ethnic diversity is a characteristic of Australian schools and a focus of Australian education policy and curriculum (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008; Department of Education, Employment and Training [DEECD], 2009; Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [ACARA], 2011a; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA], 2014). As the shape and complexity of this diversity changes, preparing and supporting principals and teachers with the understanding and skills necessary for teaching in and administering contemporary Australian schools is critically important (Toner, 2010; Walton et al., 2014; Noble & Watkins, 2014; Halse et al., 2015; Harrison, 2017).

In response to this trend, interculturality has become an increasingly relevant concept in Australia in recent years (Quality Teaching Programme, 2005; Noble, 2011; Levey, 2012), and being interculturally competent is desirable for students in Australian schools (ACARA, 2011a; VCAA, 2012). This is, in part, demonstrated through the inclusion of the general capability of ‘intercultural understanding’ in the first Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2012) and ‘intercultural capability’ in Victoria’s version of this curriculum, the Australian Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AusVELS) (VCAA, 2014). Dervin, (2016, p 1) describes interculturality ‘as a process and something in the making’ and an essential dimension of the day to day practices of schools. He claims that interculturality in education offers the kind of critical awareness and reflexivity required to respond to racism or injustice and in making schools more inclusive. It is therefore through interculturality that such ambitions as intercultural understanding and intercultural capability are realised (Koegeler-Abdi & Parnscutt, 2013) and where ‘interactive and reciprocal cooperation’ is evident (Greenfields & Ryder, 2013, p 113).

While interculturality is not new, it is a difficult concept to convey or define (Koegeler-Abdi & Parnscutt, 2013; Alexander et al., 2014; Dervin, 2016). Furthermore, the introduction of mandated intercultural dimensions to Victorian and Australian curricula takes place when there is limited research about what interculturality looks like in practice (Halse et al., 2015), particularly as it relates to primary schools (Freeman et al., 2012; Walton et al., 2014).
This study addresses these gaps by examining the professional practices of principals and teachers in one Australian primary school over three years as they relate to the development of interculturality. The lens of the Theory of Practice Architectures and the companion theory of ecologies of practice (Kemmis, 2012b; Kemmis et al., 2014) are used to analyse and discuss the data. Examining the development of interculturality through the experience of one school can help develop greater insight into how interculturality is both understood and enacted in practice. There are no other studies I could find that focussed explicitly on interculturality in a context of this nature, that is, a school that experienced the effects of residualised poverty and disadvantage and where the majority of the student population is made up of a cohort of black African-Australian students. The central aim of the study was to find out what can be learned from this school, guided by the central question, ‘How might interculturality be developed in an Australian primary school?’ and the four research sub-questions.

- In what ways did the school context and policy conditions influence the development of interculturality?
- How did the change in leadership and vision influence the development of interculturality?
- How did the staff understand and relate to interculturality in this context?
- How might the Theory of Practice Architectures help us understand the presence and attributes of interculturality in a school?

**The context**

The school under investigation, hereby known as ‘Ackenham Primary School’\(^1\), was one of 12 schools involved in the Australian Research Council Linkage Project (ARCLP 120200319, 2013-2015). ‘Doing Diversity: Intercultural understanding in primary and secondary schools’ (Halse, Mansouri, Moss, Paradies, O’Mara, Arber, Denson, Arrowsmith, Priest, Charles, Cloonan, Fox, Hartung, Mahoney, Ohi, Ovenden, Shaw & Wright, 2015). This project investigated the processes and strategies used to generate intercultural understanding in a variety of school contexts and reported on those factors that facilitated or impeded such development.

\(^1\) This is a pseudonym.
Ackenham was established in the 1970s next to a public housing estate in the suburb of ‘Cossington’\(^2\) to provide for the early education needs of newly arrived refugees and migrants (Education Department, 1968). Over time, successive waves of migrants from different countries and cultural and ethnic backgrounds have attended the school. Many of the students in the study were black African Muslims from countries in and around the ‘Horn of Africa’. These families mostly lived on the housing estate that provided accommodation for low income families, particularly, but not exclusively for, migrants since the 1960s. The estate has a history of social and environmental problems, leading to public safety concerns, including crime and drugs (Hulse, Herbert & Down, 2004). In recent years however, the immediate suburban environment of Cossington has become gentrified as house prices have increased (Property prices, 2018) dramatically in the inner-urban areas. For Ackenham however, this has not resulted in a corresponding rise in enrolment of children from wealthier families.

In addition to these demographic, cultural and religious dimensions, Ackenham had experienced significant turnover of staff that included six principals over six years, including three changes in school leadership over the three years of this study. Furthermore, the school was staffed by a comparatively high number of early career teachers, who, in contrast to the students, tended to be from white European Australian backgrounds.

Adding to this complexity, during the first year of this study, the Australian Government introduced the inaugural Australian Curriculum in collaboration with all states and territories. Coincidentally the DEECD in Victoria embarked on reform focussing on increased school autonomy around the same time, which placed higher expectations on schools’ academic performance and accountability as is illustrated in the following quote:

> The best school systems complement high levels of autonomy with effective accountability and support mechanisms. Government schools will be provided with greater flexibility to develop the means to achieve improved learning, supported by access to excellent data and information about good practice. The

\(^2\) This is a pseudonym.
Department will intervene in cases of local failure to deliver acceptable results (DEECD, 2013a, p 15).

These reforms came at a time when the collection and use of centralised data was increasingly emphasised and more was being demanded from school performance in terms of raising student achievement (Lingard et al., 2016), particularly in the disciplines of literacy and numeracy (DEECD, 2013b). For a school such as Ackenham, which already had fluctuating and low student enrolments and whose student achievement results for the National Assessment and Performance in Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] were in the bottom range, even when measured against ‘like schools’, (ACARA, 2013c) the challenge of developing interculturality was set against many other pressing priorities.

This is a story of struggle and adaptation as the staff grapple with issues of culture, identities and religion. In this environment, the practical realities of education provision in a performative and competitive market in the context of social and economic disadvantage are amplified. The development of interculturality is part of this story.

**Finding my place in this field**

In my various roles over many years, as a student, teacher, researcher and public servant working on education policies and programs, I have experienced the effect that a lack of interculturality in schooling can have on young people and teachers. My schooling began in a small government primary school in a mining town positioned on the edge of an open cut brown coal mine. My family on my father’s side had migrated to Australia from Scotland in the 1930s, where my grandfather found work as a dredger driver in the mine and my grandmother managed the home (which began as a tent) and five children. My mother’s father, a second-generation Australian of English heritage, had also come to the area for work in the 1920s. My maternal grandmother was born in England and migrated to Australia as a child, and she too fulfilled domestic responsibilities in the home and for four children.

The region in country Victoria was and is still dedicated to electricity power generation and attracted people locally and from around the world because of prospects of high employment (up until the 1990s). Many of my peers at school were from families where one or both parents who had come to Australia from countries like Yugoslavia, Serbia, Lithuania, Estonia,
Italy, Greece, Poland and Malta post World War 2 to find work and establish themselves in a new country. Some of these people had arrived as refugees and were formally regarded as ‘displaced persons’ (DP) after having been interned or forcibly ‘evacuated’ by the Nazis or had fled communist insurgences in the aftermath of the war. Several camps had been established on the outskirts of town to accommodate the DPs. I partly realised then and as I know now, their experience of integrating into Australia during this time was not easy and their early experiences were at times characterised by a degree of prejudice, discrimination and violence (Sestokas, 2010). While the school was filled with children from diverse backgrounds, albeit predominantly from European countries, I was not aware of any efforts to promote multiculturalism or any multicultural education. History and geography lessons, throughout my schooling, were taught from the British and colonial Australian perspectives. The designated reading texts at each grade level reinforced these narratives of the empire and colonisation. Such experience resonated with my Scottish and English heritage, and I did well. This, however, was not the experience of other children at the school. I remember the ridicule that some faced when they wanted to play soccer and not Australian Rules Football [AFL], or when children brought lunches with unfamiliar foods that were different from the ubiquitous “Vegemite sandwich”. In this sense, my schooling experience and lived experience of these times reflected a very narrow view of the world and Australia’s place in it.

In developing this dissertation, I also reflected on my schooling experiences as a young teacher in an inner metropolitan government secondary school. Most of the parents of students in my Year 7 home group were born outside Australia and came from countries such as Lebanon, Vietnam, Cyprus and Palestine mostly to escape conflict and difficult economic circumstances during the 1960s and 1970s. In my first year at the school, I remember two students arriving from Greece mid-term who spoke no English. Fortunately, I had the support of a Greek language aide for a few hours a week, but mostly I was on my own. Apart from responding to individual learning or behavioural needs, there was little else that we did as a school to overcome cultural stereotypes and ongoing discrimination being played out in the schoolyard and classrooms. It was here, as an early career teacher, that I struggled to maintain order and to keep students from routinely insulting and hurting each other. This behaviour seemed to be motivated by the students’ inability to empathise or see a different perspective from their own and I had no idea how to respond to the underlying prejudice, sexism and
racism. I wish now I could have done more to prevent such harm and have often wondered what long-term effect this had on these students.

It is worth noting that for 70 years up until the early 1990s, Victoria operated dual secondary schooling pathways: high schools and technical schools (Pardy & Preston, 2015). I was educated and then taught in the technical schooling system for 13 years, which largely provided vocational, technical and trade courses, mostly for boys, as an alternative to the largely academic offerings in the state high schools. Technical schools provided more practical courses of study, considered “better suited” to students from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse [CALD] backgrounds and working-class students and pioneered curriculum practices, particularly for inclusion and equal opportunity. Their closure, in part, explains a narrowing of the focus of secondary schooling in Victoria from the 1990s onwards towards a more academic and performative education system where ‘the completion of exams to comply with university entrance’ (Pardy & Preston, 2015, p 112) was privileged over other pathways. I believe my technical schooling experience had a profound effect on my ideas about the purpose of education, and the positive and negative effects of schooling, particularly on those from less advantaged backgrounds.

More recently as a public servant with the state Department of Education in Victoria, I have worked on a range of policy and program initiatives for schools, particularly for values education, civics and citizenship education, international education and multicultural education. It is with hindsight that I look back at the changes in the educational landscape over the years, and from a policy perspective there is now much more impressed on principals and teachers now about inclusion and engagement, and an emphasis on naming and addressing sexism and racism. For me these changes were evident through more progressive national and state gender equality and social justice initiatives through the late 1980s, anti-bullying programs in the 1990s and anti-racism programs and values education in the 2000s.

While our awareness and response to some of these social and structural inequities have improved, the template for schooling has hardly changed since my time as a student or as a teacher. Racism has been an ongoing issue in Australian schools (Dunn & Nelson, 2011; Mansouri, Jenkins & Walsh, 2012); there is evidence of ethnic residualisation in disadvantaged

New waves of migration and refugees to Australia, particularly from Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries continue to reshape the social, cultural and religious mix. Successive state and federal governments’ efforts to manage this shifting multiculturalism have resulted in measures such as increased emphasis on border control, revision of citizenship laws and efforts to articulate and promote Australian values (Australian Government, 2016).

In school education where there is a clear mandate to develop students who can contribute to the ‘common good’ and to ‘ensure that school contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural and religious diversity’ (MCEETYA, 2008, p 7-8) there are new and complex challenges. What constitutes ‘common good’ and ‘social cohesion’ and how these ideas and aspirations are interpreted and enacted in schools are however not always clear. Schools themselves are complex organisations, situated in different locations and serving different communities.

I feel compelled through this dissertation to uncover some of the issues and challenges facing schooling, particularly as they relate to the introduction of intercultural understanding as a mandated general capability in the Australian Curriculum. Importantly I would like to offer some insight and direction to those people facing the similar classroom dilemmas as faced by my early teaching self.

Rationale

While Australia is perceived as one of the more successful immigrant countries in terms of multicultural legislation, policy and practices (Kymlicka, 2007; Levey, 2012) there are concerns that current programs and services, including schools are not responding to the changing settlement patterns (Collins, 2013; Block et al., 2014). In many schools, where education is one of the pillars of Australian multiculturalism, teachers are largely unfamiliar with the cultural, ethnic and historical backgrounds of a new wave of students from African countries (Matthews, 2008). The integration of migrants and refugees from these countries are also more broadly surrounded by deficit discourses (Uptin, Wright & Harwood, 2013; Matthews 2008) and further influenced by religious and cultural misconceptions (Keddie, 2011). Many
of these children have been traumatised and have had little or no limited formal education before arrival and require additional support and expertise (Block et al., 2014).

This study provides evidence and insight about how principals and teachers, in an evolving policy and curriculum context, go about responding to the needs of students from refugee and migrant backgrounds, particularly from countries in the Horn of Africa. There have been a few studies relevant to the development of interculturality that have included African Australian primary students. For example, Walton et al. (2014) conducted a study in Melbourne that included one school with students from the Horn of Africa and drew attention to the need for targeted professional development for staff to help them understand their own privilege and develop a critical awareness of the notion of whiteness. This study concluded that there was limited research about how teachers acted as socialising agents and influenced student cultural attitudes and behaviours. A study in Melbourne by Dodds et al. (2010) offered some insight into the experience of students of primary age from Somalian backgrounds and their perceptions of the skills needed for secondary school. While this study found that there was a reasonable adaption between the students and their educational expectations, they faced challenges in balancing these with their parents’ cultural expectations and previous experience with schooling. Other studies such as those by Keddie (2011), Taylor & Sidhu (2012) and Pugh, Every & Hattam (2012), Uptin, Wright & Harwood (2013) and Baak (2018) provide further insight into the practices of teachers responding to refugee and migrant students from black African backgrounds in Australian schools.

Fox (2017) conducted research in Ackenham as part of the Doing Diversity project. Her study focussed on how the intercultural experiences of students and how their subjectivities were shaped and negotiated. I have drawn on her research to bring the student voices at Ackenham into sharper focus. Overall there has been limited investigation into the effects of different policy settings on teacher practices in sites such as Ackenham. It is important to address these gaps in knowledge as schools become increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse.

The Australian Curriculum, Foundation Year to Year 10, was developed by the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA) and progressively introduced from 2011. This included intercultural understanding as one of seven general capabilities expected to be included in all areas of the curriculum (ACARA, 2012) introduced in 2013. The general
capabilities were guidelines in curriculum terms, that is the content knowledge and skills that were expected to be progressively developed over 10 years of schooling. More specifically intercultural understanding was framed against three organising elements that promoted engagement and interaction between students ‘recognising culture and developing respect, interacting and emphasising with others and reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility’. Furthermore, this capability should involve learning about the process of interaction and dialogue and skills for self-reflection in which ‘Students learn to interpret and mediate cultural inequalities within their own and other societies. They learn to take responsibility for their interactions with others, to act on what they have learnt and to become intercultural citizens in the world’ (ACARA, 2012, pp 86-90).

The Victorian initial adaptation of the Australian Curriculum AusVELS similarly included intercultural capability as one of four capabilities expected to be taught in all learning areas (VCAA 2014a; 2015b). This brings into question the capacity of teachers to give life to these capabilities in the classroom (Toner, 2010; Walton et al., 2014), the type of educational leadership (Santamaria & Gaëtane, 2014) and the nature of professional learning (Perry & Southwell, 2011) required to effectively enact the curriculum in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

Regardless of how desirable and important these curriculum aspirations are, their application resides with schools. A study of principals’ and teachers’ practices will provide some insight into the way an education reform, such as the introduction of new curriculum capability, is understood and enacted. Furthermore, there is a need to examine the changing shape of diversity in multicultural Victoria and what this means for different cohorts of students and principals and teachers who find themselves in the cultural and ethnic minority.

**The study**

This study is set in a unique context with a majority of the cohort of students from countries in the Horn of Africa taught by teachers from Australian backgrounds who are mostly early career and new to the school. The students and their families, many arriving as refugees, were in the early stages of resettlement in Australia. Intercultural understanding was prioritised in the school, but staff had relatively little experience in teaching students from African Australian backgrounds. The study also took place at a time when education reform was heightened by a
school autonomy agenda set against a backdrop of performance and accountability. Ackenham Primary School's history was marked by ongoing structural disadvantage, staff instability and declining enrolments.

The study is framed in the Theory of Practice Architectures (Kemmis, 2009; 2012; Kemmis & Mutton, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014) and the concept of the Education Complex (Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015; Kemmis et al., 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014) which is the idea that schools are social forms and the practices within them are connected, shaped and maintained by the people in them. The introduction and success of a large-scale reform in schooling, or a new policy emphasis on school performance, depends on influencing and transforming local arrangements and individual and collective practices to support the reform or innovation. The practice architectures found within the semantic, material and social arrangements in schools can enable or inhibit such transformation. Making practice architectures visible during the tenure of each principal will provide insights into what interculturality, as one part of complex social form, looks like in a school.

This study involves the collection of empirical data through observation, interviews, focus groups and text analysis and engaging with relevant cultural, leadership and practice theories in the form of philosophical-empirical inquiry (Kemmis & Mutton, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014). Practices that produce and reproduce certain ways of saying, doing, and relating found in the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements as they relate to the development of interculturality will be examined and analysed. The study is marked by the tenure of the three principals, a new Australian Curriculum and a shifting political landscape. The study extends the theoretical understanding of interculturality in the context of schooling.

**Theoretical contribution**

It is anticipated that the findings of this research, while focussed on one school, can be applied more broadly to others, particularly where the teachers’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds are different from their students and the realities of intercultural practices and negotiations are improvised or conducted with uncertainty. From this perspective the study will add clarity about the processes that characterise interculturality such as a ‘heightened awareness of otherness’ (Barrett, 2008, p 1), how self-knowledge is developed, and the nature of
sensitivities and competencies needed to effectively engage and interact with people who see themselves as culturally different (Coulby, 2006; UNESCO, 2011; Walton, Priest & Paradies, 2013).

Intercultural understanding in the Australian Curriculum emphasises interaction and engagement between people. It promotes a critical and nuanced awareness of a student’s own cultural perspectives with the aim to cultivate values and dispositions that support positive intercultural behaviours and broader social impact (ACARA, 2013b). While teachers and principals are expected to incorporate intercultural understanding across the curriculum little is known about how this will be taken up in different contexts (Halse et al., 2015).

**Methodological contribution**

One way of understanding how schools respond to reform, adapt their everyday practices and bring new practices into being, such as the introduction of intercultural understanding, is through the use of the Theory of Practice Architectures (Kemmis & Mutton, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014; Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015). As far as I am aware, this has not been done for an inquiry into interculturality, particularly in a school in which there is such a contrast between the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of students and their teachers. A key question for this study is, how might the Theory of Practice Architectures help us understand the presence and attributes of interculturality in schools? The case study methodology used to investigate this question further builds on the research approach, employed by Kemmis and his colleagues (Kemmis & Mutton, 2011; Kemmis et al. 2014; Hardy & Edwards-Groves 2016) in a number of studies in schools. In broad terms, studies using the Theory of Practice Architectures has demonstrated that, by taking a site-based approach and investigating the nature of practices and their interconnections, a deeper understanding of the conditions for educational transformation can be developed.

**Outline of chapters**

The thesis is made up of eight chapters. *Chapter One* introduces the context in which the study is set, a rationale and why it is important to undertake an in-depth case study in a school like Ackenham. *Chapter Two* outlines the relevant literature in which interculturality is situated and applied to the context of schooling. This includes an examination of
multiculturalism and multicultural education and positioning of interculturalism and intercultural education in Australia.

**Chapter Three** chapter includes an explanation of the methods and tools used during the case study and the process of analysis and of interpretation applied to the data. The application of the Theory of Practice Architectures is presented as a methodological approach. The chapter concludes with the ethical considerations.

**Chapter Four** provides an overview of the background and context in which Ackenham is situated. This includes details about the environment as well as the policy environment over time that has and continues to influence the school. A summary of professional standards and performance development measures for principals and teachers in the Victorian context is also presented.

**Chapter Five** is focussed on Virginia, the first principal involved in the study and the period of her tenure, from 2012-April 2014. The Chapter outlines the conditions and circumstances in which Virginia undertakes her project to ‘fix a broken story’. The findings are framed within the five dimensions of the *Education Complex*; student learning, teaching, professional learning, educational leadership and evaluation (Kemmis et al., 2014 p 51). They show and elaborate on examples of *sayings, doings and relatings* with particular focus on practices and arrangements that supported the development of interculturality. The chapter concludes with a summary of the practice architectures during Virginia’s tenure.

**Chapter Six** focusses on the period in which Hilda was caretaker principal from April-August 2014. The chapter elaborates on Hilda’s efforts to “hold the fort” and her concentration on improving students’ behaviour and interest in developing intercultural capability. The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) Day commemoration and a teacher discussion about discrimination are used to illustrate the different perspectives on diversity and culture in the school at this time. The chapter concludes with a summary of the practice architectures during Hilda’s tenure.

**Chapter Seven** is focussed on the period of Amanda’s tenure from September 2014 – June 2015 and like the previous two chapters presents the findings and provides an analysis using the Theory of Practice Architectures. Amanda’s project to transform the school into a
‘contemporary Australian multicultural school’ is examined and discussed, including the idea of moral purpose. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key practice architectures identified during Amanda’s tenure.

Finally, Chapter Eight brings the thesis together by responding to the research questions through an overall discussion of the findings and analysis. Central to the discussion are the practices of leading and teaching which for the development of interculturality should ideally be in concert with each other. This chapter elaborates on some of the challenges such as staffing a school like Ackenham, which plays such a critical role in helping the children and their families make a positive start in formal education and life in Australia more broadly. I argue that this should not be left to chance or governed by short-term arrangements. My broader argument is that systemic and structural disadvantage sits at the heart of many of the challenges faced by staff in the school. Many of the pressures, including prejudice based on class, religion and race are reflected in and around the school community and more broadly in the Victorian and Australian psyche. Regardless of the good intentions of staff or great programs, such external pressure remain a source of ongoing disadvantage. This is despite the popular narrative of Australia’s multicultural credentials and the hope placed in the implementation of intercultural capability in the Australian Curriculum.
Chapter 2  Setting the scene; a review of the literature

Introduction

This thesis is situated mostly in the fields of cultural studies (Hall, 1997a; Gillborn, 2013; 2014; Hickey, 2016), educational leadership (Blackmore, 2006; Fullan, 2000; 2009) and practice theory (Schatzki, 2002; Green, 2009; Kemmis, 2009; Kemmis et al., 2014; Hager, 2012), particularly as they relate to the study of interculturality (Lavanchy, Gajardo & Dervin, 2011; Dervin, 2016) in schooling. In this review I have not been able to traverse the significant scale and complexity of these fields but refer to relevant concepts and ideas pertinent to an Australian context.

This chapter consists of three sections. The first section provides an overview of the theoretical perspectives and tensions associated with interculturality and the concept of culture and related concepts of cultural identity, race, ethnicity and diversity.

The second section examines how such concepts are deployed in the context of schooling, particularly in relation to the Australian Curriculum and its adapted version in the state of Victoria. This elaboration is supported by an overview of multicultural education and intercultural education and related diversity and language discourses. The key features of teaching and leading for interculturality are described and summarised and provide some insight into the types of practices that will assist the development of interculturality in schooling.

The third section examines school leadership and the role of principals in developing and sustaining interculturality at a school level. This chapter is critical to understanding how schools can respond to the shifting nature of cultural and ethnic diversity, and to identify approaches and practices employed by principals and teachers that is likely to contribute to the development of interculturality.

Section 1  Relevant cultural theories and perspectives

Clarifying interculturality

As presented in Chapter 1, interculturality can be conceptualised as a dynamic and evolving process of engagement and interaction between people from different cultural and ethnic
backgrounds and nationalities (Lavanchy, Gajardo and Dervin, 2011; Dervin, 2016). As such, interculturality has always been a significant feature part of human history (UNESCO, 2006; Dervin, 2016; Portera, 2011). Interculturality ‘presupposes multiculturalism’ and has been defined as the existence of ‘respectful and equitable interactions’ of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions’ (UNESCO, 2006, p 17). Interculturality also contains the idea of transculturality, which means the adaption and fusion of ‘new’ and ‘established’ cultures, such as through migration and trade, that invariably have a broad effect and influence on everyone (Koegeler-Abdi & Parncutt 2013, p 7).

While it is hard to arrive at a widely accepted definition for interculturality (Dervin, 2016), the concept has more appeal in times of increased transcultural contact such as being experienced through current trends in human mobility and migration, and more broadly through globalisation (Lavanchy, Gajardo & Dervin, 2011). The contemporary world is dominated by global politics and financial markets, advanced media technologies and where ‘various forms of religious, moral and political affiliations are plainly transnational’ (Appadurai 2002, pp 43-44). Such geopolitical shifts have contributed to multi-dimensional notions of culture, increasing intercultural tensions, a rise in nationalism and the need to find ways to promote social cohesion and intercultural understanding (Mansouri & Arber, 2018).

Proponents of interculturality argue there is a need, through education, to develop the understanding and capacities of all students to live in more globalised, transnational and multicultural contexts (UNESCO, 2006; 2013; Barrett, 2008; Koegeler-Abdi & Parncutt, 2013; Dervin, 2016). In practical terms this means moving away from students just having knowledge about the "other", which in schools can mean being identified as being different from "us" (Watkins, 2016) towards a more universal recognition and understanding of the role that culture plays as a social construction. For students and teachers, developing skills and attributes for engagement and interaction with people who are perceived as different from themselves in ways that demonstrate openness to diversity, curiosity and empathy underpin interculturality (Barrett, 2008; UNESCO, 2006). In this sense the process of developing interculturality ideally involves a heightened sense of critical thinking and personal reflection (Barrett, 2008) and provides an impetus for examining one’s own cultural understandings and perspectives (Cruz, 2013). As a methodology, interculturality in education
should provide a means of thinking beyond differences in culture, ethnicity or race, to thinking about people (Dervin, 2016).

Interculturality is currently favoured in Australian schooling as revealed through the presence of intercultural understanding and intercultural capability in national and state curricula respectively (ACARA, 2012; VCAA, 2015a) but must also be considered as part of an ongoing project of providing positive and culturally aware learning environments (Halse et al., 2015). Intercultural understanding and intercultural capability contribute to a state of interculturality in schools. Ambitions for interculturality have generally coalesced around the attitudes and behaviours such as those that contribute to positive encounters and interactions between people of different backgrounds, cultural commitments and languages (Dervin, 2016; UNESCO, 2006). Intercultural understanding in the Australian Curriculum emphasises interaction and engagement between people and promotes a critical and nuanced awareness of a students’ own cultural perspectives, as advocated by proponents of interculturality, and points to values and dispositions that are likely to support positive intercultural behaviours (ACARA, 2012) and contribute to the reflexive civility advocated by Watkins (2016).

It is therefore worth examining some of the key constructs that make up interculturality and the study of culture and how these relate to education and schooling.

**What is culture?**

For the purposes of this thesis, culture is understood to be a socially constructed concept produced by people (Hall, 2011; Dervin, 2016). As such, culture is a dynamic process, and is subject to change and adaptation (Kramsch, 1998; Barrett, 2008; Liddicoat, 2005; 2009 Kalantzis et al., 2012) rather than a prescribed or static set of characteristics (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006; Portera 2011). Culture is broadly applied to behaviours, customs and practices found in groups of people involved in the production and representation of meanings and identities (Hall, 2011) particularly through the medium of language (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009; Liddicoat, 2005; 2009). Culture can also be shaped and represented by the historical context (Arber 2012) and affiliations to an historic cultural identity based on ‘its technological achievements, its monuments, its works of art, and its popular culture over time’ (Kramsch, 1998, p 7). Furthermore, the intersection of other ascribed characteristics
such as gender, class, ethnicity, disability and religion with culture shape and reshape perceptions and interactions (Grant & Sleeter, 2007) in ways that make it difficult to highlight one over another.

The concept of culture is also applied to organisational or institutional environments, social or sporting clubs or affiliated groups where certain discourses, values and behaviours are promoted or accepted over others (Maguire et al., 2011; Eagleton, 2016). For example, the notion of school culture and discourses is used by way of describing what are desired acceptable values and characteristic practices in a school (Blackmore, 2008; Kemmis et al., 2014).

As a social construct, the concept of culture is therefore difficult to define. This is partly due to the fluid nature of a concept but also because groups are rarely homogeneous (Dervin, 2016). People can embrace a range of diverse practices and customs, regarded as belonging to a “culture”, but enacted in personalised ways (Eriksen, 2009; Barrett, 2013). In this sense, ‘no human being belongs to a single culture’ (UNESCO, 2013, p 12), and so the concept of culture can be mixed up with multiple affiliations and applied in a range of ways and for different conditions. Furthermore, as Coulby (2006) argues, it is almost impossible to fully understand another culture given the complexity of the interplay of language and the relativism and absolutes of cultural politics and knowledge.

What is more useful then is to look at how the concept of culture is used, rather than how it is defined. In some forms, as with race and ethnicity, culture ‘is traditionally bound up with the concept of distinction’, and as a means of ranking and differentiating people and groups (Eagleton, 2016, p 20). In this sense, culture can be used as a process of inclusion and exclusion (Kramsch, 1998), particularly when used as a discrete entity leading to comparison with "another culture". It is also when culture is used as a form of class based on historic relationships and power imbalances which leads to the idea that some groups more superior than others, that is ‘Culture as a means of legitimising the inequalities of modern society’ (Gartman, 2012, p 41), for example, such as through conquest or colonialism (Hall, 1997b). Dervin (2016 p 9-11) argues that such comparisons are inevitable but are ‘illusionary and divisive’ and promote perceptions of difference, ethnocentrism and moralistic judgements.
such as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘ours’ or ‘theirs’ or the ‘other’ and therefore problematic when it comes to developing interculturality.

Similarly, Abdullah-Pretceille (2006) argues that culture is not a useful concept due to the complexity of contemporary intercultural relations, cross-cultural exchanges and the ways that culture is used to objectify, describe and categorise people and behaviour. The use of culture as a determining factor can, as the quote below suggests, be incomplete or imprecise lead to negative consequences.

Indeed, any excessive focusing on the characteristics of others leads to exoticism as well as to cultural dead-ends, by overemphasizing cultural differences and by enhancing, consciously or otherwise, stereotypes or even prejudices (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006, p 476).

Extending this argument, Abdallah-Pretceille (2006, p 479) proposes the ‘notion of culturality’, that is, broadening the degree or state of being cultural to offset the focus on certain groups. Culturality, she claims acknowledges culture as a changing, dynamic fusion of social, symbolic and relational fragments and diversities, rather than a fixed category and would be a more precise and effective way of thinking about culture in the development of interculturality. In this sense, culture acts as one of the variables rather than a determining factor however she also argues that successful interactions between people from diverse backgrounds require more sophisticated forms of intercultural recognition, understanding and engagement. This means that in education, culturality requires a deeper understanding of oneself, particularly as an educator, and to be ‘open to the perspective of diversity and not difference’ (p 478) and where practices promote ‘culture in action and not culture as an object’ (p 481) in intercultural reasoning and capability.

**The idea of cultural identities**

It follows that distinguishing between groups and their customs, behaviours and rituals gives rise to the notion of cultural identity and more specific ways of characterising and grouping people (Hall, 1997a; Banks, 2008; Du Gay & Hall, 2011). However, as already noted, people can have multiple identities within cultural groups (Koegeler-Abdi & Parncutt, 2013) as well as other identities such as those constructed through gender, class or religion (Santoro, 2009).
Hall (1997b) conceptualises identity as a mediated and negotiated process in which the interplay of language and culture shapes and defines difference. He argues the process of identity formation is discursive and ‘is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation’ (Hall, 2011, p 2-4). In this sense, the concept of identity is does not have to be essentialist in the way that a person has a fixed cultural belonging but is more strategic and a process of transformation.

Hall (2011) proposed two key signifiers for the construction of cultural identity; the first is agency, embedded in relationships and practices between subjects, and the second is politics, manifest in identity politics and the politics of location. By way of example, he points to the effect of globalisation and the experience of migration as a process of identity formation. Following this reasoning, the identity formation of migrants, for example, the students and their families at Ackenham, have their historical and cultural roots in the Horn of Africa which they relate to and draw upon (Ramsden, 2008; Baak, 2018). The shape of their identity, however, must also respond to the politics of identity found in the new country and notions of a national identity that according to Hall (2011, p 661) strives to unify but are unlikely to ‘cancel or subsume cultural difference’.

For other cultural theorists, such as Banks (1997, 2008, 2010, 2013) and Sleeter and Grant (2007), cultural identity has also been anchored in agency and identity politics, particularly through the civil rights and social justice movements in the United States of America (USA). This approach has evolved as a response to experiences of "cultural oppression", social inequity and discrimination, particularly against African American minority groups from the 1960s (Banks 2013; Sleeter & Grant 2010). Identity and cultural interactions from this perspective, are therefore also rooted in power and the degree of power that is exerted by some groups over others based on their perceived cultural, racial or ethnic difference.

**The intersections of culture, race and ethnicity**

Historically the concept of culture was developed by American anthropologists in the early twentieth century to provide an alternative explanation to race as to why people around the world were different. This was at a time when race and biological determinism was used as
an explanation for human differences that also supported the idea of racial superiority of some people over others (Banks & Banks 2010), most notably justifying Western imperialism and colonial rule (Hall, 1997a).

Race is now regarded as a socio-political and discursive construct rather than a biological or genetic category (Hall, 2011; Banks, 2010; Gillborn, 2015). Given that the genetic differences between people such as skin, hair and eye colour constitute only a small percentage of human genetic make-up, there is little reason from a scientific perspective to use the concept of race (Kattmann, 2013). Race however continues to be a way of differentiating people and is routinely employed in the formation of racial stereotypes and is the basis of much discrimination, inequality and racism (Hall, 1997a; Gillborn, 2014; Kattmann, 2013; Parker, 2015).

In Australia, race has historically been used as a way of classifying people in the population. One of the most extreme examples of race-based policy in Australia was the Immigration Restriction Act, later known as the White Australia Policy that remained in place from 1901 to 1949. The act intentionally favoured immigration to Australia by white people, mostly from Britain, and actively discouraged non-whites, particularly those from Asian countries such as China (McGowan, 2013). By way of illustrating the thinking behind such a policy, the 1947 Australian census (Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics [CBCS], 1951, pp 552-53) employed two categories of people to describe the ‘racial’ makeup of the population; non-indigenous and indigenous Australians. Non-indigenous people were regarded as full-blood Europeans who were ‘fundamentally British in race and nationality’. Non-indigenous Australians made up 99.3% of the population and the remaining 0.7% were categorised as foreigners, that is, ‘other races who had migrated to Australia and their descendants’ or as half castes. The term ‘half-caste‘ was used to describe people of mixed parentage, and included Australian aboriginals and people of other non-European backgrounds who were counted in the census. The indigenous group, estimated to be around 47,000 people, were described as ‘full-blood aboriginal natives’ who at that time were not counted in the census. (CBCS, 1951, p 53).

The Act was progressively dismantled as the need for skilled workers increased during the 1960s, but it was not until 1973, when restriction by race was removed from Australia’s
immigration policies (Australian Government, 2018). Significantly, indigenous Australians were not formally regarded as Australian citizens until 1948, and not fully counted in the Australian census until the census of 1971, the first held after the 1967 Referendum on the citizenship status of indigenous Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2007). Multicultural policy did not include Aboriginal Australians until 1978 (Meer & Modood, 2011).

While in contemporary Australia race is not commonly used to describe someone’s identity (Allard & Santoro, 2008), the politics of race are routinely present and entangled with ethnicity and nationalist discourses (Mcleod & Yates, 2003). Whiteness in Australia remains a socially and historically constructed position of privilege (Santoro, 2009; Hambel, 2005; Naidoo, 2009) and according to Colic-Peisker & Tilbury (2008, p 52), race must be included as ‘a category in the construction of the Australian nation’. The idea of "being white" as the prevailing normative identity in Australia means that power and privilege conveyed through whiteness is less visible or less likely to be the subject to same analysis that non-whites might be subjected to (McLeod & Yates, 2003, p 34). For example, a study of race relations between urban aboriginal youth and black African refugees in Western Australia (Colic-Peisker &Tilbury, 2008) reported significant tensions between the groups over rights and resources. The authors concluded that "blackness" was a central part of the lived experience, identity and oppression for both Aboriginals and African refugees, and that race as well as class were two important factors in their socio-economic disadvantage in Australia.

Race-thinking and racist practices can be found embedded in Australian social, political and educational structures and systems (Halse, 2015) and in schooling are evident in the lived experience of many Australian students (Priest et al., 2014; Dunn et al., 2014). More recently racism has been found to be more pronounced in the experience of people from Arabic or Muslim backgrounds (Kamp & Mansouri, 2010; Mansouri & Jenkins, 2010) and from countries in the Horn of Africa (Baak, 2018; Uptin, Wright & Harwood, 2013).

A study of “ethnic-racial socialisation” and the role teachers’ play in how children learn about cultural diversity and their cultural and ethnic identity was conducted in four Melbourne primary schools. This included one with a high proportion of African Australian students (Walton et al., 2014). The study found a lack of teacher confidence and capacity to engage in deeper discussions about culture and diversity, particularly in critical discussions about
racism. It was concluded that while these discussions could begin from an early age and teachers needed support, particularly professional development, to help them think about notions of privilege and to question the position of white normativity. The following quote highlights the importance of engaging teachers in critical discussions about race and identity:

If white teachers continue to effectively deny or fail to see their whiteness as raced, then they will continue to see students of colour as "Other" and respond to them from that perception i.e., they are raced, I am not (Walton et al., 2014, p. 120).

Just as the concept of race is a problematic social construct, so too are other conceptions of cultural identity and difference such as ethnicity. Banks and Banks (2010 p 445) define ethnicity as a ‘sense of identity developed through shared language, historic, geographic or economic background’ based on ‘a sense of peoplehood’ and ‘distinguishing cultural characteristics’ rather than biological determinism. De Brock and Levy (2005, p 73) also refer to notions of shared history, identity, geography and cultural roots and the idea of, ‘national origin, whether in the home country or not’ in defining ethnicity.

Ethnicity is more commonly used in Australia to describe differences in people’s cultural, religious backgrounds and nationalities rather than race. Allard and Santoro (2008) suggests this is because ethnicity is not seen to have the same deterministic or essentialist characteristics as race and in the way it is used elsewhere in the world. On the other hand, Santoro (2009) argues that ethnicity can be also be a problematic conception if limited or attributed to basic characteristics and cultural traditions and backgrounds. As with race ascribing certain ways of being and behaving to particular ethnic groups promotes essentialism and stereotyping (Noble & Watkins, 2014). For example, the 2016 Australian Census, employs the term ‘ethnic origins’ as one of three ways people can self-identify their ancestry, the others were cultural heritage or nationality, however the ABS (2017) cautions in the use of the data with a caveat that it may not be the most reliable basis on which to make decisions about future service needs and planning for particular groups given the other variable and complexities associated with identity. In other words, ethnicity is only one of many variables in the construction of identity and should not be used in essentialist ways.
Similarly, in schooling, studies have shown a degree of uncertainty and conflation in discursive practices associated with concepts such as race, culture and ethnicity. This includes the ways that teachers understand and construct the concept of culture which in Australia has been shown have had a negative effect on educational outcomes of students from some ethnic and cultural minority backgrounds compared with their peers (Matthews, 2008; Taylor and Sidhu, 2012; Keddie, 2011; 2012; Block et al., 2014). Teacher assumptions based on their students’ background and status, such as being a refugee have also been found to contribute to how students are positioned in the classroom and how their behaviour is assessed (Keddie, 2011).

The ways that culture and ethnicity are discussed or not discussed have been associated with teachers’ perceptions of themselves and their students and how some students, particularly of minority linguistic and cultural backgrounds, are included or excluded in schools (Arber, 2006; Edgeworth & Santoro, 2015). Arber’s (2006) study of everyday conversations in one Melbourne school over ten years found teachers’ and parents’ understanding and conception of race and ethnicity ‘positioned people differently within the school and within the Australian community’ (p 99). Her findings demonstrated the different ways that people discussed or avoided discussion about race and ethnic relationships. Arber concluded that many of the respondents lacked the language or the conceptual understanding to talk about race or ethnicity in a comprehensive way.

Given the complexity of Australian’s multicultural diversity and the influential role that teachers play transmitting ‘information about, racial, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity’ (Walton et al., 2014, p 112), it is important to find ways to reduce uncertainty and confusion about how ethnic diversity and the concept of culture are understood and are enacted in schools’ practices. Moreover, it is also useful to look at the conceptualisation of multiculturalism and interculturalism and some of the relevant issues and challenges as they apply to education and schooling.

**Clarifying "multiculturalism" and introducing "interculturalism"**

In terms of clarity it is difficult to get beyond the ongoing debates, disagreements and tensions surrounding the conceptualisation of both multiculturalism and Interculturalism and their use and misuse in public discourse and policy particularly in light of globalisation and increased
migration (Meer & Modood, 2011; Modood & Meer, 2012; Levey, 2012; Kymlicka, 2012; Mansouri & Arber, 2017). Levey (2012, p 217-18) claims that while the terms ‘have occupied the same discursive space for a few decades’ the meanings of Interculturalism and multiculturalism have varied contextually. In part this is due to the different ways that both have evolved and are understood and enacted. As Emerson (2011, p 2) notes ‘multiculturalism is a particularly hazardous term, since it is so widely used with so many different meanings; mixing analysis, political statements and emotions’. What separates the use of the terms according to Lavanchy, Gajardo & Dervin (2011, p 6) is the preoccupation in the latter with the rights of minority groups which on the one hand is designed to contribute to a form of social cohesion and cultural harmony, while on the other contributes to processes of othering that they argue underlie complex mechanisms of social categorisation that interculturalism seeks to overcome. There are many ways to interpret and enact multiculturalism, although in common usage it likely to refer to the ‘political accommodation by the state and/or a dominant group of all minority groups’ (Meer & Modood 2011, p 7). This is the idea that multiculturalism carries with it the political aspirations of minority groups coupled with assumptions of inclusion, civic integration and equal rights (Kymlicka, 2007; Meer & Modood, 2011; Banks & Banks, 2010). However, as Kymlicka (2007, p 19) argues, ‘multiculturalism is hard to sell outside Western democracies’ because of the tensions associated with confirming any power to minority groups.

Proponents of interculturalism, and its conceptual state of interculturality, argue that this approach is more dynamic than multiculturalism (Coulby, 2006; Portera, 2011; Koegeler-Abdi & Parncutt, 2013; Dervin, 2016) and that interculturalism provides a greater focus on common human needs and interests and broader engagement and dialogue within and between cultural differences (Coulby, 2006; Barrett, 2008; Noble, 2013; Dervin, 2016). Furthermore, Coulby (2006) and Portera (2011) contend that interculturalism should be a major theme in education and inform all learning and teaching across all disciplines.

Multiculturalism has been most notably employed in western democracies; immigrant or "new world" countries such as the USA, Canada and Australia (Kymlicka, 2007; Banks, 2008) and other countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, England and Germany, where there have been significant flows of migrants and refugees in recent years (Faas, 2008; Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2014). Conceptually however, multiculturalism has been understood and
applied differently in different countries (Meer & Moodod, 2011; Levey, 2012; Banks, 2013). Similarly, Emerson (2011, p 3-4) claims ‘there is no pure model practice in contemporary Europe, for either multiculturalism or assimilation’ and that the variation of policies should be viewed as a part of spectrum where multiculturalism and assimilation are at one end and interculturalism somewhere in the middle. According to Emerson, assimilation is not multiculturalism because any languages, commitments and specific rights claimed by a minority group would be diffused into the host country. Interculturalism, he argues is ‘sympathetic and respectful towards ethno-cultural religious minorities’, and acts as ‘a compromise between the polar opposites of multiculturalism and assimilation (Emerson, 2011, p 2).

In the USA forms of multiculturalism have been used but have been primarily premised on overcoming the negative consequences and effects of a ‘dominant white-Anglo culture’ on cultural and ethnic minorities (Margai & Frazier, 2010, p 2), although it has more broadly applied to other oppressed groups which includes a focus on gender (Gillborn, 2015; Banks & Banks, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). Multiculturalism in the USA has taken a more encompassing view of diversity with ambitions for promoting equity and inclusion, particularly through institutional structures. For example, Banks and Banks (2010, p 446) define multiculturalism as a ‘philosophical position and movement that assumes that the gender, ethnic, race and cultural diversity of a pluralistic society should be reflected in all of the institutionalised structures of educational institutions, including staff, norms and values, the curriculum and student body’. Under the current US administration, slogans such as “Make America great again”, multiculturalism has been subsumed by broader debates of reclaiming a ‘white western European and US hegemony’ (Blake, 2017, p 2615) coupled with the persistence of racism, particularly against African Americans and the politics of race and national identity (Nighaoui, 2017).

Interculturalism has been offered as an alternative to multiculturalism in part because a perceived failure of this latter approach to effectively manage the integration of migrants and refugees in Europe (Levey, 2012; Meer & Moodod, 2011; Emerson, 2011; Johnson & Bellofatto, 2012) and increased xenophobia worldwide (Coulby, 2006).
It is however difficult to compare because of the variation in approaches to multiculturalism. For example, Meer et al. (2015) compared the policy environment in the UK and Netherlands, two countries that had favoured multiculturalism, with Germany and Denmark, ‘countries that have historically rejected multiculturalism’ (p 702). The authors suggest that, ‘arguments regarding multiculturalism’s retreat in Europe do not do justice to the complexity of the processes that led up to the adoption of civic integrationist policies’ in each country (p 705). They concluded that multicultural policy has been staggered in each country beginning at different starting points and with different policy settings that have been advanced, adapted or left behind.

More specifically, versions of multiculturalism can be found in different levels of government in Germany. These have tended to be framed around notions of historical western cultural and religious experience and have been regarded as more assimilationist in practice with the effect of isolating immigrants from genuine political life (Emerson, 2011; Habibbayli, 2015). In 2010, Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, famously declared ‘multiculturalism a failure’ in its inability to integrate immigrant minorities (Emerson, 2011). Such responses are based on perceptions that ‘multiculturalism racialises ethnicity, culture and religion in ways that link "otherness" to invasion and the erosion of European values’ (Blake, 2017, p 2621).

In contrast to this sentiment, Germany’s more recent approaches to immigration, led by Merkel, have seen a shift away from the kind of ethno-culturalism alluded to above towards a multicultural pragmatism that has resulted in the accommodation of more than a million refugees from Syria and Africa from 2015 (Schmidke, 2017). Merkel’s administration however has also seen an erosion of popular support associated with this approach (Duetsche Welle, 2016).

Interestingly, Germany has been one of a number of European countries that also has employed interculturalism at a local and state level (Emerson, 2011; Faas, 2008). Other countries such as Netherlands, Greece, Spain, Belgium and Ireland have all adopted the concept of interculturalism and intercultural education at a national level in some form (Hajisoterioiou & Panajiotis, 2014; Gaine & Gewirtz, 2008; Emerson, 2011). Interculturalism appears to offer ways of moving away from the foreigner "other" towards developing a commitment for a ‘stronger sense of the whole’ leading to aspirations of social cohesion.
This shift towards interculturalism has also been aligned to creating more effective means of integrating Muslims and to diminish the negative associations with terrorism in Europe (Khader, 2016; Meer et al., 2015).

While interculturalism might be regarded as a middle ground between multiculturalism and assimilationism as Emerson (2011) suggests, Meer and Modood (2011, p 18), argue that for the moment, interculturalism is neither an ‘updated version’ of multiculturalism nor does it have the intellectual capacity to ‘eclipse multiculturalism’. The strength of multiculturalism, they argue, is in the political dimension which while problematic in some countries still provides more surety in terms of matters to do with equality and citizenship than interculturalism. Furthermore, Coulby (2006; 2011) and Dervin (2016) point to different versions of interculturalism, theoretical weakness and a lack of clarity, particularly in intercultural education as problems to be overcome.

In Australia, the conceptualisation of multiculturalism, rather than interculturalism, is more commonly used in public and policy discourses (Levey, 2012) and recognises the rights of new immigrants and minority groups and provides opportunities for citizenship (Kymlicka, 2007; Yanasmayan, 2015; Levey, 2012). Multiculturalism appeared as a priority area of the Australian government in the 1970s (Kalantzis et al., 2012; Sharp, 2011) however early policies were based on a static idea of culture as being represented by ‘distinct and cohesive ethnic communities’ (Watkins 2016; p 133). These policies tended to be centred on two social needs. The first to address and support integration of these ‘ethnic and cultural communities’ into a broader notion of Australia as a nation framed around a history of Anglo-Australian hegemony (Chiro 2009; Mansouri & Percival Wood 2008; Aston 2009). The second was expressed through a desire for cultural pluralism and social cohesion (Kalantzis et al., 2012) which offered citizenship which according to Chiro (2009) is only sustainable so long as the cultural hegemony was maintained.

As the shape of Australia’s cultural diversity changes, as was noted in recent Australian census (ABS, 2013; 2017a) there have been increasing challenges in accommodating the complexity of this diversity within the development of new multicultural policy (Noble, 2011). Like Chiro (2009), Noble (2011) argues that the rhetoric of cultural harmony found in multicultural policy does not match the lived experiences and practices nor the nature of contemporary
intercultural relations in Australia. Furthermore, the conceptualisation of multiculturalism in
Australia is framed around the minority and majority binary which reinforces the idea of a
dominant culture without necessarily recognising the diversity within it (Kalantzis, 2005).
Noble (2011) suggests there is a need for a better understanding of the different perceptions
and ways that people interact in interethnic communities. He points to interculturality as one
of three competing dimensions within urban community settings, along with
assimilationalism and ‘multiculturalisation’, which he argues contain significant orders of
difference and complexity that can make ‘categories of ethnicity celebrated by multicultural
policies unviable’ and challenges the way cultural diversity is managed and included in policy
(p 830).

Such arguments highlight some of the tensions and challenges associated with
multiculturalism in Australia and for developing interculturality in schooling. For example, the
most recent Federal Government multicultural policies, People of Australia, released in 2011
acknowledges multiculturalism as a continuing success story in promoting ‘shared rights and
responsibilities’ that ‘acknowledges the benefits and potential that cultural diversity brings’
(Commonwealth of Australia [CoA], 2011, p 2). Multicultural Australia: United, strong,
successful, released in 2017, reinforces the idea of inclusion but elevates ‘safety and security’
and a rationale for counter-terrorism and boarder control (CoA, 2017). These policies
demonstrate a shift from celebrating Australian cultural diversity and promoting social
cohesion to pointing out the risks of multiculturalism and the need for greater controls on
who is allowed into the country. This sentiment is consistent with the public discourse around
multiculturalism that gravitates to notions of nationalism, sometimes connected to the threat
of terrorism but also to perceived loss of privilege and culture of established groups (Noble &

The influence of such broad policy perspectives must be considered in the context of
education policy and curriculum and their influence on approaches in schooling. As Kalantzis
et al. (2012, p 4) argue, that while cultural and linguistic education policy made by federal and
state governments have played a critical part in shaping and reshaping public opinion about
culture and identity in Australia, ‘multiculturalism is an unfinished historical process, visionary
and historically active, yet ridden with limitations and inherent difficulties upon which its
practitioners work creatively in their daily activity’. In this sense the work of teachers and
principals, while critically important in enacting the policy aspirations for Australian multiculturalism, is also complex and challenging.

**Section 2 Education and schooling in multicultural Australia**

This next section will elaborate on two of the relevant underlying discourses in education; diversity and languages, that both influence forms of multicultural and intercultural education found in Australian schooling.

**Discourses of diversity in education**

In Australian education, policy tends to support the broader ambition of social cohesion, through its cultural diversity and promotes the discourses of diversity, shared values and nationhood. The Australian goals for schooling are framed around the idea of shared Australian values with an underlying Australianness based on values propositions such as equality, fairness and inclusion. The ideological discourse presented through shared values is one of egalitarianism, and promotes the idea that in Australia everybody will have the same opportunities. One of the values for Australian schools is "fair go" which is commonly understood to expresses the idea of fairness to all and tolerance as a feature of Australianness (DEST, 2005). Likewise, the Victorian policy framework for multicultural education, *Unity through Diversity*, emphasised cultural diversity as an asset and as a way of acknowledging and celebrating cultural diversity in schools (DEECD, 2014b) which asserts the right to be different within the context of a unified whole.

Moreover, the idea of an Australian culture is woven around themes of allegiance, identification and nationalism that are embedded in stories of colonialism, pioneering, migration, settlement and war, such as the ANZAC battles and traditions. Australia is promoted as an egalitarian country, yet the struggle for reconciliation with the indigenous people continues to challenge public policy and sentiment (Soutphommaasane, 2012). As Hall (1996) argues the idea of one national culture is problematic as ‘Most modern nations consist of disparate cultures’ (p 616), and national identities are invariably gendered, stratified by class, and have a history of colonisation, conquest or suppression. Noble (2012, p 830) points out, cultural diversity has become more complex in Australia and is more realistically reflected as ‘diversity within diversity’. He suggests that this diversity is neither
understood nor accounted for in many Australian multicultural policies, which in his view largely positions specific cultures and ethnicities as if they were homogeneous.

Dervin (2016) takes a similar view and argues that diversity is being used as a shorthand way to categorise people of certain races, cultures or religions. This he suggests leads to a biased and problematic discourse that emphasises difference and highlights people who do not look like the “imagined” majority and leads to injustice as described in the quote below:

While the word diversity should refer to multiplicity, it often means difference and ‘oneness’. While the other is often imprisoned in the straitjackets of a homogenized ‘diversity’, the majority can freely claim to be ‘normal’, ‘not visible’ and thus not needing special attention. I agree with Wood that ‘(such conception of) diversity is a form of systematic injustice and it makes us accomplices to injustices. To treat people as objects, as though they are the residuum of their race, class, gender and other such superficialities, and not individuals who define themselves through their ideas and creative acts—that is injustice (p 28).

In schools, Blackmore (2006) argues that while some diversity policies seem empowering because cultural, religious, ability and gender differences are acknowledged, this can be misleading if policies are introduced in the context of neoliberal managerialist discourses. The assumption is that such social actions such as equality, fairness, fair go, justice can be enacted at the same time as self-interest and choice are promoted. According to Blackmore, such contradictions can be found in contemporary diversity discourses that fail to deliver on the promises of inclusion and equity, but rather promote individualism, that has replaced previous collective discourses and practices of equal opportunity and social justice. Applying neoliberal principles to education has pushed standardised test results to the forefront of measures of school and student success and self-determination (Lingard et al., 2016). Such practices shift schooling away from the notion that everyone can learn (equal opportunity) towards addressing specific cultural linguistic and social needs of learners from a certain diversity groups where success or lack of success rest with the teacher (Blackmore 2006).

The Australian Curriculum differentiates diversity in a number of ways but is consistent with principles of equal opportunity and inclusion for all students. Teachers are advised to pay
specific attention to inclusion and equity for students with disabilities as well as gifted and talented or students from English as an Additional Language or Dialect (ACARA, 2014). Studies show that while teachers are aware of such discourses and are more open to diversity than the general population, their depth of awareness of multicultural education and diversity policies and how to implement them is lacking (Watkins et al., 2013; Freeman et al., 2010).

**Language, discourses and intercultural understanding**

Language plays a central role in representing and transmitting cultural values, beliefs and identity (Hall, 1997; Kramsch, 2014; Liddicoat, 2005; 2009). The acquisition of language, is therefore a process of cultural and social development which is embedded in and is shaped by the context in which it is created, received and understood. In other words, language and more broadly discourses of communication shape ‘the way people think’ (Kramsch, 2014, p 33). As Liddicoat (2009) notes in the quote below, communication through language forms the basis of our social relationships.

> From an intercultural perspective, communication comes to be seen as primarily an act of sociality: that is not simply the case that information is transferred from one participant to another, but rather language is used to create and form social relationships (p 116).

Acquiring and understanding language is therefore part of a process of entry into and participation into society which in turn, through a variety of discourses, contributes to a certain social order, providing opportunities for people to be recognised as well as conferring power and privilege (Gee, Hull & Learshear, 1996). For example, specialist discourse communities are formed around such professions in the law, medicine, and education, embedded in professional practice and realised through language and text to represent professionals, their status and their authority relative to other discourse communities (Green, 2009, p 23). Discourses are made up of the ways of behaving and interacting with people that can be conveyed through thinking, speaking, reading and writing and ‘operate to sort persons, groups and society’ (Gee, 2008, p 3). This is why it matters in education and schooling, particularly for migrant and refugee students in Australia, who are typically from language backgrounds and discourses that are different from their teachers.
There are many discourses at work in schooling which include those contained in educational policy (Maguire et al., 2011) the language of instruction (Arber, 2006; Arber & Weinmann, 2017), texts (Liddicoat, 2009) teacher professional learning (Cruz, 2012; Diaz, 2013) and through the curriculum (Luke, Woods & Dooley, 2011). The way in which language and text are discursively shaped and used by the teachers conveys cultural knowledge which is intrinsic to meaning. For example, in a study of professional language teachers in Australian schools, Weinmann and Arber (2017, p 174) found that the research participants’ ‘identities are shaped by the normative terms and conditions of an understanding of languages and Languages Education that is rooted in parochial and monolingual norms and behaviours, which form the unspoken " rules of the game"’. Moreover, the authors argue that the discourses surrounding the daily experience of these teachers were ‘raced, neo-colonial and neo-liberal, and which suggest perspectives that often appear parochial, monolingual and pecuniary’. Such arguments call to attention the socio-political dimensions in the development of identity and sense of belonging conveyed through relationships with others and through language and text in schooling.

The transmission of meaning through language is therefore much more complex than what is said. Language has symbolic value that carries cultural and political allegiance and identity. The choice of words and phrases, silences and non-verbal cues also convey meaning as well as relationships that can be embedded in teacher identity and hierarchies of power and in power differentials (Dervin, 2016, p 106).

Kramsch (1998, p 77) argues that while English as a form of linguistic pluralism is desirable, it is also important to allow for the maintenance of different languages and thus ‘making sure that the linguistic semiotic capital is as rich and diversified as possible’. This is the idea that loss of language, without some manoeuvrability brings with it a loss of social, cultural and economic capital. From the perspective of schooling in Australia, families identified as being from English as Another Language (EAL) or CALD backgrounds must grapple with not only the acquisition of the English language but also the ideological, cultural and political impact on their first languages.

More broadly, linguistic nationalism, that is, ‘the association of one language variety with the membership of one national community’ can be used as a way ‘of excluding outsiders and can
be perceived as a form of national allegiance’ (Kramsch, 1998, pp 72-74). Furthermore, Kramsch (1998) argues, this can lead to an artificially created standard language made up of different dialects that imposes one dialect over others thus creating a monopoly that reduces communication rather than enhances it. The loss of language has also been coupled with the loss of culture. For example, a study of refugee African Australians (Ndhlovu, 2010) in the context of learning English found a strong emotional attachment and loyalty to the maintenance of their African languages. The study claimed that ‘...their speakers consider them a vital part of their social and cultural capital’ and the attitudes of these refugees to language learning needs to be understood in the context of their associated notions of identity and belonging through language (p 312).

**Clarifying culture in the new Australian Curriculum?**

Given the discussion in the previous sections pointing to issues of clarity and definition of key concepts relevant to interculturality in education, as well as the language and diversity discourses it is therefore no surprise to find that from an education policy and curriculum perspective it has been difficult to answer the question, ‘What is culture?’

One of the conceptual challenges in developing the Australian Curriculum was a lack of a settled definition for intercultural understanding and correspondingly how to move intercultural education into all discipline areas as part of the mainstream curriculum as noted in the following quote:

> Given its diverse origins, it is not surprising that the nature and place of intercultural learning are by no means settled nor the definition of the term ‘culture’ is itself agreed upon (ACARA, 2012 p 85).

In clarifying the scope and meaning of culture for schools, the curriculum writers drew on the theoretical perspectives of ‘cultural theorists such as Hall, 1997, in language education, Kramsch, 1998; Liddicoat, Lo Bianco and Crozet, 1990, and in multicultural education Banks and Banks, 2004’ (ACARA, 2012, p 2). The following definition of culture, taken from *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* (ACARA, 2011b) was used to provide some clarity for educators:
Culture involves complex systems of concepts, values, norms, beliefs and practices that are shared, created and contested by people who make up a cultural group and are passed on from generation to generation. Cultural systems include variable ways of seeing, interpreting and understanding the world and are constructed and transmitted by members of the group through processes of socialisation and representation (ACARA, 2011b, p 13).

Leading up to the introduction the Australian Curriculum, consultations involving 130 teachers and other educators about the intercultural capability showed that 88%, an overwhelming majority of respondents, thought the ‘theoretical basis for the Intercultural understanding capability is sound’ although there were concerns about the adequacy of the definition. Some called for more clarity, particularly for emphasising the dynamic nature of culture while others noted omissions of such dimensions as prejudice and anti-racism (ACARA, 2011a, p 32). To agree with this definition and its associated distinctions of identity, beliefs and behaviours there must be an acceptance that the concept of culture exists and that cultures are different.

While the ACARA definition positions culture as a social process, Dervin’s and Abdallah-Pretceille’s concerns about the use of culture as a discrete entity are relevant, particularly in the different ways that culture could be understood and presented using this definition in the classroom. The challenge becomes one of interpretation and enactment which to a large extent depends on the teacher understanding of culture and how they read themselves into the definition. Furthermore, the potential influence of teacher assumptions about culture and ethnicity about students from migrant or refugee backgrounds (Allard & Santoro, 2008; Matthews, 2008; Keddie, 2011) and their ability and willingness to engage with issues to do with race and ethnicity (Arber, 2006; Freeman et al., 2012) adds further complexity to how studies of culture are reflected in classroom practice. Other factors such as student assumptions about their teachers’ cultural or ethnic background (de Brok & Levy, 2005) also suggest a need for deep engagement with concept of culture and ethnicity at all levels. For example, an understanding of ‘their ethnic self’ as well as ‘the ethnic other’ have been foregrounded as essential attributes for effective pedagogy in multicultural classrooms (Santoro, 2009, p 34).
As noted earlier, the idea of whiteness has been put forward as a normative cultural identity in Australia (Hambel, 2005; Naidoo, 2009). Teachers need to consider, and to be critically aware of, the influence of their backgrounds and any privilege and power associated with race thinking (Gillborn, 2014; 2015) and culture in their teaching. It is therefore important that these more critical dimensions of curriculum enactment are made visible or are subject to some analysis in studies involving culture, particularly in classrooms with refugees or migrant others (McLeod & Yates, 2003, p 34).

**Situating multicultural education**

Different versions and applications of multicultural education has been used in education to support multiculturalism (Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Hambel, 2005). Internationally, multicultural education emerged as part of the US civil rights movement to promote social reform and democracy (Banks, 1998; 2013). More specifically, proponents hoped multicultural education would address social and structural inequality leading to discrimination and racism mostly effecting African Americans, Hispanics and other minority groups (Banks, 2013; Gillborn, 2014; Sleeter & Grant, 2007).

In Australia, multicultural education has been regarded as an important strategy in achieving social cohesion following the lead of other immigrant nations such as the USA, Canada and New Zealand (Kalanstzis et al., 2012; Kymlicka, 2007). Prior to the 1970s, Australian immigration policies sought to assimilate and align immigrants with the mainstream culture, and it was seen that there was little need for multicultural education (Kalanszis et al., 2012). Later multicultural education efforts have tended to emphasise English language acquisition and integration of immigrants (Swetnam, 2003; Kalantzis et al., 2012). By the late 1980s, aspects of multiculturalism were generally reflected in schools around Australia through multicultural education (Sharp, 2011).

Multicultural education in Australia has been criticised for presenting a static or simplistic view of culture and therefore not able to address structural inequality or properly tackle racism (Hatoss, 2006; Watkins, 2016). It is argued that such approaches have tended to focus on students from minority cultural or linguistic backgrounds with the problematic assumption these were distinct and cohesive groups (Watkins, 2016) and the idea that multicultural education is mostly about integrating immigrant and refugee students into an assumed
mainstream culture (Kalantzis et al., 2012). This thinking also encapsulates the idea that a student’s ethnic identity is fixed and somehow determines thinking and behaviour, a factor that Watkins (2016, p. 135) notes is unlikely to be considered for other students such as those from ‘Anglo Australian backgrounds where class or individual family experience is seen to play the major role’. Likewise, Kamp and Mansouri (2007) and Chiro (2009) argue that multicultural education approaches and policies in Australia have historically been influenced by "white-western" perspectives. In their view, such thinking largely neglects fundamental oppressions and structural disadvantage for new immigrant groups from other backgrounds and forces them to substantially shift or modify their identities to fit with the mainstream (Powers, 2002; Hill, 2007) that in turn runs contrary to the spirit of pluralist aspirations.

In the Victorian Curriculum, the concept of multiculturalism, ‘refers to the preservation of different cultures or cultural identities within a unified society, as a state or nation’ (VCAA, 2018, p 45) and is pluralist in nature reflecting the idea that in multicultural Australia, minority groups can maintain their identity and culture. The obvious challenge is the implementation and translation of such ideals into school and teacher practices. For example, a study conducted in 14 Australian schools in New South Wales schools (Noble & Watkins, 2014b) investigating multiculturalism and the application of multicultural education found competing understandings of culture and intercultural understanding among teachers, parents and students and therefore a lack of shared discourse. Furthermore, there was a substantial variation in understanding of these concepts within groups that led to essentialised and stereotypic racial and ethnic characterisations. These were schools where multiculturalism was adopted as policy and in which teachers had undertaken training as a requirement of Anti-racism policy. Recommendations from the study called for the strengthening the social-cultural emphasis in pre and post service teacher training with the aim to improve the critical capacities of teachers to challenge such essentialisms. Such findings point to the complexity in translating policy into the professional practices of teachers and more fundamentally the need to challenge the assumptions about culture and cultural diversity contained in policy and curriculum.

While more broadly intercultural education is presented as being more progressive than multicultural education (Meer & Moodod, 2011) one must be careful to not to dismiss some of the different versions of multicultural education. For example, Bank’s (2001; 2008) critical
approach to multiculturalism could fulfil similar ambitions as interculturalism, particularly his *Dimensions for Multicultural Education*. The topology for this framework includes five elements, ‘content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction process, equity pedagogy and empowering school culture and social structure’ that could offset the mono-cultural mindset that interculturality seeks to overcome (Banks, 2010, p 20). Other features of this approach that could contribute to interculturality include the pedagogies for equity and inclusion, development and use of critical and reflective practices, cross cultural interaction and competency and cultivation of values such as reflection, empathy, respect and responsibility that are present in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2012).

Sleeter & Grant (2007, pp 184-85) point to another form of multicultural education, ‘*Multicultural Social Justice Education*’ which they contend is distinctly different and more effective that other approaches used in multicultural education because it takes a more critical stance. This approach, they claim, is more politically motivated and ‘starts with the premise that equity and justice should be goals for everyone and that solidarity across difference is needed to bring about justice’. The overall aim of this approach is to ‘eliminate oppression of one group of people by another’ (p 184-85). The approach advocated includes teaching and practising democratic principles and values, empowering students to share and analyse different perspectives and engaging in self-reflection. A *Multicultural Social Justice Education* curriculum is more broadly framed by an intersectional emphasis on issues such as ‘racism, classism, sexism, sexuality and disability’ and is designed to promote behaviours associated with justice and fairness and thus enhancing cultural pluralism. The intersectional and inclusive orientation of this approach coupled with the application of critical theory has some appeal in terms of the development of interculturality. However, as Sleeter and Grant (2007, p 210) note there are challenges in implementation, not least of which is teachers’ readiness to ‘deal with issues and the emotions around them’ and confronting the lived experience of students’ own social inequality or inequality present in schools.

In light of the contested meanings of multiculturalism (Meer & Madood, 2011; Levey, 2012; Portera, 2011) and interculturalism (Alexander et al., 2014; UNESCO, 2006) and the overlapping versions of multicultural education and intercultural education, it is over
simplifying things to divide them into a simple binary when discussing the development of interculturality.

**Introducing intercultural education**

Intercultural education is described more in terms of equality regardless of a person’s cultural or ethnic background or religion (Portera, 2011), and where an understanding of cultural diversity includes one’s own cultural and ethnic identity (Santoro, 2009). This approach might be differentiated from versions of multicultural education where the focus on raising students’ awareness and understanding of the exotic other or emphasising assimilation of newly arrived migrants or refugees (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008; Kalantzis et al., 2012), that is, culture is about the *other* and not about *us*.

While intercultural education has been present in policy documents in Victoria since the late 1990s (DET, 1997) it was not explicitly written into the Victorian Curriculum. It highlighted the need for schools to be ‘socially just’ and inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as well as the need for all students to ‘understand and acknowledge the value of cultural and linguistic diversity’ (Board of Studies, 2000, p 7). These aspirations however, were largely framed in the context of Civics and Citizenship Education without pointing to relevant content or approaches related to multicultural or intercultural education.

In the most recent version of the Victorian Curriculum the term intercultural is defined as ‘what occurs when members of two or more different cultural groups interact or influence one another in some fashion’ (VCAA, 2015a). For example, in achievement standards for intercultural capability, students at levels 3 and 4 (equate to Grades 3 & 4) are asked to ‘compare a range of cultural practices and explain their influence on people’s relationships. They explain what they have learned about themselves and others from intercultural experiences. Students explain cultural traditions in the development of various identities. They develop a critical perspective on and respect for their own and others culture’. By Level 10 students are expected to be able to ‘analyse the components of a cohesive society and the challenges, benefits and consequences of maintaining or failing to maintain that cohesion’ (VCAA, 2015a).
To teach intercultural capability as elaborated in these examples, curriculum developers have accepted that cultural differences exist, that there are identifiable practices, traditions and identities that can be examined. It is assumed that having this capability will contribute to a respect for other cultures, in which minority groups can maintain their identity within the broader society (VCCA, 2018). From this perspective diversity is viewed as an asset to be celebrated and supported. Intercultural education also means ensuring that lessons do not essentialise or exoticise culture (Watkins, 2016) nor presume that by treating everybody the same way will account for any structural or embodied differences or power differentials (Allard, 2006). Alexander et al. (2014) also caution against the assumption that intercultural competence is the coming together of well-intended people to freely engage in cross cultural exchanges as equal participants. Interculturality, she argues, are the processes of building relationship between cultures and must include an understanding of the power dynamics, embedded contexts, and histories. In other words, intercultural education entails developing sustained and integrated approaches, perspectives and activities so that the engagement of the various cultures does not look artificial or forced. Interculturality therefore involves sensitivity to the encounter, whether positive or negative, superficial or deep, between and among cultures (Cruz, 2012).

From a broader perspective Coulby (2006; 2011a) argues that intercultural education has moved towards the centre of education policy to replace multicultural education, as is happening in Australia, and in doing so carries some unrealistic assumptions about what can be done without the necessary conceptual clarity and teacher capability (Noble & Watkins, 2014b). Such expectations and assumptions can further impact on curriculum delivery as Shim (2011) argues the provision of a new curriculum or policy by itself, may not lead to the desired outcomes without also attending to the way it is delivered or understanding the social and political structures in which it is delivered. Coulby (2011b, p 114) further warns that the ‘vastness of the intercultural ambition’ can also mitigate against achieving aspirations for intercultural education. This is not surprising given factors such as the crowded curriculum, the extent of linguistic and diversity in schools, limited financial resources and the difficulty in determining what is included or left out of curricula and how this is translated into practice.

The next section will elaborate on role and practices of school leadership in addressing some of these complexities and challenges.
Section 3  The role of leadership in transforming schools; finding a place for intercultural understanding

The health, safety and wellbeing of principals in Australian schools has been the subject of an annual national survey since 2011. More than half of Australia’s 10,000 principals have participated, with nearly thirty percent of respondents coming from Victoria (Riley, 2014; 2017). The following quote illustrates some of the challenges faced on day to day basis:

Principals, deputy/assistant principals and teachers deal daily with parents’ greatest hopes and deepest fears; the lives and potential futures of their children. While this is recognized in the law of loco parentis, the emotional consequences remain under-researched (Hargreaves, 2013; Woolfolk Hoy, 2013). This means high levels of emotion are attached to many aspects of school functioning, and principals and deputy/assistant principals have to learn how to deal with this on the job, rather than through systematic preparation. This can be particularly difficult for principals and deputy/assistant principals who must communicate the way education policy is both developed and practised to teachers, parents and students, sometimes in emotionally charged situations (Riley, 2017, p 18).

Part of the education policy that Riley refers to is framed within the context of ‘short-term political cycles with heavily politicised education standpoints’ (Riley, 2017, p 11) and more broadly within contemporary globalisation with its infusion of marketisation and business models (Hartley, 2012; Giroux, 2013; Hyslop-Margison & Thayer, 2009; Hursh & Henderson, 2011). It is here that the function of schooling can be reduced to that of sorting and training future workers and consumers (Torres &Van Heertum, 2009; Giroux, 2012).

Furthermore, as Collard (2007, p 740) argues, education leadership discourse as it relates to contemporary intercultural contexts has been dominated by ‘Western-led educational interventions’, which have the capacity to transmit and maintain limiting and stereotypic perspectives and assumptions about culture. This implies that if school leaders wish to provide just and inclusive intercultural learning environments, in schools such as Ackenham, they must not only fulfil their policy obligations and manage day to day expectations of parents and but work towards establishing reflexive organisations, which often starts with themselves (Dervin, 2016; Walker & Chen, 2007).
Coulby’s (2006, p 246) assertion that ‘if education it is not intercultural then it is probably not education’, requires an understanding of what is means to lead an intercultural approach in schooling. Intercultural education from this perspective is not a single subject but a theme embedded in the discourses, practices and cultures of schools. As already noted interculturalism is a contested field influenced by the wider context and the demands and nuances of education policy and the Australian Curriculum.

**Leading for interculturality in schooling**

The literature reveals that the process of developing interculturality is primarily characterised by attributes and skills associated with reflexivity, moral literacy and authenticity (Dervin, 2016; Walker & Chen, 2007; Weber & Lupart, 2011; Walker, Qian & Chen, 2007). Interculturality is more likely to found in contexts where leaders recognise and emphasise the need for ongoing development of cultural capability in professional learning (Halse et al. 2015; Leeman, 2002; Weber & Lupart, 2011). Moreover, developing interculturality requires multidimensional and collective approaches and practices to teaching and learning in which teachers and principals value diversity, and intercultural dialogue and engagement are part of everyday practices.

**Developing moral literacy and authenticity**

As Walker, Haiyan and Chen (2007 p 379) argue the kind of leadership that is best suited to intercultural schools that is, those schools predominantly serving culturally and ethnically diverse and/or minority communities, is one supported by the development of ‘moral literacy’. Their idea of moral literacy is made up of knowledge components, virtues and values components and reasoning and communication skills that relates to Walker and Chen’s (2007, p 192) claim that ‘authenticity’ is required to effectively lead in intercultural schools. Authenticity is underpinned by a disposition for values-based approaches, ongoing leadership learning’, and reflexivity, that is, ‘an ongoing interaction between how well one understands oneself within the meanings of a given educational context; and what can best be done to improve student lives and learning within this context’ (186). Their argument is that in intercultural schools, leaders must respond to additional complexities and tensions such as managing cultural difference or racism that require a deeper commitment, the emotional literacy to understand and respond to the needs of the students, teachers and broader
community. Leadership in this sense is not only sensitive to the cultural context of the school but also learns from it and strives to improve practices as a result. This sentiment is expressed in the following quote, which may in part address Collard’s (2007) concerns about overcoming cultural assumptions and biases.

Authentic leadership in intercultural schools, rests not on over-generalised lists of what works for others, which is often grounded in mono-cultural assumptive biases, but on personal, professional learning orientation and awareness that can result in authentic practice (Walker & Chen, 2007 p 193).

Furthermore, the quote points to the need for authentic school leaders to focus on their personal and professional learning, particularly self-reflection, and as alluded to earlier, reflexivity.

The importance of reflexivity

Reflexivity was consistently identified in the literature as integral to effective educational leadership (Collard, 2007; Webber & Lupart, 2011; Walker & Chen, 2007) as well as in teaching for interculturality (Dervin, 2016; Cruz, 2013). Reflexivity means having the ability for, but moving beyond self-reflection, towards being respectful of people who are perceived as different towards recognising that there are other legitimate ways to see the world (Barrett, 2008, Cruz, 2013, Cribb & Gewirtz, 2008), and what Watkin’s (2016, p 135) calls ‘reflexive civility’. Such attributes and skills are particularly important for school leaders and teachers generally, but even more so when teaching in culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse contexts (Santoro, 2009; Freeman et al., 2012; Walton, Priest & Paradies, 2013).

In practical terms, this means having the capacity to ‘interrogate assumptions, beliefs and biases’ and to actively engage in overcoming any potential biases and addressing any negative power differentials (Webber & Lupart, 2011, p 11). Such a proposition resonates with Dervin’s (2016, p103) focus on self-knowledge and the ability to critique, ‘personal values about justice, purpose, culture and ethnicity’, and learning to challenge values and assumptions about culture. It also means having a professional responsibility and capability to reflect on attitudes and behaviours, verbal and non-verbal as alluded to in the following
quote that may also contribute to production and reproduction of cultural and racial inequalities:

In intercultural education then, it is not just what teachers explicitly teach and say but the teachers’ gaze and gestures that flow from their own prejudiced and racialized habitus that may have negative effects on students from diverse backgrounds (Shim, 2012, p 212).

Ladson-Billings; as cited in Shim (2011, p 741) asserts ‘understanding how we think is more important than figuring out what to do in culturally responsive teaching’. Habitus and thinking and embedded in instructional practices and the reasons for thinking are internalised and embodied (Shim, 2011). Leading for interculturality therefore requires much more than just a commitment to diversity but that capacity for reflective thinking and critical reflexivity coupled with a desire to participate in and lead professional development for culturally responsive teaching (Walton et al., 2014).

**The importance of professional learning**

It is apparent that principals and teachers need to understand and actively learn about the diversity, including cultural diversity that makes up any school community otherwise they contribute to a failure to address diversity, related issues and the reproduction of exclusive practices (Young, Madsen & Young, 2010). Weber and Lupart (2011) point to the need for professional leadership development and argue that to be leaders, school principals must value diversity and they themselves must have the intercultural capability to model and engage in socially just practices.

The views and beliefs of principals and teachers about the impediments and facilitators of intercultural capability were examined as part of the *Doing Diversity* project. This included regular interviews with principals and teachers, professional development for school leadership teams, the provision of an academic mentor to support in the development of action plans and the collection and use of data to monitor progress. The schools themselves were accountable for building intercultural capabilities over time with support of their mentors. In the initial stages of the study principals and teachers demonstrated a ‘high level of uncertainty about the meaning of intercultural capability in the Australian Curriculum and
how this differed from multicultural education’ (Halse et al., 2015, p 10). This was coupled with beliefs that facilitators and impediments to interculturality were outside their control, for example media and parents. In relation to leadership, the findings show that the schools that made the most progress in developing intercultural capabilities where those in which the principals were actively engaged in the study. In these schools, the principals were focussed on developing staff and were prepared to make appropriate changes to the operations of the school in response to the data and professional learning.

In another Australian study, conducted on behalf of the Department of Education in Victoria (DEECD, 2012a), the impact of intercultural understanding in learning and teaching practices on student outcomes was investigated in 26 schools including 13 with students at P-6 level. Findings indicate that the most important factor for promoting intercultural understanding was the need to increase the personal and professional capacity of teachers and school leaders to engage in a more critical and holistic approaches to cultural diversity. The study recommended professional development that would help teachers engage students in challenging and appropriate discussions. The researchers concluded that supporting students to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds helped them to take ownership over their learning. More specifically, if negative attitudes or perceptions of people from different cultural backgrounds are not appropriately discussed, then the students are likely to hold onto views that are left unchallenged.

**The importance of welcoming, inclusive and democratic schools**

The type of a school culture is particularly important in influencing the ways in which practices are valued and enacted. A key enabling condition for a positive professional learning culture according to Kemmis et al. (2014, p 130-32) is the cultivation of, ‘a culture of care and collaboration’ that is strengthened by ‘practice architectures’ based on ‘humanitarian values’ and ‘relational trust and respect’.

Webber and Lupart (2011, p 12) argue that leadership in multicultural settings means ‘building a school culture that promotes intellectual and psychological safety and cultural tolerance’ and considering the intersectional dimensions of school cultures by ‘monitoring the quality of teaching and learning in relation to gender, ethnicity, income level and academic ability’.
In the context of providing positive pedagogical climate for intercultural education the most influential factors include the presence of cooperative learning, opportunities for inter-ethnic contact, personal engagement between the teachers and students and an emphasis on reducing racism and discrimination (Leeman, 2003). Blackmore (2006) argues for a democratic and inclusive form of leadership in schools which she claims foster more equitable outcomes for students in schools that are more culturally diverse. In her view such approaches move beyond intolerance and a focus on the ‘Other’ towards greater cultural awareness and where, for example, the focus of professional development is more likely to include the type of self-reflection and reflexivity needed to overcome social and pedagogical issues related to cultural, racial and gender differences. From her perspective democratic and inclusive schools, led by the principal and underpinned by ‘a sense of self and moral commitment to social justice’ (p 30), is a key factor in making diversity issues visible and making education more equitable. However, according to Biesta (2015, p 83) the current trend in schooling is towards bureaucratic, and away from ‘democratic accountability’, particularly for the provision of data and developing standards. He, like Kemmis (2009) argues, such trends need to be challenged by broader questions about the purpose of education and what constitutes good education. Such ideas resonate with Blackmore’s (2006) argument to emphasise the moral ethical dimensions in school leadership, particularly in culturally diverse schools.

**Leading for transformation**

While it is known that school principals play a critical role in fostering and creating the environment and conditions for learning it is difficult to arrive at a list of attributes for leadership that will work in different school contexts (Walker & Chen, 2007; Kemmis et al., 2014). This is due in part to the situational dimensions and the range of different practices and approaches used by principals. Furthermore, Walker and Chen (2007, p 157) claim that when trying to understand what makes an effective learning environment, too much emphasis has been placed on looking at the leader rather than the ‘practices of leading and the practices that connect with them’. From this perspective, leading has much to do with the way in which other practices such as professional learning and teaching are connected with other factors such as school culture.
As noted in the introduction to this section, a major challenge in creating school cultures that are responsive to democratic principles or promote inclusive practices favourable for the development of interculturality can be demanding and difficult. Thomson and Blackmore (2006) argue that in Australia many teachers are deterred for applying for principal positions or that principals become overwhelmed and/or leave positions early because of the time consuming and challenging nature of the work. They suggest that answer to these problems can be found in redesigning the work of principals and correspondingly, of schools. Drawing on their study of Australian rural and metropolitan primary and secondary schools they identified five approaches that they argue are most likely to have a positive impact on the work and agency of principals, and more broadly the workplace culture. These approaches, ‘distributed pedagogical leadership, co-principalship, shared principalship, multi-campus principalship, and community-based principalship’ (p 1) were all holistic in application which meant that the leadership was only one part of the connected set of organisational activities and practices. Thomson and Blackmore argue that the leadership pressure is taken off the principal when leading becomes absorbed and shared across the school in ways that builds professional trust and respect among staff. A caveat for such outcomes was that redesign at scale could be easily undermined by a lack of a ‘coherent and meaningful ethical and political’ purpose (p 15). Furthermore, they also noted a limitation of their study was that lack of time to make the relationship between student learning and the school redesigns approaches.

The central aim of this thesis is to learn from one school how might interculturality be developed. The literature shows the contested and complex nature of cultural studies, and how relevant and important it is to provide some clarity for teachers and school leaders in developing interculturality. The literature points the role of leadership, professional learning and more broadly to the formal and informal curriculum in overcoming some of the cultural assumptions and biases that continue to negatively frame the experience of many students in Australian schools.

The next Chapter will detail the methods employed in the study and includes reference to literature related to research in schools and evaluation in education more broadly.
Chapter 3 Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodological approach used for this study. This includes some of the strengths and limitations of case study and some reasoning why this approach was used over other methods. I begin by providing an account of the approaches used for evaluating contemporary schooling. An account of the relationship between this study and the Doing Diversity project is provided, including an explanation of the data collection methods. The use of the Theory of Practice Architectures is explained to show how relevant data was identified, displayed, verified and analysed. This process followed interpretive and critical lines of inquiry and provides some insight into its application in this context. I conclude the chapter with an explanation of the ethical considerations and how any potential conflicts of interest were managed.

Evaluating schooling

Systems of accountability are used globally in contemporary schooling as a mechanism of reform and “good” governance. These are designed primarily to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of education policies and programs and whether obligations are being met by schools, principals and teachers (DET, 2015; UNESCO, 2015; DEECD, 2013d).

There is a current predisposition towards test-based research as a means of accountability and gathering knowledge about school performance and student outcomes (Biesta 2010; Lingard et al., 2016). The rise in globalisation and increased technical capacity has also resulted in a rise in large-scale international tests such as the Program for International Assessments [PISA] and Progress in International Reading and Literacy [PIRLS] (Lewis & Lingard, 2015). These tests essentially involve the collection of quantitative data and are based on underlying assumptions that school effectiveness and performance can be measured and compared at scale in similar ways (Giroux, 2013; Gillborn, 2006). Biesta (2010) argues that while there is benefit in comparative data, measurement tends to be based on a narrow range of educational outcomes that can lead to 'valuing what is measured rather than measuring what we value' (p 26). Lewis and Lingard (2015, p 633) highlight the dangers that this approach, particularly when the focus moves from ‘explanation and causation to
correlation and prediction’. One effect of such large scale and essentially quantitative measures in Australia has been the creation of a ‘high stakes’ competitive environment that links funding to performance and targets. This contributes to a distortion of the work of schools and what constitutes educational practice (Lingard et al., 2016 p 66).

While evaluation is important to the governance of education, it is also important to understand how data is used as evidence, particularly in relation to equality and inclusion (Luke, Green & Kelly, 2010). According to Lingard et al. (2016), global measures such as PISA rely ‘to a significant degree on racelessness, denial and erasure in its articulation and constitution of what is to count as equity and successful educational reform. These processes place sole responsibility for student outcomes on policy, schools and teachers and in the process deny structural inequalities and the ongoing effects of institutionalised racism’ (p 120).

Australia has had an increasing interest in its standing in global measures, such as PISA, to the extent to which data is disaggregated by state and used to justify school reform, but as Lewis and Lingard (2015) argue, this should be used cautiously when comparing performance, particularly with the notion of ‘high performing’ jurisdictions (p 628). National standardised testing was first introduced by the Australian federal government in 2007 with the NAPLAN, which continues to test the literacy and numeracy performance of students in years three, five, seven and nine. While NAPLAN is not positioned as ‘high stakes’, by education authorities, school results are now published on the national MySchool website in a comparable form. This new form of accountability has led to increased pressure on schools an inevitable comparison of performance data and ‘policy as numbers’ found in high stakes’ testing (Hurs, 2017, p 528). Unfortunately, such approaches have contributed to a system of ranking of schools and testing regimes that have been unable to adequately capture the nuances of activity in individual school sites and have more broadly had a negative impact on the work of many teachers and principals (Hurs, 2017; Lewis & Lingard, 2015).

**Adopting a research lens Qualitative research**

Qualitative research is used as inform policy decisions in education (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2012; Merriam, 1998; Elliott & Luke, 2008). The aim of qualitative research is to construct a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of the concepts, models and schemes that
will stand up to scrutiny through rigorous analysis and synthesis (Stake, 1995). Qualitative research can be useful when investigating alternative or rival explanations (Yin, 2013).

Case study is a common means of social inquiry (Stake, 1995, 2000; Yin, 2012; Merriam, 1998; Elliot & Luke, 2008) mostly involving qualitative methods and is well suited to data collection in “real world” contexts (Stake, 1995; 2000; Yin, 2012; Merriam, 1998). Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that context-dependent knowledge is essential for research and that predictive theory needs to be supported by a more detailed investigation such as that found in a case study. He suggests that much can be learned from a uniqueness of case investigations as noted in the quote below:

> Atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied. In addition, from both an understanding-oriented and an action-oriented perspective, it is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p 229).

Case study was selected as the method of research at Ackenham as it was likely to produce context-dependent knowledge about the development of interculturality which was difficult to capture by other means. This approach supports the idea of a site-based approach in which studying the physical environment and the relational interconnections within it provides an ontological perspective and sensitive interpretation of how education is created (Kemmis et al., 2014). This school provided the ideal conditions for a case study, that is, a ‘bounded system’ with enough ‘peculiarities and complexities’ to provide multiple views, and the potential to tell a compelling story (Stake, 1995, p X1). Data were collected via a range of qualitative methods including focus groups and interviews with staff and students, as well as observations and document analyses. These will be elaborated later in the chapter.

**The Theory of Practice Architectures**

Given the context, complexity of the site, and the evolving nature of school practices associated in producing intercultural understanding and associated capabilities, I have drawn on the Theory of Practice Architectures and the work of Kemmis and his colleagues to guide
the display and analysis of practices found at Ackenham. Kemmis’ work in theorising and studying professional practice, often using case study in schools as a means inquiry (Hager, 2012; Green, 2009).

The theoretical foundations for the Theory of Practice Architectures emerged from the work of Schatzki who elaborated on the social nature of individual practices and the ways they exist in certain arrangements of sayings and doings (Kemmis & Mutton, 2012; Kemmis et al., 2014; Hardy & Groves-Edwards, 2016). This is the idea that ‘social practices form the context in which social orders are established’ (Schatzki, 2002, p 70). According to Kemmis et al. (2014) the Theory of Practice Architectures, make Schatzki’s implied notion of social relationships within practice arrangements more explicit by adding the social-political dimension of relatings. This they argue, ‘draws attention to the medium of power and solidarity which always attends practice, and invites us to consider what social political arrangements in a site help hold practices in place’ (p 30). From this perspective, practices may be studied more comprehensively as transactional social activities that involve individuals as well as communities in interactions in which people can understand and relate to each other (Kemmis, 2009).

Practices can be shaped by the different ways people encounter each other in inter-subjective ways, that is, the ability to share conscious experience and empathetic communication with others. They are most evident through language, in the physical environment through work and activity, and through their relationships. These practices are most often found in common-sense shared meanings and ways of doing things that enable people to interact and understand each other. They are ‘pre-shaped but not predetermined’ which mean they can change (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 4). From this perspective, transforming a school practices such as the delivery of a program or the use of a particular pedagogy requires transforming the arrangements around the practices that produce and reproduce them. Accordingly, practices cannot be changed unless the inter-subjective activities and arrangements that support the practices also change (Kemmis, 2009; Kemmis et al., 2014).

At Ackenham, examining the characteristic arrangements, distinctive discourses, traditions, activities and social relationships between people and groups can for example help identify what was being done to facilitate or hinder the enactment of intercultural capability. Using
the Theory of Practice Architectures this can be done by collecting evidence of what people say and do and how they relate to each other while taking account of the circumstances in which they occur. This means finding ‘different bundles made up of *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* that can be arranged as patterns and studied (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 32) within the three domains in which practice arrangements exist. These are listed below:

1. Cultural-discursive arrangements exist in the *semantic space* e.g. language, symbols or specialist discourses such as in education;
2. Material-economic arrangements exist in *physical space* – time e.g. classrooms, community, buildings, playground; and
3. Social-political arrangements exist in *social space* (include power and solidarity) e.g. relationships between family, teachers and students or a political entity such as a nation (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 32-34).

Identifying the characteristics of practices within the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political domains provided a structure for mapping and organising the data. Furthermore; identifying *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* relevant to each domain helped find patterns, and identify any gaps thus adding more definition to the data in readiness for analysis.

Furthermore, at Ackenham, the intersubjective spaces where the teachers, students and their families interacted and in which *sayings*, *doings* and *relatings* could be observed were particularly important in understanding how interculturality might be developed. Intersubjectivity refers to having shared meanings and the common sense understandings that can be found in interactions involving groups of people (Correa-Chavez & Roberts, 2012). Developing school family partnerships and shared values formed part of both Virginia and Amanda’s projects. School Community Forums, weekly assemblies and teacher professional learning sessions were rich intersubjective spaces in the first instance. In this case, it was also important to apply a cultural lens to these observations and what was present or missing as argued in the following quote:

*Although they are often taken for granted in interaction, patterns of communication and understanding are cultural in nature and undergird our communicative interactions. Therefore any analysis of interaction failing to take*
cultural patterns of communication and interaction into account is necessarily incomplete (Correa-Chavez & Roberts, 2012, p 100).

Intercultural understanding and capability, as included in the Australian Curriculum, might be understood in this case as emergent practices. The notion of ‘emergent practice’, that is ‘one which is not long-established, not yet well-formed, not yet stable, routinised and institutionalised’ (Kemmis & Mutton, 2011, p 189) was particularly relevant to understanding the development of interculturality. Studying how this was incorporated into a practice landscape that was unstable and socialised with people who were new to the school or new to the professional practice of teaching or new to Australia would help our understanding of how practices are formed.

**Research approach**

As noted in Chapter 1, this study was part of a larger Australian Research Council Linkage project, *Doing Diversity: Intercultural understanding in primary and secondary schools (Doing Diversity)*. This multi-method research was conducted in Melbourne between 2012 and 2015 involving 12 schools, including Ackenham. The data collection methods and data sources used were individual interviews with principals and Intercultural Capability Coordinators (ICCs), individual interviews with students, focus groups with students and teachers, and three student and teacher surveys conducted over three years. The research intention of *Doing Diversity* was to develop some insight and new knowledge about what facilitates and impedes intercultural capabilities in schools and how the development of intercultural capabilities be supported in schools (Halse et al., 2015).

The Victorian Department of Education and Training, my employer, was one of four Doing Diversity project partners and my role on the research team formed part of their in-kind contribution to the project. The Department’s objective was to gain further insights into what could be learned from schools about the introduction of the new capability and how intercultural capability was being understood and enacted. I was allocated one day per month from role as a Senior Project Officer in the International Education Division to participate in the *Doing Diversity* project, act as a mentor and researcher at Ackenham and to undertake my PhD.
I was initially guided by the research approach employed in Doing Diversity and for this case study I followed a complimentary interpretative approach, informed by the work of leading case study researchers and theorists such as Stake (1995, 2000, 2005, 2010) and Yin (2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). The main role of the case researcher is an interpreter, observing the ordinary to look for patterns and coherence and then crafting meaning (Stake, 1995) which began on the first visit to the school and subsequent meeting with Virginia, the school principal to discuss the Doing Diversity project.

While my research essentially was an in-depth study of one case, as an extension of the Doing Diversity Project, I applied the Theory of Practice Architectures, after much of the data had been collected and found particularly useful in the analysis and findings. Given the complexity of the research site, it was important to provide a concise way of organising and analysing the significant amount of data looking for patterns and characteristics. This approach proved particularly helpful given the layers of change and disruption to the school both internally and externally.

Furthermore, the analysis drew on the concept of ecologies of practices within the Education Complex which Wilkinson and Kemmis (2015) and Kemmis et al. (2014, p 51) describe as five different but related practice groups that can be found in contemporary mass education. These are listed below:

- leading (including policy and administration)
- professional learning (both initial and continuing)
- teaching
- student learning
- and researching and reflecting on practices.

The concept of ecologies of practices is a biological analogy of a life system in which practices, while not living things, are ‘organically’ connected to each other and by the people who use them (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 47).

Data collection

Data collection for this study was entwined within the Doing Diversity project. As part of the project, an agreement between Deakin University and the school I had been given approval
to undertake my ‘supplementary’ study. This meant that data collection at Ackenham while guided to a large extent by the research needs and data collection tools of Doing Diversity project was more extensive than other schools involved in the research.

Data collection formally began in a preliminary meeting with Virginia at the end of 2012 until she left in April 2014, and continued with the second principal, Hilda, from May to August 2014 and then with Amanda, the third principal, from September 2014 until June 2015. Doing Diversity project research activity concluded at the end of 2014 however, I interviewed Amanda in June 2015 and continued to monitor Ackenham’s newsletters, website and reports. Data were collected from interviews, focus groups, surveys and from field observations on and within the prescribed intervals of the Doing Diversity project. On top of this, I was also able to take advantage of additional research opportunities such as two Doing Diversity school showcase events as well as participating in school events such as an excursion to Frazier Hills’ Catholic Primary School and the premier of student films in a major Melbourne public square. Furthermore, with members of the Doing Diversity project team, I facilitated a whole school professional learning day for all staff focused on intercultural understanding in 2013 and, in collaboration with Virginia, planned and led the second school community forum in 2014. At the end of 2014, in collaboration with Amanda, I facilitated two Professional Learning Team (PLT) meetings for teaching staff to map intercultural capability from the Victorian Curriculum against Ackenham’s teaching and learning program. These activities and events each provided opportunities to collect additional data.

The extent and scope of data was tempered by the change of leadership and staff over the course of the study period. Hilda and Amanda both agreed to continue Ackenham’s for participation in the Doing Diversity project and support my PhD although at the beginning of each transition it took time to re-establish the relationships with the principals and reaffirm the research purpose and credentials. Amanda initially indicated that school was being over-researched and likened Ackenham to ‘being like a rat in a laboratory’ (Principal meeting, September 2014). As Stake (1995, p 57) notes, ‘Almost always, data gathering is done on somebody’s “home grounds”. Most educational case data gathering involves a small invasion of personal privacy’. I was therefore always mindful not to overstep the privilege the study had afforded me and, like a house guest, not to outwear my welcome. For example, in some
instances this meant respectfully concluding interviews within agreed times without being fully able to follow new lines of inquiry.

On the one hand I was granted privileged access to the school and staff over three years, which was sufficient to gather an extensive array of data, but on the other, access and time was also limited by the need to work within the agreed one day a month time release from my work commitments as well as to maintain a respectful and unobtrusive research relationship. In other words, school visits and face to face data collection was undertaken wherever and whenever was convenient for the school although I was able to monitor the school newsletters and other public information offsite for the duration of the study.

My key research question essentially remained intact for the duration of the study, that is ‘How might interculturality be developed in an Australian primary school?’ A supplementary question, developed in response to unanticipated turnover of principals, ‘How did the change in leadership and vision influence the development of interculturality? further acted to focus the collection of data, particularly what was said in interviews and during meetings, written in school documents and emails, reports and newspaper articles and to consider how this information might be relevant to the development of interculturality.

**Methods**

Beginning in 2013, individual interviews with the principals and Intercultural Capability Coordinators (ICC) were conducted at approximately six to eight months intervals until the end of 2014 (Halse et al., 2015). For me this involved more than one interview on a number of occasions. For instance, the first round of interviews with Virginia consisted of three recorded interviews; the school tour interview (which also involved Karen, the Teaching and Learning Coach), the school website interview and an interview about the school foyer as illustrated in Table 1.
### Table 1  
**Summary of interviews, meetings and focus groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Focus and/or data emphasis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2012</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 December</td>
<td>Meeting with Virginia, principal Ackenham Primary School.</td>
<td>Introduction to the <em>Doing Diversity</em> project and my study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2013</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 February</td>
<td>Meeting with Virginia</td>
<td>First project meeting to affirm the intentions of the research and to begin to collect background and contextual information from the principal’s perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 February</td>
<td>Staff meeting</td>
<td>First meeting with teachers and other staff to introduce them to the <em>Doing Diversity</em> project / PHD research and engage their interest and support. Begin to collect background information from a broader staff perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 February</td>
<td>School Community Forum involving more than 50 people from the school community including school staff, students and their families attended.</td>
<td>Participated as an observer / mentor and documented the interactions, questions, responses and outcomes from the Forum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 April</td>
<td>Meeting with Virginia</td>
<td>Provided feedback and reviewed insights from the School Community Forum and to begin the process of developing a school action plan for intercultural capability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 April</td>
<td>Formal interview with Virginia and Karen (Teaching and Learning Coach)</td>
<td>Recorded interview while being taken of a tour of school and the physical spaces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 April</td>
<td>Formal principal interview with Virginia</td>
<td>Recorded interview focusing on the construction, aims and features of school website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 June</td>
<td>Formal interview with Virginia</td>
<td>Recorded interview focusing on the physical layout, artefacts and aims of the school foyer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 July</td>
<td>Meeting with Virginia</td>
<td>Co-designed a staff professional development day focusing on intercultural understanding for Ackenham staff and other teachers from the local network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 August</td>
<td>Formal teacher Focus Group 1</td>
<td>Recorded discussion with teachers Brendan, Lisa, Jenny focusing on their understanding and experience of intercultural capability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 August</td>
<td>School assembly</td>
<td>Observed whole school assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 August</td>
<td>Meeting with Virginia</td>
<td>Reviewed program for staff professional development day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 August</td>
<td>Staff Professional Development Day involving 20 people. Participants included all Ackenham teachers and ancillary staff and teachers from two local network schools.</td>
<td>Co-facilitated the staff professional development day on intercultural capability with other members of the Doing Diversity team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 August</td>
<td>Formal teacher Focus Group 2 with teachers Brendan, Lisa, Jenny</td>
<td>Recorded discussion seeking further elaboration on their understanding and experience of intercultural capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 September</td>
<td>Formal focus groups with six Year 3-4 students</td>
<td>Recorded discussion focusing on students understanding and experience of intercultural capability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 September</td>
<td>Formal focus groups with six Year 5-6 students</td>
<td>Recorded discussion focusing on students understanding and experience of intercultural capability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 September</td>
<td>Doing Diversity Professional Development Day</td>
<td>Participated in professional learning facilitated by Doing Diversity team for all participating schools including Virginia and Karen from Ackenham.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 October</td>
<td>Meeting with Virginia and Karen</td>
<td>Discussed the Ackenham Action Plan for intercultural capability and the school’s presentation at the Doing Diversity School Show case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 November</td>
<td>Doing Diversity School Show case hosted by the Department of Education and Training. Ackenham was represented by Virginia, teachers Brendan and Jenny and Kandra (Somali Multicultural Aide)</td>
<td>Hosted a day for all 12 Doing Diversity schools in which all school presented their progress and achievements to an audience made up of education officials, Doing Diversity team members and Doing Diversity school participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 December</td>
<td>Meeting with Virginia</td>
<td>Reviewed progress of Doing Diversity project and planned next steps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 February</td>
<td>Meeting with Virginia</td>
<td>Planned and began preparation for a school community forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 March</td>
<td>Meeting with Virginia</td>
<td>Finalised program for the School Community Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 March</td>
<td>Workshop with nine Year 5-6 students</td>
<td>Workshoppe students for their involvement in the Forum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
19 March  | Special event Engaged with Virginia and teachers Brendan and Colin (Grade 1-2) and a small number of students.  

Attended the launch of the Australian Football League and Department of Education’s multicultural and anti-racism competition for schools ‘One Team, One Goal’ held at Ackenham.

19 March  | Premier of student films. Engaged with Virginia, Brendan, Karen, Grade 5-6 students and parents.  

Attended public launch in Federation Square, Melbourne.

19 March  | School Community Forum. Around 30 people from the school community including school staff, students and their families attended.  

Co-facilitated forum with assistance from students and Virginia focusing on school values.

1 April  | Meeting with Virginia  

Reviewed school’s survey results and was informed about and discussed Virginia’s departure.

15 April  | Formal interview with Virginia  

Recorded interviewed about Virginia’s tenure as principal, achievements and legacy with a particular focus on intercultural capability.

2 May  | Meeting with Hilda as acting principal  

Updated and briefed Hilda on Doing Diversity project and confirmed ongoing arrangements for the research including my PhD.

30 May  | Formal interview with Hilda  

Recorded interview focusing on impressions of the school, plans and experience and understanding of intercultural capability

4 June  | Meeting with Hilda and Brendan  

Discussed status of Doing Diversity project and briefed them on the process for the focus groups.

4 June  | Formal focus group with six Year 3-4 students  

Recorded discussion focusing on their responses to scenarios designed to promote discussion about asylum seekers, cultural appropriation and racial discrimination.

4 June  | Formal focus group with six Year 5-6 students  

Recorded discussion focusing on their responses to scenarios designed to promote discussion about asylum seekers, cultural appropriation and racial discrimination.

4 June  | Formal teacher focus group  

Recorded discussion involving all teaching staff focusing on their responses to scenarios designed to promote discussion about asylum seekers, cultural appropriation and racial discrimination.

1 August  | Interview with Hilda (by phone)  

Discussed her tenure as principal, including challenges and achievements.
8 September  Meeting with Amanda, new principal  Introductory meeting and orientation to Doing Diversity project and my PhD study.

27 October  Meeting with Brendan and Molly  Preparation for Doing Diversity school show case and excursion to Frazier Hills Catholic Primary School.

31 October  School Excursion to Frazier Hills Catholic Primary School with Brendan, Molly and five Grade 5-6 students.  Accompanied staff and students to Frazier Hills and documented interactions, questions, responses and insights.

12 November  Doing Diversity School Showcase. Ackenham was represented by Amanda, Brendan and Molly.  Hosted a day for all 12 Doing Diversity schools in which all schools presented their progress and achievements in developing intercultural capability to an audience made up of education officials and Doing Diversity team members. Recorded Ackenham’s formal presentation.

17 November  Professional Learning Team Meeting with Amanda and all teaching staff  Facilitated discussion about intercultural capability in the Victorian Curriculum

24 November  Professional Learning Team Meeting with Amanda and all teaching staff  Facilitated discussion about the teaching and learning opportunities for intercultural capability in Ackenham’s Curriculum Plan.

2 December  Formal interview with Brendan, Intercultural Capability Coordinator.  Recorded interview about the progress of the intercultural capability at Ackenham.

2 December  Formal interview with Amanda  Recorded interviewed about her impressions of the school and future plans with a particular focus on intercultural capability.

2015

23 April  Meeting with Amanda  Updated her on the outcomes of the Doing Diversity project and discussed future plans.

9 June  Formal interview with Amanda  Recorded interviewed about her time as principal, achievements and future plans with a particular focus on intercultural capability.

Table 1 shows the range of encounters, including school events and formal and informal meetings with people in the school. These encounters were documented as transcribed texts from interviews and focus groups, field notes (documented as close to the encounter as possible) and other forms of documentation such as annual school plans and lesson plans that were provided by school staff plus policy documents and newsletters that were publicly available on the school website.
The information collected through these methods was then sorted into templates based on the work of Kemmis et al. (2014), with an initial aim to identify and code any emerging patterns, groups or gaps. This process is elaborated in the section headed ‘Analysis and reaching conclusions’. References to specific data, including relevant quotes have been employed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 to provide an understanding of what happened during the tenure of each principal.

**Interviews**

Interviews with the principals and teachers were a key method of qualitative data collection. The first formal interviews with Virginia, who was also the Intercultural Capability Coordinator (ICC) at that time, occurred at the beginning of 2013. Formal interviews concluded in June 2015. These 45 to 60 minutes interviews were conducted in the school and were taped and transcribed. As noted in Table 1 above there were four taped and transcribed interviews with Virginia, one with Hilda and two with Amanda. The interviews were conducted in open ended and semi-structured manner. Such an approach provides the flexibility for the participant to set the direction of the interview and more fully reveal the nuances of their work (Yin, 2012), although each was governed by an overall trigger theme or question prompted by Doing Diversity project. For example, the School Tour interview conducted with Virginia and Karen, and the School Foyer interview conducted with Virginia were designed to answer the question ‘How does the physical environment facilitate or impede intercultural capacities in schools?’ (Halse et al., 2015, p 41). For these interviews we, both myself and the research participants, walked around and through the physical spaces so that the participants could point to features of the environment and relevant artefacts to provide a clearer picture of the spatial arrangements. These two interviews led into other discussions such as about school values, the learning and teaching program and student behaviour management. They were particularly important in the early stages of the research to build an understanding of the role of site, situation and context for later analysis of practices and how these were present and produced. This follows the idea of looking at educational transformation in terms of ‘site-based education development’ (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 212), that is, that all schools are different, with different needs, challenges and opportunities that require a local response. While the physical and geographical dimensions are only one aspect of site-based education development, in the case of Ackenham these played a significant role in shaping the practice.
arrangements of the school, as detailed in the interviews. Similarly, the initial interviews with all three principals focused on the participants’ background and how they came to be at Ackenham, their plans for the school (their project) and their understanding and beliefs about what facilitated or impeded intercultural capabilities at Ackenham (Halse et al., 2015, p 26). The latter focus was repeated in subsequent interviews to establish what, if anything, had changed over time.

There is one recorded interview with Brendan as Intercultural Capability Coordinator. He was one of two teachers who remained at the school throughout the course of the study. In my role as Doing Diversity mentor I had many conversations with him which I documented as field notes. He also participated in three teacher focus groups. Reference to Brendan as an example of teachers’ voice and transformation is included in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

**Focus groups**

The study involved three teacher focus groups, the first two involving the same three teachers. The third included all six classroom teachers plus Karen, the Learning and Teaching Coach and Anna, the Italian language teacher.

There were also four student focus groups that were made up of two groups of Grade 3-4 students and two groups of Grade 5-6 students. Each focus group had between four and six students. Teacher and student focus groups were also based on 45-60 minutes durations and were taped, transcribed and de-identified.

The focus groups were conducted in the school with the first set conducted in the latter part of 2013, August and September, during Virginia’s tenure. The second was set in June 2014 during Hilda’s tenure. The Doing Diversity project inquiry and discussion process for both the second teacher and first student focus groups involved the use of an ‘interactive matrix’ on which the group response could be shown to promote discussion about commonalities or dissidence of individual responses. Participation was guided by the idea that there were no right or wrong answers. Each participant was given a set of coloured stickers and a transparency for each question. Each transparency was divided into four named quadrants, on which they were asked to place one coloured sticker according to their views to the question. For example, the students’ discussion was guided by the prompt, ‘In my class kids
mostly hang out with…….’ ‘mostly boys’, ‘mostly girls’, ‘all sorts of different kids’ or ‘mostly kids from my own country or religion’ (indicated on four quadrants). Once the students had put their sticker on their transparency these were combined to form a map of their views and were the asked to explain and discuss their responses. I found both student focus groups quite challenging with much of the time taken up explaining the process and managing the distractions of pens, stickers and transparencies. Furthermore, some students found the task was conceptually challenging leading to disengagement and behaviour management issues. In saying this there were some insightful comments and moments of rich discussion.

The same process was used in the second teacher focus group. All four prompts, listed below, were used for the focus groups:

- ‘The general capability, intercultural understanding in my school’…….. ‘is a high priority’, ‘low priority’, ‘pressure is strong’, ‘pressure is weak’.
- ‘Teaching intercultural understanding’ ……. ‘students can be assessed’, ‘students cannot be assessed’, ‘ICU can be taught or improved’, ICU cannot be taught or improved’.
- ‘Levels of intercultural understanding are’…….’high in my school’, ‘low in my school’, ‘high in Australia’, ‘low in Australia’.
- ‘In my school empathy for the experiences of different cultural groups is’……..’high among teachers’, ‘low among teachers’, low among students’ and ‘high among students’.

The first teacher focus group was held on the same day as a professional learning day focusing on intercultural understanding and led to rich discussion about their perspectives on the school, teaching practices and their understanding and application of the intercultural capability.

The second set of student and teacher focus group questions and processes were also governed by the _Doing Diversity_ project. At the beginning participants were asked by way of introduction where they were born, where their parents were born, what languages they spoke and as a final question what they had learnt about diversity. The focus group discussion for both teachers and students was framed around four scenarios below:
• Scenario 1 - Asylum seekers and their right to be in Australia; guided by the question, ‘If you were the Prime Minister, would you allow refugees into Australia?’

• Scenario 2 - Cultural appropriation and representations of the other; guided by an image of Katie Perry (American singer and performer) dressed in a traditional Japanese outfit and the question, ‘Should pop singers be allowed to dress up as if they are a different nationality?

• Scenario 3 - Proposed changes to the Australian Racial Discrimination Act; guided by the question, ‘Is it okay to say something to offend somebody from a different race or culture? Should there be rules to prevent such a thing?

• Scenario 4 – Shopping centre incident with representations of racism and bystanderism; guided by the question, ‘What would you do? What do you think you should do? Have you ever experienced something similar?

Both teacher and student focus groups drew out opinions of participants towards contemporary social issues such as racism, migration, discrimination and culture. The four scenarios were written by the Doing Diversity team and were related to the content descriptions of intercultural capability in the Australian Curriculum, that is, ideas of the ‘foreigner other’, cultural representation and appropriation, and discrimination and racism. It was therefore useful to explore teachers and students understanding and perspectives on the role and its influence of culture in Australia particularly with aim to look at ways this capability, in conjunction with other capabilities could reduce and prevent discrimination and racism.

Discovering documents, websites and records

There was a significant amount of contextual data available to the study in the shape of school documents, online material and public records. This was collected from internal sources and a range of external sources, most publicly available, and included high level school charters and reviews, school curriculum statements and guides, school policies and newsletters taken from the school’s public-facing website. Other materials such as lesson plans and internal planning documents were provided by teachers and principals. External sources included newspaper articles, directly referring to Ackenham or indirectly reporting on schools like Ackenham. A trove of archived historical material such as planning documents and original
letters about building the school was found in online public records. The MySchool website (ACARA 2012-2015) provided comparative demographic and achievement data. State and federal education policy and curriculum materials were freely available and publicly sourced although I did have access to some internal Department of Education documents and personal correspondence that were relevant to the policy environment in which the study took place. I was mindful of Yin’s (2012) caution to take account of any editorial bias that may be present in locally produced documents and used critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2008; Paltridge, 2012) to guide my analysis of these.

**Observation and taking field notes**

A case study researcher’s job is to understand the workings of the case and record objectively what is happening at the same time as examining and redefining meaning (Stake, 1995). School visits and activities were rich sources of data, which enabled me to capture a snapshot of day-to-day activities and to record comments, impressions and observations that are critical to a case study (Yin, 2012). Outside the recorded transcripts I kept detailed notes and took photographs of school artefacts and spaces. Rough notes and observations were then more fully developed after visits and when relevant and possible, cross-checked through interviews, focus groups or discussions with staff. This continued through the tenures of the three principals in what Stake (1995, p 21) refers to as ‘progressive inquiry’; that is observation, renewed inquiry and explanation.

**Analysis and reaching conclusions**

While I referenced the data collected for the Doing Diversity project in my discussion and findings, I did not use any of the survey findings from this project at Ackenham in this analysis. This was due to the small number of respondents and the fact that the first survey had been partly compromised by technical problems which made comparison with the later survey and drawing conclusions difficult. Instead I relied on the collection of qualitative material supported by as much additional primary source material as possible to produce a through and detailed analysis of what was happening through certain periods of time.

Stake (1995, 2000) cautions about trying to do too much with a case, making too many demands and trying to serve too many audiences. He acknowledges that these concerns are
evident in qualitative research more broadly but argues that by paying attention to the characteristics of good research, such as the use of multiple perspectives through triangulation and continuing to validate the observed and generalised help avoid some of these problems. The more specific focus on practice arrangements enabled me to consolidate the data into manageable bundles where patterns could be identified. For example, in analysing the practices during Virginia’s tenure, the key sayings, doings and relatings were identified. See Table 2, to show what happened during this period, mapped against the practice landscape and the main features of Virginia’s project. I was able to include perspectives from multiple sources, which was helpful to discern what remained the same or if there were any new or different practices introduced during Hilda’s or Amanda’s tenures.

The teachers’ perspectives were collected through the focus groups and field notes during visits and meetings to the school, and particularly through Brendan. The principals, particularly Virginia and Amanda, provided the richest source of data through the interviews and many conversations and meetings I had with them. Their sayings, doings and relatings were also evident in school newsletters, on the school website, newspaper articles and in documents such as the annual reports, school reviews, handbooks and policy. The student voices are present through focus groups, the school community forums and the excursion to Frazier Hills Catholic Primary School, that I attended as an observer, but less well represented in the overall data and hard to draw a qualified understanding of their experience at Ackenham.

Practice Architecture Theory was particularly helpful in developing a suitable framework and analytic approach for displaying and analysing the different types of data collected. By looking at the connections and relationships, between people, particularly in historical, social and discursive terms can bring an understanding of acquired social practices, in particular communities of practitioners (Kemmis, 2009).

Following this lead, I initially searched the data for key words, phrases, sentences, ideas, observations, images which were then organised into text boxes equating to the key organisers of the Theory of Practice Architectures, initially as a primitive version of the Table of Invention (Kemmis et al., 2014). For temporal clarity, the data was assigned to periods marked by the tenure of the three principals. In all there were nine rubrics, developed through
this approach to initial data analysis, three for each period. This process enabled me to identify and code relevant data from transcripts, text, field notes and observations and then refine these into themes and practice arrangements relevant to the research focus on interculturality. The aim here was to display as much of the data as possible without being overwhelmed. For example, I initially focussed on what the principals, teachers and students were saying about the school, themselves and each other in terms of culture and developing intercultural capability. This included references to how the school’s curriculum and teaching and learning practices were deployed. As more information was collected and other related themes were revealed such as the intersections with professional learning, school leadership and more broadly the presence of and influence of education policies and practices. Yin (2010) and Stake (1995, 2000) contend that the collection of evidence from multiple sources assists in triangulating and validating the results. Where possible I triangulated data, checking against principal, teacher, student interview and focus group transcripts, field notes and documentation such as the school newsletters, annual reports, website and those from education jurisdictions and departments. The data overall was limited by the fact that I was not able to examine classroom practice and to see the teachers at work beyond what was observed in staff meetings, school assemblies and events. Such data would have strengthened the case and enabled a greater sense of validation. This means that much of my data was contained in the semantic spaces and therefore unable to be validated through more concrete examples of principal and teacher practices.

To bring the data together for the tenure of each principal, a variation of the ‘Table of invention’ (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 226) was employed. For example, Table 2 represents a snapshot of some of the findings and interpretations made during Virginia’s tenure which were bundled together for analysis. This table broadly identifies the main practices identified during this period, including some of the enabling and constraining factors. As a way of bringing this data together I followed Schatzki (2002; 2005) and Kemmis et al.’s (2014) example by using the term ‘project’ which places a sense of order around the arrangements and the practices they establish. As Virginia was a key informant, I have called this period Virginia’s Project, although this term also includes others in the school; teachers, students and their parents, that is anyone involved in the practices and the ‘rules’, that supported and linked practices at this time. The project was in turn shaped by the site, or the practice
landscape and shown on the top right-hand side of Table 2. The practice landscape represents the site as a spatial location and the context in which it is part, that Schatzki (2002, p 70) asserts is the time and space in which practices occur and in which the ‘social order is established’. The middle section shows a summary of the data, and the main examples of practice identified through sayings, doings and relatings that emerged from the research. At the bottom left hand corner are the social dispositions which are the ‘practical senses’ that give meaning to the way people encounter each other and produces actions in a particular site Schatzki (2005, p 471). Kemmis et al. (2014 p 60) also employs Bourdieu’s notion of ‘habitus’, that is, ‘a set of dispositions that enable people to operate in a given field’. Dispositions such as knowledge, skills and values are learned, sometimes in different ways, and make practices possible in particular social sites. In this case, for example, there were different dispositions identified for staff and the students and their parents towards the school value of empathy and in the expectations towards student attendance. The use of the Table of Invention for the tenures of the three principals proved a useful way to cluster my interpretations of practices into cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements and to gain a picture of the conditions, relationships and interdependences that may have supported or not supported the development of interculturality.

Table 2 Table of Invention for analysing practices during Virginia’s tenure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of practice</th>
<th>Practice architectures in the site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Virginia’s Project</strong> (2012-14); to transform the school by creating a new and optimistic narrative that would dislodge deficit perceptions, restore confidence and lift performance. Aimed to ‘fix the broken story’ and build stronger relationships with the families. Focus on Intercultural understanding and capability (ICU) as part of building teacher capacity and improving relationships within the school.</td>
<td><strong>Practice landscape</strong>; located on a public housing estate and faced with declining enrolments and a high turnover of principals and teachers. High numbers of students from refugee from language backgrounds other than English. Project coincided with new Australian Curriculum and period of school reform, that had already had a detrimental effect on schools in areas of disadvantage. Practices mostly about overcoming deficits. Evidence of ongoing structural disadvantage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sayings**
- School narrative described in terms of deficit and disadvantage i.e. low socio-economic demography, students living in public housing, declining enrolments, Horn of African family backgrounds expressed in racist concepts such as ‘White flight’, ‘ghetto school’ or ‘school for blacks’. Narrative needs to be more positive.
- Staff instability with most early career, inexperienced in multicultural contexts and report a lack of confidence in managing student behaviour and wellbeing issues.
- Expressions of empathy and compassion for students and parents by principal but teachers have mixed views.

Cultural-discursive
Material-economic
Social-political
arrangements
• Student data (NAPLAN) assessed as problematic and at the low end for like schools. Expressed desire to improve results by focusing on literacy,
• School website and newsletters highlights positives and reasons for sending children to the school e.g. community languages, iPad program for preps, inclusive and supportive learning environment

**Doings**
• School values reviewed in collaboration with students, teachers, parents and the wider the school community
• Emphasised inquiry-based and constructivist approaches with a focus on literacy that were used within a team-teaching environment
• Provided some professional development in ICU but not integrated into the orientation of beginning teachers practices
• Included curriculum to learn about other cultures
• Focus on school pride and belonging and inclusion through fortnightly newsletters, school assemblies, parent meetings
• Brought external projects and volunteers into the school as allies and collaborators
• Extensive use of programs focusing on student social skills such as empathy (Stop, Think, Do) and conflict resolution (restorative practices)

**Relatings**
• Building partnership / relationships / creating dialogue across cultures through community forums and improved communications with parents
• Parents asserting cultural and religious beliefs in secular government primary school

**Dispositions**; characterised by the metaphor 'Walking on eggshells'. This partly defines the relationships within the school; between staff and parents and occasionally between students and teachers but also between teachers and principal. Virginia emphasises emotional attachment between the school and families and promoting social justice. Patchy use of values-based (multi-program) approaches but are at times incompatible with parents and student expectations e.g. empathy and attitudes to attendance. Teacher agency and intercultural capability less well developed and a work in progress. Student agency encouraged. Virginia’s migrant experience contrasts with teachers’ limited experience with students from non-English speaking backgrounds, migrants and refugees.

**Practice traditions**
• Funded as a low SES school that brings additional resources and staff into the school
• Employs constructivist approaches and inquiry-based learning and team teaching
• Teacher professional learning focused on literacy, wellbeing and student behaviour management
• Caters for individual student needs
• Provides community languages
• Involves external programs and volunteers to bring resources and expertise into the school

Similar tables were used for the periods denoted by Hilda and Amanda’s tenures. Based on the **sayings**, **doings** and **relatings** identified during these periods, the projects, practice landscape, dispositions and practice traditions could be compared and analysed. For example, Amanda’s emphasis on moral purpose, and Hilda’s emphasis on positive behaviours were significant dispositions that resulted in some new practices in a relatively consistent practice landscape. Analysis of the data showed that certain practices had stayed the same while others had changed. Elaboration of the findings can be found in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 and subsequent analysis and conclusions in Chapter 8.
For further refinement, I used the concept of the *Education Complex*, as noted in Chapter 1, and the five related practice groups; leading, professional learning; teaching; student learning; and researching (Kemmis et al. 2012, p 344), to group the findings from all three periods to look for connections and interdependencies between practices. It was within data and emerging practice architectures at Ackenham, I looked for practices and dispositions that contained critical reflection, openness to diversity, compassion and empathy or reflexivity, and were most likely contribute to the development of interculturality across the *Education Complex*. Furthermore, I looked for evidence about the development of intercultural capability as a professional practice that, like culture, could be discursively developed through ideas, language and customs and transmitted to others. Tables summarising the practice arrangements for each principal’s tenure can be found at the end of Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Through the analysis process the question arose whether it might be possible to identify practice architectures for interculturality. This question is explored further in Chapter 8.

**Limitations of research**

While the study of cases is extensively used and referenced in social research (Merriam, 1998; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2012), the literature indicates that there is a lack of consensus amongst theorists about its use and validity (Tight, 2010; Elliot & Luke, 2008; Butvilas & Zygmantas, 2011; Yin 2012). Furthermore, the term ‘case study’ has been appropriated to become a convenient label generically applied to different types of social qualitative research project projects (Tight, 2008; Butvilas & Zygmantas, 2011; Ragin, 1992). A case study could include mixed methods, as used in the *Doing Diversity* project, use of quantitative data but does not have to be qualitative (Stake, 2000) and as Ragin (1992) points out could be theoretical or empirical.

Ackenham provided ideal conditions for a case study. As a comparatively small, but nevertheless complex and bounded environment it enabled me to conduct a rich and progressive inquiry over time. This case study is about the work of principals and teachers and about the challenges and opportunities they faced in meeting the needs their students and their broader organisational obligations.

Despite the contained nature of the site and study there were some limitations to the extent and nature of the data collection possible. For example, the direct inclusion of parents’ voices
and perspectives was missing and would be have been helpful in contrasting the perspectives of principals and teachers. Parents were not included in the *Doing Diversity* project research agreement with the school nor was any observations of classroom practices, which may also have been beneficial in this case. While it would have been ideal to have more voices and data from different perspectives, this study was established within the context of the *Doing Diversity* project. My study was designed to provide a more detailed inquiry and analysis of the practices of one school that in turn would contribute to larger research project. For this reason, I had to use some of the methods and where appropriate refer to findings from the *Doing Diversity* project to add weight to my arguments and to give validity to my conclusions.

The ability to make generalisations and draw conclusions is important in social research although Stake (1995, 2000) argues that single cases may not provide a strong base for generalising to a population of cases as other research designs. He warns however that if too much attention is paid to generalising the researcher could lose sight of the details and be distracted in developing an understanding of the case. In this sense, the case study has the potential to particularise in ways that larger studies may not and discover detail not found in other ways. On this basis Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that generalisations can be made from a single case and that ‘examples’ drawn from case studies can supplement generalisations made in broader studies. He contests the criticism of bias toward verification in case studies and claims that, ‘The case study contains no greater bias toward verification of the researcher’s preconceived notions than other methods of inquiry’ (p 237).

As this case study is site-based, it was important to honour the people and the context in which it was set. The analysis and conclusions drawn are based on my interpretations of what I was told and observed, as viewed through the Theory of Practice Architectures. While there was a strong reliance on the interview and focus group data, I remained alert to any lines of inquiry and relationships that emerged between practices as well as those from within the broader educational policy and practice landscape. I carefully reviewed the available evidence over time and consulted frequently with members of the *Doing Diversity* team. At the beginning of the study, despite the history of the school, I could not have foreseen that there was to be such instability, particularly the change of principals. A case study about the development of interculturality widened to become a more in-depth study of school
leadership. Adopting a practice perspective enabled me to tell an unbiased story of change more succinctly and confidently, and in ways that would add value.

My time working on the Doing Diversity project was limited to one day a month. This added pressure to my ability to visit the school which had to be strategically managed so as I could meet the project requirements of Doing Diversity as well as to maximise additional research opportunities. Fortunately, I was able to juggle my work commitments to conduct research. For example, I was able to visit the school on nearly 20 occasions in 2014, a year in which there were three principals and significant instability and change.

**Ethical considerations**

My research was guided by the guidelines, ‘Conducting Research in Victorian Government Schools and Early Childhood Settings’ (DEECD, 2013) which was in turn informed by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Australian Government, 2013). Of key interest in these guiding documents was consideration of burden on participants and on sites, appropriateness of the methodology for the setting and ethical design and research conduct (DEECD, 2013e). The importance of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy and protection from harm or risk were duly considered in all research activities undertaken at Ackenham.

Approval for this sub-study of the Doing Diversity project was granted by the Deakin University Human Ethics Committee in 2012. The reference number is DHREC (2012-048). Letters of approval from the DEECD (ref 2013_002001) can be found in the Appendix 1. Virginia provided consent for the research to be undertaken in Ackenham and paper copies are stored at Deakin University. Authorisation to continue the Doing Diversity project and my associated study was provided by the subsequent principals.

One of the ethical dilemmas faced in this study was the degree to which my professional position and personal involvement in the school would influence data collection and analysis. The researcher can have different and at times overlapping roles in case study research. These include that of a ‘neutral observer’ or ‘evaluator’, ‘critical analyst’ or ‘advocate’ (Stake, 1995, p 103) each of which carries certain perspectives and research behaviours. How the data is collected and studied depends on the researcher’s standpoint and whether practices are
viewed objectively from the perspective the observer (outsider) or subjectively from the perspective of the participant (insider) (Kemmis, 2009, p 27). Furthermore, the act of researching professional practices is a professional practice itself and carries a risk of distorting the research (Green, 2009). As Angrosino and Perez (2000) argue it is naïve to think that research identities can be fixed or remain neutral however they generally should not interfere with the activities under observation to overcome any bias.

My role as mentor in the Doing Diversity project, uniquely positioned as an insider, but also my role as a Department of Education official as an outsider. According to Kemmis (2009), it is important to negotiate and to clearly articulate the relationship between the researchers and participants. In this instance case I tried to establish my role and my relationship with the staff as a researcher first. As my role in the Department of Education had no official bearing or authority over the school or staff I was able to separate this with research role. This understanding remained intact with staff who remained at the school during the duration of the study however new research relationships had to be renegotiated with Hilda, Amanda and other staff as they entered the school. It was therefore difficult to judge overall if and to what extent the research was affected by my professional role or any personal biases. As a mentor I brought resources and ideas into the site and facilitated three teacher professional learning sessions and one school community forum. That being said I tried to remain objective throughout the study but recognise that as relationships developed, I became more subjectively and emotionally connected to the people and school. While this meant that it was often hard to be a “neutral observer” my overall stance was that of the “evaluator” in which my research conduct and data collection was professionally managed.

All identifying data, including original transcripts of interviews and focus groups are stored on an encrypted file at Deakin University. Other data collected through this study was mostly publicly available, except for my field notes and a small number of internal, department and school documents which are securely stored in my home.

The next chapter provides a broad account of the background and the conditions in which Ackenham is situated. This includes an examination of the relevant literature and research findings related to school and teachers practices in schooling of refugee and migrant students in Australia, particularly from countries in and around the Horn of Africa.
Chapter 4  Background and context

Introduction

In this chapter I outline the context in which this study takes place and provide relevant background information to help tell the story of what happened at Ackenhams over the tenure of three principals; Virginia, Hilda and Amanda.

The cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements discussed in the study are in part determined by the location (site) of the school. As Schatzki (2005, p 4) points out ‘A site is a type of context. It can also be loosely understood as an arena or a set of phenomena that surrounds and immerses something and enjoys powers of determination with respect to it. Furthermore, as Kemmis et al. (2008, p 34) argue, practices can be influenced by a range of factors, not only ‘intentional action and practice knowledge’ but also by the circumstances and conditions that are ‘external’ to them’, that is, the broader context.

I first provide background about the cultural and ethnic diversity in Australia which influences education policy and curriculum development. I then provide information about the location in which Ackenhams is situated and a brief history of the neighbourhood and the school from its foundation in the 1970s until the period of the study. This includes contextual matters of relevance and demographic details about the student cohort.

Cultural and ethnic diversity in Australia? Setting the scene

Australia is a country where most of the population are immigrants or descendants of immigrants and who derive from diverse geographic, ancestral, linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In a broad sense, the idea of culture and what constitutes contemporary Australian culture have been situated in the context of its diversity (ABS, 2017a) and the idea that this multicultural demographic is a social and economic asset (CoA, 2011; 2017).

The 2016 Australian Census revealed that more than 28.5% of the population of 24.13 million inhabitants were born overseas (ABS, 2017a) and showed a 1% increase in cultural and ethnic diversity from the 2011 census. Furthermore, 48% of the population in 2016 had at least one parent who was born overseas. While people born in the United Kingdom (5%) and New Zealand (2.5%) continue to be the largest group of overseas-born residents, residents born in
China (2.2%), India (1.9%), Philippines (1%) and Vietnam (1%) make up an increasing number of Asian born Australians. Australia’s indigenous people made up 2.8% of the population (ABS, 2017d).

The census provides both the empirical dimensions used to categorise the diversity of Australia’s population as well as a record of how this has changed over time. For example, the 1947 census indicated that Australia had 7.5 million people of which 90% were Australian born and were declared almost exclusively from ‘full-blood European’ namely of ‘British nationality’ (CBCS, 1951, pp. 551-553).

In 2016 there were 93,851 people from 54 African countries living in Victoria, with the most, 27,184 from South Africa. Ethiopia with 6,368 and Sudan 5,665 persons were ranked fourth and fifth respectively, Zimbabwe sixth with 4,694 while there were 3,904 people from a Somalian heritage ranked seventh, this was up 27.5% from the 2011 census (Department of Premier and Cabinet [DPC], 2018, p 47).

Australia, along with the USA, Canada and New Zealand has been widely regarded as one of the world’s leading immigrant nations, applying a liberal form of multiculturalism to manage ethnic diversity and minority rights in ways that are consistent with human rights and democracy. Australia has had the greatest migration globally relative to its size and for the past forty years or so Australia multiculturalism has been favoured to guide the policy and program settings (Kymlika, 2007; Levey, 2012; Collins, 2013). While multiculturalism in these countries may be viewed as a pragmatic response for managing large scale immigration, multiculturalism has been understood and applied differently in different countries with different outcomes (Levey, 2012; Meer & Moodod, 2011).

In Australia and Canada, multiculturalism is presented as the application of liberal values that extend individual freedoms and equality (Kymlika 2007; Kalantzis et al. 2012) that have been important in fostering integration of migrants (Mansouri & Arber, 2017). In the USA, multiculturalism has been framed around the struggle for civil rights and protections for minority rights under the constitution (Banks, 2010). In Europe it has come to mean the ‘political accommodation by the state and/or a dominant group of all minority cultures defined first and foremost by reference to race, ethnicity or religion, and, additionally but more controversially, by reference to other group-defining characteristics such as nationality.
and aboriginality (Meer & Modood, 2011, p 7). Moreover, the influence of globalisation has meant that the regulation of migration has become more challenging as has gaining loyalty and allegiance to another nation state (Appadurai, 2002).

In broad terms, multiculturalism and cultural diversity are celebrated in contemporary Australia as making a major contribution to cultural harmony and social cohesion (Kymlika, 2007; Collins, 2013; Markus, 2016). The policy discourse positions diversity as a positive facet of immigration and as a national and state asset promoting economic and social benefit (CoA, 2011; Office of Multicultural Affairs, 2016). At the same time, there are other cohesion and diversity discourses that paint a different picture of experiences of minority cultural and ethnic groups and contest nature of multiculturalism in Australia (Kalantzis et al., 2012; Levey, 2012; Chiro, 2009). There is a tension here between the implied equality of multiculturalism, that is, everyone regardless of the cultural or ethnic or religious background is given a ‘fair go’ and should be treated the same (Mansouri & Arber, 2017), in contrast with the notion of equity. Equity implies fair treatment but may include additional and potentially unequal treatment of some people over others to bring about change. For example, the view that multicultural policy and program settings are inadequate for ever-evolving ethnic and cultural diversity of Australia (Watkins et al., 2013); or that multiculturalism acts against certain cultural groups including indigenous Australians (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2008) and in practice simply maintains a white-western cultural hegemony (Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Chiro, 2009).

**Locating the school and neighbourhood, a brief history**

Ackenham is located in the suburb of ‘Cossington’ii, which is about five kilometres from the centre of Melbourne, Australia’s second largest city. Melbourne was established as a town then city by European settlers from the 1830s on land previously occupied by the indigenous inhabitants, the Woi Wurrung tribal groups, for more than 30,000 years (Canning & Thiele, 2010, pp 2-4).

Cossington, for much of its contemporary history, has been a working class, industrial suburb providing employment in industries such as the cattle saleyards, abattoirs and glue factories (Hulse, Herbert & Down, 2004). The housing stock and living conditions through the 1800s reflected the industrial activity of the period.
In the city of Melbourne there were a number of low-lying areas, such as West Melbourne and ‘Cossington’, where poor grade housing and poor sanitation contributed to high rates of disease and child mortality (City of Melbourne, 2012, pp 63-64).

Prior to the 1940s, around 90 percent of the population of Australia were white Australian born Anglophone (Kalantzis et al., 2012), a demographic that was broadly representative of the people of Cossington during this period (Hulse, Herbert & Down, 2004).

Contemporary Cossington occupies 2.9 square kilometres and the landscape is dominated by four large public housing blocks up to twenty stories high and several three and four storey blocks of flats. The land had originally been the site of a tannery, a landfill and then low-cost housing. Built in the 1960s on land compulsorily acquired under a program described as ‘slum clearance’ (Hulse, Herbert & Down, 2004, p 12; City of Melbourne, 2012) the housing estate was designed to accommodate the large numbers of migrants that had begun arriving in the post-World War 2 war period from southern Europe countries such as Italy, Malta and Greece. From this period on, the population of Cossington became more culturally diverse as new waves of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers began their settlement in Australia. Migration included people from Vietnam and South America in the 1970s, former Yugoslavia, Turkey and China in the 1980s and Horn of Africa countries from the 1990s (Hulse, Herbert and Down, 2004).

The housing estate was redeveloped in the early 2000s near the time when the abattoirs closed, freeing up land for new private and public housing. At this time around 30% of Cossington’s population lived on the estate and of an estimated 1000 residents affected and moved by redevelopment of flats between 2002-2004 most came from language backgrounds other than English, including ‘three in ten being Vietnamese speakers and 16 percent speaking African languages such as Somali and Tigrinya’. The estate also included people from Anglo-European Australian backgrounds (Hulse, Herbert and & 2004, 2004, p xii).

The redevelopment of old industrial sites occurred in the late 1990s and began a period of new housing and gentrification (Hulse, Herbert & Down, 2004). By 2018 the median house price in Cossington was over $1,000,000 AUD having risen from around $672,000 in 2013 (Property.value.com, 2018).
In 2011 Cossington’s population was 7,528 people. The majority, 53 percent, were Australian born while 5.8 percent were from Vietnamese, 2.6 percent Ethiopian, 2.6 percent Chinese and 2.4 percent Somali backgrounds. In terms of religion 13.2 percent of residents claimed Islam as their religious affiliation which was well above 2.9 percent overall for Victoria (ABS, 2011). By 2016 population had risen to 10,812 (ABS, 2017).

A brief history of Ackenham Primary school

Ackenham is one of three primary schools in Cossington and was opened in the 1975 to provide education to the increasing numbers of children living in the housing estate (DoE, 1976). There is also St. Mary’s Catholic Primary School\(^3\) and Cossington Primary school\(^4\) and Ackenham Secondary School\(^5\). Situated just under a kilometre from Ackenham, Cossington Primary School has had a long history in the community having been opened in 1858 (DET, 2016).

Ackenham was originally designed to accommodate 650 students. This assessment was based on expected projections of the number of primary age children who would be living in the housing estate. The design included four large open-planned learning areas that could accommodate teaching spaces for 140 students each and withdrawal areas for smaller group work. A decision was made by the Department of Education for the school to utilise the public park as playing space and not to fence the school boundaries so as not to affect the overall appearance of the park (DoE, 1972; DoE, 1974). This latter decision was one that would continue to cause problems for staff up to present the day in terms of safety and security. The blurring of school boundaries meant the student play and recreational spaces were at times situated in public spaces and thoroughfares and therefore difficult to supervise as they posed risks for student safety and security.

A submission to ‘change the child space ratio’ from the Victorian Teacher’s Union [VTU] Sub-Branch at Ackenham written to the Director of Primary Education, Department of Education, in December 1975 outlined issues identified by the teachers in the first year of the school’s operation. This included overcrowding, which the teachers’ union argue resulted in excessive

\(^3\) This is a pseudonym
\(^4\) This is a pseudonym
\(^5\) This is a pseudonym
noise, cramped conditions, limited use of specialist rooms, increased ‘physical and mental pressure’ on staff and high levels of frustration experienced by the children. Furthermore, the submission pointed out that the ‘type’ of children attending the school, ‘multicultural children from the commission flats’, who created additional work for the teachers. Overcrowding, the children’s home living conditions and their inability to properly use and look after play equipment were cited as factors leading to the increased risk of disease and aggressive behaviour:

Due to overcrowding there is more physical contact between children which leads to more aggressive behaviour in the units. Their confined living conditions with no privacy and no defined personal boundaries, no yard or garden they can call their own. This confined living in such a densely populated community, means that parents and children often become very aggressive toward people around them. This reaction spreads to behaviour at the school – both in the class and in the yard (VTU Submission, 1975, pp 4-5).

Some of the solutions proposed in the teachers’ union submission included; excluding children from students outside the housing estate as well as from particular blocks of flats (no reason given) and transferring all of grade six students to Cossington Primary School. The optimum ‘pupil/space ratio’ according to the teachers was for a total of 500 students in four units of no more than 120 with a relative class size of 24 children per classroom (VTU, 1975, p 2). I was not able to determine what happened as a result of the teachers’ union submission.

**Ongoing reform and the residualisation of disadvantage**

The building of Ackenham coincided with a period of significant education policy reform in Australia and Victoria which had an ongoing effect on the size and composition of schools from this point on (Teese, Lamb & Duru-Bellt, 2007). Lamb (2007) argues that up until the late 1970s, Victoria had a centralised state education system where most decisions, to do with government school policies, the buildings, as well as curriculum and teaching methods were made by a central bureaucracy. This included zoning policies that regulated the movement of students and ensured they attended schools in their local area.
From 1984, Victorian schools have been governed by elected school councils made up of the parents, teachers, principals and community representatives. This approach also described as ‘devolution’ didn’t mean complete autonomy and involved a balance of centralised direction and support based on local need and democratic decision making (Fuhrman & Johnson, 1994, p 1).

School autonomy was not new in Australia having taken root in the early 1970s. It was based on the idea that by increasing school communities’ control over facilities, budgets, staff and the curriculum improvements in student outcomes and the quality of schooling would be made (Fuhrman & Johnson, 1994; Lamb, 2007; Thompson & Blackmore, 2006). More fundamentally, this notion of autonomy was underpinned by an ideology of the marketization of education and competition between schools. Parental choice was encouraged and supported, and schools were able to raise additional funds, and attract sponsorship and community support for educational purposes. While this approach worked in favour of many Victorian schools, particularly those in wealthier suburbs, private schools or in communities who could marshal the expertise and resources of their communities to take advantage of this form of self-management. It was found however to have the opposite effect on those schools in areas of disadvantage or who carried responsibility for settling refugees and other new arrivals (Lamb, 2007; Fuhrman & Johnson, 1994). The overall effect ‘reinforced the privileges of the wealthy and residualised the poor’ (Lamb, 2007, p 36) and in the case of Ackenham, this resulted in ongoing structural inequality. More broadly this meant that there was an uneven and arguably undemocratic distribution of benefits to schools (Blackmore, 2006). Not only were the poorer schools unable to compete with schools in the wealthier areas, but they were also being drained of their high achieving students thus placing further pressure on staff to cater for higher concentrations of the most disadvantaged students (Lamb, 2007):

At the end of 25 years of reform, schools in the poorer areas of Melbourne had become residualised and were a shadow of their former selves. They had become ‘sink’ schools, denuded of student numbers and resources, and thanks to these changes, repositories of academic failure (Lamb, 2007, p 2)
The effect of such policies on Ackenham were profound. Despite having capacity for an additional 350 students at Ackenham, and an increasing local demand for places in primary school between 2011 and 2015, most new enrolments were taken at other local primary schools including an additional 116 students at Cossington Primary School (DET, 2015b).

All three principals at Ackenham during the time of this study reported that a negative perception of the school pervaded the broader community which was characterized by deficit terms such as; a ‘ghetto school’, ‘a school for blacks’ or ‘a Somali community school’ which carried racist connotations. The principals reported such attitudes and perceptions to be contributing factors in the school’s decreasing enrolments that manifested in a form of ‘white flight’. This term is used to describe the inclination for ‘white’ background people to deselect and move away from neighbourhoods or schools following a corresponding increase of people from a different ethnic background, in preference to places where there was a familiar ethnic concentration (Anderson, 2017). This ‘flight’ phenomenon was not new to Ackenham primary or secondary school nor was it necessarily associated with a black or white binary. For example, the following quote attributed to a past principal of nearby Ackenham Secondary School suggests that negative perceptions of his school were broadly attached to whichever migrant group was transitioning through the public housing estate:

Ackenham is currently perceived as a black high school, just as we used to be seen as an Asian or Vietnamese high school, or a Turkish or Lebanese high school, depending on the wave of immigration into the city at a particular time (The Age, 2004).

Perceptions of schools with refugee or ‘black students’ as being undesirable were however difficult to dislodge, and at Ackenham Primary School ‘like schools’ which were regularly featured in media reports with such claims that, ‘White families with higher incomes are opting to enroll their children in over-subscribed schools a few suburbs away’ (Jacks, 2016). The decreasing numbers of Vietnamese background students was raised as an issue in a community forum in early 2014. The Vietnamese Multicultural Aide had spoken to families that had left or were considering leaving the school and reported feelings of marginalisation highlighted by a ‘lack of mixing between the African families and Vietnamese families’ (Field notes, March 2014). While it was difficult to judge parents’ choices in this case, a 2016
Department of Education intervention report on Ackenham points to the notion of class and economic and social mobility as the contributing factors for declining enrolments:

Middle class parents have also been concerned about the monocultural nature of the school’s enrolment. Parent apprehensions had resulted in many families situated close to the school enrolling their children in other local schools. The effect of these parent choices has been a concentration of multiple disadvantages at the school. This disadvantage has effectively led to a cycle in which the apprehensions of parents are seen to be fulfilled, further depressing student numbers (DET, 2016a).

According to the principals the location of the school on the housing estate, with its multiple levels of disadvantage was a negative factor in the thinking of those parents who were in a position to make a choice about which school to send their children to.

The trajectory of student enrolments at Ackenham can also be mapped against periods of instability. For example, prior to the start of the school year in 2007, a fire destroyed part of the school building and resulted in all the students being transported by bus to a range of local schools for the whole of term one. The fire contributed to the loss of students, as some did not return to Ackenham, which then resulted in a corresponding loss of teachers due to falling enrolments (DEECD, 2010).

At the time of Virginia’s arrival in 2011 enrolments were down to 94 students. While they reached 108 at one point of Virginia’s tenure, they had fallen below 100 by the time Amanda, arrived in 2014. Enrolment at the beginning of 2015 was 88 students. According to Department of Education projections, enrolments will continue to decline to an estimated 74 students in 2019 (DET, 2015d) and continue to put the viability of the school at risk.

Between 2010-2013 more than 22% of students were enrolled as refugees, one in ten was eligible for disability funding and 98% of students required additional language support. Staffing stability and their limited teaching experience had been an issue over an extended period (DET, 2016b).

In contrast to Ackenham, Cossington Primary School’s student enrolments had almost reached 500 at the beginning of 2015 (DET, 2015d). This school was located in an established
residential pocket less than a kilometre from Ackenham and the housing estate. It had a history of stability and of having a student population of mostly white European background students but in recent times, had become more diverse including a small number of students from the Horn of Africa (Field notes, March 2014). During the period 2013-2015 student enrolments had increased by 53 students with a corresponding increase from 50% to 58% of students from language backgrounds other than English. Figures for overall social-economic status of families in the school also show a decline from the top range and a corresponding increase in mid to bottom range of 8% (ACARA, 2017), indicating a small decline in Socio-economic status [SES] measures. These changes in Cossington’ s profile brings into question the idea of ‘white flight’, and the need to consider other factors in parent preference for Cossington over Ackenham. For example, Virginia reported that some Horn of African background families had taken their children out of Ackenham and enrolled them at Cossington. The reasons she gave included disputes with the families over the school’s methods of behaviour management or a dissatisfaction with the teaching and learning program (Field notes, March 2014).

**Ackenham, a contemporary view of the site**

Ackenham consists of one large double storey brick building set on a small narrow site, with a 15 metre perimeter of asphalt and a few garden beds. Low cyclone wire fences maintain the boundaries although a high security fence was built at the front of the school in 2016. When the school was built, the site was levelled by cutting into a rise in the land on one side which is supported by a retaining wall. The main entrance is via a first-floor landing from the main street, up a flight of concrete steps as shown in Image 1.
From the street, people can look into the first-floor windows and down onto the playing spaces at the ground level.

While there was very little outside space, inside the classrooms are large and open offering the flexibility for team teaching and joint activities. On the ground level there is also a specialist art room, a performance area and a large room with attached commercial kitchen. This latter space was not used by the school during Virginia and Amanda’s tenure but was rented out to community organisations.

The first floor consists of more teaching spaces, a library, the administration area, staff room, principal and a student wellbeing coordinator office, and a large open area that was used for professional learning activities, community forums and other whole school activities (School Tour interview April, 2013). As noted earlier, the large four internal spaces were originally designed to accommodate up to 650 students in large groups.

The school was renovated after the fire in 2007 and in 2010 was further refurbished as part of the Federal Government’s economic stimulus spending (DEECD, 2010). Virginia made some modifications to the inside spaces and developed specific areas for team teaching, quiet
reading and study. Significant changes to the building and yards took place during Amanda’s tenure. This will be explained more fully in Chapter 7.

The yard and playground

All three principals in this study expressed concern about the look and feel of the school grounds and surrounding environment. The playing spaces were confined to a narrow perimeter around the school building which both Virginia and Hilda had said were too small even for the student cohort of 90 plus students. These were reported to have contributed to overcrowding in student disputes over premium spaces and resources. These concerns were not unlike those of the Ackenham teachers in the 1970s. The following quote demonstrate Virginia’s concerns about the students’ use of play equipment and following rules:

They love playing down ball, one of the things we’ve found is as much as they love to play games, but many don’t know the rules or have the skills, so whilst we might buy lots of little racquets and balls, we tend to see a lot of them just being whacked across the fence. So we’ve realised that we do need to teach a lot of skills and a lot of games to the kids (School tour April, 2013).

Around the school were a few sandpits and raised garden beds. The asphalt areas were dotted with boundary lines for ball games and jumping games. Virginia developed a kitchen garden, which Amanda developed further and had set up a Play for Life POD which was a shipping container filled with play equipment. Teachers took the students on ‘Learning Walks’ in the areas surrounding the school. These walks were treated as mini-excursions with learning tasks and activities along the way. A key play space was the public area to the side of the school. This included a large grassed playing field on which ball games, favoured by the students, such as soccer and AFL, could be played. As a public space, however, there was a constant need for teacher supervision during break times (School tour, April 2013).

This context and the related environmental factors had a powerful influence over how the school was organised and the practice arrangements required to manage student movement and interaction in it and around it. For Virginia, Hilda and Amanda, the porous nature of the school and public ‘boundaries’ posed risks of unwanted public contact with students, impediments to student wellbeing and safety. Additional supervision was required to monitor
security. On one occasion Virginia was forced to place the school in ‘lock down’ due to a ‘vicious dog’ being encouraged to run among students on the public park. Amanda had reported an attempted abduction of a student outside the school (Field notes, June 2013; June 2015):

I have had ‘junkies’ sitting in the playground, mini-bike riders crossing the yard, and middle-aged white guys riding through the grounds and stopping to talk to students and letting the kids touch their bikes, and a woman just pushing her pram through. It is a problem (Principal interview, Sept 2014).

Safety and security concerns as well as the limited playing spaces and the visual character of the school building on the outside were seen to reinforce a perception of being poor or under-resourced. All three principals reported their concerns to regional education authorities and government representatives. The front fence was raised as an issue in the Victorian State Parliament in early 2016 by the local member for Cossington and a security fence built later that year. Security cameras were also installed around this time (School newsletter, February 2017).

The students at Ackenham

At the time this study was undertaken, the school population was mostly drawn from students with family backgrounds from countries in and around the Horn of Africa; Somalia, Yemen, Ethiopia and Sudan, with a majority 70% from Somalia. Sixteen percent of the students had resided in Australia for less than 2 years and 96% were from language backgrounds other than English. ‘The average refugee enrolment during 2010-2013 was above 22% of all students. One in ten students was eligible for funding support under the Program for Students with Disabilities’ (DET 2016b, p 1). There were also a small number of students from Anglo Australian, Vietnamese, Bosnian, San Salvadorian and Turkish backgrounds. The main language groups in the school included Somali, Tigrinya, Oromo, Amharic, Vietnamese, Arabic, Chinese (Cantonese, Hakka), Turkish and Indonesian (ACARA, 2013c). The language program consisted of Arabic, Vietnamese and Italian (School website, 2013). At the beginning of 2012, the school had seven children on the Program for Students with Disabilities, and all children commencing the Foundation year, first year of school, were from a Somali
background (Field notes, February 2013). New enrolments were made up mostly of families originating from countries in the Horn of Africa.

Ackenham is a school with one of the highest proportions of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in Victoria, which federal and state authorities use as measures for funding and comparative purposes (DEECD, 2013g; ACARA, 2013c). Socio-economic and family backgrounds are considered proxy determinants of academic performance in Australia, that is, children from low SES backgrounds, from refugee backgrounds or children who have lower levels of English are considered less likely to perform well on academic measures compared to than their more ‘advantaged’ peers (Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission [VCEC], 2013; Teese, 2000). These measures of disadvantage include the Student Family Occupation (SFO) index which is based on family members’ employment status, that is, whether they were in high or low skilled occupations or whether they were receiving forms of income support such as unemployment benefit. In 2013 Ackenham had an SFO of 9.6 which was calculated by combining weightings of parents’ self-reported highest educational qualifications with occupational status and categories. The SFO for Cossington Primary School at this time was 3.6 (DET, 2016d). The less well qualified or lower the occupational grouping the higher the SFO (DEECD, 2013g; DET, 2015g). By way of example, the following extract from the 2010 Ackenham Primary School Review, gives some idea of the range of learning difficulties and challenges that faced students, and correspondingly by teachers and principals:

Students tend to live relatively limited life-styles in the Ministry of Housing flats and have few language experiences to draw on. Not all Prep students have attended kindergarten due to a shortage of places. Many of the parents are illiterate. Furthermore, on the basis of cognitive assessments by Lewis and Lewis and speech pathologists’ assessments, the school has identified 20 students with borderline or funded Intelligence Quotient (IQ) deficiency, and 20 students with a severe language disorder. It also has nine new arrival students enrolled. Taking into account three students who fall into two of these groups, the school has 46 students out of a total of 101 who face additional learning challenges. There are also high levels of student transience and high absence rates (DEECD, 2010).
Almost all families at the school received the Education Maintenance Allowance [EMA], a form of funding support paid to eligible parents to assist with some of the costs associated sending their children to school, such as books, excursions and uniforms. Eligibility is based on whether the families had a Health Care Card, another indicator of the presence and need of income support. The payments however represent a relatively small amount with a Prep student’s families receiving $200 and all other eligible families $150. In 2013, there were around 200,000 students were eligible for this support, about a quarter of all Victorian students (DEECD, 2013h). This form of funding ceased from 2015 in favour of what is known as Schools Relief Funding (DEECD, 2014).

**Ongoing student wellbeing and behaviour management challenges**

The students’ social emotional and cognitive development, and the associated management of their sometimes ‘extreme’ behaviours has been the subject of concern for staff over time. Beginning with the Victorian Teacher’s Union Sub-Branch letter to the Director of Primary Education in 1975 to improve the student and teacher ratios, other reports, including school annual reports, and research projects involving the school, have specifically identified student wellbeing and behaviour management concerns (Burchielli & Bartram, 2003; Otway, 2012; DET, 2015b; 2016a; Watson, 2017).

A study into teacher stress at Ackenham (Burchielli & Bartram, 2003 p 4-6) in the early 2000’s reported a ‘unique’ combination of ‘multi-ethnic student backgrounds’, high numbers of EMA recipients and students with disabilities compared to other schools had contributed to significant day-to-day challenges and stress for teachers and principals. Almost half the 190 students at the school at the time were listed by teachers as requiring some form of monitoring or possible intervention for ‘health, social or psychological issues’. Many students were refugees from ‘war torn countries’ and were identified as suffering some form of trauma. The principal reported 97 percent of students from language backgrounds other than English, high levels of economic disadvantage and the regular occurrence of critical incidents, which included violence against other students. A Welfare Support Group, comprising of external specialists such as a ‘school psychologist, school nurse, speech therapist, protective worker from Human Services, family support worker and representatives from the school’ (p 8) had
been established to support and monitor interventions and well as address welfare and behaviour issues.

Another stress related factor for teachers reported in the study, was the methods of data collection used by the Department of Education, particularly for measuring academic achievement, which they claimed represented the students as ‘under-achievers’. According to the teachers, the characterisation of the students as underperforming failed to properly take account of the students’ circumstances nor their progress. The following quote from the student Welfare Co-ordinator, illustrates this point:

...the kids come with so little and we’re supposed to test them and it’s like comparing apples and oranges ......I have to try not to be worn down by that and measuring our kids’ progress by this because they are progressing very much; probably as much as other kids. Even though they’re still not meeting benchmarks they’re actually coming in at a point and making very good progress. (Welfare Coordinator, cited in Burchielli & Bartram, 2003, p 7)

The unsuitability of performance measures to properly account for this cohort of students continued to be an issue for the school. By way of comparison, the Ackenham’s 2017 Annual School Improvement Plan, students’ NAPLAN data was compared with expected developmental progress of Australian students as measured by the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), and it was found that many students were between two and two and half years behind their peers in the development of literacy skills (Watson, 2017).

Issues, such as those noted above, as identified by Watson (2017) and other staff in this current study, suggest the ongoing and systemic nature of the problem. The following quote would not have been out of place in the VTU submission from 1975:

A lot of conflict happens in the yard, a lot of competitive stuff, sometimes we get a bit of exclusion. For example, ‘They (other students) won’t let me join in the games’. Things like that happen. The other teachers will back this up as well, is that we have a lot of kids who have not a huge amount of resilience. They’ve got no sense of catastrophe and scale, and something minor will happen and it will be World War III. It starts as a low-level problem, then it’s escalated to like
a huge, high level problem. They've just got no ability to put the event in perspective and have an appropriate reaction. They have this massive huge reaction to really what's a low-level issue (School tour, April 2013).

The students revealed that some of the playground conflict was intentional, because ‘they just want teachers’ attention’ suggesting that there were other emotional issues at play (Grade 5 & 6 Focus Group, August 2013). While the quote also points to the importance for staff in having a deeper understanding of the student backgrounds and motivations, it also points to some of the difficulties the teachers had in overcoming the social emotional and behavioural challenges. There were students, for example, who had been in conflict zones and had arrived in Australia as refugees having experienced trauma and ‘catastrophe’. The quote below highlights reveals some of the challenges that the principals and staff faced at Ackenham:

Many of our kids are traumatised, damaged. They have been through things we couldn’t imagine. One boy saw his father killed in front of him. I have one Anglo boy who is as bright as a button, but his mother is a drug addict. Kids here had had to cope with lots of change and we need to bring some stability to their lives. (Principal meeting, September 2014).

In contrast to this picture of behavioural challenges and traumatised students, a study by Fox (2017) involving seven students from Ackenham as part of the Doing Diversity project tells the story of four boys, first-generation migrants, all from different cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and their friendship and the development of their intercultural capabilities. While the boys noted their differences, including skin colour, these were not things that divided them. They were neighbours, part of the same class and spent most of their time in and around the estate where they lived. They shared the space and a common interest in soccer which they played together at the nearby park and supported each other in the development of their social and cultural capital. Fundamentally they didn’t see themselves as disadvantaged:

The boys do not consider themselves to be under-privileged compared to their neighbours. Instead the boys emphasise how they are fortunate compared to their past life experiences with relative poverty, as many family members
remain in circumstances they consider to be not as well off as their own. Friendships are part of the intercultural experience (Fox, 2017, p 89)

This elaboration is consistent with the broader finding from the Doing Diversity project, that intercultural moments and insights can often be found in day-to-day peer interactions or outside the school, particularly through the development of friendship groups based on locality and common interests (Halse et al., 2015).

The teachers at Ackenham

The Burchielli & Bartram’s (2003, p 9) study found that despite the challenges, the teachers at this time had maintained a positive outlook, in part because they engaged in ‘organisational citizenship behaviours’ that consisted of ‘acts of cooperation, altruism and goodwill’ and had been relatively stable as a group (p 9).

By 2012, however the staffing situation was less stable. According to Otway (2012) the 2007 fires had a significant disabling effect with a significant decline in enrolments, from which the school was unable to recover, and a period of staffing instability that followed.

At the time this study there were only six full-time teachers at Ackenham and all were from young White European Australian backgrounds. Most were in their first or second year of teaching and had little or no experience with students from CALD backgrounds, certainly not African-Australian. On the other hand, specialist support staff that included Maria, the Italian language teacher, who was born in Melbourne of parents of Italian background, the Vietnamese language teacher, Tran, who was from a Vietnamese background, and the wellbeing co-ordinator, Francis, from an Anglo Australian background, all had previous in experience teaching in multicultural contexts. One teacher, Manny, had been at the school for about five years and while born in Australia, was from a Maltese background. Kandra, the Somali Multicultural Aide, had herself been a refugee and had children at the school (Field notes, February 2013; Teacher focus group, June 2014).

Three of the teachers had grown up in rural Victoria in communities that they described as ‘mono-cultural’, meaning a white European or more specifically Anglo Australian, and provided limited experience with diverse cultures. This transcript from a focus group involving three of the early career teachers illustrates this point.
I grew up in Ballarat [a regional city with a population of around 100,000 people, located 110 kilometres north west of Melbourne] and there’s not a lot of multiculturalism there and I feel like really racist sort of, but one of my best friends is an Australian-born Thai and my sister commented that it was really unusual that I had an Asian friend. That’s something she notices and that we notice because we just haven’t had much interaction with other cultures. It’s, I don’t know what I’m trying to say but in Ballarat it’s just so sheltered (Lisa, Teacher Focus group, August 2013).

The quote points to teachers feeling unprepared for working in cultural and ethnically diverse schools. There is an uncertainty about what constitutes racism and whether Lisa herself is racist because she has not been exposed to multiculturalism. The idea of being sheltered also raises questions about whom or from what were they sheltered. According to Noble and Watkins (2014, p 3) such limited understandings of culture in schools can shape perceptions of difference that may contribute to essentialising students and parents thus encouraging forms of ethnic and racial stereotypes. The limited exposure to cultural and ethnic diversity, as demonstrated here, warranted additional professional support to both understand and to approach the enactment of the school’s curriculum with a more confident understanding of concepts such as race, culture and cultural identity.

**Contemporary Reform Contexts**

**Marketisation of education and a new wave of school autonomy**

Following a change of the state government in Victoria in 2010, education authorities embarked on a new wave of reform. Virginia’s tenure coincided with one of the key planks of this reform, ‘Towards Victoria as a learning community’, which was launched in late 2011. This was a statement of strategic intent with a focus on decentralisation and increased school autonomy and accountability. The aim was to improve student and school performance, particularly those students in the bottom tiers of academic performance and become a higher performing schooling system both nationally and globally (DEECD, 2011a). In part, this reform was based on a ‘flat-lining of overall student performance’ (VCEC 2013, p xxii) in the NAPLAN and the PISA. The NAPLAN assesses Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 in reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation), and numeracy, while
PISA assesses the Mathematics, Science and reading performance of 15 year old students, in over 70 countries (Jensen 2013). The NAPLAN results for each Australian school have been published on the *My School* website since 2010 (ACARA, 2018).

*Towards Victoria as a Learning Community* was coupled with a significant restructure of regional and central support for schools. The nine school regions were reduced to four with a corresponding reduction of around 400 staff state-wide (AEU, 2012) based on a devolved funding model that was designed to incentivise schools (DEECD, 2011b). As a caveat, the VCEC, (2013) noted that the effectiveness of school autonomy relied on a large extent on the capability and quality of teachers and principals (p xxvi). While the Department of Education outlined a strategy to work ‘alongside schools’ and ‘support school leaders to raise the quality of instructional practice’ (DEECD, 2013, p 15) the dismantling of regional and central support, and an increased burden on administration and technical management for assessment and measuring outcomes made it more difficult for some schools to develop teacher capacity to the expected levels (AEU, 2012). The approach for increased school autonomy was later consolidated through *The Compact*, that is, an agreement between the government and school councils and their principals to deliver the desired outcomes at the local level to acceptable levels or face intervention DEECD, 2011b). The responsibilities and accountabilities of the principal at this time, expressed through the rhetoric of *The Compact* and *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community* was in practice weighted more heavily towards compliance and operational requirements than educational (DET, 2015h).

Findings from a 2011-14 Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey, a national study based on reports from 2,621 government and non-government school principals indicated that one of the greatest stressors for school principals was the ‘sheer quantity of work and lack of time to focus on learning and teaching’ (Riley, 2014, p 50). Conversely ‘Principals with the highest levels of autonomy reported higher levels of wellbeing and lower levels of occupational stress’ (p 49). Virginia reported both a high level of autonomy as well as a heavy workload as part the role of principal (Field notes, April 2014).

**Pressure to perform**

The emphasis on data collection and demands on schools to lift academic performance was part of a much broader reform in other Australian states (Yates, 2013). In Victoria this was
designed to measure and compare school performance, and to encourage competition for students and between schools based on the idea that the combination of autonomy, data, and market forces would produce more efficiency in the delivery of education and lead to improved outcomes both locally and globally (DEECD, 2013a).

As found in such agendas elsewhere in the world, failure to perform to desired national or state standards within the notion of school autonomy was likely to be attributed to individual deficiencies of students, principals and schools or linked to productivity, teacher and principal performance or a lack of competitiveness (Hartley, 2012; Biesta, 2013; Hager, 2014). While this reform in Victoria carried messages of inclusion and meeting the needs of all learners, there were consequences of a failure to do so as summed up in the following quote:

> The best school systems complement high levels of autonomy with effective accountability and support mechanisms. Government schools will be provided with greater flexibility to develop the means to achieve improved learning, supported by access to excellent data and information about good practice. The Department will intervene in cases of local failure to deliver acceptable results (DEECD, 2013a, p 15).

A review of regional relationship and support of schools in 2015 found that during the ‘Victoria as a learning Community’ phase, ‘Principals felt unsupported and bogged down in operational matters’, particularly in smaller primary schools. Furthermore, principals felt compromised by the weight of compliance for both operational and academic requirements to deliver the higher levels of achievement expected (DET, 2015h, p 16). Such findings add weight to Jensen’s (2013) claims that it is local autonomy over curriculum and assessment coupled with high order leadership skills that has the strongest correlation with student achievement. He argues that this type of autonomy can however be reduced when national student assessments, such as NAPLAN, are imposed.

NAPLAN data is meant to assess relative growth and progression over time so that schools can adjust their teaching and learning programs to respond to students’ needs (ACARA, 2018). In a school like Ackenham however, their comparative NAPLAN results, coupled with declining enrolments led to perceptions of being a ‘failing school’ and added pressure on staff to improve student achievement on these tests.
There are almost 9,500 Australian schools, and all are profiled on the Australian Government’s My School website. My School is an ACARA information service and the public face of NAPLAN achievement results. A review of the My School data for Ackenham between 2012 to 2017 indicated that Ackenham was below or substantially below schools serving students of ‘similar levels of educational advantage’ or SES comparisons in other Australian schools on NAPLAN indicators for; reading, persuasive writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation and numeracy (ACARA, 2017). While standards are intended only to be a snapshot of typical achievement, and do not describe the full range of what students are taught or what they may achieve in other parts of the school curriculum. As Yates (2013) points out one of the problems with a national testing regime like NAPLAN is that it can act as a discouragement for teachers who already trying to overcome additional challenges, such as those faced at Ackenham. Furthermore, NAPLAN tests have been found problematic for students of refugee backgrounds who may not have reached a level of competence of the linguistic conventions and ‘taken for granted meanings’ (Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010, p 155).

An assessment of NAPLAN in 2018 advocated for an impartial review of the national assessment reporting ‘NAPLAN’s focus on low-level mechanical skills, trivialisation of thought, and its overall disjunction from authentic constructs of writing may be partially responsible for declining scores in international tests’ (Perelman, 2018, p 8).

Jensen (2013) argues that market driven education reform that involves giving schools more autonomy will not improve student performance. In addition there is there a strong correlation between NAPLAN and school enrolments. He suggests that school improvement is better served by empowering school leaders with a level of autonomy coupled with direction and support. Many principals felt compromised by the weight of compliance during the period characterised Towards Victoria as a Learning Community’ in terms of both operational and academic requirements to deliver the higher levels of achievement expected (DET 2015h).

As noted earlier in the chapter, the shape and scale of education policy can have significant impact on schools and their relative disadvantage (Fuhrman & Johnson, 1994; Lamb, 2007; Teese, Lamb & Duru-Bellt, 2007). Amanda’s tenure coincided with a change of state government and a shift in policy in education provision and support. The flagship reform for
the Government was to make *Victoria the Education State*. One of the first steps to test the vision was through public consultation (DET 2015f). *Victoria the Education State* was launched early in 2015 and set out new policy targets for the next 10 years. These included targets for lifting academic performance in reading, mathematics and scientific literacy as well as for student resilience and physical activity. Central to the policy for schooling was the restoration of pride in Victorian state schools and to reduce the impact of disadvantage (Hawker Britten, 2015).

The following section elaborates on the expectations of school leadership and teacher performance in Victorian government schools with reference to their application in Ackenham.

**Professional practice arrangements for leadership in Victorian Government schools**

The operation and management of Victorian schools are governed by a range of legislative and regulatory requirements that are the shared responsibility of the principals and school councils. In particular, the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, provides both the legislative arrangements and the principles on which school education is based. The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority [VRQA] is responsible for ensuring that schools meet the standards required for registration was established under the Act (VRQA, 2018).

Victorian principals are employed under contracts that may be tenured periods of up to five years. The Department of Education and Training regional educational authorities, in collaboration with school councils, of which the principal is the executive officer and the President and Treasurer are parents, are responsible for the appointment of principals (short and long-term), the renewal of contracts and the management of an annual performance and development process for principals (DET 2017). Principals in turn are responsible for the performance of teachers. The ability to monitor principals’ or teachers’ performance however in a system of high autonomy with more than 1,500 Government schools has proven challenging particularly where there is strong reliance on school councils, who are essentially volunteers from the school community. The most significant ‘capability gaps’ have been found in schools with ‘students from low SES and disadvantaged backgrounds’ (VCEC, 2013, p XL11) such as Ackenham.
The approach to performance and accountability for Victorian Government schools at the
time of the study was rolled out as part of Towards Victoria as a Learning Community and the
notion of a ‘self-improving system’ (DEECD, 2013h, p 37) and reflected in cycles of ‘self-
evaluation’, ‘self-assessment’ and ‘self-determined school improvement’ (DEECD, 2012b, p 24). School performance was based on NAPLAN scores, teacher judgements, student
perceptions, students’ attendance and retention rates. This approach was underpinned by
the idea that ‘outstanding results could be unleashed by autonomy’ and where the principal
was the central decision maker (DEECD, 2012b, p 3) and infused with the idea of
benchmarking ‘current practices’ against those from other education jurisdictions (DEECD,
2013d p 7) such as in Finland, Hong Kong and Ontario (DEECD, 2012b, p 3). At the same time
there was recognition that there were factors outside the control of schools that influence
student performance and an ‘intake-adjusted performance’ allowance in government schools
was made for such as language background and SES status (VCEC, 2013, p 16).

More broadly, the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is the
national agency responsible for developing and monitoring professional standards for
teachers and principals as well as accreditation of teacher education programs (CoA, 2014).
The Australian Professional Standards for Principals as set out by AITSL were instituted in 2011
and provide the backdrop for professional practice in Victorian schools and the performance
and development of teachers and principals (DEECD, 2013d; DET, 2015c). The Standards are
referenced against the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians and
the idea that, ‘Principals help create the future’ (AITSL, 2014, p 2014).

As noted earlier, during this study there was a significant emphasis on monitoring
performance and improving performance as part of a school principal’s role. At a
fundamental level, Victorian principals were required to operate within new state-wide
guidelines and policies called Professional practice and performance for improved learning
which were informed by the Australian Standards (DEECD, 2013d). AITSL acknowledged that
while each school site and community was unique, the expectation was that the Professional
Standards and Practices were present regardless of context. The competencies for effective
school leadership, according to AITSL fall into four areas; operational, relational, strategic and
systematic. These competencies are to do with the effective management and day-to-day
practices, people management, effective use of resources and strategic planning. The
professional practices are framed around five areas; leading teaching and learning, developing self and others, leading improvement, innovation and change, leading the management of the school and engaging and working with the community (AITSL, 2014, pp 6-11). There are also three core leadership requirements the first of which is to lead the vision and values of the school, which were central to both Virginia’s and Amanda’s projects. The other two, ‘Knowledge and Understanding’ related to the theory and practice of teaching and leadership and the third, ‘Personal qualities, social and interpersonal skills’ relate to emotional intelligence and the ability to work effectively across and within the school community (AITSL, 2018).

In this context if a school was performing below desired expectations, the principal in collaboration with the school council may ‘self-select into a priority review to address any performance declines before they reach a level below the thresholds’ (DEECD, 2013d, p 8). In early 2015 Ackenham was the subject of a School Intervention Advisory Panel Submission. This process followed a priority review undertaken by Amanda in late 2014 and involved a further assessment of the school by regional staff to find ways improve teaching and learning, curriculum planning and assessment as well as student wellbeing and leadership development (DET, 2016a).

**Professional practice arrangements for teachers in Victorian Government schools**

In terms of practice theory, teaching is regarded as a relatively new profession compared to medicine or the law, and its status, economic position and autonomy is less well established (Green, 2009). As a consequence of recent education policies, emphasising performance and regulation, increased pressure has been placed on teachers and their practice (Biesta, 2013; Green, 2009; Kemmis, 2009). This can be problematic if professional bodies are regulating from a distance (Kemmis, 2009) and are potentially out of touch with the consequences of their policies. In the Victorian context the performance of principals is monitored by the regional education authorities (DEECD, 2014c) while the performance and assessment of teachers is the responsibility of the principals (DEECD 2013g; DET, 2015c). As noted earlier, performance management and quality control of professional practices are to a large extent self-managed.
More broadly, all teachers in Victoria are required to register with the Victorian Institute of Teaching [VIT], a statutory authority established in 2002 to regulate and monitor teacher professional standards. In 2012-13, just over 5000 new graduates were registered to teach in Victoria schools, which is an increase of 12 percent over the previous year (VIT, 2013). This included three graduate teachers who were starting their careers at Ackenham during the period of this study.

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In 2011 about 19 percent of government school teachers were employed on fixed-term contracts. This included covering for staff on leave for extended periods. Short-term contracts were also a way of creating a probationary period and screening for teacher quality (Competition and Efficiency Commission 2013, p 138-39). At Ackenham four out of the six classroom teachers were on short-term contracts at the beginning of 2013 (Principal interview, February 2013).

In 2011 about 19 percent of government school teachers were employed on fixed-term contracts. This included covering for staff on leave for extended periods. Short-term contracts were also a way of creating a probationary period and screening for teacher quality (Competition and Efficiency Commission 2013, p 138-39). At Ackenham four out of the six classroom teachers were on short-term contracts at the beginning of 2013 (Principal interview, February 2013).

Professional practice arrangements for teachers in Victorian government schools have been influenced by a history of teacher autonomy within the broader context of school autonomy and the idea that teachers are best placed to make decisions about the needs of their students and their teaching practice (VCEC, 2013, XXVII). The professional practice skills and knowledge required for Victorian teachers include those for creating and maintaining supportive, safe and effective learning environments but where ‘Improving student outcomes is the core purpose of teachers’ work’ (DET, 2015c, 6-7).

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In the period of this study, professional practice was guided by the ‘Performance and Development Guidelines; for the Teacher Class’ (DEECD, 2014c). Teacher practice was positioned as part of a performance management cycle and designed to be developed through a process of personal reflection, peer feedback and formal reviews. These approaches were based on theories of empowerment evaluation (Hattie, 2015, p 15) that emphasised the development of collaborative arrangements and peer sharing expertise in schools with the expectation of increasing the school’s capacity for self and group improvement. To do this, teachers were to use both qualitative and quantitative methods and to collect and share evidence about their own practice to demonstrate how their practice impacted on student outcomes. Salary progression was incentivised through a favourable outcome of performance review (DET, 2015c) which in turn was influenced by the ambition
of becoming a ‘high performing system’ that required ‘highly effective teachers’ (DEECD, 2014c, p 7).

The overall proposition was that ‘effective’, ‘quality’ and ‘excellent teaching practice’ (DEECD, 2014c, p 9-11) were best developed within the context of peer-to-peer learning, and the idea of a learning community (DEECD, 201b). These approaches were central to both Virginia and Amanda’s projects. The professional practice guidelines referenced the work of a number of scholars, including DuFour (2010) and Marzano (2003), advocates for professional learning communities and collaborative practice and Hattie (2009) and his extensive synthesis of teaching and learning practices (DEECD, 2014c). Du Four and Marzano and Hattie were cited extensively by Amanda and formed the basis of Ackenham’s Pedagogical Platform in 2017 (p 196). The types of teaching practices and learning expectations promoted in professional practice guidelines included; personalised learning, building meaning and understanding rather just the acquisition of knowledge or the completion of a task. There was an emphasis on formative feedback, inquiry-based and co-operative learning and connecting learning to the wider community (DEECD, 2014d, p 9).

The policy and guidelines for professional practice also wrestled with the broader ambition of ‘access and inclusion’ that is that ‘all students have the capacity to learn’ and it was incumbent on teachers to provide quality learning environments for all students, particularly the most vulnerable and/or disadvantage (DEECD, 2014d, p 4).

The preceding sections elaborated on the policy in which the principals and teachers at Ackenham worked. The period in which this study is situated is one of significant and ongoing change in which student academic performance and accountability and compliance for schooling are central to the story. Applying system wide measures and accountabilities however to a site such as Ackenham will not necessarily tell what success looks like or provide adequate direction for school improvement. The needs and abilities of students were hard to compare to that of their peers while the relative inexperience of the teachers and principals also needed to be factored into any proposed intervention (DET, 2016a). On the other hand, Ackenham was seen to be a site of significance based on its unique cohort of teachers and students as demonstrated by the number of research projects in the school including this study. The curriculum and policies for intercultural understanding
The conceptual ingredients of interculturality in Victorian schools have coalesced around multiculturalism and multicultural education since the 1970s. From this time, the formal curriculum has emphasised the importance of knowing about other countries and acknowledging and celebrating Australian’s migrant cultures (Kalantzis et al., 2012). This approach, while symbolically important, has also been criticised for being superficial or tokenistic or too narrowly focussed on the migrant cultures thus reinforcing their minority status in a dominant White Anglo hegemony (Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Powers, 2002; Hill, 2007; Chiro, 2009). Furthermore, it is often difficult to avoid simplistic notions of social cohesion and cultural harmony within both policy and practice (Noble, 2013).

The current Australian Curriculum is framed by the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008), which represents a national agreement by federal, state and territory ministers of education for common curriculum and policy aspirations (MCEETYA, 2008, p 4). The Melbourne Declaration contained two goals, both of which have relevance to this study; the first to promote equity and excellence in Australian schooling and the second that ‘All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens’ (MCEETYA, 2008, p 7). Contained within the second goal were the following aspirations:

- appreciate Australia’s social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity and have an understanding of Australia’s system of government, history and culture
- are able to relate to and communicate across cultures, especially the cultures and countries of Asia (MCEETYA, 2008, p 7).

Generally, culture in this context is understood to include the affective domains; being able to ‘value, relate to and contribute to’ for purposes such as reconciliation and the cogitative domain; knowing about and understanding, in order to communicate with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Intercultural understanding was one dimension within the new Australian Curriculum designed to support the development of ‘a range of generic and employability skills’ as well as to promote ‘national values of democracy’ and ‘respect for others’ (MCEETYA, 2008, p 4-5).

It should be noted that while all state and territory education agencies had agreed to cooperate with the federal government to support and implement the Australian Curriculum,
they had also retained formal responsibility for its administration. This meant that while responsibility for curriculum policy and development processes shifted from states and territories to the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, they possessed a degree of autonomy in deciding how the curriculum would look at the local level (Savage, 2016). For example, the Victorian Curriculum (2012-2015), was known as AusVELs and was an amalgam of the Australian Curriculum and the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, and intercultural understanding was one of four general capabilities. Here intercultural understanding was positioned as a ‘powerful commitment to multiculturalism’ and designed to being inclusive of ‘the study of histories, languages, civics and the arts’ (Howes, 2012, pp 3-4).

It was during Virginia’s tenure at Ackenham that the Australian Curriculum was introduced in Australian schools for the first time (ACARA 2012; VCAA 2013a). In Victoria, there had already been history of curriculum development and implementation within the context of local decision making about how it would be resourced and delivered:

Schools have considerable flexibility in the design of their teaching and learning programs. This enables schools to develop particular specialisations and areas of expertise and innovation while ensuring the curriculum is delivered (VCAA, 2014b, p 5).

In Victoria, teachers were expected to infuse intercultural understanding as a general capability across the Foundation to Year 10 curriculum as part of AusVELS, particularly through the Physical, Personal and Social Learning and Interdisciplinary Learning strands (VCAA, 2014a). The Learning Continuum for this capability in the Australian Curriculum was designed to promote dispositions such as reflection, empathy, respect and responsibility and to assist in the building of positive relationships, reduce stereotyping and prejudice and mediate cultural difference (ACARA, 2014). The General Capabilities were described as discrete skills and knowledge rather than a statement of pedagogy (VCAA, 2014b), and therefore could be taught and assessed, although the need for assessment tools for intercultural capability has been noted (Halse et al., 2015).

Teachers were advised to focus on essential skills, knowledge and attributes for ‘valuing their own languages, cultures and beliefs and those of others’ and to cultivate values such as interaction, reflection, empathy, respect and responsibility between students with the
proposition that this would that could be implemented across all curriculum areas and make a broad contribution to social cohesion (ACARA, 2013b, p. 1-2).

Education policies in Victoria initially positioned intercultural understanding as part of multicultural education (DET, 1997) or in language education and global citizenship education strategies (DEECD, 2009; 2012a; 2014b) without providing clear explanation or advice to schools about how to implement this aspiration in teacher practice. In this sense it was expected that intercultural understanding would occur by osmosis as a complementary element of language learning or through the provision of (local and global) citizenship education.

During the time of the study, Unity for Diversity, described as a vision for Civics, Citizenship and Multicultural Education (DEECD, 2014b) was released in Victoria but failed to fully develop or define intercultural understanding. Preceding this document was the Strategy for Global and Multicultural Citizenship (DEECD, 2009) that was couched in terms of globalisation and global citizenship and where intercultural literacy was defined in terms of the skills for cross-cultural interactions and contributing to social cohesion and economic prosperity. The usefulness of such vision and strategy to Ackenham Primary School is questionable given that the principals were unaware of them (Principal meetings, February 2013; May 2014).

**ANZAC Day commemorations**

One of the challenges for staff at Ackenham was how to participate in ANZAC Day commemorations. ANZAC Day is marked by a national holiday which is held annually on the 25 April. The significance of the date is reflected in the day in 1915 on which Australian and New Zealand troops launched a heroic but failed campaign to invade Turkey in an area known as Gallipoli. The nine-month long First World War battle, in which more than 8,000 soldiers died, has been commemorated in Australia since the 1940’s and is a significant part of Australian and Turkish historical narrative. ANZAC Day is described as a day of national remembrance and more broadly acknowledges the service and sacrifice of Australians in wars and conflicts around the world. Commemorations involve a specialist discourse, constructed actions and rules such as formal reflection with a minute of silence, placing wreaths and flowers around a shrine or symbolic shrine to honour the sacrifice that people had made in war. Traditions include wearing red poppies as a symbol of life and reclamation or eating
ANZAC Day occupies a particular intersubjective space in the Australian historical and cultural narrative, framed around terms like ‘mateship’, ‘ANZAC spirit’, ‘ANZAC legend’, ‘sacrifice’ and ‘patriotism’. Such a cultural discursive narrative is positioned to promote a sense of national identity, about who and what Australia is as a nation (DET, 2018).

The Victorian Department of Education’s policy indicates that schools must ‘hold (patriotic) ceremonies for students that acknowledge their role as citizens of Australia’. ANZAC Day ceremonies are an expected part of schools’ practice during the lead up to the 25 April. This includes ‘An oath devised by the school council expressing the ideals of citizenship and celebrating cultural diversity’ (DET, 2018).

Arrangements outside schools included Dawn Services held at war memorials throughout Australia and ANZAC Day Parades, which involve returned service people and/or their descendants in marches and commemorations. Schools are advised that they should include patriotic practices such as the singing of the Australian National Anthem and use the Australian Flag. Many other schools independently undertake tours to Gallipoli and other battlefields in which Australian service personal. These tours are sometimes referred to as ‘pilgrimages’ (DET, 2018).

Such traditions and sentiment however have also had a history of polarising public discourse, particularly around the notions of glorifying or sentimentalising war. Criticisms of ANZAC Day include that it can be experienced as an exclusive form of nationalism, that is, it is perceived as ‘fostering of nationalistic jingoism’ (Scates et al., 2012, p 530). This view is framed around an argument that the ANZAC tradition has derived from a period of post-colonialism and the white Australia policy, the legacy of which emphasises a type of Anglo-Australianness which in contemporary multicultural Australia doesn’t resonate or include particular ethnic, cultural or religious groups (Scates et al. 2012; Soutphommasane 2012). In other words, the meaning and significance of ANZAC Day does not resonate with all sections of the community in the
same way and is therefore a contested space as an official commemoration in Australian history.

Given the differing perspectives about ANZAC Day, schools are advised that students should not be compelled to participate in commemorations if they or their parents have a religious, cultural or philosophical objection (DET, 2018). Such was the experience of staff at Ackenham as they grappled with what to do with ANZAC Day and in a school with perceived or real objections to the ANZAC story. The dilemmas and challenges will be elaborated in later chapters.

The next section examines the literature that relates more specifically to the schooling of migrants and refugees, particularly those from families from countries in and around the Horn of Africa and in the stages of early resettlement in Australia. This section provides a background for understanding some of the limitations and opportunities found in school practices and an insight into desirable approaches to teaching.

**Schooling students from the Horn of Africa**

Relevant to the application of intercultural understanding at a school like Ackenham, are the deficit discourses and polarised opinions surrounding refugees in Australia (Uptin, Wright & Harwood, 2012; Taylor & Sidhu, 2011). Public rhetoric surrounding asylum seekers includes terms such as ‘illegals’, ‘terrorists’ or ‘queue jumpers’ and has fuelled suspicion and anti-refugee sentiment (Hattam & Every, 2010; Baak, 2018). Uptin, Wright and Harwood (2013) claim that young refugee migrants from black African backgrounds are likely to be perceived in deficit as they begin their school education in Australia; that is, poorly educated, suffering trauma, victims or at being at risk. Furthermore, a common assumption that refugees are a homogenous group with similar needs may consign them to programs that don’t suit their differing educational and settlement needs that can assign students to lower starting points than their peers (Matthews, 2008). Recent public discourse about the presence and criminal activities of black ‘African gangs’ in Melbourne (Bowden, 2018; Wahlquist, 2018) have also added to negative perceptions of the broader African Australian population promote negative stereotypes, racist thinking and behaviour (Baak, 2018) which can add further complexity to developing intercultural capability in a school like Ackenham.
Finding ways of meeting the needs of African Australian students

Multicultural education is considered instrumental in the successful integration of migrants into Australia (Kymlicka, 2007; Collins, 2013) but conversely has been implicated in the maintenance and privileging by a dominant white European Christian hegemony and the ‘othering’ of minority groups. Prevalent in recent waves of migration has been the othering of people from Middle Eastern and Muslim backgrounds (Mansouri & Kamp, 2007; Scarino, Liddicoat & O’Neill, 2015) and from black African backgrounds (Matthews, 2008; Ndhlolvu, 2010; Pugh et al., 2012; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

A western tradition of formal education, in which the site of this study is positioned, carries with it particular cultural frameworks that have historically ‘privileged British heritage and institutional practice over indigenous or other immigrant cultures’ (Collard, 2007). How students from African backgrounds are faring in Australian schools and what teachers are doing to effectively respond to these students’ needs is still largely unknown or problematic (Matthews, 2008; Ndhlolvu, 2010; Pugh et al., 2012; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Baak, 2018).

Dodds et al. (2010) offers some insight into the primary school experience of African Australian students in an investigation of Somali and non-Somali students’ perceptions of skills needed for secondary school. The study involved a cohort of 30 Somali students from refugee backgrounds, 60 non-refugee children from two neighbouring disadvantaged schools and 44 non-Somali advantaged children from a nearby lower middle-class school. The researchers were interested in the children’s perceptions of their skills as indicators of ability to move from primary to secondary school as well as making a place for themselves in the school environment. The most discriminating feature of the Somali children’s self-described skills was their strong rejection of any skill in music and art. In contrast, the disadvantaged local children rejected spelling, and the advantaged local children, maths, as their weakest subject skills. Problem-solving, conflict resolution and speech making were generally rejected as important skills by all groups. Most of the Somali and Non-Somali boys and girls from the disadvantaged schools chose sport as their greatest skill which may reflect the broader Australian interest in sport and a match with the Somali children’s passion for soccer (Spaaij, 2012). While this study found that there was a reasonable fit between Somali background students and the Australian school system they faced the additional challenge of navigating
between home and school cultures that included parents’ doubts about their children’s involvement to activities such as sport, music, art, dance that may not have matched their expectations of schooling or cultural or religious practices.

Other studies such as Keddie (2011, p 1308) investigated issues of cultural recognition in a P-7 primary school in Queensland where just under a third of students where from immigrant or refugee backgrounds including from the Horn of Africa. She found evidence of practices and discourses that ‘essentialise and inferiorise student difference’, thus compromising school policies for justice, equity and inclusion. More broadly, Sidhu and Taylor (2012, p 40) found there was a tendency to ‘medicalise’ refugees, and that schools tended to focus more on English as a Second Language and emotional problems than on ways of including students in the mainstream curriculum. Such findings pointed to a need to improve our knowledge about how teachers respond to the learning needs of these students and to identify within the intercultural education discourse, those concepts, terms, tools and units of analysis that are useful to educators.

A study by Taylor and Sidhu (2012), involving four schools including one primary school in Queensland, investigated the role schools played in the resettlement of African background refugee children and concluded that teachers were struggling to cope with the demands of their students. They found the factors that were most likely to contribute to successful support and integration of refugee students in schooling included:

- Targeted programs and system support
- An explicit commitment to social justice
- Adoption of a holistic approach to education and welfare
- Strong leadership and advocacy for refugee students
- Celebration of diversity
- Whole of school approach to learning assistance and
- Partnerships with agencies (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012, pp 47-51).

Other studies into the experience of African Australian students and their families reinforced the merit in the use of holistic approaches, a welcoming environment and reflective practices
for teachers (Pugh, Every & Hattam, 2012). Such attributes in teachers promote a sense of belonging for young people (Correa-Velez et al., 2010) and can contribute to building social capital through family relationships with teachers (Ramsden, 2008).

At the secondary level, a study of education experiences of refugee students in four Queensland high schools and an intensive English language school found that students were struggling due to their limited English proficiency and a lack of appropriate resources and pedagogies to support them (Matthews, 2008). Similarly, in a study by Dooley and Thangaperumal (2011) that followed eight low-literate refugee students of African background through an intensive English Language school and three regular secondary schools pointed to the potential reproduction of social disadvantage through literacy education. This experience included students being mocked for their accent or feeling a sense of failure for not participating quickly enough in classroom discussions. Their findings suggested the need for the development of technical capabilities of literacy as well opportunities for students to make social and cultural meaning of their refugee experience within a reflexive and critical pedagogical approach. Strategies recommended to overcome to such classroom power dynamics and ‘linguistic discrimination’ (p 13) includes an increase emphasis on oral interaction in literacy classes about their lived experience as refugees that enabled opportunities for critical reflection and for the co-construction of meaning and knowledge.

Ramsden and Taket’s (2013) study into the extent and nature of social capital of Somali families with children in two Victorian secondary schools similarly reported strong feelings of belonging with the ‘homeland’ and positive recollections of the Somali education system that contributed to tensions between Somali parents’ cultural values and beliefs and the expectations of their new school. These tensions included a higher than expected involvement from parents in school activities or a perceived lack of academic rigor in the school program. If relationships were however framed around the common aspiration to improve educational outcomes for their children and parents received support for accessing resources, this tended to have a positive effect and translated into building and bridging social capital. Such findings are particularly relevant for the staff at Ackenham given the large number of Somali families involved in the school.
The next section introduces the school as a research site and how the Theory of Practice Architectures will be used in this context.

**Understanding and studying practice; foregrounding Practice Architecture Theory in this site and context**

The notion of emergent practice (Kemmis & Mutton, 2012) is particularly relevant to teaching and learning for intercultural understanding at Ackenham. As a recent addition to the Australian Curriculum, it was valuable to see how intercultural understanding can be incorporated into a practice environment where most of the staff were new to the school and the profession of teaching and where each principal introduced new discourses or different ways of doing things.

As outlined in Chapter 3, applying the Theory of Practice Architectures in a unique setting such as Ackenham provided a means for organising and analysing what was found within the three dimensions of practice; cultural-discursive, the material-economic and the social-political arrangements. In doing so, this study could identify those practices that facilitated or impeded the development of interculturality.

**The school as a site for interculturality**

For the purposes of this study, the site as described by Schatzki (2005 p 468) has been used as a reference for presenting the relevant features of the practice landscape, that is, ‘a type of context that can be understood as an arena or set of phenomena that surrounds or immerses something and enjoys powers of determination with respect to it’.

The site in this case can be the spatial context, such as the library, school building or neighbourhood as an objective setting in which the action takes place, however, the practices themselves are also sites and episodes of social phenomena. Practice architectures are made up of *sayings, doings* and *relatings* within and across cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements. Furthermore Kemmis et al. (2014 p 50-51) have also identified five characteristic kinds of interrelated practice that are relevant to changing practices in schools, these are; ‘student learning, teaching, professional learning, leading and researching’. The authors argue that each set of practices influences the other, that is, teaching will be influenced by professional learning, leadership and research and so on. By
identifying the types of practices that are most evident in each domain it is possible to study the development of interculturality across the five practice areas.

The combined effect of the social practices at Ackenham therefore can be understood as contextualised entities that occur in a certain time and place but are further impacted on by arrangements such as traditions and customs, and as Hardy and Edwards-Groves (2016) point out, their connectedness to past professional learning experiences. For example, an interaction such as explicitly teaching for reflexivity, an attribute of intercultural capability (Cruz 2013; Diaz 2013), may be done through a lesson, the application of specific teaching practices or emphasised as a school priority. The success of lessons may depend on the degree to which the students are individually and collectively prepared to engage with the teacher and the content (Stake, 1995) or the existence of student resistance to teacher authority based on cultural perceptions (Santoro & Forghani-Arani, 2015). Furthermore, the lesson itself is situated in a period of cultural adjustment for many of the students and their families. Developing students’ reflexivity may involve questioning ‘taken for granted’ cultural norms or beliefs and has the potential for undesired consequences such being seen to undermine their parents’ authority. The lesson is also constituted within a broader curriculum context in which the development of intercultural capability is integrated as part of a cross disciplinary approach and therefore only one of many learning intentions. The ‘site’ therefore in which the lesson for progressing the students’ reflexivity is a complex milieu of the people, place, practices, time and the social phenomena that surround it. It is physically, historically and socially situated in the intersubjective spaces in which the teachers, students and their families encounter each other. Ackenham presents a unique case, and while it can be argued that every school context is different and unique, the school’s history of supporting waves of immigrants and refugees and the challenges faced by students and staff are significantly different and more complex than other schools to justify the claim of being unique.
Leading others and how is this different from a leader?

While a key practitioner in each of these next three chapters is the principal, practices cannot be properly understood from the perspective of one individual (Kemmis et al., 2014). In the context of a study framed around the tenures of three principals it was important to look for the different ways that leadership and leading others were evident at Ackenham. It was also important not to default to look only at the principals in leading day-to-day routines and practices. In this case, leading others included the leadership demonstrated by the teachers, students, parents, multicultural aides and support staff as well as the principal. Leading others, in this sense implies a shared responsibility and accounts for the contextual conditions and the intersubjective spaces, i.e. the semantic, physical, social spaces and time in which practices take place. Such an approach broadens the study to include leading, as part of the broader suite of practices that contribute to educational transformation (Kemmis et al., 2014).

In traditional leadership discourses, there is tendency to study “the leader” which can emphasise individual and personal characteristics leading to an individualistic ontology (Green, 2009; Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2014; Thomson & Blackmore, 2006) that contributes to a linear view of organisational change. Furthermore, in education the attributes of good leadership, particularly in a neoliberal version of schooling are often consigned to an essential set of managerial and technical skills (Kemmis et al., 2014; Biesta, 2013; 2015). From this perspective, change in contemporary educational practices can be positioned as a binary, that is of enlightened democratic practices as educational development with a social and critical (collective) view versus one of school improvement that is essentially a managerial and technical (individualistic) view (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 158). By examining some of these concerns using a case study approach in one school enables a more nuanced view of what is required to support the success and effectiveness of a new policy or curriculum reform such as the development of intercultural understanding more broadly.
Chapter 5  Leading change; fixing a broken story while ‘walking on eggshells’

At the beginning of Virginia’s tenure

Virginia was principal at Ackenham Primary School from June 2011 until April 2014. This was her first principal appointment and it followed nearly three years as Assistant Principal at a large outer suburban primary school. Virginia’s career included more than 20 years as a primary teacher in Victoria during which she won a state Department of Education Primary Teacher of the Year Award. She also spent 12 months in a coaching role with the Department of Education working with a network of schools to enhance the use of information and communication technology to improve student learning (Principal interview, February 2013).

At the time of Virginia's arrival, Ackenham had already experienced a significant period of instability including a turnover of six principals from 2006. Enrolments were down to 94 students from a high of 303 in 1996 (DEECD, 2010). As an indication of parents’ sense of instability and impermanence of school staffing one of the first questions Virginia was asked was, ‘How long are you staying?’ (Principal interview, February 2013). The difficulty in attracting retaining teachers and principals was not confined to Ackenham as a study (PWC, 2015) on the future readiness of the school workforce showed:

Schools in low SES communities typically offer more challenging working environments, with poor attendance, less readiness for schooling, poorer average outcomes at school, less advantageous physical circumstances, higher rates of staff transience, and often less qualified and experienced staff (PWC, 2015, p 29).

At the end of 2012, the Business Manager had retired and three “expert” teachers who had ongoing positions at the school had taken “leave” and began working at a nearby school with a former principal of Ackenham (Principal interview, February 2013). Expert teachers typically have had responsibility for implementation or coordination of school priorities, particularly those related to teaching and learning. In teacher classifications, an expert teacher, can also equate to a renumerated position known as a leading teacher (Education & Training Reform Act, 2006b). The ongoing nature of the position meant that these were held at the school until
they returned, usually after 12 months, and could only be filled by other teachers on short-term contracts. While on the one hand Virginia saw this as an opportunity for renewal, ‘there were staff who had been here for years and things had always been done in the same way. They were an entrenched group; one had been here for 21 years, the others for 13 and 8 years’ (Principal interview, April 2013). This also resulted in the loss of teaching experience, which was difficult to replace, and furthermore, created a level of uncertainty and instability for the teachers on short-term contact positions.

At the beginning of 2013 there were 10.2 equivalent full-time (EFT) staff, which included the principal, six full time classroom teachers, four of whom were early career, two in their first year and the new Grade 3-6 Teaching and Learning Coach, Karen, who was in her first year at the school but had 12 years’ experience in other schools. Karen’s role was funded through the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Low Socio-economic Status School Communities, to support teachers and develop intervention and extension programs for students (Ackenham Primary School [APS] Annual Report, 2013). With the replacement of experienced teachers with early career teachers and other staff changes, Virginia and Karen, as the most experienced and senior staff, were also involved in managing orientation and mentoring new staff, on top of their other duties.

The remaining teaching allocations comprised of part-time language teachers for Arabic, Vietnamese and Italian, and for Art and the Kitchen Garden. There were also 6.2 EFT [Effective Full-time] non-teaching staff that included a full-time Student Wellbeing Advocate, Francis who worked directly with individual students and their families, a Business Manager and Multicultural Aides (School website, 2014). Two social work students were also doing a field placement during terms 3 and 4, 2013 and providing support to school programs (Principal interview, February 2013).

In mid-2013, further staff changes were warranted as the Prep-2 teacher left the school and another early career teacher joined the staff. His role was to work with all classes from Prep to Grade 6, particularly focused on English language learning (School Newsletter, 15 July 2013).
State and national education policy context

There were two significant reforms to schooling during Virginia’s tenure that had direct impact on her role as principal and on practice architectures at Ackenham. The first was the Victorian Government’s push for greater autonomy in schools as a way of improving student achievement outcomes (DEECD 2011a; 2011b). As previously noted, school autonomy and the underlying principles of local decision-making and increased parent choice were not new in Victoria. The consequences of such policies included a widening the disparity between rich and poor schools and segregation of schools and reduction in student numbers and resources for schools in low SES areas (Lamb, 2007).

This ‘reform’ followed a change of state government in 2010 and was confirmed in the DEECD 2011 vision statement, Towards Victoria as a Learning Community, which outlined an ambition to reach the top tier of world education measures within 10 years (DEECD, 2011a). This vision was based on ‘international evidence’ that indicated that high performing systems achieved better student outcomes when schools were given greater autonomy over resources (DEECD, 2011a, p 4). Such claims were disputed at the time by teacher unions (AEU, 2012) and some Victorian principals as reflected in such comments as, ‘Schools hear rhetoric around increase autonomy and wonder what this means, apart from shifting of costs, responsibility and work to them’ (Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals [VASSP] 2013, p 21). While there was some evidence to say that high levels of school autonomy can contribute to increased performance on international tests, it was also found to contribute to educational inequality which remains an ongoing issue in Victoria and Australia (Orlando & Sayer, 2013).

Schools such as Ackenham, serving low Socio-Economic Status (SES) migrant and refugee children had become much smaller, harbouring higher concentrations of disadvantage than schools in middle income and wealthier areas. As such the burden of responsibility for the students in most need was being disproportionately shared by Victorian government schools through a process of marketization started in the 1980s (Lamb, 2007).

One of the significant elements of this reform was a reduction of both regional and centralised education support. In 2013 in a process of ‘consolidation’, nine regions were collapsed into four which resulted an overall loss of around 400 Victorian Public Service and other allied
support positions from the Department of Education, including those from the central bureaucracy (DEECD, 2013a; AEU, 2013). The logic of such reforms was based on assumptions that if resources, previously used in school support services, were placed in schools then these could be better directed towards local needs (DEECD, 2013b). Conversely, there were claims that such an approach constituted a reduction in services, otherwise provided by the Department of Education (AEU, 2013). Such claims suggested that school autonomy placed additional burdens on schools and their principals to source and fund services for themselves:

Cuts to central and regional departmental staff and programs have diminished the DEECD’s capacity to assist schools in providing instructional and welfare support for vulnerable students. The State Government has cut at least 400 jobs from the DEECD. Schools have been hit by the disappearance of Literacy and Numeracy Support Officers, Koori Support officers, Reading Recovery tutors and Regional Network Leaders. The AEU State of Our Schools survey (2013) found that over 90 per cent of principals reported that regional support for schools had deteriorated over the past year (AEU, 2013).

Asserting a fresh emphasis on school autonomy with corresponding reductions in regional and central support (DEECD, 2011b), made it difficult for schools such as Ackenham to fulfil the Department of Education’s desire for lifting student performance outcomes to international standards.

The second major reform was the introduction and implementation of the Australian Curriculum in Victoria in 2013. Commencing with English, Mathematics, Science and History, schools in Victoria continued to use 12 existing essential learning domains and three embedded cross curriculum priorities from the Victorian Curriculum, the AusVELs as well as the new core subjects. In 2013 schools were required to report against new curriculum framework to parents (Foster, Smith & Fisher, 2013), the first full year of Virginia’s tenure.

One of the consequences of curriculum implementation in a devolved system was that schools could choose when and where to include or not include certain content so long as they could meet the expected learning outcomes. The VCAA conducted briefings for principals and curriculum coordinators during the introduction of the Australian Curriculum and it was incumbent upon them to lead the transition from the Victorian to Australian
Curriculum as AusVELS at the local level. Additional resources, support and advice, primarily electronic, were available from both state and national authorities (ACARA, 2013a; VCAA, 2014a). Principals and teachers were able to make decisions about what lessons, approaches and resources should be used to support the learning and teaching program of the school (Field notes, April 2013; DEECD, 2012b; 2013d). Within the logic of school autonomy, such flexibility was required to better respond to students’ needs at the local level. A reduction in regional school support services however, coupled with the roll out of the AusVELS meant there was an increased onus on principals to drive the curriculum change and lead professional learning required for its implementation. Virginia became involved in the Doing Diversity project as one means of supporting the development of intercultural understanding, as part of a plan for developing staff capability in the AusVELS as well as collecting data about the school.

Educational Leadership; a new story

Based on the school’s history of instability, declining enrolments, comparatively weak academic results and performance and negative public perceptions, Virginia’s warrant was contained in the ‘project’ to improve student outcomes through the creation of an optimistic narrative that she hoped would dislodge deficit perceptions, build the confidence of students and teachers as well as to lead to a more positive school identity.

Virginia introduced a variety of interventions and communication strategies in the semantic spaces, such as weekly assemblies, fortnightly newsletters, community forums and a new school website that were aimed at making Ackenham more welcoming and attractive. There were also a range of resources and projects in the school that she hoped would improve the teachers’ professional capability and transform practice (Principal interview, April 2013).

Kemmis and Wilkinson (2014, p 344-45) characterise leading practice change such as that which Virginia was attempting at Ackenham, as an ‘orchestration’ of practices, which together can form in distinctive forms of sayings, doings and relatings. These practices are supported by particular cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements and, like an orchestra, create a particular effect if they work together. While it is important to understand what constitutes school practices and what the orchestra is doing, it is also
important to understand the relationship between practices and how these are connected to each other, and what effect they create together.

The critical questions here are, how such approaches and programs contribute to the desired transformation of Ackenham in Virginia’s project, and how might these contribute to practice architectures for the development of interculturality?

Virginia’s project – ‘fixing a broken story’

Virginia completed a Master of Education in 2012 which included an action research project at Ackenham in which she investigated the role of stories in engaging students in learning. She had looked at studies of African countries such as Somalia and their history of oral storytelling to pass on memories and cultural meaning as well as engaging emotions. The story she reported at Ackenham was one of deficit and disadvantage, and a reputation, couched in negative terms, as a ‘school for Blacks’. This led her to conclude that the school had a ‘broken story’ that needed to be fixed. Her aim was to dislodge any deficit perceptions and improve the school’s reputation thus making it more appealing to current and prospective parents and arrest Ackenham’s decline (Principal interview, February 2013; Field notes, February 2013).

In her research she also drew on studies about schools comparable to Ackenham, that is, those with groups of refugees and immigrants from the Horn of Africa with disrupted backgrounds (Principal interview, February, 2013). For example, an ethnographic study of Somali children from refugee backgrounds and their adjustment to schooling in New Zealand (Guerin et al. 2003) found that while Somali parents valued education they were less inclined to be involved in the processes of their children’s schooling. This was sometimes due to the parents’ limited English skills or negative perceptions of school visits with their children being in trouble.

Using local school satisfaction data and interviews with parents, Virginia confirmed low levels of student-parent engagement. In Australian schools, there has historically been an emphasis on parent engagement and involvement in school activities (Emerson, Fear, Fox & Sanders, 2012). Virginia’s approach to learning and teaching involved some level of partnership and shared responsibility between home and school (School Foyer interview, April 2013) along the lines of interventions recommended by Guerin and his colleagues. These included ‘specific
parent teacher nights’, bilingual teaching assistants’, ‘translation of materials’, ‘involving parents on school excursions’ and ‘building flexibility in age and ability groups’ (Guerin et al., 2003, npn), which were all practices that Virginia employed (Field notes, April 2013).

Central to Virginia’s new narrative were four complimentary cultural-discursive practices; weekly assemblies, fortnightly newsletters, a revamped school website and a new school blog. These practices were consolidated around the aim to increase engagement and establishing stronger links between the school and students’ homes. Each was designed to showcase the positive and productive aspects of the school and put an optimistic public face on the work of the teachers and students. Stories were therefore conveyed through different media such as the School Blog which was used extensively to highlight the cultural activities, events and projects in which the students were involved. The Blog, for example, included photographs and stories about how the school had taken part in the local Eid Festival, celebrated diversity and belonging in a Harmony Day event and how the school hosted visitors from the United Arab Emirates (School Blog, 2013). Virginia moved the assembly to the library, a brighter and more accessible space than the multipurpose room where it had been previously held. She changed the way in which assemblies were conducted. A positive discourse was employed that expressed optimism about what the children were learning and doing. Parents were actively encouraged to attend assemblies and on occasion stay afterwards for a morning tea and discussion. These practices were designed to promote inclusion, participation and connection, as well as model expected behaviours and attitudes. She had tested aspects of this approach during her Master of Education research and expressed confidence in the approach and continued implement and refine these practices (Principal interview, February 2013).

One of the challenges in Virginia’s new story was working into the local community. Much of Ackenham’s story was positioned in the material-economic factors, particularly the school’s location on the edge of the public housing estate where many of the students and their families lived. This was an area with high levels of social and economic disadvantage which is reflected in the measures used by federal and state education jurisdiction rankings as being low SES school (DEECD, 2013i; ACARA, 2013c) and a ‘disadvantaged’ school for funding purposes (DEECD, 2014a). Through her involvement with the Neighbourhood Renewal Committee, Virginia was made aware of the nature of some of the domestic and gender-
based violence issues in and around the housing estate that effected people in the school (Principal interview, February 2013).

At the same time as these families were facing significant social and economic adjustments and hardship there were broader discourses about refugees from the Horn of Africa, which often portrayed them as undesirable or a drain on resources (Uptin, Wright & Harwood, 2013; Taylor & Sidhu 2012; Guerin et al. 2003). Discrimination in employment, lack of recognition of qualifications or access to informal local networks and work experience have also been identified as factors that contribute to a loss of confidence and other mental health issues such as depression among refugee groups (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012). In the following quote, Virginia points specifically to some of the gender-based attitudes and behaviours that she was trying to manage:

Many of the students come from patriarchal families where men have always been dominant and where it was common for men to tease the women. Some students are copying this behaviour. The women find they have greater access to money and have more independence. Some of the men are mostly employed as taxi drivers or can’t get jobs. There is some resentment that they have lost their authority. The school teaches the kids that Australia is a free country and this is perceived that you can do what you like which can cause further tensions in families (Principal interview, April 2014)

Underpinning Virginia’s project was her compassion for migrants and refugees based on personal experience. However, as identified in the quote above, such patriarchal attitudes were a source of tension and ran contrary to the teaching and learning intentions of the school and to Virginia’s emphasis on social justice.

The quote highlights some of the complex social-political factors at play in schooling. For example, more broadly, Somali parents have been found to encounter significant difficulties in adjusting to Australian cultural norms and institutions, such as schools (Ramsden & Taket, 2013; Dodds et al., 2010). These difficulties include loss or reorientation of familiar social structures such as those expressed through patriarchal gender roles or based on parental authority or status established through clanship networks (Spaaij, 2011). Furthermore, as the children experienced contrasting gender expectations and increased individual autonomy in
‘Western’ schools, the parents themselves found it more difficult to preserve important aspects of Somali culture in a new country (Guerin et al., 2003). A sense of family and the need for family support was rooted in some of the incidents of ‘teasing’ and bullying described by students from Horn of African backgrounds. This is illustrated in the following quote:

There's different people. One person can't help themselves, they can't solve the problem by themselves, they need people to help them and it make it more of a bigger deal. And they bring family members, siblings and their friends then they try to get the biggest gang so the other group doesn’t have no one, or just themselves or just a couple of people, so they think they're better than everyone (Grade 5 & 6 Focus Group, Sept 2013).

Conversely the school language program, was in part, a way of maintaining a sense of connection with particular communities. Virginia supported the teaching of Vietnamese, Italian and Arabic as additional languages because in her view they were, or had been, the most prominent languages in the school community and helped preserve a sense of identity that was important part of cultural inclusion in her project. She reported that Italian was the colonial language of Somalia and was used by some parents, while many of the families aspired to learn Arabic and had sent their children to Arabic weekend school. Virginia had an interest and need for Arabic to be part of the ‘conversations around the school’ as a way of strengthening the relationship with the parents. Vietnamese had been taught at the school for some time and was a legacy of a time when there were more Vietnamese background students (Principal interview, April 2013). It was hard to sustain this logic however, particularly for learning Vietnamese, due to the low numbers of Vietnamese Australian students in the school.

The following section elaborates on Virginia’s project, the practice architectures that were evident and some of the enabling and constraining factors.

**Demonstrating empathy, compassion and promoting social justice**

Virginia’s cultural and ethnic identity played a significant role in the way she approached intercultural understanding. Virginia was from a Macedonian background and she started primary school in Australia as a newly arrived immigrant. She reported that her experiences
as a student in an Australian school had been difficult. Though she did not specify in what ways, she wanted to create a different and more positive experience than the one she had experienced. Coincidently, the period of Virginia’s school experience in Australia in the 1970s and 80s would have been characterised by the shift from assimilationism to multiculturalism (Collins 2013), and the introduction of explicit multicultural education (Kalantzis et al., 2012).

Virginia wanted to create a compassionate and welcoming environment where students felt comfortable and where the school represented a continuation of ‘family’ as is illustrated in the following quote:

I think it’s really important for our community to feel that we do have some level of understanding around the different cultures here. I want them to think that, when they come here, that they’re not going to feel awkward or not be understood or not welcome, because of them being new arrivals or from a different culture, perhaps to the majority across Cossington. I think that’s really important. As a child, I grew up in a family that was of Macedonian background and was growing up in the Australian world, that was very Australian, and I was very Macedonian. I want to show there is a real difference here and as an Australian school we understand the difference in cultural expectations. I want
them to feel the school is continuation of their home, a continuation of their family, so we can get on with learning (Principal Interview, June 2013).

Virginia wanted to reduce feelings of social exclusion or racism. She knew from her own experience these behaviours and emotions were characteristic of being a ‘new’ Australian, and part of the experience of Horn of Africa refugees and immigrants. To promote a welcoming environment, Virginia put arrangements in place to increase the opportunities for building relationships and to promote a sense of inclusion for students and their families, and not reproduce her own “negative” school experiences. For example, staff were encouraged to spend as much time as they could with parents in informal conversations, such as when the students were being dropped off and collected from school. This social-political arrangement was designed to build relationships and to promote inclusion. ‘We have a really nice welcoming feel and that the parents can actually come up to any of the teachers and talk to them’ (Principal interview, April 2013). In the material-economic arrangements, eight colourful portraits of ex-students and staff, painted by past students, hung in the foyer. Some of the people depicted in the paintings had siblings or relatives at the school. Virginia felt this these artistic representations of the school alumni gave a sense of history and acknowledgement of the people who had come before. These were symbolically important for building a sense of connection to the school.

There were a number of people from the school community who worked in the school either as volunteers or paid staff who brought a level of cultural capital to Virginia’s project. These included Hatta, a parent from Somali background, who assisted in the office and reception and Kandra, a Somali Multicultural Education Aide (MEA) who had been working at Ackenham for more ten years. Kandra was frequently called upon to translate between parents and staff, or to act as an intermediary as well as provide counsel to Virginia, particularly around communication and engagement strategies with the Somali families. Kandra had arrived in Melbourne during the mid-1990s after fleeing the war in Somalia and had featured in a metropolitan daily newspaper article in 2004. The article puts some context around her refugee experience and some of the difficulties faced by parents in the Australian education system. Kandra had lived in the public housing estate and her five children either had been to or were current students of Ackenham. The following quote illustrates some of the challenges she faced:
Time has not dulled the memory of running with other mothers and children to escape the sharpshooters who used them for target practice. Working as a multicultural aide at Ackenham Primary School, she is keenly aware of the difficulties faced by new arrivals.

"It is so hard when you don't have the language, and for many of the mothers who arrive without English, they must depend on someone else to help them find their way through the system," she explains (Age newspaper, 15 March 2004).

Kandra was now living in a nearby suburb in private housing and was viewed as a successful and highly respected member of the Somali community (Principal interview, February 2013; Field notes, February 2013). In the absence of staff at the school with an understanding of the students and their family’s backgrounds or the linguistic skills to interpret and translate, Kandra played a significant role. Funding for her position was part of the Student Resource Package (SRP) which provided additional funding for schools such as Ackenham and was designed to address social disadvantage, for assisting newly arrived families and to support their communication between home and school (DET 2016a, p 5).

Revitalising community engagement and values – creating a shared vision?

Virginia’s Project involved two school community values forums. The first event held in February 2013 was widely promoted and attracted around 50 people; including staff members, students and their parents plus people from the community sector, and the local Federal Member of Parliament. One parent who had had eight of his children go through the school said this was the first community consultation he had been involved in over 10 years. Virginia said it was first time that such a forum had been held at the school and that it a signal of ‘a new era of community consultation and engagement’ (Principal interview, February 2013; Field notes, February 2013).

These events formed an important dimension of social-political arrangements in Virginia’s project and provided multiple opportunities for voice and agency, particularly with students and their parents but also with the teachers, many of them, new to the school. For students, agency was defined as providing more opportunities and skills to enable them to participate
in the ‘life of the school’ (Field notes, February 2013). One of the goals was an improved school community understanding and engagement that Virginia hoped would lead to ‘shared vision of the school’. The facilitated process and discussion involving mixed and diverse groups on each table with the idea to include the different perspectives. The discussion was framed around three questions as part of the visioning process for the new narrative:

- What do you want for your child when they graduate from Year 6?
- What is one thing you love about the school and would not want to change?
- What can we do without? (Field notes, February 2013).

Contributions were collected and summarised as key ideas, with the view to inform the development of new school values and future planning. While there was an intention to present the findings to parents and staff later in the term, no further community forums were held that year. The views from the forum were however used to inform the school’s action plan for the Doing Diversity project.

The second event, held in March 2014, was similarly designed to reinforce a sense of partnership and shared responsibility. This forum attracted about thirty people including teachers, parents and school support staff. One activity involved eight students presenting values cards, which they had made and asking participants to rank the values for their school community. The five values chosen by rank were; empathy, positive attitude, responsibility, respect, being cooperative which were consistent with values the school had been already using. The process was designed to move beyond the rhetoric of values and to identify where they were being demonstrated or not demonstrated. Virginia adopted a lower profile role in this event than the first forum preferring to leave most of the planning and facilitation, to me as the Doing Diversity Mentor. My role involved collaborating with Virginia in preparing for the event and working with the students beforehand to discuss the school values and to make “values cards” that might best reflect them. Throughout this process I adopted a facilitation role to support Virginia and the students to engage in reflective discussions and promote school community engagement between staff, students and their families.

The forums are examples of practices involving school and family collaboration that Virginia was trying to encourage at the school. At the core of these was the involvement of students and their families, as key stakeholders, and their teachers and other members of the school
community and engaging them in democratic processes. The teachers, parents and students worked together to generate and sort ideas. The forums provided an opportunity for the parent voices to be heard, and in the context of developing interculturality, provided opportunities for positive intergroup experiences and to build solidarity around an emerging school narrative.

Another illustration of the development of interculturality was the way Virginia had presented and decorated the school foyer.

**Practice example - Connecting people through the foyer**

The foyer was a central focus for Virginia’s project and important piece of the practice architectures. Located on the first floor of the two-storey building, it served as the main entrance to the school with a flight of steps reaching it from the street. The school was open to the public, and ‘welcome’ printed in the three languages taught at the school on the glass doors leading into the foyer. Inside there was a message ‘Be Your Best’ and a poster dedicated to ‘What we are learning at Ackenham Primary School’ with pictures of students and descriptions of what they were learning. The students were permitted to walk freely through the space, from street to classroom. The Business Manager, Catherine and her assistant Hatta, who welcomed people, managed front of house administrative tasks such as issuing late passes, answering the phone and signing in guests.

The foyer also contained a large display board. Typically used for notices and information that Virginia had decided were ‘often hard to read and unattractive’ particularly for parents from non-English speaking backgrounds. Virginia cited the display board as an example of co-construction, as it contained a coloured hand print of every child in the school and was shaped like the branches of a tree. The display was intended to convey connection and inclusion, and of people working together as a community as demonstrated in the following quote:

> We’ve actually really thought about the entrance and really changed it from being just a matter of an information noticeboard to a welcoming atmosphere’.... and to make the Foyer an ‘inclusive, welcoming space, representative of the differences in the school community’ (Principal interview, June 2013).
Portraits of students from 2000 were positioned on the floor below the reception desk (giving a slightly temporary feel), a colourful rug depicting children holding hands around a globe of the world and the welcome poster were all designed to acknowledge and reflect the students’ cultural and ethnic backgrounds as part of the heritage of the school, ‘not throwing away everything that has happened’ (School Foyer interview, April 2013). Other artefacts, such as a Habits of Mind posters and examples of students writing, help convey an intellectual climate. These were examples of how Virginia’s project was rooted in public practices and demonstrated in the assemblies, foyer, community forums and other forms of communication.

**Navigating religion in a secular school**

While Virginia was empathetic to the migrant experience, as demonstrated in the practice examples above, the religious expression of the predominantly Muslim families proved to be a dilemma and source of anxiety for her and the teachers. For example, complexities manifest in how to manage students fasting for Ramadan or taking time off school for the Eid festival. A further challenge was how to include significant Christian celebrations in school activities. There was a tension throughout Virginia’s tenure between fulfilling the responsibilities as a Victorian government school and acknowledging the rights and freedoms of students and
their families to practice their religion (Field notes, February 2013). Virginia described this experience as ‘like walking on egg shells’. Such a metaphor conveys the sense of anxiety and level of uncertainty evident at the school at this time.

The Department and Education’s School Policy and Advisory Guide provides advice to schools about their responsibilities under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (the Act) and Ministerial Direction 145 which is based on the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001. Under the Act, government schools must not promote any particular religious practice and abide by the principles of secularism:

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 provides that government school education must be secular. Government schools must not promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect, and must be open to adherents of any philosophy, religion or faith. Learning about religious and other world views is, however, an important part of learning about the contemporary world (DET, 2016c).

In Virginia’s project, it was important to build trust and maintain the confidence of the parents. From a cultural-discursive perspective she was keen to build a sense of community and shared values. From a material-economic perspective she was concerned that without trust in her and the school, parents may withdraw their children and create further pressure on student enrolments, which would potentially result in loss of further teachers or in the worst case, school closure. As already noted, schools in Victoria could include education about world faiths and belief structures as part of their curriculum, however the experience of a previous principal, who had tried to introduce a comparative study of religions as a means to teach tolerance made Virginia nervous about how to go about this:

‘There has been some anxiety about anything to do with culture and religion. A previous principal had introduced a program to promote tolerance through religion and had a ‘mass exodus’ of families who withdrew their children for a week’ (Principal interview, April 2014).

Furthermore, from a social-political perspective the relative inexperience of the teachers at Ackenham and their confidence and capacity to manage any potentially sensitive discussions
to do with religion was another consideration. For example, during a staff discussion triggered by the Together for Humanity professional development resources, Brendan, a first-year teacher for Grade 5 & 6, with limited experience in multicultural settings, made the following comment, ‘A student asked me what the difference was between a Christian and Catholic and I wasn’t able to answer. I really don’t understand religion’ (Field notes, February 2013).

In a further example, Brendan later spoke about his concern about ‘worrying what parents may think’ and the anxiety and frustration he felt regarding teaching anything that might include religion, or religious festivals or celebrations. He expressed annoyance at what he perceived as the privileging of Islam in the school:

> It is not fair to us and 20% of kids miss out (referring to 80% of students taking three days off school to celebrate Ramadan). We have to explain to those parents why other students can take a day off for Ramadan. We have our holidays such as Easter and Christmas in the school holidays and the traditions around these days are important and I would like to be able to teach everything with confidence’ (Teacher Focus Group, August 2013).

Brendan’s position reflects a broader and often prevalent assumption that it is the immigrants that need to make adjustment and adapt, not those of the local culture (Koegelor-Abdi & Parncutt 2013). Moreover, there is the potential to oversimplify or problematise as the main source of students’ identities or lived experience (Scarino, Liddicoat and O’Neill, 2015).

In this example, Brendan perceives that his rights and the rights of the non-Muslim students are being infringed and that he was being prevented from teaching about Christian observances, even though he had demonstrated in his comments some uncertainty about their meaning or what he might do in a lesson.

Lisa, an early career Grade 3 and 4 teacher who wanted to teach a unit on festivals and celebrations that she thought would develop intercultural understanding and be inclusive of all her students’ cultural and religious backgrounds. Her class included students from El Salvador, Vietnam as well as countries from the Horn of Africa:

> I was doing a unit focusing on festivals as a way to incorporate intercultural understanding. I thought to engage them, I would include few different festivals,
with really diverse and unusual customs. Some of the festivals that I thought were interesting originated from religions other than Islam. I sought advice from leadership in the school and also from our Intercultural Aide. It was recommended that I steer clear of any festivals that were closely linked to religion. I originally had a list of nine festivals, which I hoped would give students a lot of choice and create a rich discussion about many other cultures. However, I then had to cut the list back to only two festivals; those which didn’t have strong religious ties (Teacher Focus Group, August 2013).

This approach was meant to engage and be inclusive of all students, build on their prior learning and develop new perspectives about different observances and celebrations. As an early career teacher, this experience produced a level of uncertainty about what was appropriate to teach. It is unclear what concerns the leadership or multicultural aide had. Whatever the reason, the process of culling the content in this instance produced a negative experience for Lisa and less confidence about how to go about including intercultural understanding in future lessons.

In another example, Virginia reported that 15 parents had requested a meeting to express their concern about a Guy Sebastian song called *Get Along* that was played to students in class. In their view the song had referenced Mohammad in a disrespectful way and should not have been used in the lesson. Virginia had to explain how the song was used as an educational tool with the learning intention of promoting harmony and respect for difference, consistent with the school values. The verse contained the following lyrics:

Dear God, dear soul
Dear Mary, Muhammad
Can we all just get along? (Sebastian, 2012)

From a social-political perspective the lobbying by these parents was an expression of social and cultural solidarity that challenged Virginia’s project, as she noted ‘It is not an ‘us’ and ‘them’ thing but we want to be able teach the school’s curriculum without being seen to threaten the cultural or religious heritage’ (Field notes, April 2013). Such ideas highlight the need for teachers to be able to give to more attention to the influence of religion in schools, and to interrogate their understanding of secularism and the privileging of Christianity in
Australian society. Neilson, Arber and Weinmann (2017, p 13) claim there is ‘an invisible discourse of white Christian dominance’ perpetuated in Australian schooling that shapes teachers views about religion. The tensions experienced by the staff at Ackenham associated with religion and an apparent conflation of students’ religious and ethnic identities are unlikely to be understood by defaulting to the school’s curriculum unless teachers have the self-reflexive capacity to recognise religion as part of being culturally responsive to the needs of their students.

This balance between fear of offending students and their parents and teaching the school’s curriculum continued to act in social-political ways as a constraining factor between school and home as the cultural and religious understanding of teachers and principal were tested. Virginia was also aware that by privileging the interests of some of the more vocal parents over other groups she was also at risk of provoking parents to take their children out of the school (Principal interview, June 2013).

While Virginia’s migrant experience promoted empathy and compassion for her students and their families, the feelings of the teachers were entangled in their own cultural uncertainties and lack of teaching experience. The challenge in this aspect of Virginia’s project was to develop attributes of interculturality, not only of teaching and learning practices but also in terms of self-reflection and raising awareness about cultural and religious assumptions or the hegemonic presence of cultural privilege and power. As other studies have shown, without some level of intercultural understanding and competence there are risks that the teachers could contribute to the production and reproduction of practices that support inequalities and subordination of the already marginalised groups (Walton et al., 2013; Shin, 2012). Furthermore, broader issues to do with whiteness and race and the apparent invisibility of Christian privilege in the Australian context (Neilson, Arber & Weinmann, 2017), while present at Ackenham, remained largely unattended due to their complexity and the related discomfort and uncertainty of teachers in addressing them.

This next section elaborates on the range of programs, activities and initiatives that were present at the school during Virginia’s tenure and provide a snapshot of different teaching and learning experiences available to the students.
Utilising a portfolio of programs and resources: Orchestration or entanglement

Apart from what was going on inside the classroom, there were a range of activities, projects and community partnerships designed to bring different educational experiences into the students’ lives. For example, *Play for Life POD*, was a shipping container filled with pieces of wood and other waste materials that could be made in cubby houses other constructions. A ‘play policy’ was developed and a ‘play worker’ began at the school in term 3, 2013 to help the students learn how to play together (Newsletter, September 2013). The *Song Room* which engaged students in writing songs drawn from own experience, involved weekly lessons run by a music teacher with a focus on themes such as identity and belonging. Funding ran out for this program in mid-2013.

Students also participated in *The Huddle*, a program run by the nearby AFL club that involved workshops and activities exploring themes such as identity and story. *The Huddle* was run in a number of Melbourne schools where there were students from refugee and migrant backgrounds and was designed to promote social inclusion and enhance positive sense of multiculturalism.

Year 5 and 6 students were involved in an annual arts festival for young people. This event was designed and led by young people from CALD backgrounds involved in drama and theatre. This event that was. In 2013 a Kitchen Garden program was also established to ‘help students learn about growing and looking after plants and cooking with the produce’. Volunteers from the company, Boeing, participated in a working bee and local nurseries donated lime, orange and lemon trees and a range of herbs (Newsletter, March 2014). While it is difficult to attribute these activities to a precise set of capabilities or learning outcomes, the overall focus was on bringing different people and experiences into the school as well as increasing the chances of creating positive and affirming learning environment for the students. These activities were important contributions to the new story Virginia wanted to create (Field notes, August 2013).

Supporting these activities were a range of specific approaches and educational models. These included *Restorative Practices* that was being used in Victorian schools as a way of helping students take responsibility for their behaviour (Shaw 2005) and commercial educational products such as *Habits of Mind, ‘STOP, THINK, DO’* and *KidsMatter*.
'I am a big fan of Habits of Mind' (referring to a series of posters and statement on display on the wall in the foyer outside her office) (Principal interview, June 2013).

**Habits of Mind** is a program using problem solving and project-based approaches to learning that are anchored in 16 behavioural characteristics and discourse that includes ‘persisting, managing impulsivity, listening with understanding and empathy and thinking about thinking’. The program includes course material, posters and classroom strategies, some of which is free (Habits of Mind, 2018).

While Ackenham was a registered as a school, there was little evidence found in this study about of how this program was implemented. **KidsMatter** is an approach to mental health and wellbeing that involves a two to three-year process for tailoring and implementing social and emotional learning. It is founded on respectful relationships and a sense of belonging and inclusion (Askell-Williams & Lawson, 2013).

**STOP, THINK, DO** is an Australian program that began at the Adelaide Women and Children’s Hospital as a treatment program for adolescents and children with social emotional and behavioural issues. As a program for schools, **STOP, THINK, DO** is designed to develop children’s emotional and social intelligence. Students are taught about how to STOP and control feelings, THINK about options and consequences and DO, put the thinking into action by behaving appropriately. STOP, THINK, DO provides simple messaging for teachers, students and their families to monitor and manage behavior that is designed to assist children get along and enhance their friendships (School newsletter, August 2013).

**Restorative Practices** in schools has been adapted from Restorative Justice, as an alternative approach to managing the repair of harm and the restoration of relationships following a crime and incident. In schools the approach can be used to help students identify and think about behaviours that have caused harm to others. It involves them in a process of accepting responsibility for their behaviour and in collective problem solving to repair any harm done. The process can be used informally or formally, often scripted, involves circles and conferences, in small and large groups to resolve simple conflicts or more serious breaches of school rules or values, such as bullying or racism (Shaw, 2005):
We have also been working on empathy with a focus on restorative practices and the use of circles and we have been able to help students understand feelings and behaviours (Principal interview, April 2014).

Restorative Practice is fundamentally a philosophical approach rather than a program, and as such can be harder to implement consistently across a school. The approach requires buy-in by all staff and must be underpinned by professional development of teachers and wider support and understanding by the school community. For some teachers, students and parents, this also requires a shift in thinking away from traditional forms of relationship management and school discipline practices such as isolation, suspension or corporal punishment (Shaw 2005) which is banned in Victorian schools (Education and Training Reform Act, 2006a).

Each of the practices described above had their own sayings, doings and relatings which were present and sometimes explicitly connected to other activities and related practices. These included the deployment of the school values, which during Virginia’s tenure were ‘Kindness and empathy; Learning, Belonging, Acceptance, Care and Respect, Honesty and Co-operation and messaging such as the schools four ‘Bees’; Be Responsible, Be Safe, Be a Learner and Be on Time (Field notes, August 2013). While the overall architecture is complex, the connections between the different practices and programs follow some common threads. This is most evident in the social and emotional domain; that is, learning to get along with and showing care for others, and taking responsibility for individual behaviors. The messaging and slogans provided ‘signposts’ for the desired behaviours and expectations throughout the school. These ‘signposts’ were evident in posters in the classrooms or in the foyer, in newsletters and student awards presented at school assemblies. Another important thread was the focus on identity and culture found in the Huddle, Song Room and participation in the arts festival. These activities were tailored to meet the needs, interests and cultural backgrounds of the students, and in Virginia’s project provided positive new stories and supported the broader notion of the school as part of a shared Australian multiculturalism (Field notes, February 2013). Further efforts to acknowledge the students’ refugee background and promote a positive narrative around this can be found other school activities such as Refugee Week:
Our older students from Year 3 – 6 were also participants in Refugee Week, but this time at The Cossington Community Centre. They listened to an excellent talk by a Sudanese refugee, author of The Boy Who Wouldn’t Die. The students were captivated by his story and we may, in the future, ask David to speak with our students again. Three of our students read from an African Story book that was created with the help our students in 2010 (Newsletter, June 2013).

Refugee Week is celebrated nationally in June each year and designed to bring a positive focus on the contributions that refugees make to Australia (Refugee Council, 2018). School and local communities are invited to host or participate in events such as those described in the quote above.

Within such a complex array of programs, there was the risk of entanglement or fragmentation that is, a confusion of practices or a lack of connection between different activities and lessons so that they operate in isolation from one another or lack coherence. An example of such fragmentation was found in the planning and delivery of three professional learning activities; restorative practices, inquiry learning and intercultural understanding. Each activity was treated as a specific strand with an independent and external provider. It was not until a professional development activity on intercultural understanding, stimulated by the Doing Diversity project in late 2013 that the connections and links between the three strands were made explicit for staff. As part of a full day’s professional development for all staff, including Multicultural Aides and other support staff, focusing on intercultural understanding, participants discussed how to integrate intercultural understanding into their existing school curriculum and into the range of other activities. They discussed the choice of texts, pedagogy and how they could expand student perspectives. By the end of this discussion the P-2 team had ‘untangled some of the different threads’ and were working towards more explicit teaching capabilities such as respect, empathy and responsibility through initiatives such as ‘Stop, Think, Do’ and restorative practices as a means of improving intercultural understanding (Field notes, August 2013).

One of the challenges in Virginia’s project was to effectively orchestrate the different dimensions of her project and bring coherence to the range of activities and practices. By formally ‘joining’ these individual elements through teacher professional development and
the learning and teaching activities and strengthening the relationships between the cultural-discursive and material-economic arrangements made the prospect of interculturality more likely and more coherent in teachers’ practice.

**Including intercultural understanding as part of the new school narrative**

According to Kemmis et al. (2014, p 6), ‘practices cannot be transformed and sustained without also transforming arrangements in the intersubjective spaces that support the practices’. This implies that the desired change Virginia was seeking would only take root and be sustained when the staff, students and their families worked collectively to construct new semantic spaces and ways of relating to each other and understanding each other’s needs.

As noted above, there was a significant amount of activity at Ackenham, primarily ‘packaged’ programs that were offered to the school by outside providers and adapted to meet the needs of the students and teachers. These programs helped enable Virginia’s project as they brought new resources such as the *Play for Life POD* or *Kitchen Garden* into the school as a way of enriching the physical and social interaction between students and teachers. These programs helped promote an image of the school as demonstrated through the school newsletters and on the website as progressive and engaging (Field notes, July 2013). Given that these activities and programs were framed around the school values, they were also designed to contribute to improving student interaction and promote a culture of empathy and care, some of the antecedents for interculturality. Sustaining these efforts and strengthening people’s social and emotional attachment to the school also required an interrelated communication strategy.

Virginia’s desire to build emotional attachment, relationships and appreciation for the positive attributes of the school and its cultural diversity were found in the intersubjective spaces. Examples included displays in the school foyer, the promotion of student agency and voice at school assemblies and on the school’s website and in newsletters, and parent inclusion and voice at the community forums.
Professional learning - Developing teacher competency in inquiry-based learning and constructivism

It is when teachers see themselves as learners and work cooperatively with other teachers and test their assumptions about ‘cultural and classed identities’ that help them move beyond just knowing about the differences (Allard & Santoro, 2008, p 211).

From a teaching and learning perspective, Virginia’s project was highly invested in a constructivist paradigm. Constructivism is based on the premise that people construct meaning in engaging with other. In other words, people ‘co-create understandings’ in their social interactions with each other (Stake, 2008, p. 32). The origins of social constructionism are credited to theorists such Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and Habermas (Brooks, 2002). Schwandt (2000) defines constructivism as part of our everyday experience on which much of interaction with others is based as argued in the quote below:

> We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experiences. Furthermore, there is an inevitable historical and social cultural dimension to this construction. We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth (Schwandt, p 197 in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

From this perspective, constructionism and the theory of practice architecture cohabit similar dimensions, that is, the shaping of everyday practice in the intersubjective spaces of language, activity and relationships. Kemmis et al. (2014) for example defines education as ‘the practice by which children, young people and adults are initiated into other practices’ (p 37). By this the authors mean a form of individual and collective ‘self-development’ in which people learn forms of cognitive knowledge, ways of doing things or ways of relating to each other.

In education, constructivism is a learner-centred approach and assumes that learning can be co-constructed by students with their teachers, and by tailoring instruction to students’ prior knowledge, interests and needs, better outcomes will be achieved (Brooks, 2002). Such approaches are designed to develop student agency in learning and create stronger relationships between the teacher, school and community (Black, 2007). From an intercultural perspective, such an approach is also consistent with advice from the VCAA,
which described the development of cultural identity as a social construct that is reconstituted over time through intercultural interactions (VCAA, 2015a). Following this proposition, culture and more broadly interculturality, the dynamic and negotiated interactions that create change between cultures, are social constructions (Koegeler-Abdi & Parncutt, 2013).

It would seem logical in Virginia’s project to use an approach such as constructivism to develop a new narrative for Ackenham. Student-centred approaches have long been advocated in Victorian and Australian schools to promote student engagement and motivation, particularly in what were called the Middle Years that is, Years 5 – 9. The DET had, for example, undertaken an extensive research and development work in the late 1990s and early 2000s which lead to the widespread promotion of student-centred learning and personalised approaches in Victorian schools. The emphasis in these recommended approaches was on making teaching and assessment practices more flexible and responsive to students’ needs (DET, 2003; 2005).

A study conducted in nine metropolitan Victorian primary and secondary schools (Black 2007), documenting the experience of schools in disadvantaged communities, reported how the use of student-centred approaches had contributed to improving student learning. All schools were involved in some form of middle years’ reform project, ranging from teacher professional learning and pedagogy, community-based learning projects, leadership development and literacy programs. Most featured some form of collaboration with other schools. Three of these schools had a history of catering for students from the Horn of Africa, including Ackenham. The study endorsed student centred student learning in disadvantaged school communities but noted the multiple barriers and challenges that could impede progress. These included the lack of community engagement, particularly with partners and organisations that could bring resources and opportunities to the school, as well as the challenge of engaging the parents. The report noted the latter of these challenges was one of the most difficult.

In Virginia’s project, a constructivist approach, positioning the teacher as a facilitator of learning is endorsed in the Ackenham Primary School Learning and Teaching Handbook, (APS Handbook, 2014, p 9) over what is described as ‘traditional methods’ and means ‘construction
rather than transmission, mobile convertible classrooms rather than fixed classrooms, discovery rather than recall’.

The constructivist paradigm applied during Virginia’s tenure was clearly articulated in the following extract from APS Handbook:

At Ackenham Primary School we use approaches to teaching and learning that are contemporary and move away from the teacher being the keeper of knowledge. Traditional methods are not favoured as they do not allow for personalised learning that meets the needs of our students (APS Handbook, 2014, p 9)

Virginia and Karen, prepared the APS Handbook for the beginning of the 2014 school year to set the expectations of classroom management, frame the initial professional learning of staff and to guide teachers’ practice through the year. In the cultural-discursive dimension they included learner-centred language, particularly around personalised, enquiry-based and problem-based learning. For example, the quote below emphasises a shift away from a didactic role, that is, traditional methods of telling or direct knowledge transmission to that of teacher as a facilitator. This was emphasised in the APS Handbook with descriptions about the preparation of the classroom and classroom material accompanied by a rationale and examples of how to manage team teaching, and inquiry learning and problem-based learning. This approach was supported by three key material-economic arrangements; flexible learning spaces, team teaching and individualised learning plans for each student. Virginia’s project continually emphasised the school’s capacity to cater for individual needs that required both adjustment to the physical conditions for teaching, but also a shift in the cultural discursive arrangements for personalised learning over collective learning:

Programs are carefully designed to cater for individual needs, enabling students to participate as active, engaged learners to achieve their personal best. A team of education support staff supported by school-based coaches provide individual literacy, numeracy and language support. We highly value working in partnership with the community and encourage community use of facilities during and outside of school hours (ACARA, 2013c).
Virginia’s project was grounded in the idea of co-construction because she felt this approach better suited to the needs of the student cohort. For most students, English was not their first language, some had disrupted schooling and were adapting to the expectations of Australian schooling. Teaching and learning practices at Ackenham were therefore expected to be student centred, inquiry-based (interactive) and contextualised; ‘hands on’ and cognisant on the students’ prior knowledge and experience. Virginia expected the learning environment to be set up to give the students a sense of relationship with the teachers and ownership in the learning process (Principal interviews, 2013; 2014). Learner-centred, enquiry-based approaches have shown some promise at Ackenham and like schools in improving student engagement and offsetting the impact of disadvantage (Black, 2007).

From a material-economic perspective, alterations were made to the internal structure of the school building to create more open and flexible spaces. These arrangements made it possible for different configurations of teachers and groupings of students and provided for a greater variety of teaching and learning activities. It also enabled the education support staff, such as language specialists or volunteers, to work individually with students, often with the aim to focus on specific skills such as English literacy but also the three additional languages taught:

What we’ve done is converted it to an open learning space for our P-2’s. As much as we can we’ve got rid of walls, so that there’s a walkthrough feel across the area. There’s still three teachers as such, that work with their home groups, but there’s also some thinking around how they work together in a multi-age setting from P-2. So there’s teamwork, there’s units of inquiry where kids can actually go to different stations, but it’s still developing, it’s still a work in progress (School tour, April 2013).

In terms of leading others, the practice of team teaching or ‘co-teaching’ advocated by Virginia, had a dual purpose, one to benefit the students and the other to benefit the teachers. The guidance provided in the APS Handbook is primarily based on an article by Gately and Gately (2001, p 40) who argued that for teachers ‘co-teaching can contribute to improved feelings of self-worth and creativity’. Co-teaching is described in developmental terms and outlines the stages that teachers would move through to become effective and proficient. The APS Handbook includes templates derived from Gately and Gately with blank
spaces that teachers could use to evaluate their progress. Such arrangements were therefore quite structured so that the early career teachers would have a reference point for developing their skills of ‘compromising, collaborating and instructional planning’ as well as providing coaching support to each other. The predicted benefits for students through co-teaching included; ‘improved self-esteem and meeting the unique learning needs’ (APS Handbook, p 34).

**Strengthening responses to student behaviour and relationship management**

According to Walker and Chen (2007), effective leadership in ethnically and culturally diverse schools must involve a purposeful and ongoing pursuit of intercultural understanding as a means of informing practice. For Virginia, it was important that intercultural understanding was part of the teachers’ practice. First, she saw it as a way of managing some problematic student behaviours such as a lack of empathy and perspective leading to poor social behaviours. For example, teacher and student focus groups identified the presence of bullying and racism that included students teasing students who were ‘darker’ than others and calling them ‘Nutella’ or referring to more recently arrived students as ‘new meat’. These behaviours were seen to be closely related to a lack of intercultural understanding. Second, she thought it would help build the teachers’ capacity to better engage with the students as they had limited experience in multicultural contexts or with students from migrant backgrounds, and more particularly African Australian backgrounds (Field notes, October 2013).

During the latter part of Virginia’s tenure, she worked with the Vietnamese Aide to reengage local Vietnamese families. According to the aide, many Vietnamese background families had taken the children out of the school due to their concerns about the increase in student numbers from the Horn of Africa, low achievement scores, as well as some incidents involving violence between students. This was demonstrated in the story of one Grade 4 student of Vietnamese background who reported ongoing bullying because she was different from the other, mostly black Muslim students:

> S - Last year I got teased every single day because I was the only one that was like Asian in the classroom and they teased me again and again. They called me pig because sometimes my face turns a little bit pink when I am angry. Other people
like from a different religion you don’t actually see pink coming up on your cheeks.

Q - So do you mean different culture or different religion?

S - Culture and religion together because most of the people in the classroom are the same culture and religion and then they start teasing the person that has a different religion and culture to them.

Q - You said things had changed this year, can you tell me what changed, what made the difference?

S - There are more people like us like me and a long time ago there were more people like me. This year there are more people like me [Asian] as well (Grade 3-4 Focus Group, September 2013)

Virginia verified that there had been bullying of some of the Asian background students by the Horn of Africa background students. She had been trying to address the problem faced by the student in the quote above by speaking to the students involved and reinforcing school values and more vigilance by the staff (Field notes, August 2013). Much of this behaviour was however occurring in the playground and for teachers difficult to monitor and prevent as demonstrated in the following quote:

There is quite a lot of racism here and sometimes we feel a bit overwhelmed.
I don’t know how to frame it and to teach what racism is and how to show there is a need for understanding from either side (Teacher Focus Group, August 2013).

As noted in the literature, some of the challenges in teaching for intercultural education is often related to a lack of intercultural competency and awareness of teachers (DEECD 2012a; Walton et al., 2013; Leeman & Ledoux, 2005; Shim, 2013; Cloonan et al., 2016). Perry and Southwell (2011) also argue that there is a degree of uncertainty in determining which approaches are the most effective for learning how to teach about intercultural competence.

Virginia was interested in providing a positive learning environment in which interculturality could flourish, that is, conviviality and respect, where the staff, children and the families
despite any differences in cultural backgrounds and commitments could get along. Virginia attended professional development activities specifically related to intercultural understanding and was nominated for The Victorian Education Excellence Awards as the Principal of the Year for her focus on cultural diversity (Newsletter, 11 June 2013).

Virginia emphasised the importance of knowing the students and recognising their cultural and religious backgrounds in her own practice in school communications and in broader professional conversations. In 2013, the Doing Diversity project provided three professional learning opportunities for Virginia, including a full day for all staff focussed on intercultural understanding. Staff also participated in the surveys conducted by the Doing Diversity team to measure their intercultural understanding and monitor any progression following implementation of local action plans and professional learning. Furthermore, there was a presentation on Islam and Somalian history and customs from the school council president, Akan, at one of the Professional Learning Team meetings. Akan was a local social worker from a Somali background and who had ‘demonstrated a moderate and mediating style’. While he was brought up in Australia, Virginia indicated he had respect within the Somali community. He was asked to talk to staff about Somalia and about the Somali community in Cossington with the aim to give staff some understanding and insight into their students’ backgrounds:

Last year one session sticks in my head with our school council president who came and spoke to us specifically about Somalia. He talked about the customs and beliefs and why things might appear one way when actually, they meant a different thing. This was a really good session and helped us to understand more about our kids (Manny, Teacher Focus Group, June 2014).

Other staff as well as Virginia also reported that the presentation had been worthwhile, and as the quote suggests helped trigger reflective thinking. Such experiences have the potential to assist teachers move beyond just knowing about the beliefs and customs but leading to an understanding of themselves, which Santoro (2009) argues is critical for developing effective pedagogies and practice for culturally diverse classrooms. It was however uncertain how the differences Manny alluded to, were interpreted and understood, and then applied in practice. Findings from teacher focus groups suggest that while there was some understanding of the teaching and learning intentions for intercultural capability the enactment was more difficult,
particularly for behaviours such as racism and violence towards other students. For the early career teachers at Ackenham, unravelling the different issues and perspectives present at this site and to come to some understanding of their students lived experience was but one of the challenges they faced in establishing themselves both professional and personally.

Virginia was also conscious of more broadly preparing the early career teachers, whose more immediate needs related to their basic classroom organisation, learning about the school’s curriculum and how to go about meeting assessment challenges such as NAPLAN. Behaviour management was one of the many new things that these teachers were dealing with (Principal interview, April 2014) and for the most part, bullying and racist behaviour were part of the broader school practice architectures. The following quote is illustrative of the ongoing challenges that Virginia faced in making intercultural understanding a visible part of teaching practice at Ackenham:

With our new teachers, they are still learning the structures and we don’t want to overload them. They are still learning how to manage a classroom and build relationships with the kids. The other thing they have to do is work out is what to teach.

We haven’t done much with intercultural understanding this year so there hasn’t been any professional development for the new teachers. We have had to put it on the backburner whilst we help people get started, so to be honest, there just hasn’t been the time. With the new teachers, they are concentrating on their classroom management and getting the kids to “sit still and listen”. Developing calm and positive environments is important to a first-year graduate (Principal interview, April 2014).

Given that beginning teachers may take up to three years to gain the necessary experience to make a significant impact on student learning (Social Ventures, Australia 2014) there was a need for Virginia and Karen to work with the teachers to overcome the challenges teachers faced in establishing the pedagogical and interpersonal skills early in their careers (Allard & Doecke, 2014; Ringrose, 2007). Conversely, as Ladson-Billings (2001) argues, early career teachers can also act as change agents for equitable schooling, that is, challenge taken for granted assumptions and practices if they themselves have experienced disadvantage or have
a social-political consciousness. For example, a longitudinal study of nine early career primary teachers in London looking at the dilemmas and challenges associated with race, inequality and ethnic diversity concluded that ‘socially aware and reflective teachers’ entering the profession can contribute to greater self-awareness and influence policy and practice (Pearce 2012, p 470). Within the scope of this study it was difficult to determine the level of social-political consciousness of the teachers although in the focus groups, three new teachers indicated a desire to develop their students’ social awareness and to be more reflective:

Our circle time we do in the morning is particularly for checking in and building relationships. We did have a big circle time at the end of last term. It was really interesting to see what the kids thought the issues were. In their reflections, it came up that most of the conflict in the yard was to do with race and religion. (Teacher Focus group, Aug 2013).

In summary, even with the best of intentions, committed staff and relevant professional development, the ongoing presence of structural disadvantage and inequality more broadly, both socially and the education policy environment, can dampen efforts to develop interculturality in some settings.

**Student Learning**

As noted in Chapter 4, one of the major challenges for teachers was finding ways to progress student learning when most were from non-English speaking backgrounds or whose formal learning had been disrupted in some way. While social and emotional learning and developing intercultural understanding were noted as priorities in the 2012 Ackenham Primary School Annual Report, the school was also being measured on improvements in students’ literacy and numeracy outcomes (APS Annual Report, 2012).

**Improving literacy through a focus on stories and texts**

NAPLAN is designed to provide a source of information about student learning that teachers could use to focus their teaching efforts (ACARA 2013a). As most of the students at Ackenham were from non-English speaking backgrounds, it was no surprise that English reading and writing were comparatively low and literacy provision and support were priorities. The school
received funding from National Partnership Funding for a Teaching and Learning Coach and Kandra the Somali Multicultural Aide provided language support.

The school also involved volunteers, many for whom English was not their first language, in reading programs. Teachers prioritised literacy in their lessons however even with the additional focus and resources it was noted that it was difficult for students to relate to many of the recommended texts:

We have been able to focus on improving our focus on reading. But our students find it difficult to relate to the texts, for example when books refer to the back yard or a back fence. These kids don’t have a backyard in the flats. They will nod and listen, but we know that it is hard for them to relate to their experience. They are great learners and are like sponges but many of the texts don’t suit them.’ (Principal interview, April 2014).

This quote provides a powerful reminder about how the importance of visible links to the student’s lives through text and their ability to comprehend the world around them (Luke, Dooley & Woods, 2011). In analysing student reading scores from the NAPLAN results teachers identified that the students had difficulty with text analysis, particularly in relation to interpreting character and emotions. It was also noted that students were not reading widely or regularly enough. The finding a verified some of Virginia’s research into student data, and the limitations of reading and writing experience in students’ background, that is, the effect of disrupted education, low levels of literacy in their first language as well as emerging but low levels of English literacy. There was evidence that teachers were selecting texts that they thought would appeal to students:

We were looking at the story My Place. We are doing an Inquiry on Australian History and the way people had been treated over the decades and tried to relate this to things had been happening in school (Teacher focus group, August 2013).

It was however unclear how well texts such as My Place resonated with students, or to what extent other selected texts were accessible or appealing. As Hupping and Buker (2014, p 6) note, texts mostly incorporating a majority perspective, such as white middle class, can have
the effect of adding to the construction of the ‘other’ in terms of class, race or gender or of a ‘normality’ that doesn’t correspond to the lives of the students. From a teaching perspective, Virginia noted this as an issue. At a whole staff professional development day, dedicated to intercultural understanding, a selection of books and other educational materials designed to promote inclusion and cultural understanding were discussed and displayed.

Based on this “evidence” and professional development, teachers began using a wider range of reading matter, and making a greater effort to find resources more relevant to student needs, that is, characters with similar backgrounds (ethnic, cultural, religious) and story lines (refugee, migrant, new arrival) that could be used to improve their text analysis skills. Priority was given to develop students’ understanding of different perspectives and to explore and reflect on characters’ emotional states, such as empathy, anger and compassion (Principal interview, April 2014). While this example indicates greater teacher awareness of some the impediments to student literacy development it is not clear if their efforts resulted in actual improvement in student reading or text analysis.

One of the issues identified during Virginia’s tenure was a lack of appropriate teaching and learning resources for this cohort of students, particularly those texts that were inclusive of positive images and stories about people from black African Muslim’ backgrounds. When quizzed about their study of culture, students primarily described history units about Australian aborigines and early settlement of Australia. ‘We’re learning about Aboriginal people in our enquiry and we’re also looking at the houses they used to be in like in the olden days’ and ‘Like us they come from Africa, they came from Africa’. While it was hard to judge the depth of the inquiry or nature of the learning activity, the students’ descriptions suggest limited exposure to cultural studies relevant to their experience in settling in Cossington. Virginia reported that a couple of AFL footballers, from Sudanese backgrounds had regularly run sports clinics for students with underlying themes of teamwork and working together and were identified as positive role models by the students. Sports, such as AFL and soccer were very popular with students at Ackenham, particularly the boys, and who could identify more strongly with players from similar backgrounds to themselves (Principal interview, February 2013; Field notes, March 2014).
Developing student agency

The idea of student agency and its promotion as a learning and teaching strategy was also broadly used across the school at this time. This approach supported constructivist practices and enabled students to play a more active role in the co-construction of learning within key practice arrangements. Student agency was visible in school practices such as the morning assemblies, school community forums and in reporting processes. For example, students were able to personally report to their parents on their progress and achievements:

> By valuing the student in the learning process, we choose to celebrate the achievements and growth through a learning portfolio. The portfolio is used during the Student Learning Conference at mid-year, which includes the student, family member and teacher. Students lead the conversations by sharing their learning samples, reflections and future goals. Parents enjoy the process and have given the school excellent feedback on the overall benefits (Principal’s Welcome, Feb 2014).

This quote highlights the value that Virginia places on student-centred learning demonstrated here through giving students responsibility to collect and curate evidence of their learning, and then report the learning portfolio to the parents. Furthermore, the process is couched within the positive narrative that celebrated learning and positioned students as responsible, reflective and future oriented thinkers that Virginia wanted to project.

Student-centred practices involving student agency and co-constructed learning have been found to offset some of the negative effects of social disadvantage and more broadly promote student engagement (Black, 2007). Moreover, as Dervin (2016) argues the concept of agency and giving all those involved in intercultural encounters a presence and, ‘the capacity to think and speak for oneself’ are central to the development of interculturality in education (p 113).

Practice example - Wednesday morning assemblies

Another illustration of the development of interculturality was the weekly assembly. Prior to Virginia’s arrival, the assemblies had been held in the multipurpose room, which was on the ground floor and in relatively austere conditions:
When I first arrived there was a culture of resistance that permeated everything; that we couldn’t get parents to assemblies. I held assemblies in the multipurpose room, there were no parents there and I had to walk over kids to get to the front. Staff didn’t manage their students and stand at the back of the room and read the paper. There was no organisation (Principal meeting, April 2014).

‘...the way I interact with my teachers in front of the parents and in front of the students helps to create that (positive) image (Principal April 2013).

As the quotes above suggest the assemblies had not been well attended by parents and in Virginia’s view were largely uninviting and chaotic events that lacked structure and promoted poor student and teacher behaviour (Principal interview, April 2014).

Virginia shifted the assemblies to the library on a Wednesday morning. They ran for around 30 minutes. Parents were invited by Virginia and encouraged to attend by Kandra, the Somali Multicultural Aide, and other teaching and support staff. From the material-economic perspective, the library was easier to get to and more comfortable than the multipurpose room. The library was well lit, had carpet on the floor and had easier access for prams or pushers. Parents could walk their children to school and stay for the assembly. Virginia facilitated the assembly with aim of creating a welcoming and positive experience and model the kind of behaviour she sought from her staff. The assembly had a very structured but informal atmosphere. The principal and teachers were all referred to by their first names. The Somali and Vietnamese Multicultural and Educational Support staff were present to assist parents and students. The arrangements made the assembly accessible and inviting for parents. Kandra or some of the parents individually acted as translators for those parents in need of assistance. The presence of parents was a critical part of Virginia’s project as it provided the platform for key educational messages and expectations to be presented. This was a way of developing confidence in the school and inviting parents to be partners in the education process, which are tangible practices found helpful in making the transition of refugee and migrant families from the Horn of Africa to schooling a more positive experience (Guerin et al., 2003; Ramsden, 2008).

Virginia treated the assembly as a pedagogical space to reinforce the school’s four ‘Bees’; as well as the school values, and aspirations and achievements in the school and classroom. It
became routine practice for teachers to provide an update on what had happened in their classrooms, praise students or give awards. I noted that over time the teachers employed Virginia’s tone and positive demeanour in their appearances at the assemblies (Field notes, February 2013; August 2014).

Wilkinson and Kemmis (2014, p 347) argue that one of the central tenets of changing practice in schools is recognition of agency, that is, involving principals and teachers as co-researchers of their own practice. Co-construction and agency were evident in the assemblies. There were regular opportunities for the children to share their learning through presentation or performance and leading activities:

This year we will add an extra element. Each year level will provide the audience with an item. This could be a song, poem, short play, story reading, and so on. This week is the Year 1 turn. After that it will be Year 2, then 3, then 4, then 5/6 and lastly the Preps (Newsletter, 11 February 2013).

The arrangements supported the positive narrative Virginia was trying create and shifted practice from the ‘disorganised and uninviting assemblies’ she noted from the past. After assemblies, guests and parents were invited to share morning tea which provided the opportunity to gather and reinforce the idea that the school was a welcoming place and an ‘extension of the family’. There were often contributions, cakes and sweets prepared by the mothers. These gatherings also offered the chance to socialise with staff or other guests or spend some time discussing the detail of school programs.

By shifting the assembly to the library, Virginia changed the material–economic arrangements, making the space more comfortable and accessible. By trying to develop a greater sense of solidarity with parents and agency for staff and students, Virginia was working to improve the social-political arrangements. Other enablers of transformation were evident in the interconnection between the assembly and other cultural-discursive practices. The self-reflection and reflexivity, important characteristics in the development of interculturality (Koegeler & Parncutt, 2013; Cruz, 2013; Dervin, 2016), were evident in the shared responsibility in the assemblies, and on the student and teacher stories on the school Blog. For example, the fortnightly newsletter was generally weighted in favour of positive news stories, examples of student work and achievements rather over important information.
The revamped website including a blog was a site where any student or teacher could share ideas, news and reflections. Virginia’s had also instigated activities such as ‘Learning walks’ in the areas around the school, a Kitchen Garden and placing student portraits on the fence fronting the entry to the school as part of her project to create a positive school narrative and to make use of the outside spaces.

In respect to these activities, intercultural understanding was underlying priority in Virginia’s project as demonstrated by her commitment to the *Doing Diversity* project. Intercultural understanding was in part reflected in the students learning about themselves through programs such as *Stop, Think Do* or celebrating their cultural backgrounds through the *Song Room* or arts festival. Interculturality also involves using this heightened awareness of otherness to evaluate personal perspectives, perception, thought, feeling and behaviour to develop greater self-knowledge and self-understanding (Barrett, 2008). In cultural-discursive terms, Virginia’s project provided some of the pre-conditions of interculturality. The assembly, newsletters and school website were vehicles through which Virginia promoted a discourse of open-mindedness and dialogue. School values such as inclusion, empathy, reflection and kindness to others were reinforced and constantly repeated over the course of the study.

**Practice example  Digital storytelling**

Another example of practices employed at Ackenham, this time in the social-political space of student agency, Ackenham was involved in an Arts in Education Program. Under the umbrella of Centre of Cultural Partnerships of the Victorian College of the Arts and The University of Melbourne, the initiative was specifically designed to work with refugee and new arrival communities to create digital stories in a participatory way. At Ackenham this involved Grade 5 and 6 students in the production of three digital stories created over eight weeks:

- Participatory arts to foster intercultural dialogue, encourage co-creation and community celebration to build a shared sense of achievement. Co creation occurs between artists, children, parents, teachers and cultural communities fostering pride, social cohesion to strengthen identity (Arts in Education Program, 2014).
The facilitator of the project, Shahin, himself a refugee from Iran and working as a film and documentary maker, was using story-telling in his productions. Part of the attraction for Virginia was having a professional film-maker working with the students and their teacher, Brendan, who she thought would gain valuable experience and professional learning through the process. Using a process of participatory learning, that is the co-construction of stories, consistent with Virginia’s constructivist approach, the students wrote and created the short films based on their personal experiences:

Fadila wrote this story and explored the emotions of starting a new school. Fadila began at Ackenham in 2012, so her story is one of experience. Fadila’s classmates helped her recreate the story and bring it to life in film. The girls were the actors, whilst the boys were the film production team. Fadila is narrating (School Blog, October 2013)

As part of the process, Shahin broke the class into a boys’ group and girls’ group, who in turn became the actors and the production team for each other’s stories. Gender and gender deconstruction formed part of the preparation, planning and storytelling. Building or creating an intercultural classroom means making sure cultures, especially the other’s culture, are not made to appear ‘exotic’ (Cruz, 2012) as well as being cognisant of the often complex of ‘markers’ of identity such as gender, social class and ethnicity (Santoro 2009, p 35). The process for arriving at these three stories involved the development of the sensitivity and empathy and an interest in each other’s stories. Shahin overcome some initial gender issues and succeeded in bringing the boys and girls together to collectively support the each other.

Interculturality is about constructing an approach to teaching and learning that promotes mutual understanding and working together (Cruz, 2012). This role-modelling and interaction between Shahin, an experienced educator, was particularly valuable for Brendan, who was in the early stages of his career. The students’ stories were about overcoming challenges such as getting on with parents, moving to a new school and what it was like adjusting to a new neighbourhood. The narratives were simple and powerful examples of how these experiences affected them and those around them.

In this case, Shahin was developing students’ capacity for reflective thinking and perspective. Brendan, noted as the participant observer, that during the process he not only learned more
about his students but some valuable and new teaching strategies that were particularly relevant for the development of interculturality. Brendan reflected in the following way:

I learned a lot about working with these kids. It was very helpful for me to watch Shahin. He was very good about getting kids to listen and share. They were pretty ‘ratty’ at times, but their behaviour has definitely improved. This project has helped me understand the students better and I have learned some things that I will now be able to do in the class (Field notes, March 2013).

As the quote suggests for Brendan and other teachers the story-telling project provided some insight into the students’ lives and for Virginia, given her interest in narrative and story, a tangible example of the power of stories and how these could be to create emotional attachment and sense of pride in the school. This project was an important feature of Virginia’s overall project. The films were positively promoted throughout the school. They were screened at a morning assembly as a ‘World Premiere’ then at a public screening in Melbourne’s central square. This was as an example of how the school was developing relationships between students and engaging in discussion and reflection about their cultural, gendered and ethnic identities; who they were and where they came from and about them and their families and the Ackenham school community of which they were a part:

They worked together to learn the skills of team work, cooperation, listening, supporting each other, trust and respect. These skills were imperative to create the safe container within which the students could tell their stories. Stories resonate with a wide audience and achieve the connections many of us look for (School Blog, March 2014).

According to Brendan, Virginia and Shahin the film making process had developed the students’ social emotional skills and had given them and more school more broadly a sense of pride. It was held up as an example of success in Virginia’s project and as a practical demonstration of enquiry-based learning, improved behavioural outcomes and a positive chapter in the school’s story. This part of the project more broadly contributed to the development of interculturality in a range of ways, not least of all in developing student agency and providing them with the conditions to work together to tell their different stories,
drawing from the cultural backgrounds and family experiences and then acknowledging and celebrating this publicly. Expressions of emotions such as empathy, care and concern for others and responsibility were clearly on display.

**Researching and evaluation**

**Using local data**

Each Victorian school completes annual satisfaction surveys for parents, students and teachers. The results are used to identify areas where improvements can be made such as achievement and student engagement. In broad terms, parent and staff satisfaction with the school was relatively high. The 2013 Ackenham Annual Report showed parent satisfaction at six on a scale of one to seven, just below the average for all primary schools in Victoria for the previous 12 months. Similarly, the ‘student attitudes to school data’, completed by student in Years 5 to 12 also indicated that Ackenham students were only slightly less satisfied that students in other government primary schools. As noted in the quote below the report showed areas of improvement for both students and teachers.

> Our Year 6 student data has demonstrated upward trends in *Connectedness to Peers* as well as *School Connectedness*, with increased *Student Safety* and better *Classroom Behaviour*. *Teacher Empathy* has also increased again and *Student Distress* has improved. These results are all pleasing, although we need to ensure our Year 5 students also continue to feel positive about school (APS Annual Report, 2013, p 2).

Such results show progress and that there was a strong interest in improving the social and emotional behaviours, peer and school connectedness and teacher empathy.

**Utilising NAPLAN data and results**

The NAPLAN student scores for Ackenham had been consistently low and placed the school near the bottom for ‘like schools’ in Australia (ACARA, 2013c). Although, student achievement scores for English and Mathematics were comparable to schools with similar demographics while Year 3 literacy was below similar schools (APS Annual Report, 2013). Such results while promising remained an ongoing concern as they were displayed on the *MySchool* Website which became a way of comparing schools and a “resource” for those parents who were in
the position to make choices about which schools to send their children. Such comparisons were criticised as being unfair, particularly in terms of adding further pressure on schools and teachers, often early career teachers, who were already under pressure:

While, for the purposes of statistical analyses, it may be possible to identify “like” schools (a key consideration when interpreting the NAPLAN data on the MySchool website), such generalisations always do violence to the specificity and diversity of the schools into which early career teachers step (Allard & Doecke, 2014, p 51).

Virginia had to manage the technical responsibilities for national testing; sitting the test, interpreting the results and reporting. She also had responsibility for orienting the early career teachers prepare students for the tests. On the one hand, there was a need to demonstrate that that some improvements had been made in students’ scores compared to ‘like’ schools, however unfair.

In summary Virginia’s practice architectures (2013-April 2014) are presented in the Table 3 below.

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<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Virginia’s practice architectures (2013-April 2014)</th>
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| **State and national education policy environment** | • School autonomy and emphasis on schools to improve student outcomes  
• Trialling and implementing new Australian /Victorian curricula (AusVELS)  
• Evidence of ongoing structural disadvantage |
| **Education complex** | Identified practices and arrangements |
| **Educational leadership and administrative practices - leading** | • Project – to ‘Fix a broken story’ and develop a new school narrative, e.g. foyer, website, assembly, newsletters  
• Promoting social justice and developing belonging, empathy and compassion  
• Promoting and imbed intercultural capability as a whole school approach  
• Revitalising parent engagement and school values, particularly through the idea of a learning community  
• Navigating the place of religion in a secular school  
• Utilising a portfolio of external partnerships, programs and resources with the aim to improve student wellbeing and learning outcomes and teacher professional learning |
| **Initial and continuing teacher education practices – professional learning** | • Developing teacher competency through enquiry-based learning and constructivism e.g. APS Handbook  
• Strengthening responses to student behaviour management |
Planning, teaching and assessment practices

- Utilising teacher teaming to improve learning outcomes
- Enacting intercultural capability through the school’s curriculum

Student learning

- Catering for individualised and small group learning
- Improving literacy through a focus on stories and texts
- Developing student agency

Educational research and evaluation

- Utilising local data
- Utilising NAPLAN data and results
- Participating in Doing Diversity project

Virginia left Ackenham at the end of the first term, 2014 to take up the principalship of a larger primary school.

Concluding comments

Leading change in a school with a history of instability and declining enrolments was complex and challenging for Virginia. The notion of site as a broader arena of social phenomenon in which practice takes place (Schatzki, 2005) also played a significant role as Ackenham’s unique cultural nuances and socio-economic conditions intersected with any new practice arrangements. This was a period in which leadership practices were dominated by school autonomy and performance based technical and managerial activities (Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2014; Blackmore, 2006; Biesta, 2013) and where efficiencies and predictability were emphasized over risk and disruption (Biesta, 2013). At a state education level, a push for increased school autonomy further entrenched the disparity between Ackenham and other schools.

The findings show that Virginia favoured a constructivist approach in leading change. Her project was designed to create the conditions and cultural-discursive arrangements to promote a positive school narrative in which teacher and student agency could be developed. Critically she was hoping to build trust and public confidence in the school particularly through the parents but more broadly in the local community. Her underlying logic, based on her research and educational experience was that such a narrative, co-constructed with teachers, students and their families would better respond to students’ needs and result in their social and academic success.

The development of interculturality at Ackenham also needed to be a co-constructed and shared responsibility if it was to be genuinely embedded be in practice. Due to their limited
experience however, some early career teachers struggled with some aspects of the constructivist approach, particularly when it came to intercultural capability. The teachers had little intercultural understanding, of themselves or their students, or classroom experience. Virginia reported that the teachers sometimes struggled to understand the needs of learners and their limited confidence and capacity to manage students’ hurtful behaviours stemming from racist or gendered attitudes were ongoing issues.

It was not surprising that some parents felt the need to assert their cultural and priorities in their children’s education at times of instability. This dimension of school practice during this time demonstrated an anxiety about offending parents and an uncertainty about how to manage the overt expression of religion in the secular context of Victorian Education. While there was a level of uncertainty by teachers to include intercultural understanding in the school’s curriculum, Virginia continued to emphasise this capability as a requirement of AusVELS, as a key competency for teachers and as an important dimension of the ‘new narrative’. 
Chapter 6  ‘Holding the fort’

At the beginning of Hilda’s tenure

Ackenham was Hilda’s first experience of leading a school albeit in the role of a caretaker for one term from May till August 2014. She had come to Ackenham from a large outer suburban primary school, Wixford, where she had been working for about twenty years, the previous nine as assistant principal. Wixford was a school of approximately 600 students and the equivalent of 41 full time teaching staff.

Virginia’s relatively sudden departure in April 2014 meant that Hilda stepped into an acting principal’s position with little preparation. Hilda noted that she did not have a plan when she arrived at Ackenham and quickly needed to find out what was going on ‘by observing, asking questions and talking to people, particularly one on one’ (Field notes, August 2014).

Hilda, reported that Wixford, had ‘been in a worse state’ than Ackenham in an earlier period, that is, ‘a ‘failing’ school with significant behaviour problems’. From her perspective Wixford had moved to being ‘a great’ school with exceptional NAPLAN results (Principal interview, May 2014) suggesting that she had experience in school change, particularly around the notion of improving student outcomes in a ‘failing’ school. At Ackenham, efforts towards lifting the NAPLAN results were a continuing priority while at the same time recognising their display on the MySchool website was a continuing source of damage to the school image and reputation. NAPLAN invariably invited statistical comparisons which were widely criticised at the time for introducing ‘a competitive element which is damaging student and teacher wellbeing’ (Wright, 2014). While the principals in this study employed NAPLAN data for literacy or numeracy interventions as well as monitor improvement or decline in performance, the data remained comparatively low and continued to reinforce Ackenham’s status as a ‘failing school’, or in need of remediation (Field notes, August 2013; April 2014).

Student enrolments at Ackenham remained relatively static throughout 2014 only experiencing a very slight increase, from 87 at the February Census to 90 in the August census (DET, 2015d).
Hilda adopted an optimistic and pragmatic view about the role she might be able to play in the school although she acknowledged that the overcoming a history of negativism was likely to take time.

I’m the eternal optimist that if you create a culture where the kids are feeling safe and good learning is taking place, then that filters out to the community and you start to get a bigger interest in the school. Then again, this school has had a little bit of a history, maybe call it reputation for being a special school to some extent. I think that that might take a long time to get rid of that kind of stigma’ (Principal interview, May 2014).

This comment also reflects the approach Hilda wanted to take, that is a focus on school culture and student safety. She noted that on her arrival at Ackenham staff were anxious about student behaviour, some of which she described as violent and reported that the students were unsettled and concluded that ‘learning was being ‘high-jacked’ by poor behaviour’ (Field notes, June 2014).

Like previous principals, Hilda was also faced with the continuing issue of staff turnover. The Student Wellbeing Coordinator had taken family leave shortly after Hilda’s arrival. Another teacher, Colin, also left around the same time. Colin was a mature age first-year teacher who had commenced at Ackenham at the beginning of 2014 but decided to leave the school and teaching in the middle of the year. He had previously had a career in human resource management and had come from a family of teachers, including his partner, who worked at a nearby primary school (Field notes, June 2014).

Hilda said of these disruptions:

That’s a normal, natural progression of what happens. You know Virginia picked up a position at another school, a bigger school. It’s a natural progression of what anyone would do. That happens. If you think of Colin, well – it (teaching) just wasn’t doing it for him and he was recognising that so it’s just hard, it happens and there’s probably – there’s likely to be more and it’s a bit of a fickle school because the numbers are not great and we don’t seem to be able to get the numbers up (Principal interview, May 2014).
This comment indicates that Hilda was used to school change and acknowledged this was part of the ongoing challenges of leadership. Her strategy was to ‘keep communication open’.

After Colin resigned, Hilda wrote a letter to each of the families with children in his class explaining what she was doing to replace him and invited them to come to see her if they had any questions. About six parents took up this offer and the meetings took place with Kandra, with as a translator. It was understood that Colin was intending to return to his previous career in human resource management.

Like Virginia, Hilda was concerned about some of the material-economic arrangements, particularly the limited playing areas and the need to be vigilant in supervising student use of the oval, which the school shared with the public. Practices that formed around this concern included ‘very active supervision’ and ‘closely monitoring yard duty’ (Field notes, May 2014).

**Maintaining a focus on student safety and behaviour - Hilda’s project**

At Wixford, one approach for managing student behaviour was a positive behaviour program.

The *School-wide Positive Behaviour Support* (SWPBS) program was developed in the USA as a way of responding to students with behavioural problems while at the same time working to improve student self-concept, motivation and engagement.

Hilda was an advocate of the program having been involved in its implementation at Wixford for many years and believed it could help address the behaviour issues she had identified at Ackenham.

‘There are students who don’t know the difference between hurt, anger and frustration’ (Field notes, May 2014).

The SWPBS is based on behaviourist theory and methods and is described as a ‘values-based school-wide’ approach that involves setting behavioural expectations for all students. These are framed around three ‘pillars’: be respectful, be safe and be a learner (Richards et al., 2014 p 2). A study of the effects of an adaption of SWPBS on learning outcomes, particularly for literacy in government primary schools in NSW, showed that the program contributed to improvements in ‘students’ liking school, their English self-concept and their parent self-concept’. SWPBS is designed to promote a positive school culture where appropriate behaviour is normal (Yeung et al., 2009, p 29). During Virginia’s tenure, a variation of SWPBS
Program was evident but had less of a profile that some of the other behaviour and relationship management practices. In SWPBS, student behaviour was framed around four mottos; ‘Be responsible, be safe, be a learner and be on time’ (Newsletter, 29 April 2013). These symbols were used in conjunction with the ‘Habits of Mind’ program that Virginia had implemented from the beginning of 2012 (Principal interview, June 2013).

Hilda reported that the SWPBS Program used at Wixford had improved both behavioural and academic outcomes. These were two areas of need she had highlighted in her assessment of Ackenham and decided to focus on positive behaviour program.

As a staff we reviewed the pillars and built a processes and rewards that could be incorporated into the house system, e.g. points for teams, competitions (Field notes, June 2014).

While the introduction of a positive behaviours program had similarities to the Habits of Mind program and Restorative Practices used during Virginia’s tenure, that is, a focus on teaching specific values and behaviours, the arrangements for positive behaviours included some distinctive doings. For example, Hilda reported that she had to work on consistency of teacher understanding and implementation across the school. SWPBS is a school-wide approach that requires the participation of all staff (Richards et al. 2014). This initially meant that Hilda prioritised the development of a shared responsibility which was characterised by material-economic arrangements working in teacher teams and cultural-discursive arrangements by providing an understanding of the program and the language used to reward and manage student behaviour. This notion of ‘shared responsibility’ is important for fostering a climate of teacher and student agency and a dialogue of critical reflection that can facilitate changed educational practice (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 158).

Hilda described this as ‘new language and new ways of doing’. Another feature of Hilda’s approach was in the social-political arrangements with her advocacy and modelling of the program. Hilda reported she was able to translate her experience best through demonstration and promotion of the types of safe behaviours she expected during meetings with teachers and school assemblies.

By the end of her tenure, Hilda summed up the impact of SWPBS in the following way.
Teachers had become less anxious in the way they had dealt with kids and their behaviour management had improved. There has been a clear shift that has been noticed by other people. There are no fights now and learning is taking place. Students are willing to learn. It was not the standard way to effect change, but I now notice people copying what I was doing and using the language I was using with students (Principal interview, August 2014).

It was difficult to confirm such a dramatic shift with empirical data over a short time however Hilda’s comments reflected pride and satisfaction in leading this program. As shown in Chapter 4, student wellbeing and behaviour management has been an ongoing theme at Ackenham and Hilda’s approach while likely to have some benefit was also expected to be less effective unless implemented in a stable, interconnected and properly well-resourced way. The following extract from the 2015 school review reinforces this point.

There have been genuine attempts at implementing School Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) throughout the school. The implementation has however been interrupted due to lack of dedicated resources and the need to focus on individual students with intense and complex needs. The existence of School Wide Positive Behaviour as a framework is an advantage however, there is an urgent need to continue the implementation SWPBS model and ensure consistent implementation. In this context, there is also a need to develop strategies for students with extreme behaviour and high needs (DET, 2016a, p 2).

This quote highlights the merit and value of a program dedicated to positive behaviour programs but also points to the difficulty in translating Hilda’s SWPBS success story at Wixford to Ackenham. These difficulties included the disruption to the continuity of the SWPBSS, of which she was part, coupled with complex needs of some students and the teachers’ relative inexperience.

**Mixing, multiculturalism, interculturalism and assimilationism**

One of Virginia’s concerns when leaving Ackenham was the lack of leadership stability in sustaining a school focus on intercultural understanding and capability.
Not having stability and a leader to drive things is a problem. The new principal is only here for a term. The driver needs to be a good fit for the project. Curriculum days are great but what we need is a long-term strategic plan (Principal interview, April 2014).

During Virginia’s final months however, an Action Plan for intercultural understanding, one of the key strategies in the Doing Diversity project had lapsed and commitments made to professional learning and networking with other schools had become less of a priority. Hilda saw her role as one of maintenance rather strategic, and she appointed Brendan, now in his second year of teaching, as Intercultural Capability Co-ordinator. A key strategy for sustaining the approaches developed during the Doing Diversity project at this time, was networking with two other participating schools (Halse et al., 2015), however Brendan and his colleagues had only been able to convene two meetings between the schools in the previous 12 months of the Project. These meetings were meant to provide ongoing peer support and a means of pooling resources for joint activities such as professional learning. For the most part, the school focus on intercultural capability had diminished through 2014, particularly towards the end of Virginia’s tenure and during Hilda’s caretaker period.

Furthermore, the conceptualisation of ‘intercultural understanding and capability’ in the Australian and Victorian curricula was still relatively new when Hilda arrived at Ackenham. The Australian Curriculum was introduced in 2013 and the conceptual development of this capability having been derived from several fields including cultural studies, language education and multicultural education was somewhat vague (ACARA, 2012).

Hilda’s tenure was short-term and for her the pressing concern was helping teachers manage student behaviour with the aim to reduce disruption to student learning was most important. Based on her experience at Wixford, intercultural understanding was part of a natural process of integration that would occur as children mixed and played together in the school. This is the idea that student immersion in multiculturalism as part of their daily routine and natural processes would develop their understanding and sense of an “Australian culture”.

I want the kids to be enjoying and feeling good about their experience at the school, not worrying what their parents are thinking about it so – but the intercultural understanding, I mean it’s always there, and you’re always thinking
about the fact that you can see it when you walk out in the playground there’s -
all the cultures that are there; you can’t get away from it here, you cannot get
away from it’ (Principal interview, May 2014).

Hilda drew heavily on her experience at Wixford where 35% of the 600 plus student
population came from non-English speaking backgrounds (ACARA, 2014c). Her initial
comparison was that Wixford was more ‘multicultural’ than Ackenham because there were
more students from culturally diverse backgrounds at Wixford than at Ackenham.

...it’s also multi-cultural but probably more multi-cultural in the sense that they’re
all different nationalities there. I think it’s about 75% of the kids, I think that’s what
it is, are from a language other than English, so it’s quite multi-cultural and growing
so. We have asylum seekers, refugees, and other immigrants. You name it they’re
all there (Principal interview, May 2014).

Hilda explained that Wixford was largely integrated with more ‘Aussie type’ children than
Ackenham and implied the children and their families had ‘fitted in’ with the Australian
culture. The official figures suggest that there was a much smaller number of students from
non-English speaking backgrounds at Wixford, but from her perspective multiculturalism was
working there because there were not any apparent problems, including those students from
immigrant or refugee backgrounds.

So, we’ve got mainly the Somali; we’ve got a few pockets of other nationalities
but not much and a very small pocket of I guess Aussie-type kids too, so it’s a
little bit different; we still have a fair few Aussie kids at Wixford but also the size
of the school means that you know they’re reasonable in number but it is more
multicultural over there because there’s lots of different nationalities. Because
there’s no dominant nationality at Wixford there’s a kind of a more acceptance,
a way of doing, of fitting in with Australian culture and while we’ve definitely got
Muslim students there it’s not a problem. They sort of fit in a little bit more,
they’ll do their fasting or whatever it is, but they don’t seem to be offended by
things that you might do (Principal interview, May 2014).
The quote reflects the idea that the ‘Aussie type kids’ were the norm and the Muslim students needed to fit into this norm. A multicultural school from this perspective assumes the co-existence of many nationalities and religions underpinned by the idea of an ‘Australian culture’. The notion of what constitutes a multicultural school within this context also implies a cultural hegemony, which carries with it certain ways of being and doing that can be maintained so long as there is a level of acceptance. It is also difficult to get an idea of what this experience was like for students at Wixford based on Hilda’s description. Adopting such an approach at Ackenham where Muslim students were the norm and ‘Aussie type kids’ were not, however this challenges the notion of a multicultural school and how it should function in this instance.

Research more broadly into the experience of students from African backgrounds in Australian schools indicates that cultural capital is predominantly reinforced through dominant white, middle class, Christian mono-cultural values and perspectives (Matthews, 2008; Ferfolja & Vickers, 2009). Positioning students as ‘fitting in’ or conversely ‘not fitting in’ implies there are shared ideas about what is educationally important and what behaviours need to be reproduced to fit in and assumes one way is better than another. Such views risk promoting a deficit model of learning in which the historical, linguistic and cultural knowledge of students from cultural minorities, those who may not ‘fit in’, can be their less visible or valued in the classroom (Luke & Goldstein, 2006). Furthermore, as Dervin (2016, p 11) argues in order to describe a culture there needs to be comparison with another culture which risks promoting notions of ethnocentrism and moralistic judgements about what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, the ‘ours’ or ‘theirs’ which can further contribute to power imbalances or racism and prejudice.

Hilda was from a second-generation German background. She drew on this experience to stress the need for migrants to integrate and not ‘hang on’ to past practices and traditions that could counter or retard their progress in the new culture. Hilda felt her parents’ retention of an ‘old-fashioned’ version of their “German-ness” was an impediment to them in Australia. She formed a view that cultural sensitivities needed to be confronted in order for the students to be integrated into an Australian culture. In the following commentary she positioned the Somali parents as ‘fanatics’ for continuing to wear the hijab.
When she (Hilda’s mother) actually went to Germany she got the shock of her life when she realised most people weren’t doing any of those things anymore; it’s just the ones that are here. So, I think that’s what kind of happens when people migrate, that they kind of hang on to those old-fashioned things but the actual country moves on, it doesn’t stick with things to that same way. Even when you talk to some of the Somali people who are prepared to be more open, they’ll even say to you “In Somalia they’re not walking around with all this garb on”.

Q - You mean like the hijab?

Hilda - The hijab and all of the ways they’re doing things, they don’t carry on, they’re not quite as fanatical as they are here so it’s just something that I think happens when they come to another country and they are like-

Q - That sense of wanting to preserve?

Hilda - Yes I think so, I think one of the things for us is, everyone here is pretty sensitive about cultural things, but we need to really understand that and know how to go past it and not being afraid. I think we might be sometimes afraid to introduce new things but if we just stick to what they’re used to, they’re not going to move forward. We have to have the courage to explain things to them but move forward and give them other experiences. Otherwise the kids are going to grow up in the same way and they’ve got to live in this country. They’ve got to have a much broader experience than what their parents have, otherwise that’s not much of a life (Principal interview, May 2014).

In this quote Hilda expresses the idea that it would be better for the parents and their children to leave traditional customs, beliefs or clothing behind and to assume, what she later described, as an ‘Australian way of life’. This she said, was having ‘common ground’ and a ‘rapport’ with others, such as the ability to talk about AFL and cricket and about children, and to ‘joke’ in open and relaxed ways. This ‘way of life’ was in contrast to what she described as, ‘the controlled and disciplined lives of these Somali ladies’ (Principal interview, May 2014). In cultural-discursive terms the school, in this case, becomes the ‘us’, and the ‘we’ who have a
duty to provide the children, and by association their parents, the ‘them’ and ‘they’ with the type of cultural experience they need to assimilate into an Australian way of life. This assumes that what ‘we’ have, or what ‘we’ are doing is in the best interests of the children, and what ‘they’ are doing by ‘hanging on’ to the past practices and customs are not. Such thinking contributes to a degree of ‘othering’, that is, the use of stereotypes and representations about the other to form a negative view of those who wish to preserve past practices (Hattam & Every, 2010) and the creation of boundaries, outsiders and negatively defines who or what a person represents (Dervin, 2016). This approach stands in contrast to the definition of multiculturalism in the Victorian Curriculum that promotes the preservation of minority cultures and cultural identities (VCAA, 2018). The latter sentiment is incompatible with Virginia’s project where she endeavoured to position the ‘us’ as a ‘we’ and promote the notion of community and an acceptance of Otherness.

**Practice example - the ANZAC Day commemoration**

Early in Hilda’s tenure she conducted an ANZAC Day commemoration. While ANZAC Day had been commemorated in the school in the past, these events were relatively low key and didn’t involve a ceremony (Field notes, 15 April 2013) For example in 2013 during Virginia’s tenure, ANZAC Day was described as a ‘special assembly’ and involved a discussion about why the day was commemorated (Newsletter, 22 April 2013).

Hilda decided that an ANZAC Day ‘service’ would be a ‘nice thing for the students to experience’ (Principal interview, May 2014). From Hilda’s perspective, an ANZAC Day ‘service’ was part of the Victorian Curriculum and was a tradition at Wixford where it had been successfully practiced for many years as a student led activity. Throughout her commentary on this event Hilda uses the word “service” to describe the ANZAC Day ceremony. From a cultural-discursive perspective this could mean a religious or faith-based event or as a form of duty.

As Ackenham did not have a flag pole or an Australian flag, around which such commemorations are usually held, Hilda improvised with a large measuring stick for the pole and homemade paper flag. She had also been given a large paper wreath in the shape of a Christian cross by a colleague from Wixford. Teachers also made smaller paper wreaths with their students, conducted some lessons about the history of ANZAC and prepared students to
read the poem *In Flanders Fields* (McCrae, 1915), told from the perspective of a dead soldier, lying in a grave in a field of poppies at Flanders.

The cultural discursive arrangements for an ANZAC Day ceremony are particularly nuanced towards commemorating and honouring people who served in wars. These *sayings* for example, are contained in readings such the Ode which comes from a poem called *For the Fallen*. From a teaching perspective, *In Flanders Field* and the Ode, are designed to promote an understanding of Australian war history (why poppies are a symbol) as well as build emotional connection with the experiences of service people couple with a sense of national pride. Words conveying meaning at ANZAC Day ceremonies include ‘honour, sacrifice, patriotism, freedom, respect, remembering’ (Scates et al., 2012, p 226).

The Ode, for example, emphasises the importance of remembrance.

- They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
- Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
- At the going down of the sun in the morning;
- We will remember them (McCrae, 1915, npn)

The ‘service’ was held indoors with all students, sitting on the floor, and included a small group of parents, ‘Somali ladies’ who regularly attended assemblies. Apart from the readings the commemoration included a one-minute silent reflection as a sign of respect while playing *The Last Post*, a bugle call which in military tradition signifies the end of the day but is also played at funerals to symbolise the ‘last resting place’. In a school ‘that as a rule doesn’t sing the national anthem or celebrate ANZAC Day’ (Principal interview, May 2014) the event was being used as part of the integration process into Australian culture.

It is this social space that relationships, the relatings, are brought together through observance and respect, expressed in forms of patriotic solidarity, standing collectively and obediently in silence, and in the semantic spaces singing the national anthem or reading *In Flanders Field* or the Ode.

Not long after the ‘service’ had started and after Hilda had laid the wreath under the makeshift flagpole, one of the parents ‘got up and started shouting and talking loudly’ and
other parents began talking amongst themselves. While Hilda could not understand what was being said and while troubled by this disruption she decided to continue the ‘service’.

But when the service was finished, they actually calmed down and I went over and said, “Is there something wrong?” and they said, “Well, yes there is, but we’ll talk to you about it”. So I went over we sat in the PD centre there and I just looked at them all and I said, “Well you know from what people are telling me it’s got something to do with the cross?” and they said “Yes”, I said “You know-” and they told me “We don’t do the cross, the cross is another religion and we don’t accept that” and I said, “Well I have to tell you if I’ve offended you I’m sorry but I have to say at my other school, we have all nationalities and commemorate ANZAC Day every year, and we never had any complaints, no one’s ever told me that this is a problem” and they said to me, “Well you’re saying that and we have to believe you and it’s not your fault because you don’t know”. I said, “Okay that’s good”.

I felt that I handled it okay and that they would be okay. I’m pretty comfortable about that. They went off and they seemed happy and there were smiles and things like that. Look it’s a real balancing act, because by the same token this isn’t a Somali school. You know what I mean? This is an Australian school with an Australian curriculum and I even said to them “You know the Department actually tells us that we have to have a ceremony like this” so they (the parents) didn’t have a problem with the ceremony; they only had a problem with those symbolic things (Principal interview, May 2014).

As noted in Chapter 4, ANZAC Day was founded on Christian traditions of mourning and commemoration and is meant to convey a sense of national pride and solidarity. The parents’ response, as detailed in the quote above, demonstrates confusion and offence and produced quite the opposite response that Hilda was hoping for. While Hilda was able to reach an amicable outcome with the offended parents it is not so clear as to what might be different about an ANZAC Day commemoration in the future, apart from reconsidering the use of ‘symbolic things’ such as Christian cross and flowers. As Shim (2011) points out it is not just a lack of knowledge about the ‘others’ but in the interpretation of any differences and the
process of developing meaning and mutual understanding that is important in progressing intercultural education.

Some teachers reported the incident as an example of ‘blatant disrespect for Australian culture’. One teacher expressed disappointment that the parents talked through the ‘minute silence’. Sentiments such as, ‘there is not that give and take from both sides’, implies division between teachers and certain sections of the school community. The teachers also pointed out that the situation may have looked worse than it was because it appeared that some parents were telling the other parents to be quiet, ‘...because I don’t speak their language I couldn’t tell the difference between who’s trying to stop it and who is firing it up. I can’t tell’ (Principal interview May 2014; Teacher Focus Group, June 2014).

One teacher suggested the impact on the students was one of confusion as illustrated in the following quote.

And it must be so hard for the kids because when you look at it, there’s Australian culture and there’s Somali culture and I think you saw the effect on the kids as well when the parents were speaking loudly. I would not say all parents, but some parents were making an active decision to say I feel like I’ve been insulted here. I feel like I’ve been insulted and I’m not going to be respectful here and to see our kids going through this thinking, ‘What on earth? They were Confused (Teacher Focus Group, June 2014).

This quote reveals deeper concerns about the teachers’ perceptions of the ‘cultural’ divisions in the school and of being undermined by the parents. As revealed in previous quotes, Hilda and the teachers’ intention was to undertake their administrative and curriculum responsibilities by teaching the students about ANZAC and symbolically commemorating this in the presence of parents. For Hilda and the teachers ANZAC Day was fundamentally about the students’ integration into the “Australian way of life”. ANZAC Day ceremony was part of Hilda’s and the teachers educational experience which was an understood and accepted practice stored in what Kemmis et al. (2014, p 32) calls practice memory, that is, a shared language and in this case, an understanding of the “ANZAC tradition”.
The practice memory of the staff at Ackenham however was derived from and reinforced outside the school, through their personal experience as students or from growing up in Australia. Parents and students had largely been untouched by ANZAC Day during Virginia’s tenure, and ‘patriotic’ activities such as singing the national anthem, were not one of the school’s practice arrangements. It is here in the site ontology and the conditions in which the ‘new’ practice was being introduced that restraints can be identified. The context and site, that is, existing conditions and the particular place and time in which practice occurs have a strong influence over what can be enacted (Schatzki, 2005).

As Kemmis et al. (2014) note:

Practices are not performed from predetermined scripts; the ways that practices unfold or happen is always shaped by the conditions that pertain in a particular site at a particular time (p 33).

Such a perspective is useful here in analysing and explaining the “rejection” of ANZAC Day service by some parents. The ‘service’ contained practices that were familiar to the teachers and Hilda, but unfamiliar to students and parents. The Victorian Curriculum, resource and policy advice in which ANZAC Day is particularly positioned in cultural-discursive domain as part of an Australian historical and patriotic narrative, a potentially unfamiliar space for the parents. The principal and teachers wanted the students to take up certain ideas and meanings about the ANZAC tradition that were consistent with an accepted practice. According to Kemmis et al. (2014), new practices will be influenced by and tangled in the intersubjective spaces. These are often expressed through relationships and social-political arrangements. Hilda was in her first week at Ackenham, a school that had a history of leadership change and instability. Her relationships with teachers, students and parents were just being established. We know from Virginia’s tenure that some of the school practices had been challenged by parents when they were seen to be offensive or inconsistent with the parents’ religious or cultural beliefs and practices. In this school, staff expressed a high level of alertness and sensitivity about involving students in lessons or events that were related to celebrations, particularly Christian celebrations such as Christmas and Easter.

The social-political spaces occupied by staff and parents in this site had been shaped by a history of change and uncertainty. Hilda saw the ANZAC ‘service’ as a way for students and
their families to experience, what was for her, an important Australian tradition and part of the school’s curriculum. On the other hand, important Islamic traditions such as Ramadan and Eid and were supported and celebrated and ANZAC Day less important as part of Virginia’s project.

It appears that while preparatory work was done with the students; making wreaths, reading the poems, little was done with the Multicultural Aides or the parents before the event. The service was perceived as a Christian tradition by those parents who took and offence ‘we don’t do crosses’. Hilda later referred to some of these parents as a group of ‘extremists’ resisting change, ‘there is a little core here that are quite extremist, and they are hanging on desperately to what they have, and they are frightened; they are frightened that what we do here is going to impact on their way of life’ (Principal interview, May 2014).

The use of a ‘Christian cross’ and ‘flowers’ on symbolic graves as part of the ANZAC Day ‘service’, in some ways out of place in an education system that claims to be secular, was interpreted as offensive to the parents’ Muslim heritage. Conversely the teachers’ perception of the parents’ behaviour was of disrespect to one of Australia’s cultural traditions. Interculturality in this instance was entangled in misunderstanding, confusion and dispute and rather than progressing intercultural understanding, ANZAC Day in this instance acted to divide teachers and parents. Moreover, it tended to enhance the teachers’ solidarity and resistance to parents’ influence rather than the more desirable community solidarity.

**Teacher perceptions of Australian culture**

Despite high staff turnover there was no specific focus on introducing and developing teachers’ intercultural capability through professional learning as one might anticipate in orientation of new staff, towards, the end of Virginia’s tenure and during Hilda’s time at the school in 2014.

In focus groups, the teachers, all from white Australian-European backgrounds described some of the ongoing tensions and frustrations they felt in teaching in a school where their efforts towards inclusion were not being reciprocated by the students or their families. From a social-political perspective this view reflects a challenge to their authority, their confidence
in the school’s curriculum and inability of being able to fully express their version of an “Australian culture”, whatever that means:

I think there’s a bit of a concern that the teachers here are very respectful of different cultural backgrounds of the students in our care and the community, but perhaps that’s not being not reciprocated – that there isn’t that respect for perhaps our position from some of the kids in the community. Am I wrong in thinking that? That it seems like it’s not quite a balance, and I realise I need to be educated, but I think that’s a frustration a lot of people feel (Teacher Focus Group, June 2014).

This quote illustrates the sentiment expressed by some staff during this study. While these teachers believed they were making efforts to be inclusive of the students’ cultural and religious background within the context of the school’s curriculum, they felt that this was not being reciprocated by some parents who they claimed were less accepting of ‘Australian culture’ and practices, whatever that meant. More broadly, Australian multiculturalism is described by a majority of Australians as a ‘two-way process of change, involving the adaption by Australian born and immigrants’ (Markus, 2016, p 2) however the extent and influence of this amalgam of cultures, ethnicities and religions, and therefore the meaning of Australian culture, is less clear. Santoro (2009) argues it is the hegemonic mainstream, made up of white Anglo-Australians, who decides the cultural norms who gets accepted and how. Minority cultures, she claims are accepted when they are seen to provide benefit to the mainstream but still occupy a position of the ‘other’:

When minority cultures do not enrich lives of those in the dominant majority, or when members are reluctant to assimilate and take up the beliefs and values of the mainstream indiscriminately, they are often constructed as ‘problems’ rather than ‘interesting’ (Santoro, 2009, pp 40-41).

As noted in Chapter 4 black African refugees and migrants are particularly depicted as problematic in public discourse (Bowden, 2018; Wahlquist, 2018; Baak, 2018). This quote, and the underlying sentiment of staff depiction of Ackenham parents as problematic in part illustrates the point Santoro (2009) is making. For example, Hilda cited instances where she felt compromised in her efforts to provide a broad educational experience for students at
Ackenham. These included rejecting an offer from *Life Education*, a fee for service educational organisation, for free health and wellbeing classes for the Year 6 students because of concern for ‘cultural sensitivity’. She implied that it was because *Life Education* incorporated costumes and dress-ups in the lessons and likely to offend parents that the offer was rejected. Likewise, Hilda felt that a sexuality education program used at Wixford would never happen at Ackenham. Again, the reasons are unclear, although in the case of Wixford she said it was easy, ‘because Australian parents really don’t care’, by implication, Ackenham parents who were not Australian (born) and therefore are more prone to question or contest such a program. Again, it was not entirely clear what the cultural sensitivities were or if or how she had consulted parents on these matters.

**Practice example of teacher discussion – putting culture, religion and Section 18C into context**

A further example of how the teachers grappled with ideas of offence and discrimination can be seen in a focus group discussion not long after the ANZAC Day ceremony. Here the teachers more broadly asserted how education contributed to the public good as part of a response to a question about proposed changes to the *Australian Racial Discrimination Act*, and the repeal of Section 18C, that is, ‘It is unlawful for a person to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or a group of people because of the race, colour or ethnic origin’ (CoA, 1975, Section 18C).

*The Racial Discrimination Act* (1975) had been legislated during a period of increased migration in the 1970s. Multicultural policies, particularly from the Whitlam Government (1972-1975) and Fraser Government (1975-1983) were designed as a way to address social inequities, promote tolerance and cultural inclusion and move away from previous assimilationist ideologies shaped by British hegemony and designed to restrict immigration from Asian and non-white races (Kalantzis et al., 2012; Sharp 2011).

In 2014, the then Federal Government, led by then Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, proposed to repeal the Act, based on the argument that it was too restrictive to enable genuine freedom of speech. The proposal consisted of altering the nature of intent, that is, retaining the notion of vilifying and intimidating people on the basis of colour, race, national or ethnic origin but making it possible for people to make offensive comments about other people or groups so
long as it was within a context of public discourse. In other words, a caveat was proposed to the Act with the effect that discrimination would not to apply if the comments were made as part of public discussion (Attorney General’s Department, 2014).

While the proposal was not successfully introduced into parliament at the time, it resulted in a significant public debate about what constituted racial vilification, freedom of speech and the role of language in promoting social cohesion in Australia. The teachers were asked about the proposed changes to the Act and the need for rules to govern and prevent people offending each other on the basis of race, colour and religion. Their discussion touched on the intersubjective spaces in which people encountered each other at Ackenham and the importance of a moral dimension of education and teaching for a collective good (Kemmis, 2012a; Fullan, 2011):

Female teacher 1 - Morality should come into it, is it the right thing to do. I don’t know whether it necessarily needs to be illegal, but it’s just not the right thing. It’s just not kind or a friendly type of a way of acting.

Female teacher 2 - But then there’s also the question of what may offend one may not offend the other. Like for example there was an incident where we had a performance last week here at the school, and at the end the children bowed. Now we see it as a good thing, but unfortunately, I think some of the Islamic parents were offended by that because they only bow to Allah, so this is where we’ve got to also look at different cultural things as well. Who do we offend, how do we offend, we have got to be careful what we do but I think rules should be set in place. It will just make the world a better place as well.

Female teacher 1 - Yeah they bowed last week. The offence was without intent there. We asked the kids to bow and we didn’t intend for anyone to get offended.

Male teacher 3 - It doesn’t mean it’s excusable.

Female teacher 2 - So, it’s all about developing awareness and what’s appropriate and what could be a tricky subject to sort of delve into and adjusting your behaviour and what you say to your audience. It all comes down to that intercultural awareness of the possible cause of offence for different groups. It’s just an adjustment.

Q - Should there be rules for that and are there rules for that here?
Male teacher 4 - At the school we definitely have rules in place, but I think we’re also learning to think along the way, for example, we didn’t for example; sorry not that I want to use that same thing, the bow would be offensive. So that’s something we won’t do.

Male teacher 3 - It’s not like it’s a rule, it’s just an expectation that people are kind and friendly and respectful.

Female teacher 2 - That’s part of the values.

Male teacher 3 - That’s the values isn’t it, care and respect (Teacher focus group, June 2014).

In this discussion we see a sense of solidarity expressed in the social-political dimension and of collective intention to be respectful of people and to promote a broader moral purpose of education. Furthermore, there was broad agreement that they would not cause offence intentionally and on the contrary, it was their role to learn from such experiences, seek to understand the parents’ expectations better and make adjustment accordingly.

This exchange also reflects a dimension of teachers’ work that could be called ‘learning on the job’. As most of the teachers in this discussion were still relatively new to teaching as well as to the school, this is not surprising. It also suggests that while the teachers felt they were still ‘treading on eggshells’ they felt there was a lack of shared respect by parents such as demonstrated in their response to the ANZAC Day ceremony. There was a sense, however of a broader role that they were playing in society and in collectively working towards a ‘common good’, attributes of good education advocated in the goals for Australian schooling (MCEETYA, 2008, p 18). At the same time for teachers there was a need to be more aware of any racialized perspectives in the practice, particularly when trying to overcome any disadvantage (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015) as well as anticipating and addressing and ‘problematic’ parents. These were well-intentioned teachers, supporting a well-intentioned principal, but were part of the dominant cultural hegemony with limited experience or professional training to address many of the challenges they faced in the complex and unique environment that was Ackenham Primary School.
Table 4  Hilda’s practice architectures (April- August 2014)

| State and national education policy environment | • School autonomy and emphasis on schools to improve student outcomes  
• Trialling and implementing new Australian /Victorian Curriculum [AusVELS]  
• *The Compact* between authorities and schools |
| Education complex | Identified practice architectures |
| Educational leadership and administrative practices - leading | • Emphasising multiculturalism as a process of assimilation e.g. ANZAC Day commemoration  
• Maintaining a focus on student safety and behaviour |
| Initial and continuing teacher education practices – professional learning | • Modelling and implementing School-wide Approach to Positive Behaviours |
| Planning, teaching and assessment practices | • Focussing on improving student outcomes |
| Student learning | • Emphasising behaviour management  
• Focusing on literacy |
| Educational research and evaluation | Participating in NAPLAN testing  
Participating in the *Doing Diversity* project |

The principal selection process at Ackenham resulted in Amanda’s appointment in August 2014. Hilda returned to her previous school and reported that it had been a rewarding experience and that her legacy was an improvement in student behaviour although it is difficult to prove this was the case.

**Concluding comments**

Hilda was only in the school for about 10 weeks and her role was primarily to provide administrative leadership for a caretaker period. Given that she was uncertain at the beginning of this period if she wanted the job more permanently and ‘didn’t have a plan’ she saw her main task was to support the teachers and focus on wellbeing issues (Principal interview, August 2014).
What was interesting about Hilda’s tenure was the contrasting position with Virginia about interculturalism. She adopted a strong view that ‘pandering’ to the cultural and religious expectations of majority Horn of Africa background parent cohort ran counter to the AusVELS and detrimental to their integration into her perception of Australian ‘culture’. This disposition for assimilation was based on her experience as a teacher and Assistant Principal in a large ‘multicultural school’, and as a second-generation German Australian, intercultural understanding was positioned as a ‘natural process’ in which the migrant and refugee children would be assimilated into Australian culture by mixing and playing with other children. In this form of ‘multicultural education’ students would be expected to develop and adopt the dominant linguistic and cultural values and norms whilst aspects of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds might be acknowledged within the context of the curriculum expectations or special events. This kind of approach is likely to have the effect of “othering” and consolidating the idea of the dominant cultural hegemony and inferiority of minority cultural and ethnic groups (Kalantzis et al., 2012; Mansuri & Trembath, 2005). For example, Hilda’s efforts to conduct an ANZAC Day observance, an accepted curriculum practice from her previous school that emphasised a type of Australian identity and culture through rituals of remembrance based on Christian foundations, represented a challenge to the parents’ Muslim heritage, who were largely unfamiliar with its rituals and symbolism. Interculturality in this instance was tangled in misunderstanding, miscommunication and a lack of intercultural awareness. It resulted in a clash between the school staff and parents as an expression of solidarity with a familiar cultural and religious heritage. In contrast to this approach favoured by Hilda an intercultural approach is largely concerned with the process of communication and relationship building between cultures (Hill, 2007). ANZAC Day, when viewed as an intercultural moment, was not just an opportunity for students ‘to get a snippet of Australian culture’ (Principal interview, May 2014) but also as an opportunity for Hilda and the teachers to reflect on the cultural and religious symbolism conveyed through such observances and to reflexively engage the students and their families. While ideally this would have happened in a in the development of interculturality, in this case, there was no evidence that such reflexivity occurred.

For Hilda, the more immediate concern was about responding to teacher anxieties over student discipline that had been evident at the school during Virginia’s tenure. She used her
experience with the SWPBS Program to provide modelling, professional development and concentrating on helping the teachers bring student behaviour ‘under control’ to improve the conditions for learning. Her overall aim was to improve teacher confidence in managing student behaviour and to reduce disruption to student learning, particularly literacy outcomes although it is unclear if this actually happened during her short tenure.

Hilda reported that her time at Ackenham had been a rewarding experience and was confident she had left a legacy of improved student behaviour.
Chapter 7  ‘White women number six’ in a contemporary Australian multicultural school

At the beginning of Amanda’s tenure

Amanda’s was appointed principal of Ackenham in August 2014 and Hilda returned to Wixford Primary School. This was Amanda’s first appointment as principal. She had spent two years as an assistant principal in a large inner eastern suburban primary school, Bomford\(^{iii}\), in a high socio-economic demographic. Prior to this Amanda had been Assistant Principal for pedagogy and professional learning at a metropolitan Catholic secondary girls’ college for nearly six years.

Amanda’s tenure began with a focus on the site, and in a similar vein as Virginia and Hilda, to efforts to improve student wellbeing and safety. She made rapid changes to the look and feel of the school, with the view that this would contribute to improvements in teacher and student agency and a reorientation of the learning and teaching program. This ambition included a belief that students could achieve high standards and should not be hampered by assumptions of deficit in terms of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Teachers, she said, should be challenged to provide students with the ‘broadest experiences that an Australian multicultural environment provides, so that they can have the confidence and identity to become Australian Citizens’ (Principal interview, December 2014). Interculturality, in this sense, was developed as part of the Victorian Curriculum and as a broader strategy in the cultural discursive domain to market and develop the school as a contemporary Australian multicultural school.

Amanda’s initial assessment of the school was that of a ‘mono-cultural community school…. its community sees it that way and so does the broader community’ (Principal interview, December 2014). Amanda was particularly interested then in changing this perception and to attract parents from backgrounds other than those from the public housing estate or from of African Australian backgrounds. Her project from the outset was to change Ackenham from what she described as ‘neglected’ into a ‘contemporary Australian multicultural school’ (Principal interview, September 2014).
On her arrival Amanda reported being given, ‘a letter of agitation about the excessive changes of principals. Parents were looking for stability’. Amanda was further challenged by comments such as being referred to as ‘White woman number six’ (Principal interview, September 2014). The scope of this study did not involve interviews with parents, however, the comment above encapsulates the frustration of parents who had endured periods of unstable leadership and brought into question Amanda’s long-term commitment to the school. On another level the comment raises the idea of whiteness, in a gendered way, and signals additional challenges for staff as they navigated heightened issues to do with race, ethnicity and culture. Ackenham was unlike other schools in Victoria, perceived as a ‘school for blacks’ (Principal interview, May 2014) and one in which white teachers and students were the minority. While Virginia had done much to try and overcome these deficit perceptions and discourses, she did so against a broader and a prevailing negative and conflated public narrative about refugees and migrants from black African countries (Keddie, 2012; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Collins, 2013) and media about segregation and ‘White Flight’ (Longbottom, 2015).

Amanda’s initial focus was to restore confidence in the school at the local level and provide a stable learning environment for the children and teachers (Field notes, December 2014). These were things that she believed she had some control over, particularly in the material-economic arrangements and physical spaces that provided tangible proof of her commitment to the school and to bringing about a change in school culture:

There have been 10 principals in six years. This has been unsettling, and we need some stability. I only have two teachers on ongoing contracts. We had three of the most experienced teachers walk out the door and go to another local school. They have gone to a local school following a previous principal and it left an enormous gap in experience. They are still on our books but if they want to come back they are going to have to demonstrate that they want to be here (Principal interview, September 2014).

At the beginning of Amanda’s tenure, a change of state government also brought a change in educational ideology and resourcing. The new government’s policy platform aspired to make Victoria the *Education State* and many of the support networks dismantled under the previous government were reinstated, and staffing levels increased both at regional and
central locations. While there was a shift to a system-wide approach, including an emphasis on schools working in networks to collectively improve student outcomes, the operational activities and local decision-making remained in the control of school councils and principals. Additional funding was directed to schools with a range of ideological and structural changes; that is new practice architectures for the schooling system that altered the way education was described, resourced and supported. New practice arrangements included the development of a variation to the Australian Curriculum, the Victorian Curriculum F-10 (Victorian Curriculum), strategies for overcoming disadvantage and a new way of prioritising school resources to achieve improved student learning outcomes (Hawker Britain, 2015). Intercultural capability was included in Global Citizenship, one of 16 dimensions for school improvement.

Trialling and implementation of the AusVELS, Victoria’s response to the Australian Curriculum in schools had occurred over the preceding two years and in September 2015, the VCAA released the revised Victorian Curriculum (Foundation – Year 10 [F-10]). This coincided with the commencement of Amanda’s appointment.

The following sections highlight the practice architectures found at Ackenham during Amanda’s tenure.

**Educational leadership**

**Amanda’s Project – a contemporary multicultural school on a mission to 2020**

Amanda’s educational leadership was constructed around the idea of moral purpose, that is, the children deserved a quality education at least equal to their peers in other Victorian schools. Amanda’s moral purpose was established in statements such as the following:

> In this school, we have to pay attention to social justice, poverty and equity. We need to take our place as professionals in whom the community has trust and confidence. We have to give these kids the best education we can. We have to do this with a shared moral purpose and commitment (Field notes, November 2014).

Fullan, Hill and Crevola, (2006) argue that in education, ‘the vast majority of teachers are motivated by moral purpose’ (p 88), that is, the idea of a collective intention based on the
common good of learning. This intention, to be effective, must however be underpinned by beliefs that ‘all students can achieve high standards’ and ‘all teachers can teach to high standards given the right conditions and support’ (p 12).

Walker, Qian and Chen’s (2007) analysis of the literature leadership in intercultural schools found there was a greater need for leaders to cultivate and develop self and community moral literacy. This was mainly due to the complexity and intensity of some of the ethical dilemmas and importance of justice and equity in these sites. For the purposes of their study they defined intercultural schools as ‘minority ethnic groups that tend to be classified in the lower socioeconomic bands and generally fail to perform at the same level as other students’ (p 282) which is not unlike the characterisation of Ackenham. They argue that moral literacy means becoming knowledgeable about the self and the community and by ‘sharing purpose, asking hard questions and exposing and acknowledging identities’ (p 379), facets of which were found in the leadership practices, to a greater or lesser extent, during this study and will be touched on in this chapter and analysed more fully in the final chapter.

Amanda’s warrant for change and moral intention were publicly illustrated a few months after her tenure began. A large glossy sign had been erected on the perimeter fence at the front of the school affirming her vision and providing a marketing tool for new enrolments. It was designed to convey clear and compelling messages to the public about the school and what it was hoping to achieve. The sign read:

‘A contemporary, multicultural Australian primary school on a mission to 2020!’

Our students will be strong citizens, knowledgeable and creative children with an eye to their future world.

We believe that all children need to ‘play in order to learn’ and that the very youngest of children learn essential vocabulary and language concepts as they play.

The sign included a picture of Brendan, the white Australian background Grade 5/6 teacher, reading a picture storybook to six students, three boys and three girls. One of the girls was wearing a head scarf. Two students appeared to be African Australian, one from an Asian background and two Caucasian. This image was designed to convey the “normality” of the multicultural context in which the school and the community was set. It conveyed a feeling of
welcome and signalled there were male teachers in the school, possibly to offset the
gendered comments that confronted Amanda on her arrival. The sign was designed to send
cultural discursive messages about a school on trajectory of change and to represent the
aspiration for multiculturalism at Ackenham, that is, a mix of students from different cultural
and ethnic backgrounds that made up multicultural Australia (Field notes, November 2014).
It implied that Ackenham was “under new management” and when considered within the
context of the broader changes occurring in education as the Victorian government rolled out
its Education State initiative, positioned the school as modern, progressive and forward-
thinking. Being a multicultural school deflected the idea that the school was only for black
African Australian Muslims, that is, more reflective of the broader cultural and ethnic diversity
in the community.

These messages were further reinforced in February 2015, when the front page of the local
newspaper carried a story, Hope floats amid tremendous renewal’ and described the
regeneration of Ackenham Primary School. The story names some of the issues;
‘disadvantaged school’, lowest socio-economic status in the state’, ‘parents who speak very
little English and from war torn countries’ and ‘ghetto school’. This was contrasted with
Amanda’s messages of change, optimism and hope, for example, ‘Contemporary multicultural
school, ‘worlds away from a ghetto school’ and ‘the kids deserve the same education as any
others in Victoria’ (Leader Newspaper, February 2015). While there was some risk of
reinforcing negative perceptions of the school by presenting the story in this way, Amanda
deliberately opened a public conversation about the redesign of the school and its benefits.
Such a marketing exercise demonstrates Amanda’s confidence in her project and highlights
two key points of her thesis, ‘diversity’ as an asset and the high value of education to refugee
families:

Other parents might be reluctant to send their children to a place with a large
refugee community because they were worried about their uneducated
backgrounds. But it is not true. Education is extremely important to refugee
families. Sometimes even more so because we didn’t have that chance, but we
want our children to have that. The mix of cultures, be they Turkish, Vietnamese
or Somali or Chinese, were among the best things about the school (Parent,
quoted in Leader Newspaper, February 2015).
This was a story about overcoming challenge and an effort to transform the semantic spaces in which principal and the parents talked and thought about themselves and the school. Just as Virginia had tried to change the private and public perception of Ackenham through her project, Amanda was also trying to reframe the narrative and present the new practice architectures to local constituents and prospective parents.

While the cultural-discursive arrangements demonstrated by the outward facing marketing practices were relatively straightforward, the harder challenges, as both Virginia and Hilda found, were in shaping social-political arrangements for parent engagement in ways that engendered support for their projects. Amanda couched this work in terms of ‘convincing the community that they were part of an Australian community’ and reinforce the idea that the school had a responsibility to ‘teach their children all that is Australian’ (Principal interview, September 2014). Amanda’s project sought to overcome parent resistance (active or passive) and to promote their inclusion in a broader Australian community. From an education perspective, she attempted to engender the idea of belonging to the school community but in somewhat different way than in Virginia’s project. By extension this approach was designed to contribute to Amanda’s idea of developing “Australian citizens”.

To do this meant appealing for both parent and teacher solidarity around her project while at the same time introducing new and potentially disruptive social-political arrangements. These included flying the Australian flag, singing the national anthem and celebrating significant faith-based traditions including Christmas and Easter. According to Amanda these practices were more than just intercultural understanding but a form of ‘social engineering’ and achieving a balance between teaching the children ‘how to be Australian citizens’ without losing sight of the importance of their cultural identity and linguistic backgrounds, ‘We need to celebrate a range of cultures and not just the main one in our school’ (Principal interview, December 2014).

Underpinning these changes was Amanda’s sense of moral purpose which she reported was founded on ideals of ‘fairness, equity and access’ and a positive school culture supported by values-based approaches and practices. These were tangibly demonstrated in the initial stages of her project through the physical transformation of the school but just as importantly were attached to school culture change. Interculturality from this perspective is present in
both the acknowledgment of the broader cultural, religious and ethnic diversity in the school, as well as an overall emphasis on inclusion.

A School Intervention Advisory Panel’s assessment of the school which began in early 2015 acknowledged that while Amanda had made positive efforts to ‘embed a culture of high expectations for all staff, where collective responsibility and collective efficacy had become significant hallmarks of the school’ (p 2) there were high levels of relative educational disadvantage compared to other schools. The panel concluded that there was an urgent need for additional human and financial resources to address systemic issues in student achievement, engagement and wellbeing (DET, 2016a, pp 2-5).

**Revitalising the environment and making the school safe**

Virginia had sought to develop a positive school culture by building relationships with the community and demonstrating empathy and understanding for the migrant experience. At the same time, she focussed on transforming the cultural-discursive arrangements, where the school was negatively represented into positive and affirming messages that would be agreed to and understood by the staff, students and broader community. Amanda, on the other hand, had a focus on the transforming the material-economic arrangements and making the school safer and cleaner. For her this was one of the keys to transforming school culture and sending positive messages to the community:

> The first thing we want to do is have a calm and safe school, so I could talk to you for many hours about the very practical things that I’ve tried to make happen and those are things that range from removing potentially dangerous rubbish from the school environment, the physical playground area, trying to work with multiple stakeholders to achieve a safer playing space (Principal interview, September 2014).

At the beginning of her tenure Amanda embarked on a physical makeover of the school. In one of her first acts she and her husband worked over two weekends to remove rubbish from the external areas:

> The playground was a mess with logs the kids could pick up and throw at each other’. It was dangerous. We threw out all the old furniture, hosed down the
steps and cleaned up. Staff volunteered for a school ‘working bee’ the next weekend. Two skips were filled and taken away (Principal interview, September 2014).

Such initiatives sought to demonstrate Amanda’s commitment to her new role, a decisive physical act, reinforced by the teachers in a sign of solidarity. The school underwent a significant physical transformation during this period. School improvement and visual representations that show progression are important signifiers of a ‘good’ school (Maguire et al. 2011, p 604). Within five months the school had been repainted in light blue and pastel green inside (Image 4), overcome a rat infestation that was destroying the electrical wiring and new security measures, including a new front fence (image 5) were installed.

Image 4  The repainted school

Image 5  New security fence
For Amanda the idea of asserting Ackenham’s identity as a contemporary multicultural school was partly in response to a perception of ghettoisation and her overall intention to bring a new vision and stability to the school. She wanted to disrupt any perception of a ‘community school’ with a material-economic makeover that stripped the foyer of reference to the past. Practice architectures involving safety and security was consciously constructed. New security systems were installed that meant the front door, open to the public during Virginia’s tenure was locked. Parents and students could no longer enter the building through this entrance unless opened from inside.

The words of welcome that had been written in Arabic, Italian and Vietnamese languages had been removed from the front entrance. It is unclear if this was part of the painting and cleaning process or because they were no longer the additional languages taught at the school and therefore redundant reminders of the past.

Inside the building, new practices included the installation of a new automated ‘sign in’ system in the foyer. This involved a visitor using a computer notebook to enter details of their visit and taking their own photograph and a printing a pass. I found the process to be somewhat complex and impersonal, and it required an understanding of English to follow the prompts and good eyesight to see the screen. I wondered how much trouble people with English as an Another Language had with this process.

This contrasted with a practice tradition under Virginia and Hilda of visitors filling in their details in a Visitors Book and receiving a visitor’s lanyard from the reception desk.

The foyer, apart from the marble carving of a koala on a tree, had been cleared of any of the art, decoration or signage that had previously been a feature of Virginia and Hilda’s time at the school. This included the large ceramic ‘map’ of the school, student portraits and masks and the colourful rug depicting different countries and children holding hands.

A small school noticeboard had replaced the painted tree of welcome with all student handprints. On the notice-board was a message about Chinese new-year, and a front-page article about the changes in the school ‘rising to the challenge’ of overcoming a negative community image of ‘ghetto school’ (Leader newspaper, 2015). The key messages here again
reinforced Amanda’s project and Ackenham’s transition to a ‘contemporary Australian multicultural school’.

Renovations had also been carried out to create new rooms in underutilised interior spaces which eventually provided rental accommodation for an organisation working with school councils. Amanda had initially approached a non-government organisation that catered for refugee women and their children to address literacy and numeracy-related difficulties. Amanda thought that the tenancy could raise income as well as connect more broadly with the community. Conversely, she was concerned that such a move might reinforce a view that the Ackenham was primarily ‘a school for refugees’, an image she was keen to disrupt.

In the same vein Amanda was keen to market the school to “yuppies”, that is, wealthier middle-class parents who were part of the gentrification of Cossington, with the aim to increase the numbers of students from more diverse backgrounds as a way of making Ackenham look like other ‘multicultural’ schools:

My challenge is to get, at least three “yuppie” parents sending their kids here but I have to convince them that it is safe and worth coming to’ (Field notes, September 2014).

While Amanda made significant changes to school appearance, environment and improved student safety as well as to promote the school as a progressive and contemporary school in the community, this did not translate into a corresponding rise in enrolments. From 90 students in 2014 enrolments rose to 96 students at the beginning of 2015. This included 16 students enrolled in the preparatory class, when none were expected (DET, 2016a) prior to her arrival. Amanda had made it a priority to visit local kindergartens and speak to parents of prospective students early in her tenure which had most likely contributed to the prep enrolments. By the beginning of 2016 there were 97 enrolments (ACARA, 2017).

**Values-based approaches and moral purpose**

Values-based approaches and values education became more prominent in Australian education since the early 2000s with federal funding for the National Values Education Framework for Values education in Australian Schools and federal values education projects
(Lovat et al., 2009). Values, in the Australian context are defined in terms of ideals, principles and standards that act as guides for desirable behaviour (DEST, 2005).

Amanda’s overall moral purpose was infused with three school values; voice, learning and future as shown below. She wanted to avoid values clichés such as respect and community and isolate the things that made Ackenham unique, that would act as ‘constant reminder of our main focus’ and guide behaviour in the school community:

**LEARN** - Learning is our core business and that includes all of us continuing to learn new things.

**VOICE** - Listening to all voices in a respectful manner and using our voices, makes the school community the best that it can possibly be.

**FUTURE** - Looking to the future ensures that our students are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to fully participate in their local and global communities now and tomorrow (School newsletter, June 2015).

The three values were developed with staff by bundling and synthesising ideas, including those from the students and parents. According to Amanda, voice encapsulated the ideas of agency, inclusion and communication and was developed in response to students saying things like ‘nobody listens to us’ and parents reporting, ‘We don’t feel like we have had a voice’. Changed practices included the replacement of the Student Representative Council that had been functioning throughout Virginia and Hilda’s tenure and now was considered outdated by Amanda. A new Student Voice Council comprising Student Voice Crews from different year levels were elected by their peers, and according to Amanda would be more authentically involved in school decision making (Principal interview, December 2014). Students on the new Student Voice Council were provided with skill development in areas such as running meetings, developing an agenda, presenting ideas and giving reports. The initial focus of their meetings was on improving the playground and later being involved in making the decision for the new school uniforms and providing input into a review of the swimming program (Principal interview, May 2015). Significantly student voice was viewed as an important strategy for building student engagement and ‘strengthening of parent and community relationships and partnerships’ (DET, 2016a, p 12) and was a key strategy of the Education State agenda (DET, 2015f).
While learning may appear an obvious goal of schooling, in this case, learning as a value was positioned as a “culture of learners” and promoted the school as a learning community. Practice architectures for ‘learning’ included a staff school improvement team to focus on the strategic use of data and help make decisions about student learning and interventions when required. This value was as much about teachers learning as it was students who ‘were being helped to understand the way they think and monitor and regulate their own learning using the work of Marzano’ (Principal interview, May 2015). Marzano’s (2003) research provided some evidence about the relationship between safe and orderly learning environments and improvements in student learning, coupled with analysis of effective classroom practice. Other components of practice architectures for learning included ‘real life and experiential learning’ such as interviewing people in the local community, excursions into the city centre and the school camp which were then used to create reports on a “green screen” (School Newsletters, May and June 2015) a technology that enable special film effects:

Information Communication and Technology has helped the kids to do powerful learning and powerfully demonstrating what they have learned.

There is a richness in the experiences the kids are now having (Principal interview, May 2015).

This quote highlights the interconnection of the overarching value of learning with student engagement through experiential and contextual experiences, part of Amanda’s aim for students to experience ‘all things Australian’, the use of new technologies and development of student agency.

Many of these activities were reported in the school newsletters, emphasising the positive impact on students or including announcements such as progress on the schools Strategic Plan or the election of a new school council. The school newsletters had been reinstated from the beginning 2015, using the template developed during Virginia’s tenure and reported positive news stories and carried information about the progress of the school in the ‘Principal’s Message’, included regular features and photographs about ‘Students of the Week’, news from ‘Around the Grades’ to reinforce the idea of community and school values (School Newsletters, February to June 2015).
The sayings in the school newsletter continued to affirm to parents the value of learning and their role in supporting their children to ‘develop lifelong habits’, understanding the idea of ‘productivity’ and organisation for learning, ‘every minute counts – especially, when you are learning’ (School newsletter, May 2015).

Again, while there is an obviousness in schooling for the ‘future’, that is future higher education and/or employment, future as a value in this context was meant to promote the idea of students as global learners and the type of skills they would need to work and live in a more globalised future. This ambition was consistent with Victorian Curriculum in which most study designs included learning outcomes such as ‘communicating across cultures’ and aims for ‘understanding global interrelationships’ and ‘developing understanding, attitudes and capabilities of those will take responsibility for Australia’s future’ (VCAA, 2015a).

Furthermore, future implied a ‘forward-looking brightness and optimism’ (Principal interview, December 2014) which in a school where nearly a quarter of students came from a refugee background and 16 percent had been in Australia for less than two years (DET, 2016a) was part of Amanda’s narrative of renewal. New school values were developed by Amanda in collaboration with the teachers and then presented to the students and parents in forums at the beginning of 2015 and then later to the school council for approval. This contrasted with Virginia’s approach of arriving at shared values by community consensus.

**Practices for stabilising staffing and building continuity**

As the three principals had found attracting and maintaining staff was an ongoing challenge. Brendan provided an insight into the staffing instability and the effect this had on parent confidence and implementation of school practices as they related to values and intercultural understanding:

> A student in my grade 6 has had six principals since he has been at the school. The only consistency and stability in our school has been the community, the students and the parent body. They have been at the school whereas the leaders of the school haven’t been there, so the values and beliefs have been coming from the community up through the school, so what we have been working on is developing those key values of the school again. Amanda had come in and has done an amazing job straightaway in developing a strong
school culture that is aware of our own values and getting that consistency for
our students to have substantial growth of intercultural understanding and
other areas as well (Brendan, Showcase presentation, November 2014).

This quote also highlights the importance of staffing stability in projects such as those
undertaken by Virginia and Amanda. One of the critical issues affecting parent confidence and
student learning and performance was the high staff turnover and reliance on early career
and relatively inexperienced staff. Amanda emphasised the importance of teacher quality
early in her tenure and tried to resolve this issue by bringing experienced teachers into the
school as well as roll over the contracts of other staff to maintain a level of stability. For
example, Terry, a very experienced teacher was seconded, from a nearby school to take a role
as Team Leader for Grades 4, 5 and 6. Terry had an additional role in leading the laptop
program and an increased use of personal devices at the senior levels. Anne, another teacher
who had taught at Ackenham before (one of the experienced teachers who held a position at
Ackenham but had been teaching at a nearby school for the previous two years) was
appointed Team Leader for the early years, Prep and Grades 1 and 2. Anne’s role was critical
as she had responsibility for the Foundation year that Amanda had worked hard to enrol:

Our youngest children have made an excellent start to their primary schooling.
Thanks to Anne, our Foundation (Prep) students are settled and happy; they
can now sing a whole song in Mandarin (School Newsletter, February 2015).

This extract from the first newsletter in 2015 included a photograph of smiling children with
Anne, Amanda and the school’s Regional Senior Advisor. It conveyed a message of stability
and of the students being ‘settled and happy’ and therefore the successful beginnings of the
school’s transition to Mandarin, one of the new practices Amanda had introduced from the
previous three language options.

**Teacher professional learning**

An important part of Amanda’s overall plan was ‘evidence-based practice’ and it was
incumbent on all teachers to use student data and to demonstrate an increasing level of
performance. ‘This is the worst school I have ever been in and we need the best teachers
working with these kids’ (Field notes, September 2014).
An intersectional approach to minimise the focus on culture and ethnicity as a source of disadvantage

The inclusion of intercultural understanding in lesson plans and related pedagogy at the local level was the responsibility of individual teachers. As part of the practice tradition, one-hour fortnightly Professional Learning Team (PLT) meetings held after class on a Monday afternoon, throughout the period of this study by all three principals. These meetings helped shape the practice and involved all staff. They were designed to promote a culture of collaboration and sharing and one of a number of teaming strategies to ‘collectively improve instructional practice’ (APS Handbook, 2014, p 51).

Practice example – the professional learning team meeting

The following is an example from a PLT meeting designed to map the intercultural capability in the Victorian Curriculum and find ways that this could be explicitly included in the junior (P-3) and senior (4-6) program as well as in any extra-curricular activities. It is also an example of how Amanda’s emphasis on moral purpose was used to build teacher solidarity.

The eight staff at the meeting where given a ‘Whole School Curriculum Plan’ by Karen, who maintained her role as the Teaching and Learning Coach. The document provided an outline of the Victorian Curriculum against the Ackenham’s proposed program for the following year.

Before the meeting formally began, Terry raised a classroom issue he was struggling with. The word ‘nigger’ had been used in a derogatory way in his class and while he had sanctioned the students involved he expressed concern about the general level of racism in the school and what to do about it. Terry was new to Ackenham but ‘highly experienced’ having taught at nearby school with a significant multicultural population, particularly from Asian backgrounds. He was concerned that the source of racism was part of larger cultural and religious narrative:

‘How do you explain the behaviour of some students? There can be a deep-seated hatred that is ingrained in some cultures. Imagine if you have been bombed or have seen people killed. Arab brothers, there is a sense of that here. They call each other ‘brothers’ at this school. We need to pull kids up. They need boundaries’ (Field notes, November 2014).
Terry’s comment expressed both a concern about the racialised ‘gang language’, he perceived in the term ‘Arab brothers’ and a broader discourse about competing religious ideologies and conflicts in the Horn of Africa and Middle East. ‘Arab’ here was extrapolated to mean Muslim or Islam. While these were clearly factors beyond the school’s control, experiences such those in civil wars and acts of terrorism had either been experienced by some Ackenham students or their families or formed as part of family or ‘historical cultural’ narrative. Terry’s concerns were related to the potential of such behaviour in contributing to ‘us’ versus ‘them’, Muslim versus Christian division in the school.

There are two forms of social-political practices present in this example. One was the student solidarity and a marker of identity conveyed through the notion of being part of a collective whole; a brotherhood or as ‘Arab brothers’. The second was Terry’s call for teacher solidarity to resist and disrupt this behaviour. In his view, the students were at risk of identifying with an anti-western pro-Islamic extremist sentiment.

While incidents of racism were noted in the study, other teachers were less convinced about the gravity of Terry’s assessment and their potential for Islamic radicalisation. Karen pointed to the need to develop trust and build relationship with the students as way of overcoming feelings of marginalisation or discrimination that she felt underpinned the behaviour. For her the issue was much more about successful integration, helping students settle into school and building connection with the teachers over time, ‘this can take months but must be one of our most important goals’ (Field notes, November 2014).

At this point Amanda arrived at the PL meeting. She noted Terry’s concerns and highlighted the need to recognise this behaviour as part of the context and conditions that made Ackenham a challenging place to teach. She reminded the teachers, and potentially for my benefit, that Ackenham was one of the poorest schools in the state and that the goal for staff was to do the best job they could with the students in their care:

This is a unique environment and we have to pay attention to things like gender, class and poverty as well as the fact that it is ‘mono-cultural’ and that most students are from Horn of African backgrounds. In this school, we have to pay attention to social justice, poverty and equity. We need to take our place as professionals in whom the community has trust and
confidence. We have to give these kids the best education we can. We have to do this with a shared moral purpose and commitment (Field notes, November 2014).

Fundamentally, Amanda drew attention to the intersectional nature of the issues faced by teachers at Ackenham and any discussion about racism needed to take account the context in which it was situated. Managing such behaviour, she argued was in part best done through intercultural capability embedded in school’s curriculum and pedagogy but also as part of everyday practice.

What followed was a focussed discussion about the characteristics of intercultural capability and the explicit teaching of values like acceptance, tolerance, respect, and empathy. As this was not inconsistent with what teachers believed they were already doing, there was general support for a sharper focus on particular values. The group searched for different ways they could incorporate Voice into their lessons to scaffold and develop students’ skills and confidence and for their ideas and views to be authentically included in the life of the school. Teachers discussed ways to enhance intercultural capability throughout the Victorian Curriculum, particularly in the language and literacy curriculum or as part of Civics and Citizenship Education. The idea of taking the senior students on a school camp was also flagged. According to those advocating for the camp, none of the students had been on a camp and they argued that such experiences were a regular feature of other school programs and provided a way to teach practical life skills and build relationship between and with students.

Overall the discussion coalesced around how to use the Victorian Curriculum and extra-curricular activities to meet the emotional, physical and social needs of the students. At a practical level this meant working together, listening to students’ concerns and being more cognisant of their backgrounds.

Most of the teachers contributed to the discussion and seemed engaged with the ideas. As time ran out and the meeting closed Amanda asked them to continue the discussion in their teams and make intercultural understanding explicit in their curriculum planning and teaching.
Six months later Amanda reported that teachers were ‘attending to cultural issues as lines of enquiry within the Victorian Curriculum’ and making it into ‘our own viable curriculum’. Intercultural capability, she said, was ‘now threaded through the school’s curriculum’ and could be seen in the students’ engagement with different projects and activities, such as the city excursions, Stephanie Alexander Garden, and interviews through their ‘creativity and curiosity’ and the development of ‘new perspectives’. The school camp program had been organised and up and running by this time (Principal interview, June 2015):

The school established links with several community groups that have provided minor financial contributions towards specific school projects, for example; Flemington Rotary (playground improvement) and Medibank (Stephanie Alexander Garden Program). Other community partnerships will continue to work with the school in supporting the physical health of our students (APS Annual Report, 2014).

While I was unable to assess the influence of these approaches on teachers’ practices, or to establish how integrated or widespread the focus on intercultural understanding and capability was within the scope of this study, the principal’s continuing validation of intercultural capability as a curriculum and extra curricula learning intention is a key factor in building interculturally capable schools (Halse et al., 2015).

**Focus on improving instructional practice**

A ‘priority school review’ commenced in March 2015 in which focus groups and interviews were conducted with school community members, teachers and support staff and community partners (School newsletter, February 2015). The findings were later presented in *The School Intervention Advisory Panel Report* in 2016 and provided an important insight into the challenges that had confronted all three principals. The review found that while some stability for staffing was in place, the ‘students’ learning profiles and behaviour continued to present significant challenges for teachers. Furthermore, given that the ‘school performance remained consistently below threshold standards’ and there had only been a partial implementation of the SWPBS, the school warranted additional resources and new practices. The recommendations included a focus on improving teaching and learning, particularly on understanding and using data and further support for improving student numeracy. A second
recommendation highlighted the need to enhance the SWPBS Program especially for those students with extreme behaviour and high needs. New practices included the realignment and strengthening of the PLT structure, a new school-wide instructional model and professional learning for staff on the use of evidence. Further professional development was recommended for the explicit teaching of positive behaviours and the integration of school wide expectations and social emotional learning consistent with the Victorian Curriculum. There were also intentions to developing further knowledge and skills around Intercultural Understanding (DET, 2016a).

Amanda reported that a school improvement team had been established early in 2015 to provide strategic advice about the literacy and numeracy and instructional pedagogy with the aim to improve reliability of school practices. Furthermore, teachers were being coached to work with individual students with the ‘lowest skills’, who were specifically targeted for intervention:

In the classroom we’re working with evidence that informs teachers about the instructional classroom practise that works, and that’s about nine categories of teaching that help them to do very explicit teaching after they’ve looked at their data and deciphered exactly where each child is now (Principal interview, June 2015).

Practices included the collection of baseline data samples at the beginning of the year, so teachers could measure student development. This included conducting English Online Interviews for Foundation to Level 2, a means for assessing the English skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening (Watson, 2017), as well as other reading, writing, spelling and maths assessments across the school.

Two staff were also allocated roles as Intervention Teachers to ‘spend most of the week helping with students who need additional support with the learning, (School newsletter, February 2015). Part of the role of these teachers was also to provide specific support to EAL students in collaboration with the Education Support Staff [ESS] and volunteers who worked with students, particularly on reading, individually or in small groups.
Planning, teaching and assessment practices

The student performance data at the end of 2014, based on teacher assessments showed that for English and Mathematics, Ackenham students were performing lower their peers in the middle 60% of Victorian schools. Student connectedness to school, partly measured by an annual Department of Education implemented Years 5-12 Attitudes to School survey indicated that the Year 5 students were similarly connected to their peers in other Victorian schools (APS Annual Report, 2014) although Amanda had some concerns about student attendance. The achievement, engagement and wellbeing results led to further changes in 2015 as well as further investigation into what could be done to improve school behaviour management practices (DET, 2016). A need for staff to refocus their efforts in using the SWPBS Program, particularly in their professional learning had already been identified (APS Annual Report, 2014). This work was supported by a Student Wellbeing Officer who had a focus preventative programs, student counselling, social competency programs and school-wide referral processes. The overall aim was to ensure that learning areas are calm and safe and that students felt a sense of personal connection to the school.

Developing broader community confidence and trust was also a focus of the school’s work in late 2014. This resulted in a number of planned initiatives in both wellbeing and curriculum areas. These included:

- A review of its processes and protocols in relation to school attendance and student engagement and the introduction of It is Not Okay to be Away and in relation to learning that, Every Minute Counts.
- New social development programs that encourage students to participate be active school life such as; School Sport Victoria program, Arts Social Skills Program, Reading Eggs Awards, The AFL Huddle and Lunch Time Activities Program.
- A Laptop Program will be implemented to support the engagement of our upper primary students, to ensure ‘powerful learning’ and to decrease existing disadvantage (APS Annual Report, 2014, p 2).

In 2015, the Ackenham Primary School Strategic Plan (pp 2-4) outlined achievement goals and targets for 2015-2018 to address some of these issues. The Strategic Plan provided a
comprehensive statement of what was currently being done in the school to improve student learning including; the new school values, the 1 to 1 Laptop Program (Foundation to Year 3) started during Virginia’s tenure, a campaign to increase regular school attendance, refurbishment of the school and enrichment programs such as camps, performing arts and a school concert The Plan included goals ‘to maximise the literacy and numeracy learning outcomes for all students’ with targets such as ‘all students will have achieved at least the National Minimum Standard (NAPLAN) for English and Mathematics’ with ‘relative gains in reading and numeracy to reach 25% or higher in both’ (pp 5-6). The teaching and learning strategies outlined in the Plan included:

- An Ackenham PS Instructional Model – E5 to integrate Marzano’s High Yield and the literacy Big Six Strategies
- A school-wide Assessment and Data Schedule including diagnostic, formative and summative data schedules to be fully embedded in the practice of the Professional Learning Teams.
- Establishment of a Literacy Improvement Plan including a whole school evidence-based Literacy Intervention Strategy (Fountas and Pinnell Intervention Program) and the development of a Response to Intervention (Ackenham Primary School Strategic Plan pp 5 & 6).

**A pedagogical platform for school improvement**

These and other strategies are displayed clearly in Ackenham’s high level Pedagogical Platform (Image 6) to inform practice and provide a basis for teaching methods across the school. The Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (FISO), a key strategy in the Victorian Government’s Education State agenda, is referenced with an assumption that it is connected to practice.
The goal was to have a ‘consistent pedagogical approach particularly, in English and Mathematics’ to achieve the same or exceed bench marks of their peers in other schools. ‘We will be aiming to achieve national, if not state, bench marks for all students in 2015 and beyond: our new Strategic Plan will be focused upon that goal’ (School Strategic Plan for 2015, p 3).

**Student Learning**

The inquiry-based constructivist approach continued to underpin learning and teaching programs at Ackenham:

Inquiries are initiated by students, with teacher guidance, with an aim to move students from current understandings to new and deeper levels of understanding. Students are invited to investigate significant issues by formulating questions, designing research, undertaking experimentation,
observation and analysis. The inquiry process aims to support students in making their own meaning (Principal interview, December 2014).

The quote reflects the ongoing confidence that the principals and teachers had in inquiry-based learning for this cohort of students. This affirmed a child centred as displayed in Ackenham’s Pedagogical Platform.

Amanda introduced a range of new whole school practices to increase student engagement, connectedness and learning for self-regulation. For example, an eight-week circus skills program was initiated in 2015 ‘focusing on performance skills, coordination and confidence’ culminated in public performance by students (School website, December 2017). Apart from the new Student Voice Council, student of the week, students also had the opportunity to be principal for the day:

Sami turned up in a suit and tie, looking very official. I relocated, gave him the keys and briefed him on all the things he had to do in the day which included running a student voice group and he was just amazing. He had to get up every 20 minutes and do a walk around and make sure everything was okay and he asked me where the reward stickers were and knew exactly what you gave them for. It was a fantastic day (Principal interview, June 2015).

Amanda also introduced ‘Golden Time’ which was essentially a reward system for positive learning behaviours. It is one example of the practices used to develop self-regulation as described in the following quote:

‘Golden Time’ will be taken across the school on Friday afternoons and students who have been working and learning well will be rewarded with fun treats such as games, ice-cream sundaes or special art/craft activities. Students may lose ‘Golden Time’ minutes if they break school expectations or choose poor behaviour’ (School newsletter, February 2017).

Such examples demonstrate a high degree of trust in students to manage and monitor their own behaviour. Amanda reported that students’ behaviour overall had improved and simple things like knowing a student’s name and something about them and their family made a difference. This was coupled with a renewed and more consistent approach to the SWPBS
Program which included positions of responsibility for the Program as well as increased attention to student wellbeing, that she claimed had overall reduced the number of incidents in which she was directly involved:

We have little, very few issues now. I mean when I first came here I would’ve sat here with you and there would’ve been four people on the door. Nothing now and even the most recalcitrant older girls know that I’m the mum, I’m the adult and you’re the student and that’s it (Principal interview, June 2015).

Furthermore, as a way to build relationship and solidarity between the home and the school ‘Start Up Conferences’ were held at the beginning of the school between parents and teachers. These orientation meetings were designed to establish partnership, share information and develop an understanding of the child’s learning needs. These was supported by Three Way Conferences, in the same vein as Student Led Conferences, held during Virginia’s tenure the conferences involved the student, teacher and the parent, with an interpreter if required. ‘The conferences are largely student led with a focus on sharing learning milestones and achievements’ (School website, December 2017) again reinforcing the emphasis on student agency and trust.

**Practices emphasising agency, trust and high expectations**

The inclusion of intercultural capability was evident towards the end of 2014 when eight Grade 4 and 5 students along with teachers Brendan and Molly, a new Grade 3 and 4 teacher at Ackenham, travelled to Frazier Hills’s Catholic Primary School, one of their Doing Diversity network schools. Frazier Hills was on the eastern side of the city and was about an hour’s bus ride from Ackenham. This was the first time that the students, who were the designated Intercultural Understanding Leaders, had been in a Catholic school and for some, the first time they had been on the eastern side of the city. I met the group at Frazier Hills and travelled back on the bus with them to Ackenham and so had the opportunity to observe what happened.

The excursion was designed as practical exercise in intergroup engagement with the aim to conduct interviews with the students at Frazier Hills, with a particular focus on celebrations:
Celebrations is a “biggy” for us. At our school we are quite mono-cultural and it has even been to the point where ANZAC Day wasn’t seen as that relevant because it wasn’t part of the dominant culture in our school (Molly, Showcase presentation, November 2014).

This quote illustrates an underlying issue about the nature of special events and festivals that were relevant at Ackenham and how to celebrate them. While the symbolism of the ANZAC Day commemoration had caused offence to some parents and led Molly to question its relevance, it also brings into question other celebrations. For example, Eid and Ramadan were celebrated annually at Ackenham during the period of the study, whereas teachers expressed some discomfort about celebrating these events while doing less to celebrate events that were special to them such as Christmas and Easter. Some teachers perceived this as privileging one group, in this case the majority Muslim students, expressed in the above quote as ‘the dominant culture’ over them and the minority of students from other backgrounds and faiths. For some staff this led to a level of uncertainty about what to include in their lessons and feelings of marginalisation, particularly during Virginia’s tenure.

To help overcome this type of uncertainty and to promote inclusion Amanda held regular meetings with a group of mothers, ‘not just Somali mums’. According to Amanda this initially began with some antagonism from the mothers but had reached a level of understanding where she could ‘marry my needs with their needs’. This practice provided a forum for attending to issues and overcoming problems such as celebrations and honouring faith. The national anthem, ‘a major piece of symbolism’ was eventually sung by students and parents at weekly assemblies and for Amanda demonstrated a confidence in developing an Australian identity, of which Christmas and ANZAC Day were a part while ‘making sure that cultural groups represented by our families is ever so nicely woven into our school context’ (Principal interview, December 2014).

The excursion to Frazier Hills was therefore an opportunity for students and the teachers to develop an awareness about another school context and practices. The aim was to investigate how a Catholic school conducted celebrations, while more broadly it provided the students with an important and authentic leadership opportunity. The students were surprised to find out that Frazier Hills was both multicultural and multi-faith. Around 30% of families were non-
Catholic. The school was located in a low-SES and culturally diverse community. Frazer Hill’s principal reported that intercultural capability and celebrating diversity were fundamental to community development. She cited activities such as building a values garden and Australian bush dancing as important ways to bring people together, not just for key Christian observances, but to essentially acknowledge their diversity and involve the whole community in events and activities (Principal, Frazier Hills, November 2014). The Ackenham students toured the school and partnered with Frazier Hill’s students to conduct interviews. The interviews were filmed and the Ackenham students were very positive about the experience (Field notes, November 2014). This quote from Molly, demonstrates how the excursion prompted reflective thinking and opened new perspectives:

The students told us what celebrations and values were important to a Catholic school. They talked about the bush dance, the values totems and the Bollywood Bingo night and other events celebrating the different cultures and religions in their school. Our students then questioned themselves. Do we have celebrations at our school? That was an interesting turning point for our students because they realised that intercultural understanding means we celebrate everybody not just our own culture. That was a really nice discussion to be involved in (Molly, Showcase presentation, November 2014).

This outcome supports other research that personal experiences with cultural and ethnic diversity outside the school and formal curriculum, critical intercultural moments, can lead to the development of intercultural insights and capability (Halse et al., 2015, p 13). In this instance both teachers and students reported the experience positively and in ways that demonstrated an openness to new ideas and different ways of bringing people together. This moved beyond events that has some faith-based significance, something that had been a problem in the past. Students presented their findings and ideas at a school assembly. Molly and Brendan presented their analysis of the experience at a PLT meeting and a Doing Diversity School Showcase:

From the visit to Frazier Hill, the students came back to the school engaged, and interested in doing more for intercultural understanding and they had all these questions. They wanted to find out more about other schools and how they did
things to support their whole community. All the students said they loved the idea of different cultural events that happen after school, which meant their parents had time to come in after work with their younger siblings. They were keen to put the effort in and have something that they are really proud of and were thinking about putting on a celebration at the end of the year. These students will be in Grade 5 and 6 next year will be the Intercultural Understanding Project leaders (Molly, School Showcase, November 2014).

This is a powerful example of how research, student and teacher voice and student engagement and agency contributed to Amanda’s project. More fundamentally the personal experience afforded by an excursion to enable students and teachers to engage with their peers in a foreign setting, in ways that promoted positive relationships, respect and responsibility, which are important attributes for intercultural capability.

Practices to consolidate language learning

Virginia had supported teaching of Arabic, Vietnamese and Italian as community languages and reported this as ‘a big plus for school’ and something she proudly promoted (Principal Interview, April 2013). Amanda on the other hand saw this as an impediment to the students’ literacy development and detrimental to her vision of a ‘contemporary multicultural school’. She decided to abandon the three languages in favour of the Chinese language of Mandarin:

I actually have no idea why these children would ever be needing to learn three languages when they are non-literate in their own mother tongue or actually can speak at least one other language from their home land (Principal interview, December 2014).

Amanda chose Mandarin, firstly because she felt that three languages were a burden on the school’s resources and curriculum and she wanted to create more time for development of the students’ English literacy. Secondly, she felt this was more in line with Department of Education’s emphasis on teaching Studies of Asia and learning Mandarin, and the Victorian and Australian Government’s broader interest in ‘engaging with Asia’ (Halse et al., 2014). Third, in Amanda’s view, ‘weaning’ students off Arabic helped reduce the perception of Ackenhame as a Somali community school that she felt had impeded both the school’s and the
students’ development. This latter argument contrasts with research (Ndhlova, 2010) that points to the importance of community language learning in African Australian communities, particularly in terms of belonging and identity. More broadly this raises questions about the political and ideological role that language education can play in elevating one culture over another (Kramsch, 2014).

In Amanda’s project, teaching Asian perspectives and an Asian language such as Mandarin was considered appropriate for the ‘contemporary Australian multicultural school’. Amanda began by introducing Mandarin in prep from the beginning of 2015. While she reported that these changes were challenging at first, she was able to negotiate a position in which students who had begun learning Arabic at Ackenham could to continue to do so, but Mandarin was the only language to be taught to new students.

**Practices promoting self-regulation**

By April 2015 the students had a new school uniform singing the national anthem and funding had been found to erect a flagpole. For the ANZAC Day ceremony, a moment of contention for Hilda, all the students from Ackenham had been invited to the nearby Cossington Secondary College to participate in a joint ceremony. Aware of Hilda’s experience, Amanda invited discussion with a group of mothers (fathers were still largely absent from the day to day activities of the school) and it was agreed that two student representatives could carry a wreath of flowers as part of the ceremony at Cossington. The student leaders from Ackenham and two student captains from each of the five-year levels at Cossington were asked to lay the wreath in a designated and suitably symbolic area.

Amanda was particularly proud of the Ackenham students and the impact they had on the Cossington Secondary College students as is demonstrated in the following quote:

> Our kids went second, so the year eleven and twelves went up first and did their thing very nicely, but very quickly turned away and went back. Our kids then a girl and a boy, our school leaders, stood up, picked up their flowers, walked to the dais, put it down, bowed their head, stepped backwards, kept their head down for thirty seconds, walked backwards and then went back to their seat. After they did that the Alfred Deakin principal said to me afterwards “Amanda did you notice what your kids did?” I said “Yep, I sure
And he said, “My kids, the big kids, copied them.” Every group copied the same as what the little kids had done. So that was like wow, pretty cool and their voices in singing the national anthem on that day were so loud, it was almost embarrassing but they got right into it and maybe it wasn’t quite as respectful as it could’ve been but they were in there. It was great, it was really great (Amanda, June 2015).

Amanda pointed out that the Ackenham parents who attended also expressed their pride in the students. She cited this an example of the progress the school had made in developing of students and parents’ awareness and understanding of the symbolism and meaning of such celebrations in the Australian context.

**Educational research and evaluation**

As Kemmis et al. (2014, p 217) note ‘the relationships between practices of student learning, teaching, professional learning, leading and researching are better characterised by tensions and contradictions’. Amanda’s leadership was characterised by efforts to bring the practices into line, reducing contradictions, while continuing to demonstrate a commitment to improving student wellbeing and learning. She focussed on the use of data and evidence-based teaching to align and work within practice architectures as displayed in the Pedagogical Platform (Image 6).

**Practices for reporting on progress**

In 2016 it was reported that students were working at expected standards in Mathematics and English, according to teacher judgement against the Victorian Curriculum, while NAPLAN assessment demonstrated the school was comparatively similar to ‘like schools’. For example, learning gains had been made by Year 3 to 5 students who undertook the NAPLAN tests over three years, in reading, numeracy, writing, spelling and grammar and punctuation. There were Reading gains between 2014 and 2016 from Year 3 to Year 5 that demonstrated movement from the bottom of Band 2 into Band 5. This was however still below the average achievement of students in all Australian schools who were in Band 6 as shown in Table 5 below.). While attitudes to school showed similar comparisons to other schools in student perceptions of safety and school connectedness, student attendance continued to be a concern as absences were high compared to other schools (APS Annual Report, 2016).
‘Ackenham’ NAPLAN results 2012-17

Overall NAPLAN assessments for Ackenham between 2014 -2017 displayed in Table 5 showed the most significant shift in Year 3 Reading and Writing where average student achievement scores were ‘substantially below’ in 2017 after being ‘above’ those students in similar schools in 2014. Year 3 Spelling and Grammar were the only area where students were ranked ‘above’ their peers in similar schools.

NAPLAN tests students in reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy. The results for each of the five NAPLAN assessment areas (or domains) are reported on a common scale. The scale shows growth over time. The midpoint of each domain is set at 500 NAPLAN points. The mean score varies depending on the year level and test domain as well as test year to test year. Table 5 below shows the average achievement score out of 500 for Ackenham students at Years 3 and 5 from 2012 to 2017.

Table 5  
‘Ackenham’- NAPLAN results 2012-17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year levels</th>
<th>Ackenham</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Numeracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>336 448</td>
<td>387 439</td>
<td>313 451</td>
<td>312 426</td>
<td>323 443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td>356 439</td>
<td>371 422</td>
<td>350 403</td>
<td>358 420</td>
<td>347 399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td></td>
<td>328 417</td>
<td>361 438</td>
<td>351 431</td>
<td>361 412</td>
<td>358 401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td></td>
<td>395 448</td>
<td>400 419</td>
<td>372 473</td>
<td>362 449</td>
<td>319 440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td></td>
<td>347 438</td>
<td>384 433</td>
<td>372 433</td>
<td>389 416</td>
<td>330 454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td></td>
<td>286 418</td>
<td>323 426</td>
<td>387 432</td>
<td>359 405</td>
<td>335 409</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average student achievement for students at Ackenham are displayed in numbers for each year from 2012. The colour of the cell indicates whether the selected school's scores are above, close to, or below similar schools (SIM) and all Australian schools (ALL). 'Grammar and punctuation' have been shortened to 'Grammar'.
The table indicates that on prescribed academic measures Ackenham students remained, for the most part, behind their peers, even in comparisons with students in like schools.

By the end of 2016, the Annual School Report made the following assessment of student outcomes and reported that while the school had ‘achieved significant gains particularly, in the area of ‘reading’, essential oral language skills supporting reading proficiency’ including a shift in the ‘performance tail, with a greater proportion (17.3%) of students in Years 2-6 achieving ‘at expected’ or ‘above expected’ levels in reading comprehension’ there was still a gap in oral language competence that exists amongst its Early Years Students’. Furthermore, ‘student achievement in Mathematics remained an area of significant concern’. It was also reported that the school was managing a ‘high level of extreme behaviour’ and that further experiences was required in behaviour management and through the implementation of the SWPBS Framework in 2017 (APS Annual Report, 2016, pp 2-3).

There was no direct evidence for the development of interculturality by looking at the annual reports and by inference these may be located in practices such as those used for the development of school values, inclusion, school connectedness and positive behaviours. Practices highlighted in the 2016 Annual Report included programs to do with Student Voice, weekly assemblies, lunchtime activities, Community Arts Expo, African Drumming, Year 5/6 camp, Regional Sporting Program and Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program.

Comparative data indicated that

‘…..this rich plethora of activities and opportunities led to a stronger sense of connectedness amongst ‘APS’ students with the ‘Students Attitudes to School’ data placing our students in the same range as for their peers in ‘Similar’ schools’ (2016 Annual, pp 4-5).
Table 6  Amanda’s practice architectures (June 2015–)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State and national education policy environment</th>
<th>Education complex</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Education State / Framework for Improving Student Outcomes</td>
<td>Identified practice architectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Implementing new Australian Curriculum / Victorian Curriculum F-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasis on State supporting schools to improve student outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational leadership and administrative practices - leading</th>
<th>Initial and continuing teacher education practices – professional learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Marketing Ackenham as a ‘Contemporary Australian Multicultural school on a mission to 2022’</td>
<td>• Adopting an intersectional approach and minimising the focus on culture and ethnicity as a source of disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Revitalising the environment with an emphasis on health and safety</td>
<td>• Focusing on improving instructional practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasising moral purpose and values; learning, voice and future to provide a rationale for change and direction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focusing on staff stability to develop continuity and restore confidence in the school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning, teaching and assessment practices</th>
<th>Student learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Building a pedagogical platform for school improvement</td>
<td>• Emphasising agency, trust and high expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enacting Intercultural capability through the school curriculum</td>
<td>• Developing self-regulated student behaviour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational research and evaluation</th>
<th>Student learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Using student achievement data and evidence of progress to inform teaching and learning</td>
<td>• Consolidating language learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Highlighting and monitoring engagement and wellbeing through attendance data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participating in the Doing Diversity project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Amanda is currently in her fifth year at Ackenham.

**Concluding comments**

This chapter initially focused on the way Amanda’s transformed the material-economic arrangements by cleaning, painting and updating the school. The foyer was cleaned of previous artefacts and messaging, and replaced with new ones reinforcing Amanda’s project of ‘a contemporary multicultural school’. This was the discursive production of a ‘good school’ where an act such as cleaning the school and repopulating it with a new schema offered both a sense of achievement for those involved in the process and more broadly signalled improvement and progress. This was further reinforced by a new security system and fencing. While from a leadership perspective, this early effort of school improvement might be regarded as less important than improving student literacy or managing behaviour it was a
decisive act of her authority and a critical part of Amanda’s overall project of educational transformation. Leadership in this initial action was focused on physical safety, health and wellbeing, also priorities for Virginia and Hilda, but more rigorously implemented by Amanda.

A flag pole, new uniforms and new school logo were soon added to these early material-economic arrangements. At this point, Amanda engaged in ‘community consultation’ to guide the introduction of these new and more sensitive arrangements. Gaining the support of parents, students and teachers reflected new social-political arrangements by which different practices could be introduced, e.g. through student voice, the school camp program and Amanda’s regular parent meetings. Furthermore, they were laying the foundations for the cultural-discursive arrangements and how those in the school would see and talk about themselves and also how the school might be viewed from the outside. From Amanda’s perspective, a new school image, confirmed in a modern futuristic logo and a smart bright uniform and was required to attract new families and to disrupt internal and external perceptions of Ackenham as a ‘ghetto school’ or ‘Somali Community School’. Leadership in these later actions was focussed on reshaping perceptions and increasing cultural diversity within the school.

The Pedagogical Platform (p 196), in itself a visual display of a practice architecture for learning teaching, showed the connections between different elements of school practice that should work together to focus on the ‘Child at the Centre’. The emphasis on evidence-based teaching and use of data characterised this approach.

Amanda demonstrated a commitment to developing intercultural capability by including the capability in the school’s curriculum planning and mapping, however it was not within the scope of this study to determine how or where this was being enacted. Moreover, intercultural capability, as part of the development of interculturality was likely to be expressed through an intention to improve student behaviours; promote inclusion, wellbeing and engagement of staff and students. The challenge, as Virginia found, was to provide clear guidance and direction for achieving a shared vision while managing any associated staff and parent apprehensions and the day to day extremes of student behaviour.
Chapter 8  Discussion and conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the development of interculturality at Ackenham Primary School, one of twelve Melbourne schools involved in the *Doing Diversity* project. This broader research was focussed on investigating the facilitators and barriers to intercultural understanding, one of seven cross curriculum capabilities in the new Australian Curriculum.

Ackenham Primary School presented characteristics that warranted a more thorough and sustained examination. Notably the school was situated on the edge of a public housing estate, with a history of instability and declining enrolments while providing education for students, primarily from countries in and around the Horn of Africa, many of whom were refugees (DET, 2016a). Schooling these children during the resettlement process brought additional challenges not necessarily found in other migrant or new arrival groups (Pugh, Every & Hattam, 2012; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Given the significance that Australian state and federal governments place on multiculturalism and its success in managing such transitions, the study focussed on how the concept of interculturality, carried through schooling would be understood and enacted in this setting.

The case took place during a significant moment in education as the first Australian Curriculum was being introduced in Victorian schools as AusVELs (VCAA, 2013a). The inclusion of intercultural understanding as a General Capability in this new curriculum (ACARA, 2013b; VCAA, 2013a) signalled a conceptual shift towards interculturality and intercultural education and away from multicultural education. At a state level the school was affected by the ebb and flow of reform as education authorities enacted the political agendas of newly elected governments in 2010 and 2014.

Ackenham was a comparatively small school, with an average of around 90 students during the time of this study. It was struggling for survival in a system designed for much larger schools, where self-management and the pressure and expectation of producing improving student outcomes and performance were ever present. Primarily this case is about how the people in this school site respond to the circumstances in which they found themselves.
The study began under the umbrella of the *Doing Diversity* project but shifted towards an increased focus on principal and teacher practices. This was prompted by the unstable staffing conditions, most significant of which was the change of principals, which warranted an examination of leadership practices and how these may or may not be implicated in the development of interculturality. Using the Theory of Practice Architectures as a lens by which to analyse and discuss the data, and following Kemmis’s et al. (2014) lead, I have organised the analysis and conclusions around the idea of ‘ecologies of practice in the education complex’. While the central research question ‘How might interculturality be developed in an Australian primary school?’, the supplementary questions reflect the influence of these shifts in the research focus and the insights they brought to analysis and conclusions. Overall, they form the basis of discussion in this chapter and reflect the story of principals and teachers in one school and practices they encountered and employed. The rest of this chapter is organised under the following five sections.

In the first section, the policy and curriculum context and their implications on practice arrangements for the development of interculturality in this school site are discussed. This includes the influence of Victorian and Australian curricula, assessments practices and state education policy reform, including evidence of structural inequality, and responds to the question, ‘In what ways did the school context and policy conditions influence the development of interculturality?’

The second section focuses on leadership practices and the development of interculturality over the periods marked by the tenure of the three principals. Different practice arrangements are discussed and analysed. The discussion in this section elaborates on the use of democratic and values-based approaches (whole school) in teaching and leadership practices and their effects on the development of interculturality. This section provides some insight into pressures and practices for leading a school in times of reform and responds to the question ‘How did the change in leadership and vision influence the development of interculturality?’

The third section elaborates how the teachers understood and related to interculturality in this context. This also includes discussion of one teacher’s experience during this period. Some insights are provided into the use of the Theory of Practice Architectures, and what has
been learned about Interculturality as a concept is discussed. This section responds to the question, ‘How did the staff understand and relate to interculturality in this context?

The fourth section elaborates on the use of the Theory of Practice Architectures in this context with the aim of responding to the question, ‘How might the Theory of Practice Architectures help us understand the presence and attributes of interculturality in a school?

In the final section the research question, ‘How might interculturality be developed in an Australian school’ is addressed, and the chapter concludes with a discussion about what can be learned from one school’s experience, the broader implications for other schools practices.

**In what ways did the context and conditions influence the development of interculturality in this school site?**

In this analysis, I draw on the distinction between education and schooling, following Kemmis’s et al. (2014) notion of education as both a process of understanding and ways of relating to others. This leads to individual and collective self-development which they argue is good for the individual and the ‘good for humankind’ (p 26). This idea assumes an ‘Aristotelian perspective’ orientated towards the development of a good person and contributing towards ‘good for all’ (p 28). Such humanist outcomes are analogous to the notion of students being ‘active and informed citizens’ who ‘work for the common good’ and who act as ‘responsible global and local citizens’ which are underlying aspirations of the national education goals for young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008, p 18).

Schooling, on the other hand, is the process of mass education orientated towards the institutional delivery and provision of education. This includes activities and practices that for Kemmis et al. (2014) ‘may or may not be educational’ (pp 26-28) and as Biesta (2013) claims, involves being risk adverse and predictable, sustained by narrowly defined outcomes and performance measures that may not result in education. More broadly, Green (2009, p 4) argues that teaching as a profession is in crisis due to what he calls ‘bureaucratic professionalism’, that is, excessive use of regulation and risk aversion based on a narrow range of student performance measures.

Meeting the complex educational needs of the students as well as the broader requirements of schooling at Ackenham was a constant tension. Throughout this study, the principals
reported a sense of social responsibility for the students. Their intellectual and emotional commitment was mostly evident in the cultural discursive arrangements, expressed through school values and values-based approaches. Amanda prosecuted her warrant through the idea of moral purpose, Virginia through the school as a compassionate extension of family and Hilda through the values-based SWPBS Program. The challenge was how to best fulfil the explicit and implied values and purpose in ways that would ideally lead to a ‘common good’ while attending to the external accountability and performance requirements of ‘schooling’. Such purpose and preciseness however presupposed that staff had sufficient time, skills, control and orientation over the processes and practices to meet their aspirations for the common good and to improve school and students’ academic performance outcomes.

During 2015, at the beginning of Amanda’s tenure, Ackenham was the subject of a School Intervention Advisory Panel investigation. The Panel identified significant challenges associated with the ‘student background profile’ and the limited capacity of the school to lift standards and improve student wellbeing and engagement. It was also noted that the SWPBS Program had limited impact due to its ‘partial and ad hoc implementation’ (DET, 2016a, p 1).

As has already been established in this study, Ackenham was precariously situated in both an educational and schooling sense. Declining enrolments, unstable staffing and low student results in national assessments, and the ongoing problems with extreme behaviour and high needs were overwhelming in this context.

The challenge of reform in an uneven educational landscape?

The study coincided with a period of significant educational reform both at federal and state level. While curriculum reform, mandated by the federal government, was most significant in the context of interculturality the effect of state policy and funding priorities also played an instrumental role in what was possible at Ackenham. Education policy settings in Victoria shifted dramatically over two cycles of government from 2010-2015.

Ackenham was an example of a school that had been disadvantaged by reform in the past. A school designed for more than 600 migrant and refugee children in 1975 had 303 students by 1996 (DEECD 2010), a period characterised by ‘Schools of the Future’ in the early 1990s (Fuhrman & Johnson 1994), and by 2012 coinciding with Victoria as a Learning Community (DET, 2012b) had less than 100 students. Both periods of reform reinforced a neoliberal
market-driven approach to education, based on the idea that high levels of autonomy, promote competition between schools, which in turn would lift standards and improve the quality of schooling and student outcomes. This infusion of business models into education, in the name of choice and autonomy, are primarily designed to support an economic rationale (Hartley, 2012; Giroux, 2013; Hyslop-Margison & Thayer, 2009; Hursh & Henderson, 2011). From this position, learning is assessed for its value and contribution to economic growth, and the function of schooling is reduced to sorting and training future workers and consumers (Torres & Van Heertum, 2009; Giroux, 2012). In such an environment choice is framed around individualism and competition and parents are encouraged to choose the ‘best’ schools in terms of those that could provide the most economic advantage.

Schools such as Ackenham found it hard to compete with other schools given their demographic, economic or social circumstances resulting in a decline in enrolments and a shrinking of their ability to provide a comprehensive curriculum. Many schools of a comparable size were closed or amalgamated with nearby schools during this period (Lamb, 2007). Ackenham’s history and profile highlights the consequences of such policy settings over time.

Virginia had inherited a school that had been in enrolment decline for more than 15 years, in part affected by cyclical policies embedded in the notions of decentralisation and school autonomy. Virginia’s project and her efforts to ‘fix the broken story’, while intended to positively impact on students and their families and in turn arrest declining enrolments, was undertaken in a ‘marketplace’, assessed by Lamb (2007), as inherently unfair, and one in which she had little control.

*Victoria as a Learning Community* was launched in November 2011 and the logic for this approach was in part based on international comparisons and concerns that Victorian students were falling behind students in comparable education systems internationally, most notably PISA and in part a belief in ‘small’ government (DEECD, 2011a). As with previous approaches to decentralisation it was designed to increase the control of school communities to manage their own affairs but like *Schools of the Future* there was a significant reduction in the overall funding for education in Victoria at this time, offset by cuts in central office and regional support staff and services to schools (AEU, 2012). Savings made by reducing
bureaucracy and government funded programs were then meant to flow to schools and enable autonomy at the local level (DEECD, 2011b).

While reform based on the underlying principles of school autonomy offered opportunities for increased local decision making and enough curriculum flexibility for the constructivist and enquiry learning modes favoured by the three principals, this has to be tempered against the overall effects on the school. As Jensen (2013), argues increasing school autonomy in the hope that it will improve student performance is a myth. Varying levels of autonomy can make a difference to what is possible in schools but should not be central to educational reforms. More broadly, school autonomy in Australia has led to increased stress for many principals (Hogan, 2014). It has also reduced opportunities for poorer students rather than enhanced them (AEU, 2012), and therefore ‘worsening conditions for the populations that most depend on the effectiveness of public schools’ (Teese, 2011, p 22), such as refugee and migrant students (Lamb, 2007). While there have been a variety of national and state ‘targeted’ and ‘broadband programs’ to address the needs of identified disadvantaged students such those from low SES and limited English proficiency backgrounds, it is unclear due to a lack of data, what difference these have made in schools and for student outcomes (Rorris et al., 2011, pp xiii-xv).

Effects of shifting policy

Amanda’s tenure coincided with a change of State government and a shift in the education policy and program support to Victorian schools. The policy platform for the new Labour Party government was framed around the idea of making Victoria the Education State. The Education State policies included some significant changes to the way schools prioritised their work, for example the narrowing of priorities to a few ‘high yield’ evidence-based strategies and a new Framework for Improving Student Outcomes [FISO]. Significantly for schools like Ackenham, the emerging investments in Education State also carried Victoria-wide obligations to reduce disadvantage regardless of where students were located (DET, 2015a).

From a curriculum perspective, Amanda wanted to ensure that the students at Ackenham were not depicted as disadvantaged, and that the learning and teaching opportunities offered were comparable with those of students in other schools. Amanda emphasised embedding intercultural capability across a revised Victorian Curriculum. For example, she led two PLT
meetings in which teachers were involved in mapping the capability in other learning areas. These practical activities and the professional discussions that occurred around them provided an opportunity for Amanda to further exercise her ideas about ‘moral purpose’ and embedding intercultural capability in everyday practice’ (Field notes, December 2014).

Developing intercultural understanding through the Victorian Curriculum in this context, while important, was however easily overwhelmed by pressing needs as both Virginia and Hilda reported. In Virginia’s case it was to develop the new early career teachers’ classroom management skills as quickly as possible while Hilda focussed on behaviour management.

**Introducing a new Australian Curriculum – new practice arrangements**

The introduction of the Australian Curriculum included intercultural understanding. While this capability was previously referenced in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, (Victoria’s curriculum prior to the Australian Curriculum) intercultural understanding was now a discrete component of AusVELS thus requiring schools to be more explicit in how they include the capability in their learning and teaching programs (ACARA, 2013b; VCAA, 2013a). In AusVELS it became one of four mandated capabilities along with creative and critical thinking, ethical capability and personal and social capability.

As part of the longstanding emphasis on school autonomy in Victoria, teachers and principals have responsibility for translating Victorian Curriculum frameworks and study designs into school practice. Given this flexibility, the shape and scope of intercultural understanding, what this might look like and be delivered alongside parts of the school’s curriculum, was dependent on a range of contextual factors. This included existing expertise, resources and the priorities of the school. The transformation of a curriculum, ‘a product of social practices’ involves ‘transforming the practices that produce and reproduce it’ (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 7). It was incumbent on schools to make local decisions about their investments in professional learning based on school needs. In such an approach, there was no guarantee that teachers would have sufficient training or understanding of the new capability or the capacity to include it in their classrooms to deliver the desired outcomes effectively. This was the case at Ackenham.

The teaching and learning practices evident during Virginia’s tenure involved a mix of direct instruction, enquiry based and experiential learning. Teacher teaming and mixed student
groups were used extensively to promote student independence and self-paced learning. Virginia expressed interest in being involved in the Doing Diversity project as an opportunity to complement what she described as a ‘rich curriculum’ offering and to enhance intercultural understanding for staff and students. Federal and state jurisdictions provided written guidance and online support (ACARA, 2012) but there were limited professional development opportunities for teachers available to develop their capability to teach for intercultural understanding outside the school, apart from that provided through Doing Diversity project. In a school like Ackenham with only six full-time teachers and limited expertise, and where many resources were dedicated to overcoming identified social and academic deficits (DET 2016a), the burden of responsibility on the principal was high. Virginia particularly, had the main role, along with her Teaching and Learning Coach, Karen, for introducing and implementing the AusVELS, including provision of relevant professional learning.

**The importance of professional learning**

Higher levels of intercultural understanding can be found in schools in which it is prioritised and supported by school leaders in such areas as professional learning (Weber & Lupart, 2011; Halse et al., 2015). One of the keys to teaching intercultural capability is to challenge educator assumptions and perceptions about culture (Santoro, 2009; Allard & Santoro, 2008) and to develop a level of self-awareness and recognition of the role that their own cultural identities as well as the broader influence the culture plays in education (Dervin, 2016; Coulby, 2006; Barrett, 2008). This was partially achieved with Ackenham’s involvement in the Doing Diversity project.

Initially Virginia was focused on developing intercultural understanding as part of her project. Such preparatory work about culture and cultural identity is fundamental to delivering effective pedagogy for migrant and refugee students (Matthews, 2008; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). She and other members of staff attended professional development activities provided by the project, participated in data collection activities and developed a school action plan. The challenge, however, was how to sustain this level of engagement and interest as well as that of the staff over time.

Virginia conceded that the focus on intercultural understanding had diminished by the beginning of 2014. Teacher professional learning was dedicated to the more immediate need
of helping teachers improve student literacy outcomes, mostly driven by a need to overcome low student scores in standardised testing and improving the teachers’ ability to manage student behaviour. In Australia, the NAPLAN standardised test results of all Australian schools have been publicly available since 2011 (ACARA, 2012). NAPLAN results were one of the factors by which the school could be judged by prospective parents and it was critical for Virginia’s project to improve these scores.

The challenge for a school such as Ackenham, with comparatively low performance outcomes, declining enrolments and a history of staff instability was how to be competitive in this kind of policy environment. Furthermore, teachers themselves were under increasing pressure to perform (O’Mara, 2012; Perelman, 2018) and the risk of teachers focussing their efforts in preparing students for test and increasing anxiety, disengagement and self-esteem issues (CoA, 2014) some of which was noted during Virginia’s tenure.

Furthermore, tools for measuring the development of intercultural understanding were less well developed than other learning areas such as literacy, in which spelling, grammar and punctuation were being empirically tested as part of NAPLAN. The ongoing resistance by some parents against the school’s learning and teaching program and a conflation of religion and culture by teachers also sapped their confidence to fully embrace intercultural understanding or see how this capability could be integrated into the more pressing literacy and numeracy priorities. Such challenges became significant barriers in Virginia’s efforts to develop interculturality at Ackenham.

**Developing interculturality as a desired state at Ackenham?**

Interculturality was signposted in AusVELS in 2012 and later in the Victorian Curriculum in 2015, through the mandated capabilities of intercultural understanding and intercultural capability. Being intercultural was framed by six expected behaviours; empathy, respect, responsibility, recognising, interacting and reflecting (ACARA, 2012). The inclusion of this capability reflected the shift from multiculturalism to interculturalism. Multicultural education is broadly positioned around cultural and ethnic groups, either for them or about them, while intercultural education tend to be positioned as a more active state of engagement and understanding about the effects and influence of cultural and ethnic diversities (Meer & Modood, 2011; Portera, 2011; Halse et al., 2015; Mansouri & Arber, 2017).
I argue that interculturality is a conceptual state for which many schools intuitively and literally strive. While not necessarily named or articulated as interculturality, this is a state of inclusion, fairness and cohesion, and can be reflected in education policies, school vision statements and values, and teaching and learning practices. It is demonstrated in schools that value diversity, promote social emotional learning, encourage critical thinking, self-reflection, open-mindedness, empathy and compassion. More specifically, interculturality involves people from different cultural commitments or social and ethnic backgrounds interacting, collaborating and getting along (UNESCO, 2006; 2011; Barrett, 2008). At Ackenham, against the backdrop of cultural, ethnic and religious differences there was a strong desire for staff, a minority group themselves, and students to get along and for students to manage their own behaviours. These aspirations identified in an earlier study (Burchielli & Bartram (2002) and were evident throughout the study.

Virginia hoped participation in the Doing Diversity project would contribute to the development of a more positive and inclusive environment as she and teachers had reported their poor expression of such skills as respect, empathy and perspective taking which they felt were contributing to ongoing bullying and ‘racist’ behaviour. Virginia opted for programs such as restorative practices; Stop Think Do and Habits of Mind which included specific intentions to teach pro-social skills and positive behaviours such as empathy, perspective-taking and personal accountability. Hilda had explicitly focussed on the SWPS Program, although its implementation had been affected by ‘students with intense and complex needs’ and a lack of dedicated resources (DET, 2016a, p 2). Despite these intentions and the provision of professional learning related to these programs, the teachers reported a lack of personal and professional confidence in teaching the kind of pro-social behaviours necessary for intercultural understanding and capability such as demonstrating respect and taking responsibility (ACARA, 2012). Some teachers expressed uncertainty about how to teach for intercultural understanding or how to manage more extreme behaviours such as racism. Most of the teachers had virtually no experience in working in such complex settings and the principals also had different ideas about this should be done e.g. Virginia – as a project of sympathetic integration; Hilda – through a natural process and a version of multiculturalism entangled with assimilation and Amanda – as a project of renewal as a contemporary multicultural school.
Both Virginia and Amanda were looking for different ways to expand the students’ understanding and awareness of the world outside the local neighbourhood. Virginia facilitated activities and projects that involved students in local sporting activities and competitions (e.g. Multicultural Cup) as well as some opportunities for a small number of students to represent the school both locally and state-wide programs. Amanda was keen to take the students to concerts and other external arts-based events and activities. An annual school camp was organised for the beginning of 2016, the first for most of students. One of the highlight activities for Virginia was showing three films made by the students about their lives, in Federation Square, a central and high-profile public space in Melbourne. For Amanda, the collaboration of Ackenham and the nearby secondary school to commemorate ANZAC Day in 2015 was regarded as a success by providing a positive ‘cultural’ experience for the students and parents, and part of her vision for Ackenham to be ‘a contemporary multicultural school’. Such activities were regarded as important elements in developing a positive school narrative and were perceived as more beneficial when the parents were engaged and supportive and their involvement was joined up with curriculum and teacher practice.

While the approaches employed by Amanda and Virginia overlapped in some ways, such as their emphasis on a positive school narrative, they went about things differently. A great deal of Virginia’s efforts concentrated on developing teachers’ professional skills and improving the social environment. Virginia’s tenure was influenced by significant curriculum and policy disruption which were exacerbated by ongoing staffing problems and efforts to appease a small number of parents. Amanda was able to reduce the turnover in staffing by renewing teachers’ contracts and focused on improving the physical environment. The Victorian Curriculum, having transitioned from AusVELS, was by then more established, and used proactively to map, plan and implement intercultural capability. Given the limitations of my study I am unable to say to what effect. Amanda also instituted some long-term changes such as a new uniform, school logo, school values and the introduction of Mandarin language learning which, while initially disruptive, signalled purpose and stability. Such an approach, demonstrated through a connected group of practices, particularly those in educational leadership and administration and professional learning, were further consolidated around Amanda’s ideas of ‘moral purpose’.
Ideally interculturality is evidenced through shared and connected practices. It was within this sense of moral purpose that Amanda explicitly argued for imbedding intercultural capability as ‘part of everyday practice’. While not as explicit as Amanda, Virginia sought a shared vision and promoted a strong sense of social justice. She expressed this through her empathy for the migrant experience and her interest in making the school an extension of families as well as an emphasis on values such as kindness, acceptance, care and respect.

Both Amanda and Virginia pointed to the development of intercultural competencies as a way in which teachers and students could more effectively engage and interact with each other and more broadly promote social cohesion. The evidence suggests that both were seeking and progressing a state of interculturality. Hilda on the other hand had less commitment for interculturalism and it was hard to establish to what extent her focus on positive behaviours was influenced by cultural, religious or ethnic assumptions.

How did the change in leadership and vision influence the development of interculturality?

This section focuses on leadership practices and the development of interculturality over the periods marked by the tenure of the three principals. Different practice arrangements are examined. The discussion in this section elaborates on the use of democratic and values-based approaches (whole school) in teaching and leadership practice and its effect on the development of interculturality. This provides some insight into pressures and practices for leading a school in times of reform.

Leading for transformation: developing purpose, stability and confidence in a complex, high needs school setting

The influence of the site is particularly relevant to development of interculturality in this case. Intersectional influences of poverty, class, gender, criminal behaviour and violence were reported by the principals to be prevalent on the housing estate and in the local neighbourhood. Some students had experienced trauma as part of the refugee experience. As noted earlier the average refugee enrolment at Ackenham from 2010 to 2013 was exceptionally high for Victorian schools. (DET, 2016a). State and federal measures used to
assess students’ needs based on parent occupations that leads to school funding allocations, showed that Ackenham was a school with very high needs (DET, 2016b; ACARA, 2013c).

Derogatory terms such as a ‘ghetto school’ were used by all three principals referring to external perceptions of the school and one of the reasons for declining enrolments, manifested in a so-called ‘white flight’. At Ackenham the ‘flight’ of Vietnamese background parents was identified by the part-time Vietnamese Multicultural Aide as a major issue. It is likely that the location of the school next to the public housing estate and residualisation of disadvantage, plus an increased economic mobility of these parents, had something to do with their decision to leave the school, although this was unverified.

Amanda and Virginia tried to offset such apparent disadvantage and negative perceptions of the students and the school by focussing of care, compassion and expectation of improved student performance and achievement. Virginia’s migrant background influenced her leadership practices and was demonstrated in her empathy and compassion for the students and their families. She wanted the school to be experienced as an extension of the family and subsequently she employed practices that promoted a sense of community while endeavouring to build intercultural capital for both teachers and the parents. For example, she encouraged teachers to spend time meeting and greeting parents during the before-school drop off and after-school pick up. This practice was intended to promote habitual behaviour that would encourage encounters of the sort that Noble (2013) described as a form of conviviality, that is, ‘embedded expressions of recognition and respect, and pragmatic habits of social and intercultural civility’ (p 179).

Virginia also presented the foyer as a means of displaying students’ work and celebrating the school community. Student self-portraits were scattered around and produced the effect analogous to a ‘family photographic album’. This effect was reinforced with a display of other ‘family’ artefacts, (like those stuck to a refrigerator), such as examples of written student stories on the walls and a large colourful rug depicting a map of world with images of children holding hands (see Image 2), and the Welcome Tree, with leaves made up of student handprints (see Image 3).

Virginia’s project was focussed on presenting a positive narrative internally and externally that she hoped would both overcome the negative perceptions and encourage new students
to the school. Arresting declining enrolments was central to her project regardless of their background.

Practice architectures, particularly evident in the cultural-discursive arrangements as demonstrated through the school messaging in fortnightly newsletters and regular updates and Blogs on the website were designed to celebrate the school’s relationship with the community and promote a sense of achievement, belonging and connection to the school. While these practices are not unusual for schools, in this case Virginia hoped the positive narrative constructed around, for and with the students, would build a sense of identity and pride in the school which she felt was missing for many of them (Field notes, February 2013). The foyer was designed to welcome students and their families and was opened up to be the main thoroughfare in and out of the building.

During Amanda’s tenure, the foyer became a security-conscious administrative space. It was a controlled gateway to the outside world and like many contemporary school foyers was positioned to minimise risk and filter people, and was a manifestation of social relationships and subjectivities (Moss, O’Mara & McCandless, 2017, p 962) that underpinned Amanda’s emphasis on the health and safety practices.

**Fostering school community solidarity**

While the principals’ leadership practices were notably different, they were underpinned by a common desire to improve the circumstances of the students and the school.

Virginia’s leadership was characterised by her advocacy for the students demonstrated in empathic and compassionate practices, particularly in the cultural-discursive and social-political arrangements which were focussed on communication, building solidarity and relationships. Virginia revised the weekly assemblies, by moving them to a new location and making a stronger emphasis on order and respect through more active involvement of teachers and students and providing opportunities for their agency. Virginia also wrote and produced fortnightly newsletters on a refreshed school website herself that told ‘good news stories’ and promoted a sense of family and school community. With these changed practices she hoped there would be corresponding improvements in the students’ self-perception and
in the reputation of the school thus making it more attractive to current and prospective parents.

I attended four school assemblies, two school community forums and my analysis of the newsletters and school blog over this period show a commitment from teachers and other staff to support this approach. This means they proactively contributed to these practices and gave the impression of supporting the narrative.

A major challenge for Virginia however was connecting and enabling the many practices that made up her project. As noted by Kemmis et al. (2014), in relation to the Education Complex:

‘….. if educational change is to be realised and secured then change needs to occur in all practices in this ecology of practices, not just in one or another of them alone’ (p 52).

In Virginia’s case the capacity to secure and build teacher confidence and capacity in their teaching and learning skills to support other practices presented an ongoing challenge. The management of student behavioural problems and complex emotional states remained an issue for some teachers throughout this period despite the significant efforts that Virginia and Karen made to provide professional learning and ongoing classroom support.

Hilda noted student behaviour management as the key issue on her arrival and concentrated on implementing a program of positive behaviours. It is unclear what impact this approach had on the teachers and students in her short tenure (one term of 8 weeks) but it highlights her perception that teachers needed more support in their student management skills.

Amanda’s practice architectures were conceptualised around the idea of moral purpose, high expectations and economic logic is captured in the following comment:

I’m absolutely clear about the purpose of the school and I don’t care where the school is. These children deserve the same high standard of education as any other child, in fact they deserve more because they’ve already suffered significant trauma in their early lives. It can only be to the taxpayer’s detriment to not correct that and to not invite these children to participate in the richest manner (Principal interview, December 2014).
Amanda’s initial assessment of the school was that it was one of the poorest in the state, but she was not convinced that this was just because of the location nor the student’s ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This was not to say that Amanda ignored the setting, as one of her aims, not unlike Virginia’s, was on changing the public perception of the school, but her approach focussed on transforming Ackenham into a ‘contemporary Australian multicultural school’ (Principal interview, Dec 2014). Amanda’s leadership was initially focused on transforming the material-economic arrangements and one of her overall ambitions was to make Ackenham safe and calm and broadly more attractive to a wider cohort of students.

Such an approach might also have had the effect of disrupting essentialist or medicalised discourses about the learning needs of Black African refugee students (Keddie 2011; Sidhu & Taylor 2012). Broadly speaking Ackenham was more mono-cultural than multicultural given that most students were from Horn of African backgrounds. The application of multiculturalism in this context was an attempt to turn the concept around and push the school into the mainstream.

In many ways Virginia’s project was being realised through Amanda’s more radical redesign and explicit moral commitment to the students. The community solidarity that Virginia sought through concentrating on the cultural-discursive arrangements was evident in Amanda’s project but reinforced by a tangible change in new material economic arrangements. Amanda was also focussed on building teacher solidarity and stability, factors that Virginia struggled to achieve completely, while at the same time prosecuting her warrant for change to parents and the broader community. Conditions that would enable interculturality such as moral literacy and authenticity (Dervin, 2016; Walker & Chen, 2007; Weber & Lupart, 2011), commitment to social justice (Blackmore, 2006) and inclusion of intercultural capability in professional learning (Rey-von Allmen, 2011; Halse et al., 2015) were evident in both projects, but they were produced and sustained in different ways. These differences are explained below.

**Leadership challenges: instability, fragmentation and intersectional issues**

Some of the biggest leadership challenges at Ackenham related to unstable staffing and enrolments and managing the multiple demands of student wellbeing and learning needs.
This next section provides an analysis of the arrangements the principals put in place to address some of these challenges.

**Virginia, the pressures of achieving parent and teacher solidarity and overcoming fragmentation**

Virginia emphasised a student centred, inquiry-based, constructivist approach in leading change. For example, Virginia hosted community forums with the notion of co-designing school values as part of efforts to build trust and confidence in the school, particularly with the parents but more broadly in the local community. She had also joined the local Neighbourhood Renewal Board to help her understand local issues and involve the school in some of their projects. Virginia’s underlying logic, based on her own study and educational experience was that such a narrative, co-constructed with teachers, students and their families as a learning community would better respond to students’ needs and result in their social and academic success.

Virginia however found it difficult to seed such ideas in the face of parent resistance and solidarity. For example, some parents asserted their rights to maintain a level of autonomy over matters to do with their cultural and religious practices, such as taking the children out of school for the three days of Eid and persisting with Arabic language instruction. Virginia and other staff had to confront and manage such issues and described the effect as ‘like walking on eggshells’. Virginia was concerned that the parents would take their children away from the school adding further pressure on the declining enrolments. On the other hand, some staff perceived this as privileging Muslim parents’ interests and needs at the expense of the school’s curriculum which constrained their classroom practice, including teaching about festivals and celebrations and more specifically about Christmas and Easter. This they felt ran counter to the idea of secular government school education, in a primarily Christian country. Additionally, teacher solidarity formed around a perceived need for stronger leadership for managing student behaviour. Bearing in mind that the teachers had limited experience, both in terms of teaching and intercultural engagement with students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds it was not surprising to find some felt ill equipped to respond to some of the behaviours and attitudes they found at the school.
Further to the idea of a learning community, that is a community enabled by a level of autonomy to make local decisions about school needs, Virginia brought a significant number of external projects, consultants and resources into the school. These included those to develop students’ social skills such as the *Play for Life Pod, Song Room or Kitchen Garden* and packaged teaching and learning programs like *KidsMatter and Stop, Think, Do*. The school’s unique cohort also attracted research projects like *Doing Diversity* and arts-based projects such as when grade 6 students made films about themselves and their resettlement and schooling experience. Some of these projects resulted in some short term ‘learning communities’ and provided a range of experiences and opportunities for students and teachers, however these were not connected in coherent ways to Virginia’s project and stretched teachers’ time in an already busy program in a demanding policy and curriculum environment. The overall effect was fragmentation. Virginia found it hard to sustain an emphasis on intercultural capability in the later stages of her tenure. The school plan and professional development intentions for intercultural capability were less active or visible among the many other priorities and activities.

**Amanda, school redesign and moral purpose**

Amanda’s project was revealed in all dimensions of the education complex. Acts such as cleaning and painting the school and redecorating with new artefacts and student work, offered both a sense of achievement for those involved and more broadly signalled improvement and progress. The discursive production of a ‘good school’ can be found in the physical environment where visual representations of what the school is, and stands for are conveyed through notice boards, messaging and the general look of the environment (Maguire et al., 2011). While from a leadership perspective, this early effort of school improvement might be regarded as less important than student literacy or behaviour it was a decisive act of her authority and a critical part of Amanda’s overall project of educational transformation. Leadership for this initial action was demonstrated through interconnected practices for physical safety, health and wellbeing but was concurrently connected to the school’s curriculum and approaches to teaching and learning.

The anchor for the development of interculturality in Amanda’s project was through the implementation of Victorian Curriculum which she reported was ‘a window of opportunity to
teach for intercultural understanding’ (Principal interview, December 2014). As part of a school wide curriculum review, teachers were asked to identify where and when they could do this. They discussed different pedagogical actions that would help them achieve learning outcomes such as acceptance, tolerance, respect and maintain a focus on developing empathy. Amanda reinfored the need for teachers to regularly consult with Kandra, the multicultural aide. Such discussion gave rise to the idea of a school camp, different resources and texts and ways to promote student voice and agency. Issues such as racism formed part of an interrogation about pedagogy, what could be done in lessons and more broadly within a whole school approach to ‘embedding intercultural understanding in everything we do’ (Field notes, November 2014). This was not inconsistent with what teachers believed they should be doing and there was general support for this approach but were looking for strategies and resources to manage challenging and complex student behaviours woven into cultural, racial and religious themes. This included the use of word ‘Nigger’ as a derogatory term and turning their backs on a cross they perceived as symbolic of Christianity. From a practice perspective they agreed to prioritise critical and emotional literacy in their lessons and to support each other in their Professional Learning teams while maintaining a focus on the whole school curriculum.

Amanda’s overall ambition was continually referenced to the idea of moral purpose, that is, a basic belief about the value and importance of education as a common good, typically expressed through a shared commitment to values and ethics and ‘accompanied by feasible, powerful strategies’ and high expectations of students and teachers (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006 p 12). Similarly, Kemmis et al. (2014) argues the purpose of education should provide inherent good for the individual as well as a common good. Amanda’s sense of moral purpose and its relationship to all elements of the school redesign were reinforced and repeated in the cultural-discursive arrangements, particularly in teacher professional learning. While the essence of moral purpose was evident in Virginia’s practice architectures from a social justice perspective, Amanda was much more explicit about the relationship between moral purpose, the warrant for her intervention and the plan for school implementation. This was verified in the Intervention Advisory Panel investigation Panel Report in 2015 (DET, 2016a).
Hilda, and a hopeful multiculturalism

Ackenham was Hilda’s first experience of leading a school albeit in the role of a caretaker for one term. Hilda strongly identified as an Australian arguing the need for migrants to integrate and not ‘hang on’ to past practices and traditions that she felt would ‘retard’ their progress in the ‘new culture’. Hilda felt her own parents’ retention of an ‘old-fashioned’ version of their ‘German-ness’ had been an impediment to their life in Australia. In her view, such cultural sensitivities needed to be confronted by schools so that students could be integrated into Australian culture (Principal interview, May 2014).

Intercultural understanding, from this perspective positioned integration as a process of assimilation as demonstrated in the ANZAC Day observance. The risk with this kind of approach is that it can essentialise the immigrant as the ‘Other’ and promote a version of multicultural education where the teaching about culture, ethnicity and nationalities, can preclude an examination of the self and the power and privilege that culture and identity may convey. While these outcomes may not be consciously intended, in these instances students are expected to develop and adopt the dominant linguistic, cultural values and norms whilst aspects of their cultural and ethnic identity are absorbed or modified to ‘fit in’ as ‘Aussie type kids’. The effects include consolidating the idea of cultural and ethnic superiority and particularly inferiority of minority groups (Kalantzis et al., 2012; Mansouri & Trembath, 2005) and producing and reproducing practices to support such cultural hegemony. For Virginia, who went through such an experience, it was important not to replicate this for the students at Ackenham. Amanda was committed to developing the students’ cultural capital and agency as citizens of a multicultural society.

From Hilda’s perspective ANZAC Day was part of the Victorian Curriculum, supported by learning and teaching resources and by a national emphasis on Australian identity and culture through rituals of remembrance. For parents, who were largely unfamiliar with its rituals and symbolism, ANZAC Day represented a challenge to their Muslim faith. The intersubjective space in this instance was a tangle of religious and cultural miscommunication and misunderstanding. While Hilda reported that she had resolved the matter after meeting with the parents the clash reinforced teacher solidarity and resistance to what they felt was another example of parent ‘interference’. ANZAC Day when viewed as an intercultural
moment was not just an opportunity for students ‘to get a snippet of Australian culture’ (Principal interview, 2014) but also as an opportunity for Hilda and the teachers to reflect on the cultural and religious symbolism conveyed through such observances and to arrive a respectful way to engage and communicate with parents who may have a different understanding. An intercultural approach ideally provides ways of engaging and negotiating different cultural positions and perspectives (Coulby, 2013) with the aim of improving the process of communication and building relationships (Hill, 2007).

During Hilda’s tenure Brendan became the Intercultural Capability Co-ordinator [ICI] as he was one of the few remaining staff who had attended the professional learning and had showed an enthusiasm for the Doing Diversity project. For Hilda, the immediate concern was responding to teacher anxieties over student discipline that had been evident at the school during Virginia’s tenure. She used her experience with SWPBS Program to provide modelling and professional development with the aim to improve teacher confidence in managing student behaviour and to reduce disruption to student learning.

Practices of leading: what does this mean for the development of interculturality?

Walker and Chen (2007) argue that a more authentic form of leadership can be found in schools that promote and develop interculturality. They define authentic leadership in reflexive terms, that is ‘an ongoing interaction between how well one understands oneself within the meanings of a given educational context; and what can best be done to improve student lives and learning within this context’ (186). Each of the principals, were fundamentally dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of the children but approached the task in different ways, drawing on their own cultural identity and experience.

Both Virginia and Amanda were advocates and practitioners of values-based approaches, particularly focussed on inclusion and justice which are features of effective leadership in multicultural contexts (Walker & Chen, 2007). Virginia also promoted student agency and focussed on values, hosting two school community forums, involving students to discuss and reach agreement on new school values.

They both encouraged staff to include intercultural understanding as part of everyday practice. At its optimum this means having the ability to engage and negotiate with students
and their parents with ‘equitable patterns of cultural recognition’ and a genuine aim to overcome deficit understandings (Keddie, 2012, p 211).

Leadership in this sense, as demonstrated by both Virginia and Amanda not only sensitive to locating the values in the ethnic and cultural context of learning but also as an organisation to be reflective and reflexive, learning from experiences and striving to improve practice as a result. Moreover, it is useful to understand leadership as a construct of intersectionality, made up of social identities which have an impact on their capacity to lead within certain contexts. This includes their gendered and cultural identity (Chin, 2013).

However, the desired change Virginia and Amanda was seeking could only take root and be sustained when the staff, students and their families worked collectively to understand each other’s needs and to construct new semantic spaces and ways of relating to and supporting each other. That is, transformation can only be sustained if the practice arrangements that support them are also transformed (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 6). When viewed through the Theory of Practice Architectures the study revealed that interculturality was most present at Ackenham through practices that were collaborative, that co-produced learning and were underpinned by a common and shared understanding such as community forums, student film making and guided professional learning.

Hilda was less convinced about the need to protect and support the preservation of different ethnic and cultural cultures and identities. Her hegemonic assumptions about multiculturalism and the students adapting to an “Australian way of life” however was misplaced in this context and the effect was to cause confusion for the parents and students and reinforce teacher solidarity in their resistance to the parents’ efforts to influence what was taught.

Transforming practices requires a corresponding transformation of arrangements needed to support and sustain practices (Kemmis et al., 2014). It is also important to understand the relationship between practices and how these are connected, and what effect they create together (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 2014). For Virginia, her identity framed was around her own migrant experience and she was mindful of working with the community in ways to avoid or reduce confrontation to promote a positive narrative and her fear of parents taking the children out of the school. During this period student management and behaviour issues
became an issue for some staff who felt that this was being neglected, which was what Hilda most noted when she arrived at the school. In this instance teachers were less invested in Virginia’s project unless there was a stronger practice response to these behaviour issues.

Amanda’s overarching ambition was to attend to current as well as future needs of students and develop their social and economic capital (that included cultural capital), that is, ‘giving these students the same opportunities as any other Victorian student’ (Field notes, November 2014). Her moral purpose was a determination to overcome any real or perceived disadvantage. By starting with material-economic arrangements, something that had widespread appeal, she garnered both support from staff and parents and then connected the idea of moral purpose with a clean and safe learning environment in which new school values, uniform and logo, for example could become visible signs of a connected and sustained practice architectures.

Section 3 How did the teachers understand and relate to interculturality in this context?

An important aspect of developing interculturality in schooling includes the capacity for self-reflection and reflexivity. This is the way staff and principals reflect on their own cultural and ethnic background and any privilege and power that it conveys (Dervin, 2016). Being reflexive means having an interest in and understanding of the students’ backgrounds and the ability to engage and negotiate with them and their families. It is the ability to act within a cultural context of the school as well as address external policy and curriculum expectations (Keddie, 2016; Walton et al., 2014). It is when teachers see themselves as learners and work cooperatively with other teachers and test their assumptions about ‘cultural and classed identities’ that help them move beyond just knowing about the differences (Allard & Santoro, 2008, p 211).

Understanding themselves: reflective practices and developing intercultural understanding

Most of the teachers generally reported an enthusiasm for teaching and goodwill towards the students and their families. They also reported the challenges they faced in managing student behaviours such as bullying and violence while trying to teach personal and social skills to overcome prejudice or develop empathy. There is no doubt that Ackenham was a challenging
school in which to work, as demonstrated by the significant turnover of teachers and principals, the constant enrolment pressures and the students and parents’ low levels of English literacy (DET, 2016a). A consistent theme in teacher professional learning and focus group interviews was identifying ways to improve practice and develop a better understanding of students’ needs as well to balance their own professional needs. The quote below sums up how one teacher tried to reconcile these dilemmas and challenges:

I think all students and parents should be treated the same in that you (teacher) shouldn’t be coming with any prejudices and everyone just has equal opportunities. But then at the same time students and parents need to be treated differently because you have to acknowledge their backgrounds, especially if they’re experienced trauma. Then you have to change your curriculum or change the way you interact with them so that you are sensitive to their needs (Teacher focus group, August 2013)

The quote reveals reflective thinking and sensitivity for students and their families and while it doesn’t show the full complexity of what this means in practice, it demonstrates a desire to make the school a welcoming and compassionate environment. The data from the interviews, focus groups and field observations shows a similar sentiment across the tenure of the three principals, despite the challenges. A high level of goodwill towards embracing and engaging with cultural diversity is a factor in promoting interculturality (Halse et al., 2015).

Brendan’s story of transformation also helps demonstrate how interculturality can be developed. Throughout the project he was open to ideas and eager to learn. In the beginning of the study Brendan reported having little experience in culturally or ethnically diverse contexts. His understanding of religion was limited and initially he considered that parents and their religious beliefs had too much influence in the school. Midway through the Doing Diversity project, after Brendan had participated in professional learning sessions and focus groups he reflected, ‘I now know the difference between intercultural and multicultural’. For teachers, such positive experiences can act as motivation for behaviour change and promote a shift in beliefs (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006). Brendan continued to be interested in how to improve his practice and with a level of curiosity and open-mindedness became a school advocate for intercultural capability. He presented the school’s progress report for the Doing
Diversity project and by the end of the project Brendon was the school’s Intercultural Capability Co-ordinator. He had established convivial relationships with students and reached some understanding about their backgrounds and interests as well as his own:

Using what I know about them culturally and being able to share my cultural beliefs I can have an open dialogue with them. This has been a really big plus for my teaching. I reckon it’s been great because the relationship I have now with the kids is probably stronger than anyone else has (Intercultural Capability Co-ordinator interview, December 2014).

This response demonstrates Brendan’s growth in confidence as a teacher but more fundamentally points to the benefits he gained from learning about his students from his discussions about beliefs and culture. Brendan’s development was undertaken in the context of learning, student engagement and relationship building and arguably moves him towards the Dervin (2016, p 103) idea of teachers becoming ‘amateur interculturalists’.

In schools such as Ackenham, where the influence of the students’ ethnic and religious backgrounds are prevailing characteristics, it is important for teachers to develop a sense of their own identity and beliefs (Keddie, 2011; Matthews, 2008; Allard & Santoro, 2008). Brendan’s progress indicates a value of professional opportunities that focus personal reflection and reflexivity. Coming to an understanding of how intercultural capability can improve his teaching practice was “like gold” to new teacher like Brendan.

**Understanding the curriculum and developing pedagogy for interculturality**

In Victoria teachers were expected to be autonomous professionals who made informed decisions about their students’ needs (DEECD, 2011a) and who prior to the introduction of the Australian Curriculum already had a history of being involved in innovative curriculum design and adaption at the local level (Howes, 2011). This is the idea that, ‘The curriculum is not a blueprint but a proposal for action’ (Stenhouse, 1975 as cited by Kemmis et al., 2014, p 209).

The transition from the Victorian Essential Learning Standards though two versions of Victoria’s adaption to the Australian Curriculum, AusVELS and the Victorian Curriculum F-10 from 2009-2015 provided a basic outline of what students should be able to know and do
from foundation year to Level 10. Achievement Standards were relatively general. For example, by the end of Level 3-4 (which corresponds with Grade 3 and 4) students should be ‘able to compare a range of cultural practices and explain their influence on people’s relationships. They explain what they have learnt about themselves and others from intercultural experiences’ (VCAA, 2015b). The depth and nature of the lessons, or the pedagogies and resources used was made at the local level. Such capabilities were meant to be reported to parents and form the basis of aggregated school reports on progress made against the curriculum to the Victorian education authorities. Outcomes for intercultural understanding or other capabilities are not formally represented in the national Myschool website.

Dispositions and skills for intercultural understanding, such as expressing empathy, demonstrating respect and taking responsibility (ACARA, 2012) were common themes during Virginia’s tenure and highly relevant to the development of interculturality at Ackenham. Programs such as Restorative Practices, Stop Think Do and Habits of the Mind included all included these three dispositions, among others as desired emotional states and outcome. A “lack of student empathy” (APS Annual Reports, 2012; 2013) was a consistent theme during this study (Field notes, August 2013; November 2014)

There was however a level of uncertainty about how to conceptualise, teach and assess intercultural capability. This was evidenced in discussions during professional learning activities as well as in teacher focus groups. For example, some teachers were unclear about what empathy would look like in their classroom and were not confident they could disentangle some of the student management and behavioural issues without compromising a focus on empathy. The issue of confidence extended to some uncertainty about how then to deal with racist, violent or bullying behaviours and how to get students to show respect and take responsibility for their behaviour. The fights and examples of bullying and racism were reported by the students in terms of family and ‘tribal’ disputes. Students were teased because their skin was darker than other students and called ‘Nutella’ or were labelled ‘fresh meat’ as new arrivals to Australia and the school. The term ‘Brothers’ used by some students was perceived by one teacher as a form of solidarity with a “Muslim Brotherhood” and by implication a rejection of things not Muslim and the teachers themselves. The relatively small number of non-Horn of Africa background students (around 5%) were also targets for bullying
and racism, for example one student reported sustained bullying due to her Asian background. Furthermore, examples of gendered harassment were also reported, such as girls being teased by boys and by other girls about the way they looked.

Virginia used the weekly assemblies and the various communications to highlight cultural recognition and model respect. Furthermore, she encouraged a culture of care and collaboration through teacher teams which when framed around relational trust and mutual respect could strengthen practice architectures for an intended transformation (Kemmis et al., 2014). Amanda worked with staff to map the Victorian Curriculum and identify where intercultural understanding could be taught and emphasised.

The entanglement tended to occur in relation to “cultural” expectations, language barriers and the complex process of adaption and adjustment that members of the school community experienced in different ways. For example, factors such as the capacity or confidence of some parents to be involved in their children’s schooling, or the ability of early career teachers to recognise sources of conflict and mediate the behaviours exhibited by children straddling significant cultural, linguistic and religious differences or for new principals to balance the immediate needs of the students against school performance and other accountabilities.

While the dimensions for intercultural understanding in the Australian Curriculum might be assigned to the three interrelated elements of a learning continuum such as ‘interacting and empathising with others’ (ACARA, 2014a) each dimension itself promotes more complex questions about the nature, influence and need for understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity in the local context. That is the ‘how’ question of pedagogy. How do you teach for intercultural understanding through a focus on empathy in a site like Ackenham where the local context was made up of multiple cultural and ethnic identities within a broader set of national identities and affiliations?

For teachers at Ackenham, teaching empathy was a focus during Virginia’s tenure as well as being a central learning intention of the positive behaviour program advocated by Hilda. It was the subject of number of professional discussions including one where Kandra, the Somali intercultural aide, reported a cultural and linguistic difference about the use and understanding of the concept of empathy between the teachers and parents and children. This meant that the teachers had to rethink their approach and using the question ‘What is
the best way to teach empathy? as a basis of enquiry, teachers questioned the nature of empathy and what they could do in their classrooms to teach for empathy. For example, questions such as ‘What is the difference between empathy, concern, compassion and sympathy in this school?’ and ‘Is everyone here capable of feeling empathy?’ were explored. This discussion was important in the context of understanding more about teaching empathy and what this might look like in their classrooms for this cohort of students.

Ideally, interculturality is developed through a process of engagement, interaction, reflection and reflexivity. It is not a program or a discrete set of lessons that can be taught. Such processes involve the ability to think critically, to question and see and appreciate other perspectives (Dervin, 2016; UNESCO, 2006). From a curriculum and pedagogical perspective, intercultural understanding and capability, such as the discussion about empathy, should be evident in everyday practices.

In summary, while interculturality is more likely to lead to the practical cultural pluralism for which many schools strive, it remains conceptually challenging to put into practice unless there is a whole school commitment from the leadership down to embed intercultural understanding and capability in sustainable ways. While scholars like Dervin have begun to overcome some earlier conceptual concerns expressed by Coulby (2006) and Abdallah-Pretceille (2006), there is limited research about what intercultural approaches look like in day to day practice (Halse et al., 2016). More work needs to be done in this area.

**How might the Theory of Practice Architectures help us understand the presence and attributes of interculturality in a school?**

In this section the Theory of Practice Architectures is discussed as both a method of inquiry and an example of practice in its own right, that is, a process for transforming practices. The discussion culminates in a ‘Framework for developing practice architectures for interculturality’. This is a distillation of facilitators for interculturality and some ‘ingredients’ for the development of interculturality through leadership, professional learning, teaching, student learning and researching practices.

The Theory of Practice Architectures, as a research method, provides one way of examining what is going on in a school; how it organised, how people talk about themselves, how things are done and how its inhabitants relate to each other (Kemmis et al., 2014). This study has
shown that individual and collective practices for the development of interculturality in this site, can be found within a broader suite of practices. These practices were either existing practices or brought into the site by the principals in both complimentary and non-complimentary ways. The dimensions of this architecture were recognisable aspects of day to day school practice within the Education Complex, and when acting together in complimentary ways promised to provide the type of conditions in which the curriculum aspirations for intercultural understanding and capability are likely to flourish. As has been noted throughout this study, this is a case of one school and one must use a site-based approach when applying the following insights in other sites and conditions.

The development of interculturality as a bundle of complimentary practices can be aligned to the idea of culture and cultural identity as a dynamic process in which the social construction or deconstruction of culture can be undertaken as a collective activity as part of the learning process:

Learning is a form of socially established cooperative human activity in which characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements in characteristic discourses (sayings) and when people and objects involved are distributed in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relatings) and when this complex of sayings, doings and relatings hangs together in a distinctive project (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 56).

The quote above is reflective of what Virginia was trying to achieve through her overarching desire for a new narrative and by bringing the community together and reshaping the way they thought about themselves and talked about the school. While intercultural capability or intercultural education wasn’t at the centre of her project, the practice arrangements were shaped by the presence of the majority of Horn of African background families and their cultural and religious commitments as well the beliefs, values and expertise brought to the school by the teachers and her desire to reshape of these identities and commitments into a collective and collaborative whole.

Kemmis et al. (2014, p 57) describes ‘learning is also an initiation into practice’, that is learning through practising the practice. The practice can mean striving for a physical accomplishment
such as playing soccer or down ball which also means developing ‘social (intersubjective and interactional) accomplishments’ associated with these games such as learning the rules. As practices are ‘ecologically’ connected, it follows that it is through this participation that learners also become co-participants and co-producers of the different arrangements within ‘ecosystem’ of practice. Brendan’s story of developing intercultural capability reflects, in part, his ‘initiation’ through formally designated professional learning activities and the opportunity to have meaningful discussion with his peers about culture, diversity and identity through the Doing Diversity project. Other opportunities, such as his involvement in the digital learning project in which Shirin modelled teaching and learning practices for inclusion and collaboration, also furthered Brendan’s understanding of student “politics”, particularly associated with gender and culture. Later, he, along with Molly, coordinated the ‘intercultural capability’ excursion to Frazier Hills Catholic Primary School and presented Ackenham’s story at a Doing Diversity School Showcase in which they highlighted the challenges and progress made in developing intercultural practice. Site based professional learning was critical to the development Brendan’s intercultural capability and enhanced when there was a collective interest in improving practice. Both Virginia and Amanda facilitated professional learning and discussion for developing intercultural capability, particularly as a curriculum piece which served as a key motivator for improving practice.

What are the implications for practice? Table 7 Applying Practice Architecture Theory to interculturality provides a summary of the key arrangements identified at Ackenham and through the literature that are likely to contribute to interculturality in a school environment.

**Table 7 Applying Practice Architecture Theory to interculturality**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Complex</th>
<th>Facilitators of interculturality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading – educational leadership</td>
<td>• Placing interculturality at the centre of connected and complementary practice arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fostering school community solidarity for inclusion and justice (founded on agreed values and have a shared moral purpose in educating for the common good)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bringing stability, purpose and confidence to complex, high needs school settings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Overcoming fragmentation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Recognising that culture is dynamic and socially constructed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Working intersectionally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching

• Being reflexive and having an interest in understanding their own history, culture, power and privilege and having the capacity to bring these insights into practice
• Learning to be intercultural and teaching for open-mindedness, compassion and respect – preparedness to engage and interact with the students and their families

Student learning

• Providing opportunities for student agency and the development of intercultural capability
• Understanding the significance of space/s and the provision of shared and individual flexible learning spaces
• Emphasising constructivist and inquiry-based learning in practice arrangements

Professional development

• Prioritising professional development for intercultural knowledge, skills and values aimed at combating the intersectional forms of inequality, racism, sexism, prejudice and discrimination

Researching – critical evaluation and evaluation

• Undertaking local research / data collection and using it in professional dialogue and planning
• Working collaboratively as a partner in school and community networks

At a system level, the kinds of practice arrangements that would be helpful for a school like Ackenham include a greater emphasis on reducing a widening wealth and cultural and ethnic divide between schools and being innovative in modes of provision and funding for smaller schools catering for high needs communities.

This summary of facilitators is expanded in Table 8 ‘A draft framework for developing interculturality’. The framework extends Table 7 and is similarly organised around the five intersecting dimensions of the Education Complex. The facilitators of interculturality, in the first column, have been derived from the literature and provide key ideas and principles for interculturality but also for school redesign and educational transformation, which should be considered within practice architectures for interculturality. In the second column suggest the type of principles for school-based action. The third column provides examples of practices from the study that demonstrates practices found in each dimension and how these were enacted. Together, the literature, findings and examples, provide an outline of what practice architectures for interculturality might look like and how to enable this work in schools. There are of course caveats here. The first is that there was no classroom observations of teacher practice or student learning in this study. The evidence is mostly drawn from
interviews, focus group discussions and from documents and texts. A second is that the practice principles in the second column are drawn from judgements based on the available evidence and therefore provide sample architectures only. The conclusion that I reached from the study is that the Theory of Practice Architectures provides a viable method of identifying and monitoring different practice arrangements as a means of school improvement.

The practice arrangements were made visible using the Theory of Practice Architectures enabled a closer examination of intercultural education and where it could be found or not found. The summary below provides the essence of what was collected and analysed at Ackenham with some examples of where the evidence was collected.

- **Cultural-discursive** - What was said and expressed (or not expressed) through ideas, forms of understanding about culture, school history, symbols, memories and beliefs. These *sayings* provided a sense of how and why certain choices were made and how the students and teachers thought and felt about themselves in this place e.g. expressed through the school values, artefacts, signage, publications such as the annual reports and newsletters, the *My School* website and school promotions.

- **Material-economic** - What was done and demonstrated (or not demonstrated) through the actions of the staff, students and their families. These *doings* and *set ups* provided a sense of how interculturality was implemented through the organisation of teaching and learning programs, the physical environment, events and celebrations and extra curricula activities e.g. community forums, uniforms, volunteerism, assemblies, foyer, fences and security, professional learning and formal programs as well as extra-curricular activities.

- **Social-political** - How people related (or did not relate) to each other within the school and the broader community and how this was expressed by the staff, students and families and where solidarity and alliances formed in terms of what was important and worth advocating for. These *relatings* were found inside and outside the school in relationships with agencies, education authorities, local parliamentary representatives, the families cultural and religious affiliations and in teaching and learning arrangements and in relationships with students e.g. team teaching, student agency, school networks and partnerships, membership of the community committees and sporting associations.
Table 8 ‘A draft framework for developing interculturality’ provides a broader summary of the facilitators and ingredients for developing interculturality in schools. The framework can be used by principals and teachers as a guide or stimulus for planning and professional learning.
A draft framework for developing practice architectures for interculturality

Applying my analysis of the literature and findings from the case study, particularly in the ‘leading’ and ‘teaching’ dimensions of the Education Complex, I have arrived at the following summary of arrangements that are likely to enable the development of practice architectures for interculturality. Underpinning this is the key idea that education is a process whereby people are ‘initiated into forms of understanding, modes of action and ways to relating to on another’ that is ‘oriented towards the good for each person and the good of humankind’ (Kemmis, 2012a, p 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Complex</th>
<th>Facilitators of interculturality (as a project of practice)</th>
<th>Practices architectures for the development of interculturality</th>
<th>Examples from this site</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Leading – educational leadership | • Placing intercultural education at the centre of connected and complementary practice arrangements i.e. if it is not intercultural then it is not education (Coulby, 2006).  
• Interculturality is a big ambition and intercultural education can’t be left to individuals, small interest group or consigned to one part of the curriculum or discrete lessons (Halse et al., 2015)  
• Fostering school community solidarity for inclusion and justice (Blackmore, 2006) founded on agreed values and have a shared moral purpose (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006).  
• Leading for interculturality involves advocacy in fostering attributes such as; curiosity, compassion and engagement with diversity, and skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and perspective taking (UNESCO, 2006; 2011). | • Adopt a whole school mindset and intersectional approach for intercultural education incorporating the notion of ecologies of practice within the dimensions of the Education Complex.  
• Call out structural and social inequalities and where they constrain the development of interculturality in planning and resourcing decisions.  
• Establish a local warrant for intercultural capability / interculturality founded on principles of inclusion and social justice (moral purpose and common good).  
• Provide opportunities to develop shared / common values around which there are agreed behaviours and practices. | The foyer was an important piece of practice architecture for social inclusion in the school. It served as the main entrance and was open to the public with words of welcome on the door in the three languages taught. The students and parents were permitted to walk freely through the space, from street to classroom:  

*We’ve actually really thought about the entrance and changed it from being just a matter of an information noticeboard to a welcoming atmosphere.... and to make the foyer an ‘inclusive, welcoming space, representative of the positive difference we were making in the school community’ (Principal interview, 2013).*
• Factions, fragmentation and a lack of solidarity or agreement about school values, purpose or practice architectures are unlikely to lead to effective or sustainable educational change (Kemmis et al., 2014).
• Build a climate of conviviality (Noble, 2013; Walton et al., 2013; UNESCO, 2006)

Teaching

• Recognising that culture is dynamic and socially constructed (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Kramsch, 1998; Liddicoat, 2005; 2009)
• Teachers are motivated by moral purpose when there is a rationale for doing so. Positive experiences are motivators for change (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006).
• Interculturality involves a heightened sense of otherness that includes reflection of personal perspectives, perception and behaviour that leads to increased self-knowledge and self-understanding (Barrett, 2008).
• Unsophisticated and haphazard use of concepts such as diversity (Dervin, 2006) and culture (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Dervin, 2016) can at the very least be unhelpful or at worst reinforce and promote stereotypes and racialized thinking.
• Identity is a co-construction and exists because there is another identity that can be

• Treat the Australian and Victorian curricula as the anchor. The general capabilities, including intercultural capability provide opportunities and motive for interculturality. A curriculum is only a guide that needs to be treated with care. Be mindful that what is taught can be assessed.
• Treat culture as a process and identities as co-constructions. Include child-centred constructivist and inquiry-based learning pedagogies, particularly for refugee and migrant background students (Black, 2006)
• Look at exceptions, instabilities, and processes rather than structures and representations for culture. Intercultural encounters are more rewarding when freed from concentrating on the habits and practices of people from different national or ethnic backgrounds (Dervin, 2016, p 106).

Virginia’s desire to build emotional attachment, relationships and appreciation for the positive attributes of the school and its cultural diversity were found in these cultural discursive arrangements. They provide a sense of how Virginia wanted students, teachers and parents to think and feel about the school. These arrangements were reinforced through assemblies, community forums and the school’s website and newsletters.

Brendan was in his first year of teaching when he arrived at Ackenham and had little experience in culturally or ethnically diverse contexts. In one staff meeting he reported being troubled by not being able to answer a question from a student ‘What is the difference between a Catholic and a Christian? Later, along with other teachers he expressed frustration about a perceived level of influence the parents’ Muslim beliefs over the school’s curriculum. Brendan however was interested in improving his practice and was open-minded and reflective. Following his participation in a series professional learning workshops and focus groups about intercultural capability he showed considerable growth in his confidence and capability. He had established convivial relationships with students and had developed an understanding about their backgrounds and interests as well as his own ‘cultural identity’:
compared or opposed to it (Dervin, 2016, p 106).

- Avoid focusing on difference and assumptions about culture that lead to moralistic judgements and reduce the ‘foreign other’ to a cultural deficit (Dervin, 2016 p 106) or an exotic depiction.

Using what I now know about students culturally and being able to share my cultural beliefs I can have an open dialogue with them. This has been a really big plus for my teaching.

After two years he presented the school’s progress report for the Doing Diversity project was the Coordinator for Intercultural Understanding. This example demonstrates the need and benefit for teachers developing relationships and solidarity with students within the social-political arrangements.

The student excursion to Frazer Hills’s Catholic Primary School was designed as a practical exercise in intergroup engagement and involved interviews with the students with a particular focus on ‘cultural and religious’ celebrations which had been problematic at Ackenham:

The students told us what celebrations and values were important to a Catholic school. They talked about the bush dance, the values totems and the Bollywood Bingo night and other events celebrating the different cultures and religions in their school. Our students then questioned themselves. Do we have celebrations at our school? That was an interesting turning point for our
open-minded disposition (UNESCO, 2013). Students because they realised that intercultural understanding means we celebrate everybody not just our own culture. That was a really nice discussion to be involved in (Molly, School Showcase, November 2014).

This reflection supports research that personal experiences with cultural and ethnic diversity outside the school and formal curriculum can lead to the development of intercultural insights and capability. In this instance both teachers and students reported the experience positively and in ways that demonstrated an openness to new ideas and potential new social-political arrangements in bringing people together.

**Professional development**

- Ongoing and targeted professional learning for developing intercultural capabilities makes a difference (Halse et al., 2015).
- ‘Teachers need to feel confident before having complex discussions about race and diversity’ and skills to effectively facilitate positive student interactions (Walton et al., 2013 pp 13-14)
- It is when the staff see themselves as intercultural learners and work cooperatively with each other and their students to test their assumptions about culture that they move beyond just knowing about the differences (Allard & Santoro, 2008).
- Provide targeted professional learning that brings teacher and principal beliefs into view (Halse et al., 2015; Walton et al., 2014). Beliefs matter and attitudes can change e.g. Understandings of culture, cultural identity and race and associated concepts and behaviours such as discrimination and racism.
- Provide time and opportunities for teachers and principals to be critically reflexive (DET, 2012) and to develop teachers understanding their own history, culture, power and privilege that bring intercultural insights into practice and can

At a Professional Learning Team meeting a teacher shared a racist incident from his class. The principal drew attention to the intersectional nature of racism and the need to take account the context in which it was situated. Managing such behaviour, she argued was in part done through in curriculum and pedagogy and an explicit focus on the general capabilities, particularly intercultural capability, but also as part of everyday practice:

This is a unique environment and we have to pay attention to things like gender, class and poverty as well as the
• Prioritise professional development for intercultural knowledge, skills and values aimed at combating the intersectional forms of inequality, racism, sexism, prejudice and discrimination (Walton et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2012).

• Interrogating definitions and understandings of culture, including those in the formal curriculum should routinely involve teachers in professional learning and reflection of their intercultural practices.

• Help make intercultural insights visible in their practice.

The teachers discussed what intercultural capability looked like and how this related to school values like acceptance, tolerance, respect, and empathy. As this was not inconsistent with what teachers believed they were already doing there was support for a sharper focus on values. Different ways to enhance intercultural capability in the school’s curriculum, were discussed including the language and literacy or as part of Civics and Citizenship Education as one way to address extreme behaviour.

In analysing student reading scores from the NAPLAN results teachers identified that the students had difficulty with text analysis, particularly in relation to interpreting character and emotions. It was also noted that students were not reading widely or regularly enough. As most of the students at Ackenham were from non-English speaking (EAL) backgrounds, English reading and writing levels were comparatively low and literacy:

We have been able to focus on improving our focus on reading. But our students find
new and effective approaches for improvement (Kemmis et al., 2014).

- Undertake local research data collection and use it in professional dialogue and planning
- Work collaboratively as partners in school and community networks to share and critique evidence.

It difficult to relate to the texts, for example when books refer to the back yard or a back fence. These kids don’t have a backyard in the flats. They will nod and listen but we know that it is hard for them to relate to their experience. They are great learners and are like sponges but many of the texts don’t suit them.’ (Principal interview, April 2014).

As a result the teachers began using a wider range of reading matter, and making a greater effort to find resources more relevant to student needs, that is, characters with similar backgrounds (ethnic, cultural, religious) and story lines (refugee, migrant, new arrival) that could be used to improve their text analysis skills. Priority was given to develop students’ understanding of different perspectives and to explore and reflect on character’s emotional states, such as empathy, anger and compassion (Principal interview, April 2014).
The next section elaborates further on what was learned from using the Theory of Practice Architectures in a school like Ackenham.

What can be learned from how one school went about developing interculturality?

While the presence intercultural capability in the Victorian Curriculum in subsequent Victorian school planning documents such as the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes [FISO] (DET, 2016d) provides authority for schools to include intercultural education in their teaching and learning programs there were a number of factors that influenced how this would be enacted in practice. As Halse et al. (2015) argue, the notion of the ‘crowded curriculum’, pre-existing attitudes and beliefs of principals and lack of professional learning for intercultural capability all can hamper the progress of interculturality. All these factors were to a lesser or greater degree evident during the tenures of the three principals and demonstrated that relying on AusVELS and the Victorian Curriculum alone was insufficient for achieving this aspiration.

The whole school project and developing interculturality

Both Virginia and Amanda’s projects sought to transform a school that they and education authorities classified as disadvantaged and weighed down by the legacies of the past and present. These included the school building and its location, staffing instability, poor student academic outcomes, the complexities of settlement of refugee and migrant students and a deficit narrative surrounding Australians from black African and Muslim backgrounds.

Developing interculturality in schooling broadly involves fostering positive, cooperative, respectful environment in which people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds can get along (UNESCO 2006). It is not just having an objective knowledge about other cultures or an acceptance of cultural diversity but the capacity to behave in culturally respectful ways including the capacity for critical self-awareness of one’s own ethnic or cultural heritage (Cribb & Gerwirtz, 2008; Dervin, 2016) and to ‘act as mediators among people of different cultures’ (Barrett, 2008, p 1). Such attributes are highly relevant in schools in multicultural Australia.
In Victoria, interculturality is encapsulated in intercultural understanding and intercultural capability and framed within two areas of study, cultural practices and cultural diversity (VCAA, 2015b). In practical terms, the fact that these dimensions of learning and teaching are present in the Australian and Victorian curricula, reflects the importance that interculturality has in both schooling and broader interest in preparing young Australians for the challenges and opportunities of globalisation (MCEETYA, 2008; DEECD, 2011a; DET, 2015e).

Securing transformation in a school, such as for interculturality, can be hard to achieve if there is not a clear warrant, or if the intended outcome is not a priority or consistently understood, supported and applied. Interculturality is an aspirational state in which intercultural approaches are reflected in the development of relationships and processes that bring people together and to do so in such ways that focus on self-reflection and analysis (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006). It is when the staff see themselves as intercultural learners and work cooperatively with their students to test their assumptions about ‘cultural and classed identities’ that they move beyond just knowing about the differences (Allard & Santoro, 2008, p 211) and being able to bring these insights into practice (Dervin, 2016). These insights are more coherent and have more currency within practice architectures when principals, teachers, students see themselves as intercultural learners and are supported to reflect on their own histories and identities as well as those who have different experiences, histories and identities. Such a shift was evident in Virginia’s initial Community Forum, Brendan’s development, in the professional discussions about the school’s curriculum led by Amanda and in the excursion to Frazier Hills Catholic and their presentation at the Doing Diversity School Showcase.

Overall the study revealed that the development of interculturality, like the concept of culture, is a dynamic process that is not always clear and sometimes fragmented and dependent on context and time. There was a warrant for interculturality, as demonstrated by the presence of intercultural understanding in Australian education goals and the Doing Diversity Action Plan developed during Virginia’s tenure. However, this was one of many priorities in the school and it was not surprising to find implementation and enactment of relevant practices and competencies for interculturality was patchy and unstable. Indeed, each principal managed the concept of culture differently and over different time spans. Family engagement was mostly with mothers as fathers were largely absent from the school.
assemblies or other events, due in part to work commitments or due to the gendered idea that ‘school was the woman’s role’ (Principal interview, April 2014). Virginia had success in encouraging teachers to meet and greet parents in the before school and after school drop off and the morning teas held after school assemblies. Kandra, the Somali Multicultural Aide, who acted as a liaison between school and families played an important role in building bridges and maintaining lines of communication. There were ongoing efforts by the principals and teachers to overcome any “cultural” misunderstandings and to achieve a level of “cultural competency”.

A whole-school plan for intercultural understanding was developed during Virginia’s tenure and despite regular mentor visits and participation in relevant professional learning activities the plan was overtaken by more pressing priorities. Hilda deferred responsibility for the school plan to Brendan, who conceded she was not able to do much during her short tenure. Amanda’s warrant for school redesign, including curriculum mapping for intercultural capability, with an aspiration for this capability to appear in everyday practice. There is insufficient evidence from this study to say how or if this occurred. Amanda’s overall focus on moral purpose encouraged teachers to look beyond the children’s cultural and ethnic backgrounds as a source of disadvantage. This suggests a deeper differentiation of each student’s individuality and potentially negating the imprecision that a variable such as culture has in the ‘act of education’ (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006, p 476).

One of the initial challenges at Ackenham was how to navigate the influence of religion, primarily the recognition of Islam, given that many families were Muslim, in the context of a government secular school. While the study of beliefs and world faiths could be included in the school’s curriculum offering (DET, 2016c), teachers felt they were unable to do this for fear of upsetting the some parents, and therefore excluded the study of different festivals and customs from their lessons. Brendan’s story reflects an individual’s growth in confidence gained through professional learning, participation in the Doing Diversity project, and his increasing knowledge of his students and their backgrounds through his role as a classroom teacher, as well as his interest in engaging with students in extra curricula activities such as cricket, football and community arts projects. Amanda introduced the singing of the national anthem and the celebration of different faith-based special events such as Christmas, the Diwali festival and Ramadan. This was done through careful communication and negotiation
as part of Amanda’s project of renewal. Furthermore, Amanda’s preference to position culture, patriarchy, faith and language in intersectional terms and to formally point to areas of the school’s curriculum that could be used to address issues such as bullying and racism, and promote agency and a new sense of school identity, presents as an example of the type change signalled by Eagleton (2016), that has a more concentrated focus on diversity and inclusion, rather than culture.

Another area requiring clarification, was the way that Hilda and Amanda situated intercultural capability within the language of multiculturalism. The use of the term ‘multicultural’, however, in Amanda’s rebranding of Ackenham, was more a promotional device to reflect the borderer multicultural context and the language of public policy in Victoria. It was also designed to shift public perceptions away the notion of a mono-cultural school embedded in deficit labels such as ‘Somali Community School’. Amanda had demonstrated a commitment to presenting the school’s curriculum through an intercultural lens and developed processes and practices for achieving this. In this instance, multicultural and intercultural were not binary concepts. From Hilda’s “multicultural” perspective, however, culture reflected an identity and membership, such as in her use of the terms ‘Aussie type kids’ or ‘fitting in’ with the Australian culture, that can promote a type of one-way assimilation and inter-group contact that highlights differences over engagement. She referred to some parents as ‘extremists’ who were frightened of change. Intercultural was conflated to multicultural and there was less evidence of intercultural capability in the school’s curriculum or as a professional learning aspiration during this period. The risks with this type of multiculturalism in Australia have been presented elsewhere in this document, however in essence this type of approach is less likely to produce positive intergroup engagement or the critical multicultural lens necessary to develop intercultural understanding (Walton et al., 2013).

Both Amanda and Virginia explicitly adopted values-based approaches to hold their practices together and initiate the members of the school site into ways of seeing and doing. Values have been demonstrated to be central to the effectiveness of whole school approaches and creating safe learning environments (Lovat et al., 2009). Virginia partially succeeded in arriving at agreed school values and a vision around which to build solidarity for her project through community forums. Values were drawn from different teaching and learning programs and repurposed but not necessarily understood and enacted in the same way.
Virginia emphasised empathy and compassion, but it should be noted that like the teachers, she was also new to the community and new to school leadership. She was orienting herself to the nuances of the school, reviewing existing practice arrangements at the same time as she was trying to form and develop the teachers’ professional dispositions. This is the idea of being initiated or ‘stirred into practice’ (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 57) but it was no means a gentle stirring for her or the teachers. At times the practices of teaching were at odds with the practices of leading which according to teachers had resulted in contradictions in the espoused values such as respect and effected their sense of professionalism. The teachers for example reported their frustration about excluding potentially sensitive lessons about beliefs and different cultures.

Amanda’s project was far more disruptive, with a clear intention of changing past practices and introducing new ones, including new values. While she too was new to the community most of the teachers had been in the school now for more two years or had additional teaching experience elsewhere. While again this was not a gentle stirring, Amanda made significant investment in the physical renewal of the school while garnering staff and broader school community support to achieve this. The new values such as Learn, Voice and Future that acted as signposts for the new school vision of ‘A contemporary multicultural school on a mission to 2020’. From my observations, interviews and analysis, the practice architectures put in place by Amanda was more than rhetoric. She focused on the teacher stability and quality while at the same time setting in motion planned interventions to improve teacher professional knowledge and practice. ‘The principal has developed a very clear school improvement plan’ (DET, 2016a) which included a continuing focus on intercultural understanding. While this study was unable to determine the effectiveness or impact of the plan over time, many of the practices for developing an architecture for interculturality in this site were being established.

**Conclusion  How might interculturality be developed in an Australian primary school?**

While interculturality is a slippery concept and hard to define, the Australian Curriculum provides clarity and direction for enactment of intercultural education through two capabilities that are helpful for progressing interculturality—Intercultural understanding and
intercultural capability. Their presence in the Victorian adoptions of the Australian Curriculum validates the idea that intercultural education is a relevant feature of a contemporary curriculum, while at the same time brings multicultural education into question and the way that multiculturalism is understood. In this study the political, economic and social dimensions of multiculturalism are accepted as defining characteristics of Australia and the context in which interculturality is developed in Australian schools. In doing so I acknowledge, Coulby’s (2006; 2011) caution that moving intercultural education to a central position in policy and curriculum by itself is insufficient to deliver the intended aspirations of interculturality. Furthermore, unsophisticated and haphazard use of concepts such as diversity (Dervin, 2006) and culture (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Dervin, 2016) can at the very least be unhelpful, or at worst reinforce and promote stereotypes and racialised thinking. Understandings of culture, cultural identity and race and associated concepts and behaviours such as discrimination and racism, including those in the Victorian and Australian Curricula, should routinely involve targeted professional learning that contest concepts and bring teacher and principal beliefs into view (Halse et al. 2015; Walton et al. 2014) particularly when working with refugee and migrant students (Allard & Santoro, 2008; Pugh, Every & Hattam, 2012; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

This case study shows that, even with an ambition for intercultural capability and, with the best of intentions for the students’ wellbeing and academic success and curriculum guidance, the development of interculturality can be challenging. A history of education neoliberalism, which for a school the size and profile of Ackenham meant it was unable to “compete” on an equal footing with nearby schools. The site, the building and surrounding environment was an ongoing source of safety, security and wellbeing concerns. Many of the students and their families were from refugee backgrounds and carried the legacy of significant disruption and trauma into the school. Teachers struggled to improve student literacy and numeracy outcomes to comparable national standards and were managing some complex social and emotional needs. Ongoing deficit discourses in the media about black African youth and Muslims added further to weight to the work of the principals in shifting negative public perceptions and arresting declining enrolments.

In contrast to these challenges, education was of high value in this school community. This was consistently demonstrated through Virginia and Amanda’s projects and there was
evidence of parent interest and engagement in their children’s education, albeit in sometimes contrasting ways. Prevailing themes of “moral purpose” and social justice were woven into teaching and learning programs and extra curricula activities. Some students encountered in the study were optimistic about their education and as noted by Fox (2017) did not regard themselves as underprivileged relative to the previous experiences of poverty or as refugees. Many were multilingual and interculturality able as they straddled cultural and ethnic divisions. In a school community where the principals and teachers were a cultural and ethnic minority, intercultural encounters were commonplace and encouraged a high level of intersubjectivity and self-reflection. Teacher beliefs of intercultural understanding and capability flourished through positive shared experiences, enquiry-based and experiential learning and in open-minded reflective discussions. Taking advantage of contextual learning and intercultural moments are critical and are enhanced through opportunities for personal and professional reflection (Halse et al., 2015). Such an approach helps build the capacity for the teachers and principals to be critically reflexive and to make intercultural insights visible in their practices.

Applying the ideas of Kemmis and his colleagues, that is, by studying the site, practice architectures and the relationships between leading, student and teacher teaching, and research was insightful in understanding what was going on at Ackenham. In a site-based approach Ackenham is no less or more unique than any other school in Australia and therefore what has been learned through this study can be considered elsewhere. The caveat is that education happens in different sites where different processes and practices exist. Understanding what is happening in any one school requires an understanding of practices in that site and what people say, do and how they and these practices relate to each other.

Developing a local warrant for interculturality helps give strength to the implementation. Part of the warrant should include an examination of the school practices that provides an insight into what intercultural education looks like, what is missing and what needs to be done.

One must however be cautious about promising too much. Culture is slippery concept and is often conflated with other concepts such as religion, nationalism and race where it is used to compare and objectify (Dervin, 2016; Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006). Blurring less progressive versions of multicultural education in the name of intercultural education also can be
problematic and interculturality can be less visible or at worst produce practices that reinforce stereotypes and othering.

Furthermore, interculturality is a big ambition and intercultural education cannot be left to individuals, small interest group or consigned to one part of a curriculum or discrete lessons, for example, language teachers or multicultural aides. Intercultural education is hard to implement consistently and holistically (Coulby, 2006) and can be limited by the scale and type of professional learning (Rey-von Allmen, 2011; Halse et al., 2015). Factions, fragmentation and a lack of solidarity or agreement about school values, purpose or practice architectures are unlikely to lead to effective or sustainable educational change (Kemmis et al., 2014).

While the development of interculturality is influenced by the site and the commitment, professionalism and ability of leaders and teachers, ill-conceived and poor policy can make this aspiration even harder. Ackenham Primary School provides an example of structural inequality and the undesired consequences of poor education policy and its implementation. *Victoria as a Learning Community* and *The Compact* were unsuited and unhelpful in the turning this “underperforming school” around. The logic of marketisation and education as a commodity, whose success is measured by narrow performance indicators takes away incentives for interculturality, contributes to stigmatisation and marginalisation of already vulnerable students and a further widening cultural and ethnic divisions in schooling.
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Appendices

1. Letter of approval from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (ref 2013_002001)

2. An adaption of Dervin’s 10 commandments for interculturality in education with critical questions and sample attributes.
Appendix 1: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Approval to conduct research in schools

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Strategy and Review Group

2 Treasury Place
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002
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2013_002001

Professor Christine Halse
Centre for Research in Educational Futures and Innovation
Deakin University
221 Bunwood Highway
BURWOOD 3125

Dear Professor Halse

Thank you for your application of 9 May 2013 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools and/or early childhood settings titled Doing Diversity: exploring students’ formation of intercultural understanding.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals and/or centre directors. This is to be supported by the DEECD approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.

3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for its consideration before you proceed.

4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.

5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education and Early Childhood development in any publications arising from the research.

6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study’s indicative completion date.

7. If DEECD has commissioned you to undertake this research, the responsible Branch/Division will need to approve any material you provide for publication on the Department’s Research Register.
I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Youia Michaels, Project Support Officer, Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 2707 or by email at michaels.youia.y@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Signature Redacted by Library

Joyce Cleary
Director
Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch
23/05/2013

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**Appendix 2: An adaption of Dervin’s 10 commandments for interculturality in education with critical questions and sample attributes.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commandments for Interculturality in Education</th>
<th>Key ideas (summary)</th>
<th>Critical questions and attributes for interculturality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Put an end to differentiated biases.</td>
<td>Avoid focusing on difference and assumptions about culture that lead to moralistic judgements and reduce the “foreign other” as a cultural deficit.</td>
<td>What do I have in common and can learn from other people? Being openminded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move away from individual biases</td>
<td>Identity is a co-construction and exists because there is another identity that can be compared or opposed to it.</td>
<td>How do I include all those involved in intercultural encounters? Being inclusive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure in interculturality is normal and we can learn from it.</td>
<td>Not everything can be explained as far as the intercultural in education is concerned.</td>
<td>What can we learn from interculturality? Where can it be found and where is it missing? Being a learner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at exceptions, instabilities, and processes rather than mere structures.</td>
<td>Intercultural encounters are more rewarding when freed from concentrating on the habits and practices of people from different national or ethnic backgrounds.</td>
<td>How can I be open to exceptions, instabilities and processes involved in the interaction? Being flexible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take account of the importance of intersectionality.</td>
<td>Intercultural encounters are the interaction of multiple identities such as gender, age, profession, class</td>
<td>What identities are at work here and how do I account for them? Being considered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place justice at the centre of interculturality in education</td>
<td>A commitment to developing the skills and understanding to combat inequality, racism, sexism and other forms of prejudice, oppression and discrimination.</td>
<td>How can reflexivity add to my understanding, knowledge and interpreting of the encounter? Being critically reflective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be reflexive</td>
<td>When dealing with interculturality in education, let our own feelings, experiences, and history enter our work.</td>
<td>In what ways can I ensure that power differentials do not overwhelm the encounter? Being respectful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay attention to power differentials</td>
<td>The concept of power should be central to interculturality in education. Every intercultural encounter depends on power relations related to language use, skin colour, and nationality as well as gender, social status, and so on. Typical interactions involve the idea of hospitality that contains an inherent power imbalance between host and guest.</td>
<td>Does the choice of language, words and texts I use warrant explanation and if so how? Being multilingual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language use is central to interculturality in education</td>
<td>Working on and/or with interculturality requires the use of a language or different languages as well as non-verbal forms of communication (mimics, silence, gesture, etc.). Disregarding the importance these is problematic</td>
<td>What might be hidden or missing from my vision of interculturality and how I go about the process of discovery? Being curious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delve into the hidden, go under the surface of discourse and appearance.</td>
<td>What we see as intercultural, or are presented with as being intercultural, often hides elements that we need to deconstruct, criticize and, if possible, reconstruct to create meaningful interaction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dervin (2016, pp 103-106)*
Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia

This is a pseudonym

This is a pseudonym