Deakin Research Online

This is the published version:

Mansouri, Fethi and Trembath, Anna 2005, Multicultural education and racism: the case of Arab-Australian students in contemporary Australia, *International education journal*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 516-529.

Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30003272

Multicultural education and racism: The case of Arab-Australian students in contemporary Australia

Fethi Mansouri
Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights, Deakin University *fethi.mansouri@deakin.edu.au*
Anna Trembath
Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights, Deakin University *anna.trembath@rmit.edu.au*

This paper discusses the social and cultural dimensions of the educational experiences of Arab-Australian students. It seeks to explore the cultural attitudes and the social experiences of Arab-Australian secondary school students from two schools situated in Melbourne's northern region. The paper seeks to examine how Arab-Australian students and their families understand and construct their own social and educational experiences in relation to schools' initiatives as well as wider social discourses. The empirical findings presented in this paper suggest that there are critical links between Arab-Australian students' perceptions of belonging, identity and citizenship on the one hand, and their attitudes to schooling and educational experiences on the other. The study's findings show the need for current patterns of multicultural education research and practice to incorporate more systematically socio-political dynamics beyond the confines of school and family factors.

Racism, identity, multicultural education, Arab-Australian students, Australian identity

INTRODUCTION

In July 2004, a public school in the northern suburbs of Melbourne announced its imminent closure. Blackwood College was located within a socio-economically disadvantaged community and had served a culturally and linguistically diverse student population, where over 50 per cent of students were of Arabic-speaking backgrounds (Student Outcomes Division, 2003). Enrolments had been dropping steadily for a number of years, and students' average educational attainments fell significantly below Victorian state averages (Student Outcomes Division, 2003).

There appears to be a variety of complex and interlinked factors contributing to the school's ultimate closure. In addition to insufficiently resourced structural change, one contributing factor appeared to include the public embroiling of Blackwood College in the complex politics of Australian multiculturalism in the post-September 11 environment. In 2002 a prominent tabloid journalist argued that the school had become a 'sour ethnic ghetto' dominated by Arabic-speaking Muslim students and their families (Bolt, 2002) and was home to violent Lebanese 'ethnic gangs' (Bolt, 2004a). After the announcement of the school's closure, the same journalist wrote that Blackwood College had been 'killed by ethnic division' (Bolt, 2004b), contending that multicultural educational policies had resulted in a 'too-heavy concentration of Muslim students, particularly Lebanese' (Bolt, 2004b), 'trapping immigrant students in their own closed culture' and leading to a rejection of Australia (Bolt, 2004a). As a consequence of this media representation, the school acquired a reputation for being educationally ineffective, isolated from mainstream Australian society, and serving only one ethnic group constructed in populist media discourse as criminal, deviant and threatening. At the time of the closure announcement, even the Victorian Opposition Spokesman for Education echoed this negative representation of the school,

arguing that the Government had failed to intervene in a school that was a 'hot-bed of violence and thuggery' (*Herald Sun,* 31 July 2004).

Against this tense socio-political climate, this paper seeks to explore the cultural attitudes, the social insecurities and educational experiences of Arab-Australian secondary school students at Blackwood College and at Clayfield Girls Secondary School.[1] It does so by examining how Arab-Australian students and families at these schools understand and construct their own social and educational experiences. It is argued that at a time when Arab and Muslim communities in Australia are often represented as the 'pre-eminent folk devil' (Poynting et al., 2004), critical links may exist between Arab-Australian students' perceptions of belonging, identity and citizenship on the one hand, and their attitudes to schooling and educational experiences on the other.

ARAB-AUSTRALIANS IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

While Arabic-speaking communities in Australia are marked by diversity of religion, nationality, gender and class, it is most notably language that makes them a distinctly identifiable group. Figure 1 illustrates the growth of Arabic-speaking communities in Australia.
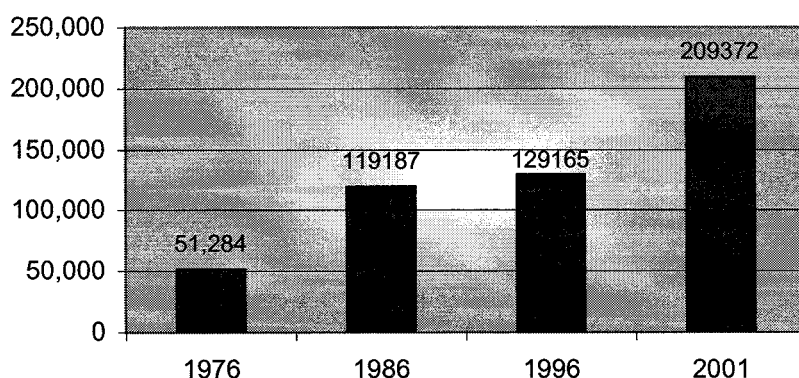

Figure 1. The growth of Arabic-speaking communities in Australia
    Source: ABS, 2001.

Arab immigration constitutes 8 per cent of the total migration to Australia, and the 2001 Census recorded that there were 209,372 people who spoke Arabic at home across Australia (ABS, 2001). This figure makes Arabic the fourth largest language, other than English, spoken at home in Australia. As Figure 1 indicates, between 1976 and 2001 the population of the Arabic-speaking community quadrupled in size. This demographic growth, however, has not translated into improved social and economic indicators. In fact, income levels of Arab-Australians fall well below the national average, with Arab-Australian communities experiencing some of the highest rates of unemployment in Australia (ABS, 2001; VOMA, 2003). More critically, the impact of the current socio-political environment upon Arab-Australian communities necessitates a reassessment of young Arab-Australians' educational experiences. In particular, in the wake of September 11 and the so-called War on Terror, it has been shown that young Arab-Australians experience significant social and cultural marginalisation stimulated by increased racism and the processes of exclusion (HREOC, 2004; Poynting and Ang, 2004; Poynting et al., 2004; White, 2004).

---

[1] Blackwood College and Clayfield Girls Secondary College are not the schools' real names.

STUDY DESIGN

While constituting only part of a broader study of educational strategies to meet the needs of Arab-Australian students, for the purpose of this paper qualitative data gathered through focus group discussions with Arab-Australian students and parents are analysed. Given the thematic approach of this paper, data elicited from teachers and school principals are not included in the analysis as the main focus is on students' social attitudes and cultural perceptions. The analysis presented here is influenced by a qualitative, ethnographic tradition of research, focusing on 'the meaning that individuals and groups attach to their own and others' actions' (Connelly, 1998, p. 126). Therefore, the findings presented here cannot be generalised as representing the social and schooling experiences of all Arab-Australian students and their families. They should only be regarded as indicative of trends and variables that *may* similarly affect Arab-Australians in other schools.

In total, four focus group discussions were held. Three were with students ranging from ages 12 to 18: two at Blackwood College (BC) and one at Clayfield Girls Secondary School (CGSS). Students were randomly selected and approached to participate in the research, with consent from their parents being a condition of participation. One parent discussion group was also held, bringing together parents from both schools. See Tables 1 and 2 for the numbers of participants in the study and their gender composition. In order to safeguard against the possible compliance of individual participants with the majority opinion, the focus group discussions were structured around thematic questions that were used as prompts to elicit differing views from all participants. The focus groups were conducted by the researcher and facilitated by an Arabic-speaking community worker known to the students and their parents at the school. Her language skills and the level of trust she engendered greatly aided the ensuing discussions, particularly with parents who spoke little English.

Table 1. Numbers of Arab-Australian student and parent participants

Participants	Blackwood College	Clayfield Girls Secondary	TOTALS
Students	25	11	36
Parents	3	9	12
TOTALS	28	20	48

Table 2. Gender of students

Gender	Number of Students
Female	22
Male	14
TOTAL	36

Australia is the country of birth for 72 per cent of the participating Arab-Australian students and of the remaining 28 per cent, most were long-settled in the country (see Table 3). Of the second-generation Arab-Australian students, 54 per cent identified their backgrounds as Lebanese. An overwhelming majority (89 per cent) of students nominated their religion as Islam (see Table 4).

Table 3. Country of birth of students

Country of Birth	Number of Students
Australia	26
Iraq	3
Lebanon	2
Kuwait	1
Greece	1
Unknown	3
TOTAL	36

Nine of the 12 participating parents were women. All participating parents were born overseas, with seven born in Lebanon, and others born variously in Palestine, Algeria, Egypt and Iraq. Only

one of the parents was Christian, with the remainder being Muslim. Educational backgrounds varied considerably, as shown in Table 5.

Table 4. Religion of students

Religion	Number of Students
Islam	32
Christianity	3
Unknown	1
TOTAL	36

Table 5. Arab-Australian parents' educational levels

Educational Level	Number of Parents
Negligible formal education	1
Primary school	5
Secondary school	4
Tertiary education	2
TOTAL	12

The Participating Schools

The two schools participating in the research project are public schools located in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, one co-educational (Blackwood College, referred to as BC) and the other a single-sex girls' school (Clayfield Girls' Secondary School, referred to as CGSS). The schools were, in effect, self-selecting, approaching the researchers to help them better address the educational challenges facing their Arab-Australian students.

Both schools have some of the highest proportions of cultural and linguistic diversity and socio-economic disadvantage in Victoria. In 2003, 80 per cent of BC's students were from a non-English speaking background (NESB), and CGSS had 69 per cent of NESB students. The largest language group represented in the student population was Arabic: 59 per cent at BC and 26 per cent at CGSS (Student Outcomes Division, 2004). Between 70 and 75 per cent of schools' students received some form of government financial assistance for their educational needs (Student Outcomes Division, 2003).

Measured by final year outcomes, the schools' average educational achievements fall below Victorian state averages. In 2003 the median study score across Victoria for final year subjects was 30 out of a possible 50. BC students on average received 19, and CGSS students 26 (*The Age,* 18 December 2003). Retention rates are also considerably below average (Student Outcomes Division, 2003). However, the schools achieved considerable levels of success in ensuring many students continued on to tertiary education and training. Seventy-three per cent of BC students and 77 per cent of CGSS students who had graduated in 2003 were in enrolled tertiary education or training in April 2004 (LLEN, 2004; *The Age,* 26 July 2004).

STUDY FINDINGS

Arab-Australian Students' Contemporary Social Experiences

Throughout the focus group discussions, students argued that political events, most notably September 11, had changed the way Arab-Australians are perceived and treated by the community. The students discussed the conflation of Arab and Muslim communities into a singular homogeneous category, constructed as synonymous with threat and terrorism, and often identified through visual markers of difference: "Like all Arabs are terrorists. Especially girls with scarves". Many of the female students were particularly concerned about negative attitudes towards girls and women who could be immediately identified with Islam:

> *Sometimes because we've got the scarf on it directs straight to us, 'oh they're Muslim'. Like if you look at her (indicates a peer not wearing a scarf), you're gonna think straight away, 'oh she's not Muslim, not her'. They're not gonna know unless she actually said it ...*

Female students recounted numerous instances of verbal abuse, while male students more commonly identified instances of structural exclusion from accessing mainstream social resources. Here a group of boys discuss racialised barriers to employment:

> *It's hard to get a job these days 'cause you're Lebbo (Lebanese). I swear to God.*
>
> *Some people have to change their name.*
>
> *My brother can't even get a job 'cause his name's Osama.*
>
> *My second name is Mohammed, and when they read that, they go, you're bad.*

The criminalisation of Arab and Muslim identity in Australia was also a common theme in students' discussions. Some students were highly attuned to the racialisation of crime in the Australian media (Collins et al., 2000; Poynting et al., 2004). In the following discussion, a group of boys discern a stark contrast between media treatment of crimes committed by Arab-Australians as opposed to Anglo-Australians. They make reference to recent coverage of a 'gang rape' case in Sydney involving young men of Lebanese, Muslim background:

> *Especially the media, 'cause the media, they show us as bad people through the news'.*
>
> *And they always refer, 'they are Lebbo'.*
>
> *Yeah, 'they are Lebbo' and they mention our religion.*
>
> *'Oh, they're Muslims.' See, they don't go, 'oh, a Christian man raped this girl', it's all 'a Muslim man raped this girl'.*
>
> *Yeah, and every time a Lebanese or someone Muslim does something they get jailed, and if some Aussie would go kidnap a baby, they'd get ...*
>
> *It would just say 'A man kidnapped a baby'. If it was a Muslim, 'an Arab kidnapped this kid', they wouldn't say a man.*

Boys in particular expressed high levels of distrust of police, often as a direct result of experience, having found themselves under close police surveillance as potential criminals.

Overall, students moved fluidly from discussing abstract processes of racialisation to relating personal narratives of racism. This pattern of conversation indicates a complexity in how the students made sense of their social experiences. They appeared able to see and make connections between their personal experiences of racism on the one hand, and structural exclusions and institutional exercises of power on the other. They seemed aware and disturbed by the tendency to use political events to construct stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims in Australia as a homogeneous, racialised, threatening 'Other', an image that the media perpetuated powerfully in its coverage of national and global political crises (Poynting et al., 2004).

While the Arab-Australian students involved in the study were predominantly of Lebanese descent, students of Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi and other national backgrounds also participated. Yet despite the diversity of national backgrounds, the students did not commonly identify themselves collectively as being 'of Arabic-speaking background', 'Arab-Australians' or 'Arabs'. Even the term 'Lebanese-Australian' was used only in rare instances. The participating students almost exclusively used the term 'Lebbo' to describe themselves, and being Muslim was seen as a source of unity and a marker of cultural identity and belonging to a social group. In fact, in the context of discussing their experiences of racism, the students tended to downplay their 'Australianness' and

question whether they are ever likely to be accepted as Australians. One typical response to the question of whether they see themselves as 'Australian' was one boy's decisive reply, "No, I think about myself being Lebbo". The following excerpt from an exchange between two boys highlights the uncertainty many students expressed about claiming a hybrid Lebanese-Australian identity:

Student A: *I don't like being, you know, Lebbo and English, 'cause like, I'm both, right, and I still get teased, see no one teases me, 'oh you're Aussie, you're half this that', they always come to me 'oh you're Lebbo you're Lebbo', like that, especially Aussies, like they don't know that I'm half, so they always go 'you're Lebbo'.*

Student B: *But you're not necessarily half Aussie.*

Student A: *I was born here.*

Student B: *Alright, alright, I know what you mean.*

This brief exchange highlights the intricate and complex process of negotiating inter-cultural identities. It is not clear whether Student A defines his hybrid Lebanese-Australian identity by ethnicity, or national citizenship status. He appears to place an emphasis on the latter by arguing his 'half Lebbo, half Aussie' identity arises from him being born in Australia. Student B appears to challenge Student A's ambivalent sense of hybrid identity by suggesting that Australian citizenship and birthplace may not equate with being 'Aussie'. As Student A suggests, racial identifiers are often used to differentiate and exclude ethnic minority groups from a dominant, mono-culturally defined Australian identity.

Mirroring this sense of ambivalence about 'being Australian', students also often appeared uncertain about whether they regarded Australia – even partly – as home. Some students argued that Lebanon was their sole, true home – despite the fact that they may never have lived in Lebanon. When asked why this was the case, they related their apparent rejection of the Australian national space to the exclusion and racism they experienced within it:

> *Nah, I'd rather go live back in Lebanon, yeah I'd rather live there. I used to live there, and I've been in Australia for like ... 18 years. Everyone reckons Australia is like, um, it's a free country and everything, but the truth is, no one's been all around this world, and like, I reckon Lebanon's the best, like, it's full-on free, there's no one there to tell you what to do, there's no cops comin' up to you, and like, there's not bad things that happen there.*
>
> *No racism.*

In contrast with this sense of antipathy towards Australia, many of the students held strong connections to their local community. The students regarded the culturally diverse nature of their local area positively because it provided them with a sense of belonging, security and cultural identity. While a sense of differentiation is achieved for the students through their 'Lebbo' identity, they also appeared able to interact easily and harmoniously with young people from other cultural backgrounds in their local area. Students in different focus groups recounted their multicultural friendships with pride, with frequent comments such as "I got Chinese friends, Vietnamese friends ... ". In this sense, the students indicated that they possessed strong 'socio-cultural resources' to show a new way forward for inclusive social relations (Butcher and Thomas, 2001, p.57). Students' interactions with other young people appear to support the idea that:

> while some young people are very consciously claiming their ethnic identity, they also link a more 'tolerant' and 'open-minded' attitude with their association with diverse friendship networks ... [and] while many young people have a sense of exclusion and rejection from mainstream society, for the most part they are not cynical about a

commitment to values of tolerance, equality and diversity (Butcher and Thomas, 2001, p. 57).

While developing inter-cultural friendships was viewed positively, students also appeared to generate belonging and comfort from living within local communities with high proportions of Arab-Australians: "It's nicer to live in a suburb where you got the same people as you, it's better, like, I used to live in Broadmeadows when I first came here, it's all Turks and Lebbos so that's good ... " Some students suggested that living within Arab-Australian communities afforded them protection from racism and a social space in which to belong, helping to negate the feeling of cultural exclusion from mainstream Australia:

> *But these days, to be honest with you, everyone's like, like all the Lebbos are starting to come together, and like, all the stuff like that 'cause of all what's happening these days, all these racist people happening, so everyone's like sticking to their own culture.*

> *Years ago it wasn't like this, there wasn't much Arabs, much Arab communities so it was hard and racism and all that, but now it's good 'cause like when you're down and that, there are more Arab communities and everyone gets along and everyone's family.*

What it means to be Australian, and to belong in Australia as part of a national community, is "currently the subject of much public contest, [as] the politics of race, ethnicity and nationalism are tightly bound together" (McLeod and Yates, 2003, p. 30). While contemporary Australia as a national space and "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) did not appear to engender a sense of belonging for many of the students, the identification with place and community did seem to shift between different scales of reference. Local geographies, in particular, afforded students a connection to place and community. Friendship networks appeared to be sufficiently open and accepting to allow the students to develop meaningful relationships with a diverse range of young people. Yet students also acknowledged the value of living in communities with a high proportion of people from similar cultural backgrounds, particularly in terms of solidarity against perceived racist discourses and practices.

Pressures of racism and exclusion were exacerbated for these students following the events of September 11 and the ensuing backlash against Arab and Muslim communities in Australia (HREOC, 2004). The students' experiences and perceptions of racism and exclusion had had negative effects on their considerations of individual and collective identities. This was illustrated by the way many of them were, at the very least, ambivalent about their sense of belonging to the Australian national community.

Arab-Australian Students' Schooling Experiences

For many students, friendships seemed to be one of the few elements of their schooling experiences about which they felt positive. Generally, racism between students was not considered to be a significant problem. Most participants felt that the issues they had with racism or inter-cultural tension at school were linked more to student-teacher relations. Boys, in particular, expressed unhappiness at school, often in terms of anger and frustration. The following exchange between male students incorporates a wide range of concerns about relations with teachers:

> *I was suspended 17 times because of her (a teacher), and for the stupidest reasons too. And I didn't get to say anything that I wanted to say, they wouldn't let me speak.*

> *They don't give you a fair go, man.*

> *They're racist, they always pick on Lebbos.*

Like especially in this month, Ramadan, they should understand what we're going through, they shouldn't force us to do things that make us scream and all.

I got chucked out of class in the first period, I don't think they understand you. If it keeps going like this, I don't know what I'll do.

See, the teachers at this time of year have got to help you to understand and be good. Say if I'm doing something bad, they should go, 'oh you're fasting', like this, like help us out a little.

As the above discussion suggests, students frequently discussed a lack of meaningful communication between themselves and teachers, often feeling that teachers make little attempt to understand them culturally. More generally, students across the two schools conveyed doubts about teachers' commitment to quality teaching and to meeting the needs of students from different cultural backgrounds. The school environments were also represented as being inert and disengaging, with many students arguing that this held them back academically and negatively affected their levels of ambition and motivation.

Yet, some students also reported positive relationships with certain individual teachers. When asked what makes a good teacher, these students gave various replies, including the following:

They listen to you.

They understand you.

They come from a different religion too, and they understand, like, you know what I mean?

'Cause you know like the Australians, they don't know what we've been through, and what we are going through.

None of the students believed that there was any significant multicultural content within the existing curriculum. Some male students expressed a desire for more multicultural educational content, particularly relating to their own culture, to combat what they saw as an Anglo bias:

Have a subject for it, like in history, all we learn about is the Anzac war and all that stuff. Why don't we learn about our culture as well?

Despite the frequency of negative feelings about the schools' learning environments, the vast majority of students who participated in the research expressed a desire to complete secondary school. The students at BC who wanted to pursue further study or training mainly aspired to join TAFE colleges. Discussions of educational ambition among the girls at CGSS were more mixed, with some students wishing to attend TAFE colleges, and some university.

Students generally felt very positive about their social interactions with other students although the research findings suggest a significant level of disengagement with the schools as learning institutions. They frequently attributed their own disengagement from school and the processes of learning to: (a) perceptions of teacher disinterest in them as individuals, and as young Arab- and Muslim-Australians; (b) perceptions of teacher racism; and (c) low teacher expectations of their schooling achievements.

The study also appears to confirm the critical importance of race, ethnicity and cultural identity in students' attempts to make sense of their social and educational experiences and the worlds in which they live (Mac an Ghaill, 1988, p. 155; Troyna, 1993, pp. 130-131). The discussions with students indicated that schools and teachers need explicitly to address and repudiate racism in order to ensure students' educational engagement. Participating students, suffering from racism in the broader social environment, often appeared to be suspicious and distrusting of the school's role in perpetuating racialised patterns of privilege and disadvantage. Teachers' claims to being

'colour-blind' and treating the students as individuals were not effective in satisfying students that teachers do not hold prejudiced attitudes. Students were well aware of how racism operates in complex ways in the social environment. They were looking to their schools and teachers to actively convince them that complex societal practices and patterns of racism were not simply also permeating their schools. Without schools giving greater acknowledgment to students' social experiences of racism and creating an environment where racism is explicitly resisted, students appear less willing to place trust in the school as a social unit and, consequently, more willing to disengage from it as an educational institution. Without a trust in the school, students are unlikely to engage fully in schools' educational processes and achieve their optimal educational outcomes.

Parents' Perspectives on Social and Educational Experiences

One major concern expressed by parents regarded their own abilities to support their children's education. Parents argued strongly against the stereotypes of Arab-Australian parents lacking interest in, or undervaluing, education. However, many parents acknowledged that they had limited resources in terms of language skills and educational background to actively assist their children in pursuit of successful educational outcomes. They indicated how teachers sometimes humiliated their children if they had not completed their homework, and yet teachers did not understand the family barriers to students undertaking successful study at home. It was argued that schools needed to recognise that in some cases second-generation or long-settled students may have special educational needs, even though – unlike newly-arrived students – they may not exhibit problems with the English language. For example, parents indicated a firm desire for well-resourced homework groups to enable their children to receive the assistance with their study that the parents themselves felt unable to offer.

The second key concern raised by parents was the effect of racism upon their children's educational outcomes. While all the parents were keen not to overstate the prevalence of racism within their children's schools, they felt that it existed as a persistent undercurrent that *"kills the spirit"* of some Arab-Australian young people:

> *There are problems, and one of them is the students feel ashamed and have low esteem and is unable to get his work done like the rest. Also when the teacher, which is very seldom, is biased or something ... the student may feel shy and want to change schools. Why they want to change schools? Racism. Sorry to mention this, it's very important. A lot of people do not mention this, the teachers are being biased because you're wearing a hijab. Not all teachers are like this but there are some who kills the spirit of the student.*

It was felt by many parents that some teachers made distinctions between girls wearing the Muslim *hijab* and those who did not. Two parents related an incident where a teacher reportedly called a girl wearing the *hijab* a 'napkin head'.

Parents were in no doubt that the current manifestation of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment has the effect of isolating their children from Australian society. They felt that their children often have to prove their 'Australianness', causing them suffering:

> *The media is really racist, sometime coming to scary stage. Especially what's happened in America, then Bali. Up to now, we really hope nothing happen to any Australian because we don't want someone to say something to our children, or to destroy our house, or something like that. The children think they are being targeted, because they've become like a soft target, because of the media here.*

> *The media makes them feel they are not Australian. You know, like it's not their country.*

A number of parents believed that issues of exclusion in the broader social environment may impact upon Arab-Australian students' educational experiences. It was argued that to combat the potentially destructive impacts of racism on their children's learning, methods of communication between students and teachers had to change markedly. In one woman's account, more constructive engagement between teachers and Arab-Australian students could hold the key to improving student-teacher relations, student behaviour, and educational outcomes:

> *The teachers, they should make at least one day a week, a few hours, and just sit down with the classroom, be honest, be frank, find out what's bothering the children. And the teachers can tell the children too, what bothers them about their behaviour, about their attitudes, and then vice versa. And then they can start working together ... Like especially when the school is like, what, 50 per cent Arabic? And with everything that's going on around the world, it has a very big effect ... It affects the children because the children are gonna say, "this is Australia, we haven't done anything here. The Muslim community hasn't done anything. So they're calling us terrorists?" And so the children are gonna take this and go all over the place in their mind and say, "well, I'm not gonna listen to any teacher".*

While some parents considered this inclusive, transformative method of student-teacher engagement to be crucial to addressing their children's social experiences of racism and exclusion, other parents favoured more teaching focus on issues of racism and inter-cultural relations.

All parents involved in the research reported high levels of educational ambition for their children. They appreciated that the schools made efforts to recognise the particular needs of their children, for example, being sensitive towards religious observances and developing literacy programs. The Arabic-speaking cultural diversity facilitator placed in each of the participating schools (as part of the larger study upon which this paper is based) was regarded by parents to be highly important, if not crucial, to their improved communication with and participation in the school community. However, parents also acknowledged that low educational outcomes was a significant issue for Arab-Australian students, and that there was an urgent need for dialogue about why this may be and how it could be addressed by schools. The parents had clear concerns and suggestions, particularly focused on the recognition by schools of the specific needs of second-generation students, and the necessity of explicitly addressing issues of racism and exclusion. Parents tended to feel that while instances of overt teacher racism may have been rare, those that did occur had a major effect on their children.

CONCLUSIONS

The fundamental purpose of education is to ensure that all students, no matter what their linguistic, cultural or socio-economic background, benefit from learning in ways that facilitate their full participation in the economy and in the broader community. While schools may reproduce social inequalities, including racism and its effects upon particular minority groups, schools are also in a rare position of being able to challenge social injustices directly. Transformative practices may be undertaken to effect positive change in the school environment, both at social and educational levels.

For this to happen effectively, schools and educators need to be equipped with the necessary resources and experience to challenge social inequalities in the educational environment. Students and parents in the participating study often expressed an explicit desire for learning environments where their social experiences of racism and exclusion, and their cultural backgrounds, were acknowledged and actively engaged with. For this to be achieved, an integrated approach needs to

be adopted, where schools, parents and communities form a strategic partnership aimed at reducing the effects of social barriers and at meeting the challenge of cross-cultural negotiation.

This findings suggest that socio-political dynamics affect not only young Arab-Australians' sense of identity, but also their educational experiences. It is not suggested here that there is a direct causal correlation between the two or that the effect of racism and exclusion is the sole factor influencing Arab-Australian students' educational experiences and outcomes. However, racism was a factor of concern readily and repeatedly identified by students and parents. Although parents indicated that overt teacher racism is a rare phenomenon, students' reactions to particular instances of unhappy interactions with teachers cannot be dismissed as over-sensitivity. Instead, by focusing on such incidents students may be voicing an acknowledgment that cultural prejudice colours multiple facets of their experiences and opportunities, including education, and that these instances are simply the most apparent. This is why current patterns of educational research may need to be extended to reflect socio-political dynamics beyond the confines of school and family factors.

At the very least, this study's findings suggest that the effects of racism on young Arab-Australians, particularly since the events of September 11, have been underestimated in educational research and practice. In addition, this study, coupled with the recent closure of Blackwood College highlights the urgent need for innovative approaches to teaching in culturally diverse schools, wherein quality education – with systematic multicultural perspectives—would be viewed as a basic right, and an essential means to social and economic development.

REFERENCES

Anderson, B. (1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2002). Educational attainment: literacy and numeracy among school students. *Australia Now: Australian Social Trends 2002,* Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2001). *2001 Census of Population and Housing.* Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2003). *2001 Census of Population and Housing: Local Government Area Usual Residence Victoria by Highest Level of Schooling Completed and Age for Language Spoken at Home – Arabic (including Lebanese).* Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Banks, J. A. (2001). Cultural *Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum and Teaching* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Banks, J. A. (1997). *Educating Citizens in a Multicultural Society.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Bennett, C. I. (2003). *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Bolt, A. (2004a). A culture in crisis. *Herald Sun,* 15 September.

Bolt, A. (2004b). Moaners strangle a school. *Herald Sun,* 1 August.

Bolt, A. (2002). Schooled to fail. *Herald Sun,* 16 December.

Butcher, M. and Thomas, M. (2001). *GENERATE: Youth Culture and Migration Heritage in Western Sydney.* November, Sydney: Institute for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney and Migration Heritage Centre.

Cahill, D. (1996). *Immigration and Schooling in the 1990s.* Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

City of Darebin (2004). *Demographic Profile.* Melbourne: Darebin City Council. [Online] http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au [Accessed August 25, 2005].

Codjoe, H. M. (2001). Fighting a "public enemy" of Black academic achievement—the persistence of racism and the schooling experiences of Black students in Canada. *Race Ethnicity and Education,* 4 (4), 343-375.

Connelly, P. (1998). "Dancing to the wrong tune": Ethnography, Generalisation and Research on Racism in Schools. In P. Connelly and B. Troyna, (Eds) *Researching Racism in Education: politics, theory and practice,* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Considine, G. and Zappalà, G. (2002). Factors influencing the educational performance of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In T. Eardley and B. Bradley, (eds), *Competing Visions: Refereed Proceedings of the National Social Policy Conference 2001.* SPRC Report 1/02, Sydney: University of New South Wales.

Collins, J., Noble, G., Poynting, S. and Tabar, P. (2000). *Kebabs, Kids, Cops and Crime: Ethnicity, Youth and Crime.* Annandale: Pluto Press Australia.

Department of Education and Training (2003). Annual Report 2002-03. Melbourne: State of Victoria. [Online] http://www.det.vic.gov.au/det/pdfs/annual03/03DET.pdf [Accessed August 25, 2005].

Dobson, I., Sharma, R. and Haydon, A. (1996). *Evaluation of the Relative Performance of Commencing Undergraduate Students in Australian Universities.* Adelaide: Australian Credit Transfer Agency.

Duhou, I.A. and Teese, R. (1992). *Education, Work Force and Community Participation of Arab Australians: Egyptians, Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians.* Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Dunn, K.M., Gandhi, V., Burnley, I. and Forrest, J. (2003). Racism in Australia: cultural imperialism, disempowerment and violence. In J. Gao, R. Le Heron and J. Logie, (Eds) *Windows on a Changing World: Proceedings of the 22nd New Zealand Geographical Society Conference,* Auckland: New Zealand Geographical Society.

Echberg, K. (2004). Sad end to a school with a proud and vibrant past. *The Age,* 4 August.

Editorial (2004). Sacrificing schools to the numbers game. *The Age,* 4 August.

Gibbons, J., White, W. and Gibbons, P. (1994). Combating educational disadvantage among Lebanese Australians. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas and R. Phillipson, (Eds) in collaboration with M. Rannut *Linguistic Human Rights: Overcoming Linguistic Disadvantage,* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyer.

Giroux, H. A. and McClaren, P. L. (1989). Schooling, cultural politics, and the struggle for democracy. In H. A. Girouz and P. L. McClaren, (eds) *Critical Pedagogy, the State, and Cultural Struggle,* New York: State University of New York Press.

Gougis, R. A. (1986). The effects of prejudice and stress on the academic performance of Black-Americans. In U. Neisser, (Ed.) *The School Achievement of Minority Children: New Perspectives,* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Green, S. (2004). Troubled school shuts door. *The Age,* 31 July.

Hage, G. (2003). *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society.* Annandale: Pluto Press Australia.

Hage, G. (2002a). Citizenship and Honourability: belonging to Australia today. In G. Hage, (Ed.) *Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging,* Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Hage, G. (2002b). Postscript: Arab-Australian belonging after 'September 11'. In: G. Hage, (ed.) *Arab-Australians Today: citizenship and belonging,* Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Haque, Z. (2000). The ethnic minority 'underachieving' group? Investigating the claims of 'underachievement' amongst Bangladeshi pupils in British secondary schools. *Race Ethnicity and Education,* 3 (2), 145-168.

Horvath, B. (1987). VARBRUL analysis in applied linguistics: a case study. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics,* 10 (2), 59-67.

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2004). *Ismaε – Listen: national consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians: final report. June, Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.* [Online] http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/report/pdf/ISMA_complete.pdf [Accessed August 25, 2005].

Kalantzis, M. and Cope, B. (1999). Multicultural education: transforming the mainstream. In S. May (ed.) *Critical Multiculturalism: Rethinking Multicultural and Antiracist Education,* London: Falmer Press.

Kalantzis, M., Cope, B. Noble, G. and Poynting, S. (1990). *Cultures of Schooling: pedagogies for cultural difference and social access.* London: Falmer Press.

Khoo, S. E., McDonald, P., Giorgas, D. and Birrell, B. (2002). *Second Generation Australians: Report for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.* April, Canberra: Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. [Online] http://www.immi.gov.au/research/publications/2gen/sg_australians.pdf [Accessed August 25, 2005].

Le Roux, J. (2001). Social dynamics of the multicultural classroom. *Intercultural Education,* 12 (3), 273-288.

Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) (2004). *On Track 2004.* Victoria: Department of Education and Training) [Online] http://www.llen.vic.gov.au/llen/ontrack/pdfs/OnTrack2004Data_A3.pdf [2005, August 25]

Mac an Ghaill, M. (1999). *Contemporary Racisms and Ethnicities: Social and Cultural Transformations.* Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Mac an Ghaill, M. (1988). *Young, Gifted and Black: Student-teacher Relations in the Schooling of Black Youth.* Milton Keynes, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Mansouri, F. (2004). *Race, Identity and Education Achievements among Arab-Australians Students,* Unpublished paper presented at the Eleventh International Learning Conference, 27-30 June, Havana. Melbourne: Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights, Deakin University.

Mansouri, M. and Makhoul, C. (2004). *Arab-Australians in Victoria: Needs Assessment and Community Capacity Building.* Geelong: Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights, Deakin University.

McDonald, K. (1999). *Struggles for Subjectivity: Identity, Action and Youth Experience.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McLeod, J. and Yates, L. (2003). Who is 'us'? Students negotiating discourses of race and national identification in Australia. *Race Ethnicity and Education,* 6 (1), 21-49.

Meade, P. (1983) *The Educational Experiences of Sydney High Schools Students Report No. 3: A Comparative Study of Migrant Students of Non-English-speaking Origin and Students whose Parents were Born in an English-speaking Country* (Vol. 3). Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Noble, G., Poynting, S. and Tabar, P. (1999). Youth, ethnicity and the mapping of identities: Strategic essentialism and strategic hybridity among male Arabic-speaking youth in South-Western Sydney. *Communal/Plural,* 7 (1), 29-44.

No by-line (2004). Beyond the VCE. *The Age,* 26 July.

No by-line (2004). School closure 'right thing to do'. *Herald Sun,* 31 July.

No by-line (2003). Your school's VCE performance 2003. *The Age,* 18 December.

Poynting, S. and Ang, I. (2004). *Living with Racism: the Experience and Reporting by Arab and Muslim Australians of Discrimination, Abuse and Violence since 11 September 2001, Report to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*. 19 April, Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. [Online] http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/research/UWSReport.pdf [Accessed August 25, 2005].

Poynting, S., Noble, G. and Tabar, P. (1999). "Intersections" of masculinity and ethnicity: a study of male Lebanese immigrant youth in western Sydney [1]. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 2 (1), 59-77.

Poynting, S., Noble, G., Tabar, P. and Collins, J. (2004). *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other*. Sydney: Sydney Institute of Criminology Series.

Poynting, S. and Tabar, P. (2002). On being Lebanese-Australian: hybridity, essentialism and strategy among Arabic-speaking youth. In G. Hage (Ed.) *Arab-Australians Today: Citizenship and Belonging*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Rothman, S. and McMillan, J. (2003). *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 36: Influences on Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Sadowski, M. (2003). Introduction. In M. Sadowski (Ed.) *Adolescents at School: Perspectives on Youth, Identity, and Education*, Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: how stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52 (6), June, 613-629.

Steele, C. M. (1999). Thin ice: "stereotype threat" and black college students. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 284 (2), August, 44-47, 50-54.

Student Outcomes Division, Department of Education and Training (2003). *(School names suppressed) Annual Report 2002*. Melbourne: State of Victoria.

Student Outcomes Division, Department of Education and Training (2004). *(School names suppressed) 2004 School Census – Language Background Other than English Students*. Melbourne: State of Victoria).

Sturman, A. (1997). *Social Justice in Education*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Suliman, R. and McInerney, D. M. (2003). *Motivational goals and school achievement: Lebanese-Background students in South-Western Sydney*. Unpublished paper presented at Australian Association for Research in Education/New Zealand Association for Research in Education Joint Conference 2003, Auckland.

Teese, R. and Polesel, J. (2003). *Undemocratic Schooling: Equity and Quality in Mass Secondary Education in Australia*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing.

Tomazin, F. (2004) Principal seconded to look at falling enrolments. *The Age*, 19 August.

Troyna, B. (1993). *Racism and Education: Research Perspectives*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs (VOMA) (2003). *Victorian Community Profiles 2001 Census Summary Statistics: Lebanon-born*. Melbourne: State of Victoria. [Online]. http://www.voma.vic.gov.au/web8/vomasite.nsf/Frameset/VOMA?OpenDocument [Accessed August 26, 2005].

White, P. (2004). Media savages Lebanese-Australian youth. *On Line Opinion: Australia's e-Journal of Social and Political Debate*, 15 September [Online]. http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=2552 [Accessed August 26, 2005].

Young, C., Petty. M. and Faulkner, A. (1980). *Education and Employment of Turkish and Lebanese Youth*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.