

LEADING FOR SOCIAL COHESION: HOW PRINCIPALS RESPOND TO 'CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS' ABOUT SOCIAL AND POLITICAL VOLATILITIES AND DISHARMONIES

AUTHORS:

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR JANE WILKINSON (EDUCATION, MONASH UNIVERSITY)

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LUCAS WALSH (EDUCATION, MONASH UNIVERSITY)

PROFESSOR AMANDA KEDDIE (EDUCATION, DEAKIN UNIVERSITY)

SENIOR LECTURER DR LUKE HOWIE (ARTS, MONASH UNIVERSITY)

RESEARCH ASSISTANT NICOLA SUM (EDUCATION, MONASH UNIVERSITY)

RESEARCH ASSISTANT DR FIONA LONGMUIR (EDUCATION, MONASH UNIVERSITY)

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	5
METHODOLOGY	7
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	7
PROJECT DESIGN	7
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	8
DATA COLLECTION	9
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	11
DATA ANALYSIS	11
PARTICIPANTS' CONTEXT	12
LITERATURE REVIEW	18
DEFINING SOCIAL COHESION.....	18
SOCIAL COHESION FACTORS	18
EDUCATION AND COHESION.....	19
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ITS ROLE IN BUILDING SOCIAL COHESION	23
FINDINGS.....	25
SCHOOL A.....	25
SCHOOL B.....	32
SCHOOL C.....	38
DISCUSSION.....	45
A HOLISTIC APPROACH	45
LIMITATIONS: A LACK OF EXPLICITNESS AND CRITICALITY	47
CONCLUSION.....	51
KEY MESSAGES.....	51
FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS.....	54
REFERENCES.....	56

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The unprecedented diversity of contemporary times has generated both richness in the social fabric of Australian society and heightened social and political volatilities. This project explores educative responses to these volatilities and disharmonies with a focus on schools. In current public and policy discourses, insufficient attention is paid to education-focused responses which challenge polarising and divisive public language and discourses, and which foster social cohesion. Yet as key socialising agencies, schools play a crucial role in engendering social cohesion as young people from different backgrounds engage with one another, and those beyond school, on a daily basis.

Educational leadership practices can play a key role in fostering the necessary conditions for social cohesion. Previous research suggests that good leaders will not see this work as an add on but as part of a holistic approach to socially just educational leadership practised throughout the school and which impacts on and draws from their communities. How such enabling conditions can be fostered by school leaders in diverse schooling contexts is less understood. Drawing on case-studies of three Victorian government schools, this report explores:

- how principals, teachers and students responded to, and opened up conversations about social cohesion within their school communities.
- what strategies and resources were employed by school leaders to respond to issues that threaten social cohesion, particularly in terms of multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary approaches that develop socially and individually resilient communities.
- how school leaders drew on non-school actors in order to build cohesion and address challenges such as disharmony and exclusion so that initiatives became 'locally owned and led by communities' (RIOSC, Strategic Framework, 2015, Research Priority One, p. 4) and challenged prevailing hierarchies, exclusionary attitudes and behaviours.

Three schools were selected for this project because of their diverse student demographics (representing a range of SES, ethnic, linguistic and faith settings) allied with their productive work in fostering social cohesion. The first school is located in a community that is characterised by high cultural and ethnic diversity of around 65 different nationalities. It has an expanding intake of international students and has witnessed in recent years a growing intake of families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds due to the positive reputation of the school. The second school is also a secondary school located in a rapidly gentrifying suburb of Melbourne. In the past decade, it has transformed from being largely working-class and ethnically diverse to an area which attracts high numbers of young professionals and families. The third school is a primary school located in an outer-Melbourne suburb. In recent decades, the community has experienced much change in relation to its cultural demography; cultural diversity has markedly increased from a largely White Anglo population in the 1980s to a vibrant mix of ethnic cultures. All three case studies provide important insights into how schools engage in challenging conversations about social and political disharmonies and volatilities within their communities.

This report starts by outlining the methodology of this pilot study, including key research questions, the collaborative approach undertaken in working with multiple stakeholders and the context of the three schools that participated in this study. It then provides a review of the literature that informed our understanding of social cohesion, its relationship to schools as sites to construct alternative narratives, and potential gaps that may exist in approaches to building social cohesion. The report then unpacks

the findings addressing the research questions as identified within the context of each of the three schools and their community, and then analyses these findings in the discussion.

The following key messages and future considerations are proposed:

1. Leading for social cohesion in schools is an ongoing process, not an end-point.
2. Leading for social cohesion in schools is a crucial form of emotional labour which is largely invisible/overlooked.
3. Leading for social cohesion requires challenging and interrogating the arrangements in schools that hold socially unjust practices in place.
4. Leading for social cohesion is a collective, not individual practice.
5. Facilitating challenging conversations as part of leading for social cohesion is risky business.
6. Leading for social cohesion requires developing educators', students' and parents' threshold knowledge (i.e. necessary understandings) and practices about how to have challenging conversations about social and political disharmonies and volatilities.
7. Leading for social cohesion requires clear support for schools in regard to the small numbers of students who may be at risk of radicalisation.

Facilitating challenging conversations as part of leading for social cohesion is an ongoing enterprise that can be difficult, contentious and emotionally taxing. Future considerations include a need for:

Ongoing, regular and targeted professional learning for leaders and teachers to develop:

- the knowledge and understanding required to carry out challenging conversations with students to identify the issues of social disharmony specific to particular schools but also those arising in the broader social world.
- the capacity to translate this knowledge within and beyond the classroom to address the issues of social disharmony specific to particular schools and the wider world.

The provision of resourcing for schools, teachers and leaders to:

- implement and integrate their professional learning about leading for social cohesion into existing school structures and practices (e.g. school policies, leadership and teaching relations and practices, behaviour management, curriculum planning, pedagogy, etc.)
- engage in ongoing critical reflection on this implementation and integration on an individual basis and collectively through professional learning teams within their school, with community stakeholders and other schools.
- engage in action research within their schools and to develop and share innovative frameworks and resources to address local and global challenging conversations.
- to work with parents and their local communities and organisations to share their learnings and develop sustainable activities and programs that foster social connections and respectful relationships.

Broader economic and social policies that support community cohesion and resilience:

- Schools can neither be a panacea for society's ills, nor can schools work alone in the endeavour to create socially harmonious communities. As a microcosm of the broader social world, the challenging conversations taking place within schools are reflective of wider social divisions, inequities and disharmonies. Economic and social policy committed to ameliorating these divisions, inequities and disharmonies would mean that schools are more harmonious places.

INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented diversity of contemporary times has generated both richness in the social fabric of Australian society and heightened social and political volatilities. For example, matters of national identity and, in particular, securing borders from the threat of the ‘other’ have fuelled anti-immigration and xenophobic sentiments (Blair, Dunn, Kamp, & Alam, 2017). Public perceptions of social and political disharmonies are magnified by limited data such as a poll of 1000 people that found that 49% of Australians supported a ban on Muslims coming to Australia (Betts & Birrell, 2017). However, a more nuanced view is evident in the Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion, which found that concern over immigration remains at the lowest level recorded since 2007 when the survey commenced (Markus, 2015). Nonetheless, the re-emergence of Hanson’s One Nation party symbolises in Australian politics the proliferation of similar anti-immigration/new nationalism parties, which also tend to be anti-Muslim (Keddie, 2017).

Our project centred upon the significance of educative responses to these heightened social and political volatilities and disharmonies, which include anti-immigration and xenophobic sentiments, as well as other forms of exclusion, such as those based on gender and sexuality. This necessarily led to a focus on schools, which are positioned in education policy as ‘micropublics’ (Ho, 2011); that is, sites of potential transformation in building more democratic, equitable and just societies (Ministerial Council Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008). In current public and policy discourses, insufficient attention has been paid to education-focused responses which challenge polarising and divisive public language and discourses. Yet as key socialising agencies, schools play a crucial role in engendering social cohesion as young people from different backgrounds engage with one another (and those beyond school) on a daily basis (Ho, 2011).

The rationale for examining education-focussed responses was to redress this imbalance, based on the hypothesis that educational leadership practices have the potential to play a key role in fostering the necessary conditions for social cohesion through generating intercultural understandings organically (Wilkinson, 2017). While there are already exemplary cases of schools making a difference in developing social cohesion, previous research suggests that good leaders will not see this work as an add on but as part of a more holistic approach to socially just educational leadership practices that are applied and implemented throughout the school and impact on communities (c.f., Wilkinson & Langat, 2012; Wilkinson, 2018).

How such enabling conditions can be fostered by school leaders in widely diverse schooling contexts (e.g., low-high SES; mono-cultural, multicultural and multilingual; multi-faith settings) is less well understood. Hence, our study aimed to:

- contribute to a current evidence base by addressing the principles of both *how* such work could be done, as well as what *could/should* be done (Research Institute on Social Cohesion [RIOSOC], Strategic Framework, 2015); and
- enrich current research that understands the significance of a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary approach to ameliorating social disharmony and building and maintaining social cohesion (RIOSOC, Strategic Framework, 2015, Research Priority Two).

More specifically, our project sought to:

- understand how school leaders (principals, teachers and students) responded to, and opened up conversations about social cohesion within their school communities (RIOSC, Strategic Framework, 2015, Research Priority One);
- explore what strategies and resources were employed by school leaders to respond to issues that threaten social cohesion, particularly in terms of multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary approaches that develop socially and individually resilient communities (RIOSC, Strategic Framework, 2015, Research Priority Two); and
- examine how school leaders drew on non-school actors in order to build cohesion and address challenges such as disharmony and exclusion so that initiatives became 'locally owned and led by communities' and challenged prevailing hierarchies (RIOSC, Strategic Framework, 2015, Research Priority One, p. 4).

Given this scope, the following section outlines the methodology of this pilot study, including the key research questions, the collaborative approach undertaken in working with multiple stakeholders, and a summary of the context of each participating school.

The report then moves to a review of literature that has informed our understanding of social cohesion, its relationship to schools as sites to construct alternative narratives, and potential gaps that may exist in approaches to building social cohesion.

Findings are shared through the unpacking of data addressing the research questions as identified within the context of each school and its community before these findings are considered in the discussion.

The report concludes with suggestions for future consideration which may inform further research work, policy responses and school-based responses.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of our research study was to identify and document, how school leaders foster social cohesion, both within schools, and by engaging and working with non-school community actors. The underlying premise of this objective was that education and community-focused responses are crucial as part of a multidimensional approach to tackling social issues such as racism, radicalisation and cyberhate. Aligning with RIOSC's Research Priority One, Social Cohesion and Diversity and Priority Two: Community Polarisation, Marginalisation and Violent Extremism, this project examined how school leaders, working in collaboration with community, guided schools in responding to and opening up 'challenging conversations' about these issues.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This objective was articulated through the following research questions:

1. What do school leaders see as the key factors contributing to social disharmony in the community? (Research Priority One)
2. What are the challenging conversations that arise from these factors? (Research Priority One)
3. How are school leaders seeking to build social cohesion in response to these challenging conversations in ways that engage with:
 - a. young people and non-school actors; and
 - b. policy imperatives? (Research Priority Two).

PROJECT DESIGN

As a pilot study, the project sought to explore the context and experiences of three government schools, each of diverse student demographics (representing a range of SES, ethnic, linguistic and faith settings). Schools were selected in consultation with industry partners who provided nominations based on their knowledge of productive work in schools that fostered social cohesion.

These rich case studies of practice involved document analysis, interviews and focus groups with school leaders, teachers, students, and community members. These participants reported on policies and practices that illustrated the diverse ways schools can foster social cohesion and respond to current social disharmonies.

Participant schools were selected based on the following process. We first formed an advisory committee consisting of our industry partners for this project, i.e., the Department of Education and Training; the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership; and the Centre for Strategic Education. An initial meeting was held at the start of the project to:

- clarify the role of the advisory group
- identify the domains of what constituted 'challenging conversations'
- discuss the selection criteria for pilot schools
- compile a list of potential pilot schools based on the advisory committee's industry expertise
- agree on protocols for approaching potential schools.

Criteria for the identification of schools included:

- a holistic/whole school and productive approach in fostering social cohesion
- diverse student demographics (representing a range of SES, ethnic, linguistic and faith settings – privileged as well as less privileged schools)
- a strengths-based (rather than deficit) approach to embracing challenging conversations (going beyond Harmony Days and multicultural food stalls)
- innovative and different practices in leading difficult conversations about issues of social and political volatilities and disharmonies
- possible markers of success (awards, word of mouth reputation).

In consultation with industry partners, a process of invitation to potential schools reciprocated by expression of interests, resulted in the identification of two secondary schools and a primary school. The Advisory Group proposed potential schools as modelling exemplary practices of social cohesion within their school and wider school communities. Although the schools were located in metropolitan Melbourne, the three case study schools represented a diverse range of geographical regions, a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds (lower and middle socio-economic status), faiths (Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish) and ethnicities (over 66 ethnic groups). The research team were also mindful of involving schools that functioned in a context of advantage and comparative disadvantage. However, underlying all these considerations is the given realisation that as a pilot case study of three schools, it is not the intention of this project to generalise its findings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Practice Architectures

The theoretical framework for this study is that of practice architectures. Practice architectures is a theoretical lens that represents a turn to practice in the social sciences in the past couple of decades. We include a definition of this theory here as it is the key lens we will employ in our theorisation of our study (see Discussion section).

A practice approach gives primacy to the practices of a specific site, how these practices are arranged and of what they are composed, rather than to the individuals (their qualities or capabilities) who engage in the practice. Practices are inherently part of our social world and hence, practice theorist Theodore Schatzki (2002) has described them as 'sites of the social'. A practice approach attempts to analyse how a practice 'hangs together' and 'unfolds' (Schatzki, 2002) in the everyday activities that characterise specific sites, such as a teaching in a school, leading a challenging conversation with a parent, learning how to read etc. In the theory of practice architectures, practices are made up of sayings, doings and relatings (Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer & Bristol, 2014). These sayings, doings and relatings 'hang together' to make up a practice. The sayings are the practitioners' characteristic sayings and thinking that make up a practice (Kemmis et al., 2014: 38). The doings are the characteristic activities that make up a practice (Kemmis et al., 2014: 38). The relatings are the characteristic relationships between participants or participants and the material world (Kemmis et al., 2014: 38). Although we may pull them apart for analysis, in reality these sayings, doings and relatings always 'hang together' in the projects of the practices.

Practice architectures are the broader arrangements that prefigure (but do not determine) a practice. Practice architectures are composed of the cultural-discursive arrangements that are found in or brought to a site (e.g., language, ideas and discourses). Practice architectures are also composed of the

material-economic arrangements that are found in or brought to a site (e.g., objects, spatial arrangements). Finally, practice architectures are composed of the social-political arrangements that are found in or brought to a site (e.g., relations of power and solidarity). Like sayings, doings and relatings, these arrangements hang together in practice architectures – arrangements and set-ups that enable and constrain interaction in the social world. Practice architectures hold particular practices in place in a specific site and give practices their distinctive shape and purpose. They shape the conditions of possibility that make it more likely for certain practices to be enabled (e.g., leading, teaching, policy-making, loving, researching) and other practices to be constrained from emerging. Importantly there is a dialectical relationship between practice and practice architectures, i.e, practices both shape and are shaped by practice architectures and vice-versa. When we walk into a classroom, for example, whether it be in Australia, Kenya or Chile, we recognise particular practices, e.g., a teacher instructing a group of students in reading, a group of children writing a narrative. What may be less visible, however, are the practice architectures – the arrangements and set ups brought from outside or already existing in a site – that make it more likely that *these* teaching or learning practices, for example, will emerge and be sustained over time rather than *those* ones.

Practice architectures in education are composed of five practices that are interconnected: leading, professional learning, teaching, student learning and researching. These are termed the Education Complex of schooling (Kemmis et al., 2014). In order to bring about change to school practices (for example, building a more socially cohesive classroom or school), you cannot simply make changes to one set of practices such as teachers’ professional learning. All five set of practices need to be changed as well as the practice architectures that hold those practices in place. Only then will change be possible and potentially sustainable.

DATA COLLECTION

Engagement with the case sites

Researchers engaged with the case study schools between July and November 2017. This included: preliminary conversations with each of the principals; two research team members spending one to two days onsite at each school for data collection; and debriefing conversations with each principal.

Documentary Analysis

Relevant schools’ policies, practices and community documentation around social cohesion were analysed. This analysis provided a more comprehensive understanding of the educational background within which school leaders were working and a context for the interpretation and analysis of data. Analysis considered how school leaders understood and negotiated broader policy frameworks in ways that supported social cohesion work.

Interviews and Focus Groups - School Leaders and Teachers

Building on the notion of schools as ‘micropublics’ (Ho, 2011), this qualitative study used semi-structured, 90-minute interviews with principals, school leaders and teachers that were informed by a critical, discursive analysis of discussion and discourse (Fairclough, 2013). This allowed the research team to build evidence provided by school leaders and teachers to problem-solve the presence of racist

and other exclusivist views in schools and how language had contributed to marginalisation and disadvantage. This approach drew on the researchers' extensive qualitative research expertise.

Interviews explored how school leaders and teachers engaged in challenging conversations about issues associated with identity, difference, privilege, and marginality in areas such as, Islamophobia, sexism, racism, homophobia, gendered exclusion, radicalisation and cyberhate, and how they sought to build social cohesion within their schools. While this project sought to understand how school leaders guided their schools in responding to these kinds of 'challenging conversations', the semi-structured, open-ended nature of the interviews worked from what school leaders and teachers identified as 'challenging conversations' and how they sought recognitive (ensuring a valuing of culture) and representative (according all a voice, particularly young people) justice (Fraser, 2009). They were asked how they engaged and worked with the community and any issues around consistent educational practice within the school to achieve social cohesion.

Student Focus Groups

Focus groups involving students from a cross-section of ages and interests were held in each school. This involved between 10 and 20 students per school and were conducted to minimise the impact of time on students' school day. Each focus group brought together students in semi-structured, open-ended discussions that explored their ideas on what issues led to 'challenging conversations' and to what extent their voices played a role in shaping school-based approaches to these issues.

Interviews with Community Leaders (non-school actors)

Each school also facilitated an opportunity for interested community members to participate in one semi-structured discussion exploring the same themes and ideas as the school leaders, teachers and students. These semi-structured interviews involved a diverse and rich representation of non-school actors including non-teaching staff, board members, peripatetic staff, parents and external service providers.

All semi-structured interviews and focus groups were recorded, and the audio files transcribed and checked for accuracy.

One Day Symposium

A symposium was held at The Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership on March 23, 2018. At this event the research team conducted a forum for key stakeholders (e.g., principals, teachers, community/non-school actors, policy-makers, advisory committee members) to disseminate findings regarding exemplary practices of social cohesion work in schools and gain feedback on draft findings. The lively discussions drew from practical, hands-on experiences and approaches identified during the above three stages. Responses from participants in the symposium were collected by the research team and this data further informed the research findings.

Attendees at the symposium included representatives from the Department of Education, Department of Premier and Cabinet, private consultants involved in supporting school leaders, community groups addressing women, interfaith issues and youth education and development, school partners in social cohesion programs, local council representatives, and fellow researchers in related academic fields.

The research team invited Professor Andrew Markus and Professor Michele Grossman to contribute to the symposium. Professor Markus shared the 2017 Scanlon Survey summary and unpacked themes across the Scanlon data set since the Social Cohesion Survey commenced in 2007. This was followed by a plenary from Professor Grossman who acted as a critical friend to reflect on the draft findings and themes unpacked during the day.

Ideas, reflections and purposeful feedback from the symposium day have been incorporated into the data collection and the preparation of this final report.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research team worked closely with the members of the Advisory Group to ensure that protocols for communicating with school teams, school leaders, students, parents of students and wider community members were in keeping with the high standards set by the Department of Education for all school liaison. The Advisory Group met at the start of the project to advise researchers on school selection, research protocols and any other sensitivities. The draft copy of the report was circulated to the group for their feedback.

The research was designed and conducted in accordance with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007; and ethically reviewed and monitored by Monash University's Human Ethics Committee and the Department of Education and Training's ethics committee in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007.

DATA ANALYSIS

All interview and focus group data were transcribed, and each transcript reviewed by at least two research team members and the research assistants. Transcripts were coded thematically before the research team brought together coded data for triangulation and descriptive analysis.

Within the context of a critical discursive framework, a systematic analysis of all data from all sources was organised via iterative categorisation techniques that allow for direct and traceable connections between research findings and conclusions and the words of school leaders. Informed by a practice architectures approach, this analysis gave primacy to the sayings, doings and relating within each specific school site rather than to the qualities or capabilities of the principals, teachers, students and community members. Our analysis was mindful of the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that led to particular challenging conversations at each school.

A note on researcher positionality

The research was explicit in its focus on exploring issues of identity, difference, privilege, and marginality and in its efforts to reflect a social justice agenda in disrupting exclusionary practices such as Islamophobia, sexism and racism. We were mindful of our position of social and economic privilege as university researchers and thus attempted to be reflexive as a team about how this privilege shaped the research processes. Such reflexivity involved being transparent about the theories and intentions informing the work as well as engaging in critical conversations ourselves about how these theories and intentions presented a particular reality or picture about leading for social cohesion. It also involved

thinking about how our own social and economic privilege might impact on our constructions of the participants' stories and identities. In all of this we were guided by the study's social justice agenda, that is to say, while appropriating a critical lens (in challenging exclusionary practices) we sought to recognise and value marginalised cultures and accord all, particularly those from marginalised groups, a voice (Fraser, 2009).

PARTICIPANTS' CONTEXT

To set the context of the analysis which follows, it is useful to outline the background of each Case Study and its participants in this project.

Background of School A

School A is located in a community that is characterised by high cultural and ethnic diversity of around 65 different nationalities. The school also has an expanding intake of international students. School A had, in recent years, witnessed a growing intake of families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds in the local community due to the positive reputation of the school. As one community member speculated, 'People strive and if people are wanting to use the public system, [School A] is probably in the top [levels]... for results they've achieved...' (Community Member). This recent growth of high SES residents and high demand on enrolment may be constraining movements of newly arrived residents to the area.

Within this changing demographic is a relatively culturally diverse student population, with an influx of Chinese and Indian families over the previous several years. Two decades ago, students tended to come from Russian and Anglo backgrounds, but since then, Europeans (e.g. Greek, Jewish) and Israeli students started to attend the school. With regard to religious backgrounds, there are Hindu and Jewish students, although the leadership team admitted that religion wasn't something that came up in daily life. A community participant described the school makeup as 'multicultural, multi-religion. We have every colour and creed...' (Community Member).

Nevertheless, it was observed that,

we've got a really mixed group of students. Probably 65 different nationalities. These days, most of them live within a very small zoned area, so they have to do that in order to move in, but then some of them move out, so that's another issue that we face. But there's a real blend of different nationalities. (School Leader)

Other community members noted a potential skewing of cultural makeup associated with demographic change, because 'We don't have many arriving immigrants at the school at all because of the area. It's too expensive to live here and so therefore they're not being exposed to the fairly new Australians' (Community Member). Another added,

I think the school is a victim of their own success. Had the school been not well performing, average grades, all that sort of stuff, then people wouldn't necessarily strive to come here and with that desire to come to a school, it's that supply and demand thing. If the supply is limited, the money goes out and all of a sudden, you cross the road over the zone and the price of a house goes down, \$100,000 or whatever the case may be. So, success is great, but it comes at a price, clearly, and I think that we probably are in a bubble in that regard

because as people have said, there aren't too many refugee families that come to [School A] because of economics... (Community Member)

The 'bubble' of the community in which School A is based is a theme to which we will return below.

A shift in student attitudes and social justice attitudes were seen by school leadership to be reflections of broader demographic change; for example,

gender identification [i.e. transitioning has] been a new thing in recent years. We probably, five years ago, would never have even had a conversation about it. And I think there've been ... a number of students who we work with in an individual way with their parents and modify things to be able to cater for their needs and make sure that they can participate in everything that they need. (School Leader)

So, we installed unisex toilets... They wear one of the uniforms on offer...it depends on what stage they're at and what their parents and their psych – for [which the] Melbourne Children's Hospital actually determines is necessary. (School Leader)

Another teacher added that 'students of late are particularly supportive of the LGBTIQ community' and a school leader noted that students see diverse gender identification as 'normal' (School Leader).

Background of staff participants

Participants from School A had degrees of professional experience, with some having been former students at the school. The cultural makeup of this group was largely White/Anglo-Celtic backgrounds, with some coming from migrant backgrounds.

Background of student participants

The students who participated in the study were relatively ethnic and religiously diverse. Student participants were from Year 12 and described their backgrounds in the following ways: one

always lived in the same house, around the same area, not far from here. Been at [School A] since Year Seven, so, always been here as well, and I guess in terms of leadership or things like that at school, I was the vice house captain for one of the ... houses here, and yeah, getting close to finishing school... I've basically been Australian for three or four generations back. (Student)

His descendants were from Wales and Ireland. Another male student had also 'been in the area for a while, my ... dad's side is very English-based, and mum's side is a lot more Polish...' (Student).

Another female student's 'family is originally from Italy, so my grandparents are migrants from Italy' (Student). Another female student came

from a European / Middle-eastern background. My parents have always lived around different countries a lot, because of wherever my dad's job has taken us. I mean they're going to move soon to Spain. I've been here, a part of [School A's] community, since year seven, I'm in Year 12 (Student).

Her female colleague 'moved around quite a lot. My background is Irish and gypsy' (Student). A male colleague had parents from India, who 'migrated here 20 years ago, or something. I was born here, and I've lived all my life in Melbourne... Both of my parents are Hindu, but I guess ... I haven't really decided yet' (Student).

Background of community participants

The community focus group was also diverse in constitution and from a range of ethnic backgrounds. One was related to a staff member who brought him/her on board as an exam supervisor. Similarly, a female participant was chief supervisor for the VCE exams. Others had children and grandchildren at the school and participated in school events such as concerts and became involved in the school's council and committees. Two taught in a language program. Another was the 'local lollipop man' who had managed the school crossing for eight years, 'so I've watched all the kids grow from nothing to everything, and I have a very good relationship with the staff and the kids, of course...' (Community Member).

Background of School B

School B is a government secondary school located in a rapidly gentrifying suburb of Melbourne. In the past decade it has transformed from being largely working-class and ethnically diverse to an area which attracts high numbers of young professionals and families. Parents have higher than average levels of tertiary education and tend to be more socially progressive in their views than the general Australian populace.

The school remains ethnically diverse with 42 nationalities, but this ethnicity tends to be second and third generation Italian, Greek, Turkish and Lebanese with a large cohort of international students. Religions encompass Judaism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. As one longstanding teacher commented, the student population and their families are

Changing ... had a large Greek, Turkish background, Italian background probably 20 years ago. [They're] becoming more affluent and possibly losing a lot of that diversity... But in amongst that ... we have 100 international students that are mostly from China, Vietnam, and a few other countries. There's still quite large pockets of Vietnamese, Chinese local students. Still got the Greek, Turkish, Italian backgrounds. (Teacher)

Along with the ethnic diversity, there was a high level of affluence. As such the school was described by a number of participants as a privileged enclave. The leadership team summed these sentiments, remarking that the school consisted of

mainly people just like us. So, it's sort of a bubble and that is an issue in this community ... there's a little bit of disadvantage, there's a little bit of diversity, there's a little bit of a whole lot of stuff, but actually it's the 'good life 101' on a platter. (School Leader)

The school was described by a range of participants as a welcoming community which worked hard to be inclusive and participatory. Comments by students summed up their sentiments,

the school community ... makes everyone feel safe and secure, and they're really good about approaching problems, and they're not at all tolerant of homophobia or bi-phobia or transphobia, which is really great, and yeah, they address lots of international days that are important, and yeah, so they're very supportive. (Student)

In contrast to the conservatism of many schools, there was a consistent emphasis by the leadership team on the importance of staff and students embracing diversity, social justice and activism. This was reflected in the school values which emphasised social justice and activism, providing a 'very ... powerful story about this community and how we'd be' (School Leader).

The community member reinforced the inclusive and activist stance of the school, commenting,

having worked at a bunch of schools around Melbourne, I feel like the culture is really fantastic ... I think socially they're very open and very progressive ... It just seemed like the kind of school where, you know kids can just be who they are ... Demographically, it's fairly wealthy ... Like, you know some of the kids there had ... a much less fortunate upbringing and some of the teachers would often just say 'you know just, you know keep an eye out for so and so, they're, you know got some troubles at home'. (Community Member)

A student noticed these more progressive attitudes when playing sport with students from other schools. He remarked,

Well, all the people that I'm friends with from sport, they all go to private schools and they all live in ... [affluent suburbs] ... And they've got very different views as well. I've also got a kid in my team from Serbia, and he was telling me about how if you're homosexual, you just get abused ... there's so much hate around. And so, when he came here, he said to me he was surprised about how everyone was just accepting. (Student)

Background of school leadership participants

The principal of School B is a highly experienced educator and leader. She had been the principal for many years. She was of White/Anglo-Celtic background. The other two members of the leadership team were also female and were respectively responsible for student welfare and the student portfolio. Both had an extensive background in teaching.

Background of teacher participants

There were five teacher participants, three female and two male. One had been at the school for many years (10+ years), one for four years, two were new to teaching, and the fifth participant was second year out. The teachers had varying responsibilities including leaders of teaching and learning, year levels, wellbeing and facilitators of two of the student clubs.

Background of student participants

Two student focus groups were held. One consisted of junior level students (Years 7 and 8) and one of middle years students (Year 9). In total there were ten student participants who ranged in age from twelve to fifteen years, with five girls and five boys. With the exception of one student, the group were second or third generation Australian but from mixed, culturally diverse backgrounds ranging from Thailand, Lebanon, China, Greece, Italy, France and Ireland as well as one Anglo-Australian.

Background of community participant

There was one male community participant from an Anglo-Australian background. He ran a training company and had worked extensively with the school on a program which involved students, staff and parents learning how to have challenging conversations around issues such as gender, sexism and misogyny. The school had successfully applied for funds for this program from the local council.

Background of School C

School C is a government primary school located in an outer suburb of Melbourne. Over the past thirty or so years, the community had experienced much change in relation to its cultural demography. While consistently home to residents of low SES, the cultural diversity has markedly increased from a largely White Anglo population in the 1980s to its now vibrant mix of ethnic cultures. Just over 50% of the population were not born in Australia, with most of these community members speaking a language other than English at home. The broad range of linguistic, cultural and religious diversity is reflected in the variety of places community members have immigrated from, e.g. Sri Lanka, India, China, Afghanistan, Eastern Europe, Malaysia and Vietnam, and includes community members identifying from diverse areas such as Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu. In our interviews with participants, the community was generally regarded as socially cohesive. However, we were aware of a serious incident of religious-related 'home-grown terror' in the community that had occurred several years previously, and we did hear accounts of previous religious-related community unrest that spilled into the school (these will be elaborated below).

Somewhat reflecting the diversity of its broader community demographic, the school caters for approximately 42 nationalities with approximately 70% of its students speaking a language other than English. The majority of students identify as Muslim, followed by Christian and then a mix of 10 other religions. Many students begin at the school with little or no English. According to several of the respondents, the school attracts students with 'challenging behaviour' (i.e. disruptive to other children) given their reputation of addressing such behaviour well.

A central aim of the school is to be a welcoming, friendly and caring place for all students, families and staff. Key here was a focus on celebrating diversity. The overwhelmingly positive accounts of the school from all participants attested to its success at realising this aim. Teachers, for example, described the school as a great example of 'how multiculturalism works when you put the hard yards in' (School Leader) and as a 'lovely community ... with so many different cultures', a 'really big family [that] ... gets along very well [and] works together' (Teacher). Students described the school as a 'quiet school [where] we all know each other and are all friends' (Student), as 'like a little family' (Student) and as a 'joyful place' (Student) where everyone is different but 'we all fit in' (Student). Community members referred to the school as 'cater[ing] to everyone' (Community Member), as 'so friendly' and 'welcoming' 'regardless of your culture' (Community Member), where 'everyone knows everyone [and] looks out for everyone' (Community Member) and where parents are genuinely interested in and invested in the school (Community Member).

Many of the respondents attributed this family and community feel to the small size of the school (at less than 200 students). This seemed to be particularly significant for the students and parents we interviewed – students described the small size of the school as facilitating friendships and positive relationships, because 'everyone knows everyone'. Parents expressed similar views, as one of the mothers commented: 'my son actually has issues making friends ... I loved the fact that it was a nice little school not a huge school where he would fall through the cracks' (Community Member). Such positivity was borne out in survey data administered at the school level to teachers, parents and broader staff which has consistently found high levels of satisfaction with the school.

Background of school leadership participants

The principal of School C is a highly experienced educator and leader. She had been the principal for many years. She is of White/Anglo-Celtic background. The three members of the leadership team were female with varied levels of teaching experience (ranging from 45 years, to 22 years to seven years). Two of these leaders were of Anglo-Celtic background, while the third member was from Fiji.

Background of teacher participants

There were four teacher participants, three were female and one male. Three of these participants had been at the school for many years (+6 years), while one was relatively new to the school. The teachers had varying responsibilities. Two were class teachers while two had specialist roles (i.e. education support coordinator, PE/technology teacher). All were of White/Anglo-Celtic background.

Background of student participants

There were eight student participants who ranged in age from nine to twelve years. Five were girls and three were boys. The group was culturally diverse with backgrounds ranging from contexts such as India, various parts of Eastern and Southern Europe, and Samoa. One of the boys was vision impaired. All of the student participants were very well spoken and very well behaved. Two of the leadership team attended the interview and this presence clearly impacted on the data gathered. We did get the impression that these students were carefully selected to present a particular positive view of the school.

Background of community participants

There were three community participants, one male and two female. The male participant, whose background is Muslim-Pakistani, was the school council president. His involvement with the school spanned seven years. The two female participants were parents of children currently attending the school. Both were of Anglo-Celtic background.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFINING SOCIAL COHESION

Social cohesion involves the achievement of a ‘value consensus’ in a community allowing adherents to ‘handle conflict and remain stable’ (Mann, 1970: 423). In a multicultural society, promoting social cohesion can generate cross-cultural interactions, feelings of belonging and inclusion, motivation to participate in community programs and social commons, recognition of diversity, and legitimacy in the institutions of government and society (Markus, 2016).

SOCIAL COHESION FACTORS

The Scanlon Foundation Social Cohesion Surveys

The Scanlon Foundation Mapping Social Cohesion national survey has been conducted nine times in the years 2007 – 2016. The survey provides detailed evidence on social cohesion, immigration and population issues. The most recent iteration countered media and political narratives which focussed on social, cultural and ethnic divisions by finding ‘more evidence of stability and social cohesion than of deterioration’ (Markus, 2016: 1). Survey data showed that concern over immigration was at the lowest level recorded since 2007 and highlighted that 91% of respondents feel a ‘sense of belonging to Australia’ (Markus, 2016). Though the survey points to overall stability across the indicators of social cohesion, it identifies an increasing number of people in Australia who have experienced discrimination because of the colour of their skin, their ethnicity, or religion and a relatively high proportion (22%-25%) of respondents who report a perceived negative attitude towards Muslims (Markus, 2016).

In seeking to measure social cohesion, the Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) defines the five domains of social cohesion as belonging, social justice and equity, participation, acceptance, rejection and legitimacy, and worth (Markus, 2016). Results from the latest analysis of the surveys according to each of these areas are discussed below.

Belonging

Belonging is measured as an ‘indication of pride in the Australian way of life and culture; sense of belonging; importance of maintaining Australian way of life and culture’ (Markus, 2016: 12). High levels of positive response (89-91%) to these questions have been evident throughout the iterations of the survey.

Sense of worth

A review of the nine surveys indicates that there had been little change in perceptions of sense of worth since 2007. In 2016, 72% of respondents indicated financial satisfaction and 85% indicated happiness over the prior year.

Social justice and equity

Participants' views are elicited on the adequacy of financial support for people on low incomes; the gap between high and low incomes; whether Australia is perceived as a land of economic opportunity; and trust in the Australian government. In 2016 most participants agreed that Australia was a land of economic opportunity (79%) but there were also many who believed that the disparity between high and low income was too great (77%). Reported trust in the government is much lower at between 26% and 31% over the years of the survey.

Participation

Participation is measured with questions that sought information about political activities such as voting in an election; signing a petition; contacting a Member of Parliament; participating in a boycott; or attending a protest. In 2016, the highest ever percentage of respondents (86%) indicated that they had voted in an election and over the years of the survey around half the participants had signed a petition. Under 25% of respondents had participated in the other activities measured by the survey and these participation rates had remained relatively consistent over the nine surveys.

Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy

This scale is designed to measure perceptions of rejection as indicated by how respondents believe Australians view immigration; reported experiences of discrimination over the prior year; disagreement with government support of ethnic minorities to maintain customs and traditions; and a feeling that life in three or four years will be worse. In 2016, there was an increase to 20% of respondents that reported experiences of discrimination. Other items within this dimension were generally positive including 68% of participants agreeing that accepting immigrants from other countries makes Australia stronger.

EDUCATION AND COHESION

Schools as micropublics

In everyday lives, individuals from diverse backgrounds engage in everyday multiculturalism through participation in shared community spaces. These spaces have been labelled 'micropublics' and are characterised by involving individuals in forced interaction for a mutual purpose, such as education (Ho, 2011). Schools and workplaces are examples of micropublics where habitual engagement provides the opportunity for individuals to come to terms with ethnic differences (Amin, 2002). It has been argued that educational policies, which have encouraged choice of schools, have damaged schools' capacity to provide such spaces of 'prosaic negotiations' (Amin, 2002: 969). Instead, the portrayal of school choice as a democratic right, has led to increasing proportions of students attending schools that do not represent the make-up of people in their neighbourhood. The ability to choose a school has led to an increasing trend in self-segregation, with families choosing to send their children to schools with more 'people like us' (Ho, 2015).

Grossman, Peucker, Smith, & Dellal (2016: 12) suggest that educational settings can connect with families and communities to involve young people in activities that 'directly tackle issues around violent extremism in culturally and context-sensitive ways, creating opportunity for dialogue and understanding'. These experiences 'strengthen young people's open-mindedness, empathy and capacity

for critical thinking' and pre-dispose them to greater engagement in resilient communities. Social cohesion can emerge in these settings and take root in the community.'

In current public and policy discourses, insufficient attention is paid to education-focused responses that challenge polarising and divisive public language and discourses (Grossman et al., 2016; Keddie, 2017). Yet as key socialising agencies, schools play a crucial role in engendering social cohesion as young people from different backgrounds engage with one another (and those beyond school) daily and are positioned as the keys to creating community unity and cohesion. Research that investigates the place of schools and education-based responses has identified strengths and challenges in the structures, policies and practices observed in education (Keddie, 2017; Wilkinson, Santoro & Major, 2017; Wilkinson, 2018).

Social context of education

As the Australian population has risen sharply over the past decade, and growing numbers of asylum seekers have been arriving, young people have found themselves surrounded by increasingly ill-informed national conversations and 'clumsy politics' (Betts, 2010: 33). The blurring of social issues, that politicise immigration, is further apparent with surveys over the past 40 years indicating widespread ignorance on matters of population size, migrant intake and their future implications. This has been identified as *demographic ignorance*, where parts of the population personalise characteristics and interpretations of the cost of living in cities and perceived quality of life as consequences of immigration policy and practice (Betts, 2010).

This demographic ignorance is compounded by problematic understandings of racial, ethnic, cultural and religious differences, which can give rise to racist speech and action (Grigg & Manderson, 2015). A study of school attendees from Victoria found that Australian youth actively engage in some forms of racism, especially racist humour. The study also identified young people engaging in stereotyping behaviours, as well as fixating on cultural exceptionalism, exclusion and excusing racism (Grigg & Manderson, 2015). Whilst there is no academic consensus on how to define 'racism', most understandings are the result of racial ambivalence and unconscious bias (Grigg & Manderson, 2015). The ambivalence of contemporary racism, enmeshed in the complexity and rapidly evolving diversity of Australian society, puts many vulnerable young people at risk of becoming subjects of prejudice (Keddie, 2012b). Certain individuals and groups are particularly vulnerable in the current context.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia is a term that became popular following 9/11 and referred to a fear or 'implicit bias' directed towards Muslims or, more specifically, people perceived to be Muslims (Gonsalkorale, von Hippel, Sherman & Klauer, 2009: 161). *Islamophobia* is commonly discussed in the context of media reporting on terrorism and violent extremism. As such, Islamophobia should be considered both a social and political problem – a threat to social cohesion and a matter of policy and politics.

Radicalisation and extremism

Radicalisation is an imprecise word used to designate a way of thinking that operates outside of *normal* political, ideological or religious parameters (Neumann, 2016; Schmid, 2013). Radicalisation is not a synonym for extremism or terrorism, although media discourses often use the terms interchangeably.

To be *radicalised*, according to Schmid (2013: iv), is to be more liberal and ‘open-minded’ than those who are extremists. Those who are radicalised might be politically active and eager to promote positive change in their communities. Whilst radicalisation is also not violent extremism, it may often be its precursor. Radicalisation often persists unnoticed and is usually only recognised once an act of violent extremism has occurred.

Violent extremism emerges as a result of unchecked or unchallenged fundamentalism, radicalisation and extremism (True & Eddyono, 2017). People exhibiting fundamentalist, radicalised or extremist behaviours are not necessarily a ‘problem’, nor should such people automatically be candidates for de-radicalisation intervention strategies. Violent extremism, however, is unacceptable in civil society and is subject to policing intervention.

Gender and extremism

Research has suggested that countering and preventing gendered inequality can reduce the likelihood of extremism and enhance social cohesion (Bendroth, 1993; Grossman, 2014; Sieckelinck, De Winter & Kaulingfreks, 2015; True & Eddyono, 2017). There are different forms of gender inequalities at different stages on the continuum from fundamentalism to extremism to violent extremism. Preventing violent extremism is most effective in early stage interventions when various forms of gender inequality are expressed in often subtle, every day and ambivalent ways (True & Eddyono, 2017). Gender inequalities that are connected with fundamentalism can be observed in schools (Sieckelinck et al., 2015), in courts and other legal institutions, and in social contexts, including on social networking sites and in the family home or shopping malls (Grossman, 2014). Therefore, support for ‘women and women’s organisations’ is considered a beneficial strategy in preventing violent extremism and enhancing social cohesion (True & Eddyono, 2017: 14).

The Education Context: Australia and the UK¹

Concern about rising social unrest and disharmony and, more recently, anxieties associated with terrorist attacks across the world, have shaped education and school policy. The education policy space in Australia (and other western democracies such as England) has tended to reflect the broader policy landscape around multiculturalism that shifted from an embracing of diversity to an emphasis on affirming a sense of national unity and identity (see Jayasuriya, 2003). This latter emphasis arose from the view that a sense of national unity and, in particular, greater commitment to a core national identity, would help to create social cohesion (see Fleras, 2009). Schools in Australia, especially through a policy emphasis on values education (but also, of course, through broader mandates associated with pursuing the public goals of schooling), have been positioned as key to creating this sense of national unity and cohesion.

In the UK and Australia, for example, the teaching of values has been a national priority with schools expected to teach ‘British’ and ‘Australian’ values through various means, but primarily through curriculum areas such as Citizenship Education and History (see Osler, 2011). Such expectation has generated much contention and debate around what exactly constitutes Britishness and Australian-ness. In both contexts, such contention is associated with the difficulties around defining national

¹ This section appears in a similar context in Keddie, A. (2017). *Supporting and Educating Young Muslim Women: Stories from Australia and the UK*. New York: Routledge.

identity and, in particular, its potentially exclusionary and racialised connotations. As Gilroy (1987) has argued in relation to the UK, Britishness tends to be presented as synonymous with and the prerogative of 'Englishness' and 'Whiteness'. Such racialised views continue to generate highly problematic assumptions, for example, that it is only minority ethnic groups that would be resistant to Britishness and who need to be 'targeted' in relation to their lack of national loyalty (Osler, 2011).

Against this backdrop, the teaching of values in schools in Australia and the UK has been fraught. While there have been attempts to define a set of values for teaching in schools such as 'democracy', 'freedom' and 'tolerance', there has been much uncertainty amongst educators about how best to teach these values in sensitive, positive and inclusive ways (see Maylor, 2010). In Australia, there has been much scepticism around teaching values within the context of national identity. The institution of a National Values Framework by the Howard government in 2005 to all Australian schools, for example, sparked much debate and controversy. This initiative was an attempt to promote 'mainstream' Australian values in schools amid concerns that Australian schools, according to John Howard, were too 'politically correct' and 'values neutral' (Clark, 2007). The framework and associated flagpole initiatives were seen as a symbolic and largely simplistic political manoeuvre designed to reign in cultural diversity under the parameters of a well-intentioned but fairly nebulous idea of national identity (see Clark, 2007). More recently in the UK, the teaching of values and, more specifically, fundamental British values, has been promoted within the context of counter-terrorism as part of the Prevent Strategy. Promoting these values is seen as building pupils' resilience to radicalisation ... and enabling them to challenge extremist views' (UK Department for Education, 2015: 5). Again, much contention has been generated by such a proposal in terms of the ways in which these values might be framed and understood.

The Prevent Strategy is the current counter-terrorism policy in the UK. A key element in this policy in terms of 'responding to the challenge of terrorism' is to 'work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation' (UK Government, 2016: 1). Education is one such sector the government is focusing on with Prevent Duty the current program provided for schools to support educators to identify and support children at risk of radicalisation. In Prevent Duty schools and childcare providers are expected to assess this risk of children being drawn into terrorism, identify children who may be at risk of radicalisation and refer them to a specialised external program for support (UK Department for Education, 2015: 5-6). As with the broader Prevent Strategy, there are serious concerns with the ways in which Prevent Duty is being used to target the Muslim community (see Jackson & Everington, 2016). According to a Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) (2015) report, practitioners and educators are 'finding threats that do not exist' such as a schoolboy accused of 'terrorist-like' views because he was in possession of an Israel Boycott leaflet and a two-year-old boy being referred to social services for singing an Islamic song. This program has led to young Muslim children being viewed through a lens of security (see also Moulin, 2012). There is also concern that such targeting is leading to Muslim children self-censoring – where children do not talk about their views for fear of being 'put on a register' (MCB, 2015).

Another contentious space within English education is the role that Religious Education is expected to play in countering religious extremism. The study of Religion has had a long history in English state schools and has changed markedly in its focus and scope since it became a mandated subject following the Education Act of 1944. Subsequent to the terrorist events of 9/11, the instrumentalist goals of RE became a key emphasis – i.e. its potential to foster social cohesion through engendering understanding of and tolerance towards religious diversity. There is the view within education and broader social policy

discourse that RE can help to ameliorate some of the problems of increased racial and religious tensions and misunderstandings that 9/11 highlighted and caused (Moulin, 2012; Gearon, 2013). However, such a focus is far from unproblematic. A key concern here is that the co-opting of RE within the government's counter-terrorism agenda has led to the study of Islam being politicised within the parameters of security (Gearon, 2013).

In Australia, it is only recently that education and schools have been recognised in the nation's counter-terrorism agenda (see Commonwealth of Australia, 2015). Australia is currently looking to the Prevent Strategy in its present focus on the role of schools and education as sites to support de-radicalisation and different states are presently participating in various initiatives and training programs for educators. Some of these initiatives resonate with the parameters of Prevent. There has, for example, been a state-wide audit of prayer groups in all NSW public schools and the instating of training for educators to identify students who may be at risk of radicalisation. Less resonant with Prevent, are more educative initiatives focused on countering religious racism through embedding the teaching of religious beliefs and spirituality across the curriculum. Suffice to say, as within the UK, the former initiatives have met with much opposition from the Muslim community in their framing of Muslim children and youth within a prism of security (see Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2015). It will be interesting to see how this de-radicalisation agenda plays out in Australian state schools especially given the problematics of positioning de-radicalisation as a religious issue and the history of contention within Australian education about the teaching of religion in schools.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ITS ROLE IN BUILDING SOCIAL COHESION

Previous research into educational leadership suggests that socially just approaches to education are a crucial component for building social cohesion with 'school leaders and leadership practices play[ing] a key role in fostering the kinds of necessary conditions for intercultural understandings to take root and grow' (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015, as cited in Wilkinson, 2018: 55). In contrast, school leaders and their practices can produce 'miseducation' and 'culturally irrelevant leadership' that stymie intercultural understandings (Brooks, 2009; 2012) and 'perpetuate social and demographic divides' (Wilkinson, 2018: 55).

The key elements of socially just leadership practices in schools that support the building of social cohesion are identified by Theoharis and Scanlan (2017: 2) as follows:

1. Building a 'widely shared vision for learning' that 'foregrounds a critical analysis of educational inequities and the intersectionality of these across multiple dimensions of diversity';
2. Developing school culture and teaching and learning programs that are 'inclusive' and in which 'students across areas of difference have authentic access to heterogeneous peers and the core instruction, affirming each student as an integral member of the school community';
3. Ensuring that the school's 'learning environment integrates the delivery of support services into the classrooms; prioritizing access and opportunities over separation';
4. Collaborating with teachers and community so that staff 'embrace a shared responsibility for the education of all students, building capacity to collectively and collaboratively meet each students' needs; families and community members are engaged in authentic partnerships';
5. 'Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner'. This includes an '[e]thical commitment [which] places emphasis on eliminating structural inequities and eliminating structural "isms"'; and

6. 'Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts' and thus, 'prioritizing the provision of educational opportunities for all students across these contexts'.

The above represent broad, general principles in building socially just schools. Realising these principles in practice requires a range of strategies including leading and facilitating challenging conversations around socially volatile issues such as racism, homophobia, sexism, socioeconomic status, ability and extremism. Such difficult but necessary conversations need to focus on how and why social inequitable practices may be flourishing in individual schools and to identify the kinds of conditions and practices that exacerbate social divisions and injustice. To lead such conversations requires that school leaders 'develop and foster a school climate rich in trust and mutual respect' in which participants can feel safe to 'speak candidly on critical issues' (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2013: 37). In turn, this requires '[i]nstilling agreed-upon norms, valuing individual racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds and respecting others' personal and professional perspectives' in order to create ongoing forums in which 'all stakeholders are invited, allowed, and supported to participate' (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2013: 37).

In order to productively and effectively lead such challenging conversations as part of a socially just approach to school leadership requires that leaders/educators develop a 'productive leadership habitus' (Lingard, Hayes, Mills, & Christie, 2003: 73). Such a habitus incorporates three key elements of leading for social justice. These are:

1. A *self-reflexivity* that includes 'habits of reflexive self-monitoring' (Brubaker, 1993, as cited in Lingard et al., 2003: 73); that is, a 'critical or reflexive disposition' and an 'awakening of consciousness and socioanalysis' by which the habitus is changed' (Bourdieu, 1990, as cited in Lingard et al., 2003: 73);
2. A 'real feel for the game' which 'keeps educational, democratic and social justice purposes of school to the fore, while reading the evidence to accept, modify or transform current practices' (Lingard et al., 2003: 74); and
3. 'a capacity and disposition to deal with the wholeness of the school and the educational system as fields ... recogniz[ing] competing agendas, while being able to locate them within the whole' (Lingard et al., 2003: 74).

In sum, a productive leadership habitus is about the 'we' of the school and leads to the 'good school living in the first person plural with a collective responsibility across the school culture for enhancing the learning of all students' (Lingard et al., 2003: 74).

FINDINGS

SCHOOL A

Question One: What do school leaders see as the key factors contributing to social disharmony in the community?

Participants defined social disharmony and the key issues arising from this in relation their school. A wide range of views were offered. Firstly, definitions can be categorised in three ways:

1. Not belonging and valuing others

A school leader characterised this as

not belonging... if people are not valuing others and they make them feel bad, whether they've got an intellectual disability, a physical disability, they're one culture or another, they're one gender or another, that respect is not there, and they're made to feel not valued as a person, an individual who can make a contribution... (School Leader)

2. When goals and ideologies clash

A student suggested that social disharmony arises,

when a group of people who have completely different cultural backgrounds, or ideologies that clash, come to live within a very close proximity, so that they always have a bit of tension there that doesn't let them live in peace and a calm state. There's always something that's bothering them about the people surrounding them, or just the environment, as a whole. (Student)

A female community member suggested it involved 'the unwillingness to have open discussions by some people who 'it's my way or the highway' attitude ...' (Community Participant).

3. A breakdown in cohesion and equality

One student described disharmony in terms of 'fractures within society, or a fractured society. So, it's when there's not a lot of cooperation between different social and ethnic groups' (Student). Building on this, another student suggested that,

for some reason there's a tension in society that is created by people's individual differences that creates some form of conflict, that means that society isn't functioning together, as a whole, the way it ideally should, I guess. There's something that's inhibiting the way it's working. (Student)

Another student's description took this a step further, linking disharmony to 'fractures within the population... like with socio-economic status, they don't have the same opportunities as someone with a higher economic status would have' (Student). A community member said,

For me, it's ... How do you deal with it, how do you tolerate it? How do you say, 'Okay, fine, I've got a different opinion, and so what? Who cares?' ... Because the thing that's important on that, social disharmony, I don't think needs to be a mistake before having a robust discussion. (Community Participant)

Question Two: What are the challenging conversations that arise from these factors?

While participants from all interviews and focus groups characterised the school as largely free from social disharmony, six issues were identified:

1. Family disharmony

A member of the leadership team identified family breakdown as

probably the most critical thing. ... some families ... are going through a really tough time with mum and dad splitting up, and then they come to school and they're really hurting ... And so, they come, and then they're bubbling over with their issues. And of course, they're kids [but] we can't manage our own issues, let alone them. (School Leader)

2. Parental expectations of student performance

Difficult conversations arose in relation to excessive expectations of Asian parents in relation to their children's learning outcomes:

Usually, [the parents] can then be managed, but there are really high expectations of people in this school [from] parents, and the families. And that's for the benefit of this school and also a challenge to this school as well in terms of the disposition that the students have around their learning and their belonging at school. I know they all feel a very strong sense of belonging, but there might be some anxiety around their achievement level. (School Leader)

3. Online disharmony

This was not seen to be a specific issue at the school but was raised by staff, students and community members; for example,

The disharmony actually starts online, so it's so far removed from this place and that physical space that you don't know about it until it gets to a boiling point. Then you go, 'Ok, what's going on?' ... and because a lot of the disharmony that we're facing isn't that face-to-face stuff ... People hiding behind keyboards or their phones and all that sort of stuff. (School Leader)

In addition, the conversation involves dealing with the perpetrator as well as,

encouraging the boy who was being picked on to try and demonstrate more resilience in dealing with being bullied, as well, and helping him deal with those issues. So not only dealing with the perpetrator but also dealing with the victim in that way. And, again, also referring back to the values [of the school]. (School Leader)

4. Language

Staff and students believed that students were able to express who they are through every day discursive practices: 'I think our kids feel pretty comfortable just expressing who they are through their speech...' (School Leader). But language was nevertheless an issue. Chinese students, for example, were self-segregating. The school walked a fine line between balancing the need for social integration with maintaining cultural heritage: 'trying to integrate [the international students] a little bit into the culture

of the school is really critical, [as] the Chinese ones tend to speak in their native tongue' and 'spend a lot of time together' (School Leader).

5. Marriage equality

Challenging conversations arose in relation to the right for same-sex couples to marry, which was prominent at the time of the 2017 Australian plebiscite on marriage equality: 'we've had some kids wanting to print out rainbow posters and then others having strong views about marriage... There's been a couple of arguments around it. It hasn't been violent...' (School Leader)

6. Racism

Racism had been an issue from time to time:

there's been, over the time, a little bit of negativity in students who behave appallingly and call other kids racist names or have negative expression about other kids, and ... I mean, there's some kids that will behave appallingly, but you never turn a blind eye to it and you just nip it in the bud very quickly (School Leader).

Pre-emptive responses by school staff were key to responding to racism.

Question Three (a): How are school leaders seeking to build social cohesion in response to these challenging conversations with young people and non-school actors?

Following on from above, social disharmony was evident in banal ways:

It's [social disharmony] not in the school, it's just sort of like the situations surrounding us... I feel like we're pretty open about things here, I don't think they try to put us under any illusion... (Student)

Within the school, disharmonies identified by students were every day in nature:

There are cliques, for sure, but that's a really simple thing. That's just based on your interests and what you like to do; that's not nearly on the same level as, say, race divides or divides based on religion and stuff like that. So, I guess that kind of doesn't stand up next to it, but that is an example of the kind of division within a level of this school. (Student)

Students saw conflict as a part of life: 'Maybe harmony doesn't mean the world has to be perfect and everyone has to agree on absolutely everything. It just means that conflict is a thing' (Student).

One community participant cited the diversity of the school population as an advantage. Another added that diversity and open-mindedness of student body are seen to be key: 'one of the things that I see is if people of different backgrounds mix together and they are open-minded about mixing with each other...' (Community Member).

Harmony within the school can be attributed to a cohesive, holistic approach and an explicit set of values and expectations that were created and regularly reinforced by the leadership team. Five strategies were notable used to pre-emptively minimise or avert social disharmony.

Strategy 1: Clear values and expectations

The school articulated a clear set of values and expectations, including a strong sense of care, belonging, understanding and interconnectedness amongst students, staff and community. It explicitly values diversity and individual responsibility. Its charismatic principal very deliberately fostered inclusion, articulating an explicit way of doing and valuing things within the school 'family'. Upon arrival at the school, the principal actively promoted inclusion through changing the culture of the school, including staff, students and its community relations:

it was like slowly, slowly, slowly just changing the culture. And I think to do it is really difficult, but it's the most important work of any school... So, expectations around the way [students] speak to one another. Expectations around the way they would speak to their teachers. Expectations about the way teachers would speak to children. Setting a vision for what it is we're trying to achieve, and then working together to try and achieve it... You had to get rid of people in certain teams, because they were not responding well to children. They were not giving them any hope. So, it was around little things, like you will not yell at children. Be explicit. (Principal)

Community participants have confidence in leadership and school processes to deal with challenging conversations.

Co-designed by staff, the vision and values sought to promote a safe and respectful relationships framework: 'the school's target [is] to make sure these people aren't hurt in that way.' Clear messages are sent in relation to school conduct and values: 'I think most things at this school are very well communicated and the kids are set up for success through very direct instruction around what the expectations are...' (School Leader).

Teachers actively model values, behaviours and expectations through their language: 'I'll talk about [school values] as being key... So, everybody needs to keep their minds focused on those three values' (School Leader). This was reinforced by staff through various behavioural codes based on the vision and values and are reinforced when certain difficult conversations arise, such as racism:

...when we deal with the things that do come up, we always refer back to [the school's values] – if you're dealing with students and there's conflict or there's an issue, you haven't demonstrated this particular value. And so, they know, 'Ok, not only has my behaviour been poor, but this is the value that relates to [it]'. (School Leader)

In response to an incident of racism, a clear behaviour code is imposed by staff. Expectations about how to behave are framed by the school as a community:

...you've got to really tell them, show them what it is to be a community and a family and care about each other. It's really – I've sort of thought about it a little bit, and I think we've started with really clear expectations. I think it's just embedding that this is at the – this is the [school's] way. And what is the [school's] way? And we're all very clear about what the [school's] way is. (School Leader)

Students also draw on the school's values to engage challenging conversations:

We have particular values at this school that our teachers put around the classrooms... – obviously not everyone's going to uphold them – but we are encouraged to. It's something I believe helps us belong to the school. So, if I was faced with conflict, I would try to deal

with it in a way that would make my school proud, I guess, and try to be resilient in fixing it, and not just giving up, and obviously not attacking the person if I was confronted with something like that. (Student)

Another student gave an example of dealing with family conflict that reflected- the values and behavioural norms taught at school:

I feel like we're at an age that we have to sort of decide what path we're going to take down our future, and sometimes that path isn't exactly the path our parents want for us. So that's a big topic of conversation, to try to focus, so that everyone's happy in the household. Things you don't want anybody to be aggressive or upset about, you kind of just have to have a calm, friendly discussion about it, and understand the opposing side as well, and try to reason with them so that everyone comes to a mutual understanding. (Student)

Another student suggested: 'I feel like the school has kind of helping us, teaching us the values that the community should uphold ...' (Student).

The inclusive language of the school is, in small part, a response to the growing intake of international students. One example of this was moving beyond an implicit English language-only policy:

There's not just rules for one and then rules for the Russian. We've all got to be on the same page so that doesn't happen anymore. But it took an enormous amount of [change], teachers would say 'don't speak in Russian [or] Chinese'... To try and help people see that that's because they're not trying to be rude, it's because that's what they're comfortable communicating in. They don't have the breadth of understanding English... (Principal)

Parental engagement and awareness of the school's values is fostered through events recognising diversity, while encouraging a view that students are foremost a member of the *school community*. The principal strongly felt that,

I helped [the school community, including parents] see that look we've got to all be the same. You know, I don't want complaints, I don't want Russian kids thinking they're different, I want them to be the same. You have to understand, these are the rules. (Principal)

The principal gave another example of when a parent from one ethnicity refused to have their child reside in the home of a family of another ethnicity during a student engagement program. The mother was invited to speak to the principal:

I said, 'Look,' and I showed her our mission about being creating global citizens and about, 'That is not the way we do business.' And ... 'you've put forward this terrible message', and our message back to you is, therefore, 'your child cannot participate in this exchange programme. If you want them to participate, then they have to have a mindset that they're inclusive and that they're going to learn, and every experience will bring about growth'. (Principal)

Strategy 2: Symbolism

Values such as inclusion were reinforced symbolically throughout the school through visible displays of cultural and gender diversity, with posters, flags and large murals. Another unifying symbol was the introduction of a uniform, cultivating a set of norms around dress. Students provided an example of a

transgender student who was able to wear the appropriate uniform in relation to their gender identification.

Strategy 3: Human Resources

Human resources were provided to support the school's vision and strategy. Counsellors, for example, play a role in ameliorating conflict within school. Student managers are

in charge of each year level ... really try to make the environment good for everybody, to make sure that if there are any little conflicts, that if they can help, they will do their best to help everyone feel better about a bad situation, if it has happened. (Student)

A student said that teachers 'are very approachable. There's no unreachable wall between us and teachers, and us and any adult staff in the school. It's really good.' Students feel comfortable there is

a level of trust that they would do their job and help you out, personally. So, if I was ever in a situation where I needed that, I would have felt more than comfortable to discuss with a teacher or the counselling staff of how to solve the problem, or how to approach it. (Student)

Another student agreed, providing this example:

At the start of the year, for me, my teacher for a particular subject said to us, 'I'm more than just your teacher. If you ever need anything for health reasons or personal reasons, please come to me or email me'. (Student)

Staff are physically,

very accessible. Like, they're placed in key locations... like, nearby the lockers, or the majority of the year eights, student managers are placed in the centre of where the year eights would hang out, usually, and if you're just walking down the corridors, there's student manager offices that people can just walk into if they need to. (Student)

Strategy 4: Curriculum responses

Opportunities were provided for challenging conversations through the curriculum and other activities, such as debating and opportunities to explore topics such as terrorism. According to one student:

My younger sister... did a project on terrorism, and she's 12 years old... I guess that's evidence that they're starting to expose people [to the idea that] the world [is] an imperfect place... Although it's kind of shocking to be teaching young kids about these challenging things, I guess teaching and informing, it has to happen I guess. (Student)

The researchers did not explicitly investigate how this curriculum was taught.

Other activities included a Year Seven induction programme, student-run assemblies and events to promote diversity, such as R U Okay day. Students clubs and activities occur throughout the year to foster inclusion and belonging and offer forums for challenging conversations. For example, there is 'a club, or a collective, that the school organised where people who support LGBT people can gather and I guess express their thoughts and feelings' (Student). Music and sport also foster cohesion (Community Member). The school had previously discussed whether to have separate activities for males and females, choosing to have mixed gender activities. As one member of the leadership team stated:

...the gender, boys versus girls type issue, is also a non-issue. We would not see it as a problem – nothing... We had a big debate whether we should have a girls' only day in the gymnasium, so that – because it's just full of boys running around. But now they have mixed netball and they have mixed activities, so they just get on together and [have a] Resilience and respect day, it's called now. (School Leader)

The school actively promotes activities and events beyond the school gates:

one of the key things we do so successfully is that the students actually have so many opportunities to go beyond the borders of the school grounds and engage in a really meaningful and enjoyable way with local groups and international tours. (School Leader)

Partnerships with other schools internationally provide a positive means of community engagement and understanding.

Strategy 5: Community connections

Reinforcing community values and expectations beyond the school gates was important as well. Students were encouraged to be ambassadors of the school, embodying school values such as active citizenship: 'Being good ambassadors and speaking about what respect and being a good person – actually *what it looks like*' (School Leader). This extends to providing visible leadership in the community, as the principal suggested:

Once upon a time we used to have churches and we used to go to church leaders and they'd be guided by the sermon or whatever it was, you know, and so you have to have the right community people showing a different way forward. (Principal)

The school also makes its staff and facilities available for wider community events and other schools. Alternatively, a community participant observed that the leadership fosters a welcoming inclusive environment to community members:

something I have noticed, the moment I walked into this school, it was an amazing atmosphere. I've worked for one of the better known private schools here in Melbourne for a while, you come in here and I've made that comment to my kids, these students look tidy, their shirts aren't hanging out of their pants, the teachers walk around and actually say, "Hello" to you. They don't know me from Adam, and it's got a wonderful atmosphere that you can feel the moment you walk in. So, I think that's an enormous credit to the school principal. (Community Member)

It was also noted by a community participant that 'a really strong school council makes a difference as well', with another observing that 'we've got a number of people that come in and provide assistance from the community that have had children perhaps 10 years ago' (Community Member).

Question Three (b): How are school leaders seeking to build social cohesion in response to these challenging conversations with policy imperatives?

The school exhibited strong relationships with the community, including alumni, parents, via school council and local government. Relations with DET (regional office) appeared to be strategic and positive. Community members noted that staff were knowledgeable and capable of navigating and leveraging policy and bureaucratic frameworks. The school cultivated relationships with the local State Member of

Parliament, who had a visible presence in the school. The students see and knew the MP and recognised the value of connectedness to local political representatives.

Some policy pressures were acutely felt by school leadership, who argued that there was not enough response to, and recognition of, leadership and the challenges of building cohesive school communities. The principal found bringing groups together to build community to be challenging:

I just think it's a really difficult thing to do, like, to bring the groups together to actually build a community. But you have to have really strong conversations with parents and sometimes they're not pleasant and the complaints will come to the region and be in central office, they'll come. That's okay. I've got a file of complaints. I don't care. I'm still doing really significant work.

But I think leaders are not strong in some instances and I feel very sad for the fact they're being hammered...by the Department and parents. The minute there's a parental complaint it goes straight to the Department and the Department are right on your case ... I'm really tough but it does wear you down and then you've got, you know, very difficult staff that you're dealing with.

It takes an incredible amount of energy to have people working together and harmoniously and, you know, to understand where we're heading and what our core purpose is...The Department's view would be 'don't deal with [certain challenging conversations]. You're the principal, don't deal with those matters.' If I'm not front and centre of what's going on in my school at every step of the way, then you might as well give up the bloody job. The job is actually not to just have nice conversations with teachers about their performance. It's actually to get your hands dirty and understand where people are at and support your people to deliver their best. It's not [the Department's] view or understanding. (Principal)

Having challenging conversations took a personal toll on the principal and staff:

That's the sacrifice you make and, really, it's not a job you do for money... you actually leave a legacy in education. It's a very big ask and a very big sacrifice and your families, they're the people that pay the price. But the Department sometimes lose sight of that and so I think that, you know, I look at the young ones coming through and I think how best do I support them to be able to continue to deliver and yet have a balanced life. (Principal)

The principal welcomes the government's attention to improving principal wellbeing.

SCHOOL B

Question One: What do school leaders see as the key factors contributing to social disharmony in the community?

The factors contributing to social disharmony encompassed those occurring more broadly in society as well as those specific to School B's community. They included:

1. The privileged nature of the school community which insulated students from social realities;
2. Home and school divisions when addressing boys' misbehaviour;
3. Divisions arising through marginalisation and lack of inclusion of certain groups of students in school;

4. Sexism and misogyny;
5. Extremism;
6. Student interactions on social media;
7. Economic disparities; and
8. Personal and peer group divisions.

Due to word length limitations, we will focus on the first five factors that were identified as key to the school.

Question Two: What are the challenging conversations that arise from these factors?

1. The privileged nature of the community which insulated students from social realities

The school leadership team commented that disharmony in terms of

violent behaviour, or things to do with ethnic groups ... is not a feature of the school, because it's sort of a bubble ... and so you can end up with behaviours and discourse that's actually unhelpful around community making ... for kids ... they don't even know what goes on. (School Leader)

As a result, the translation of progressive values into social activism and a 'fire in the belly' was lacking amongst many students. For example, the leadership team noted that students might subscribe to being green and sustainable 'but that doesn't mean you put your rubbish in the bin, that means you talk about it, you wave a flag ... but actually, 'Can you put your rubbish in that bin? Oh, no, no' (School Leader).

2. Home and school divisions when addressing boys' misbehaviour

The phrase, 'permissive parenting' was used to describe how some parents adopted double standards and/or minimised their boys' misbehaviour, particularly in relation to racist and misogynist incidents. For instance, when it was established by the school that a group of students had called another student offensive racist names whilst in a public space, a leadership team member noted that the 'parents of one of the kids completely went into 'defence of my child' mode. "What's the problem, they're just having a little bit of fun?" (School Leader). The school was then subject to a parental complaint to the minister. They observed, 'They can't have an issue around the fact that the human rights frame says that 'actually you can't be racist'. But that aside, that's when I talk about permissive parenting' (School Leader).

The second incident involved boys who were members of the local football club which had got into the local final. To celebrate, the boys were 'maraud[ing] through the school as a sort of pack, scaring the pants off all the little kids' (Principal). When the families were called in, they were 'arguing with the leadership team, 'What's wrong with that, they're just being boys', and I'm like 'Are you joking, you have to be joking?' (Principal). These double standards in behaviour, according to school leadership, cut across all backgrounds, including SES and ethnicity:

So, these are ... erudite, generally informed members of our community, who would say who are essentially supporting boofhead behaviour. And so, it's a really interesting – you know, the school has become more important around pushing back, around behaviours and agendas that we consider to be equal, are harmonious community. (Principal)

3. Divisions arising through marginalisation and lack of inclusion of certain groups of students in school

Teachers voiced their concerns about individual students who were disengaged from their peers, the school and sometimes, their families and communities. One argued:

There's got to be a way to keep those students who may otherwise fall through and end up in those pathways, keeping them engaged in some way because even if they're physically here, it is that disengagement from the community, from the learning process that leaves them feeling quite isolated and alone. (Teacher)

For teachers, this group of students represented the next challenge for schools and community:

I think what this school's done pretty well is find the groups to give a space for kids that would usually be marginalised in other schools, and out in the community. We've found them a relatively safe space, but the kids that are bouncing around not knowing who they are or what to do, that's possibly the next piece. And we usually end up finding who they are because they pop up as an anti-something. And I think that seems to me to be echoed in the community more and more these days. The people that really pop their heads up, they pop their heads up because they're anti-something, and they're feeling more and more marginalised. (Teacher)

4. Sexism and misogyny

Sexism was identified as a prevalent and long-standing societal issue that was not being well dealt with by schools. The leadership team remarked that sexist behaviours were 'not new issues, but schools have been really slow to respond to breaking down those stereotypes because they exist everywhere' (School Leader)

Unlike many schools which may ignore sexism or struggle with how to deal with it, the leadership team noted that in School B:

a lot of our conversations are around equality and bystander behaviour and reflecting community standards and how we treat people around here and everything that goes with that. So, we're trying to have an active interface with our community, rather than pretend it's not happening. (School Leader)

The community member noted that the school dealing with 'issues around gender ... was to be commend[ed]' as 'it's probably an issue that most schools would probably just ignore, but for [School B] ... it's been a real priority'.

For the leadership team, the role of school was critical when it came to addressing broader social issues,

gender and equality is one of the main things that we can address at a school level that came out of the recommendations from the Royal Commission [into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse] ... [for some girls at the school] it's something they've been concerned about for some time and then this has provided a vehicle for them to be able to actually speak up and say something. (School Leader)

The teachers commented in relation to how sexism made itself felt as misogyny in the school,

A small cohort of boys ... aspire to some alt right views on culture, gender politics ... It's their way of being different ... like drawing swastikas on school grounds ... [or demanding], 'Well, what about men? Why is it that women get this?' and those sorts of discussions. (Teacher)

The community member concurred, remarking:

I did get the sense that with this work, particularly around gender – we were really kind of brushing up against something that’s very hot right now ... I could see a lot of the young, kind of alpha male students really pushing back hard against it ... But that to me pointed to a broader issue of maledom in Australia kind of struggling to come to terms with experiences of others that are different to theirs and their willingness, or unwillingness to see that. (Community Member)

5. Extremism

Although representing a tiny number of students, the leadership team commented that,

We do have this group of kids who have somehow found each other and ... they’re sort of not discriminatory around what they’re discriminatory against ... They’re just incredibly right wing and they’re fuelled by the sort of Trump blah. (School Leader)

When the school sought help from the Department of Education and Training with how to deal with these kinds of challenging behaviours, leadership commented:

they had no strategies on ‘what are we going to do about these kids?’ So, when you can’t get any grab with the families, because possibly they’re religious right, or they’re neo-Nazis, or they’re whatever else ... you’ve got nowhere to go, because often their behaviour’s clandestine. So, you then go, Can I really affect and influence that group, or am I better off grabbing this group in the middle and moving them up to this more ethical, more active, more positive space? And then when they put their head up, we’ll just give them another bang. Because really, I don’t know if we’re ever going to be able to fix that bit. (School Leader)

Teachers remarked poignantly on the vulnerability of some students, suggesting limited social connections might increase their chances of being ‘targeted by extreme groups, but even opportunistic types as well’ (Teacher). Teachers worried about the fate of such students when they left school and the decreasing community safety nets. One summed these concerns up thus:

School is a big socialiser and big community builder, but ... there’s a community outside of the school. And particular kids who are disengaged and schools are trying to find learning plans, and there’s a whole bunch of competing needs ... when they do walk out the gate ... who’s keeping an eye on them? Who’s aware of them? Are there any nets out there? Because they do perhaps go into their room and sit on the internet for a time and that’s where like finds like, and that can be the appeal ... “You can be one of us, look how much fun it is?”. You know, young teenage boys, guns, glamour. (Teacher)

Question Three: How are school leaders seeking to build social cohesion in response to these challenging conversations in ways that engage with: young people and non-school actors; and policy imperatives

School B identified a range of strategies they employed to engage young people in debates, discussions and most importantly, forms of activism that overtly tackled social and political volatilities in the school and without and fostered social cohesion. Strategies included:

Strategy 1: Social justice philosophy

The leadership team worked from a set of values and explicit social justice philosophy which was translated into a whole school approach. This included developing a school narrative and set of values underpinned by a strong commitment to taking action in response to social issues identified within the students' lives.

A whole school narrative was critical in distilling the key values of the school and using these values as a mean to generate discussion and debate about what living well in a world worth living in entailed. This meant going beyond discussion to encouraging behaviour change that led to action and social activism to make the world a better and fairer place:

So, we try and develop a narrative around how we'd be at the school and how that's reflected, you know through our actions. So, ... we have re-visioned our values together, as a community and determined that [they should be values associated with social justice and activism] ... So, unusual ... school values ... but a very powerful story. (School Leader)

Strategy 2: Staff selection.

Selecting staff that reflected the values of the school, but who also came with a diversity of views and were prepared to take action, was crucial. As the leadership team remarked, 'We don't want beige, we want someone with an opinion. So, in order to build the brand, we want diversity of opinion and we want people who will take action' (School Leader).

Strategy 3: Building parent and community partnerships.

Building partnerships with parents and community was not an optional extra but crucial in dealing with ongoing social issues such as sexism and other forms of inequality. These partnerships provided an opportunity to openly deal with crucial issues in ways that aimed to model for students and parents what the school understood to be community standards. The leadership team observed:

We have this really interesting community issue around young men, sexism, gender bias, language ... who are ... part of clubs and organisations that don't seem to get it. And so, what we're often trying to do is partner with community groups, like football clubs and with families around how kids' parties ... So, a lot of our conversations are around equality and bystander behaviour and reflecting community standards and how we treat people around here and everything that goes with that. So, we're trying to have an active interface with our community, rather than pretend it's not happening. (School Leader)

Strategy 4: Clubs

Clubs were identified by teachers and students as an extremely important part of building a 'community within a community' at School B and allowing students to find their 'own tribe'. Students noted how having a club they could attend really helped them start to make friends and feel included:

Yeah ... when I first came to school I did find it actually quite hard to find friends that were kind of like me, but then I went to a few clubs that I was interested in in that way, as you were saying, you find people that have some of the same interests as you, so I think clubs is a really good way to find friends. (Student)

Clubs were not mandatory, students had the freedom to start any clubs they wanted. Teachers worked with the students to facilitate the clubs. As well as building a sense of inclusion, clubs also helped students to look outward to explore issues, interests and identities, such as sexual identity, featuring visitors who gave talks and helped students to build connections into larger communities.

Strategy 5: Specific training in upstander behaviours and conflict resolution.

School B gained funding from the local council to run conflict training programs in the school including for students, staff, leaders and parents. These were run by a leadership training provider with strong social justice principles. From all stakeholders' perspectives, this was a very helpful program that had raised staff and students' social awareness and given staff and students the skills to negotiate conflicts in a more constructive manner and to recognise socially unjust behaviours in oneself and others and to deal with them. These behaviours could range from particular kinds of language used to sexist and misogynistic behaviours. This was the only program of its kind identified in the case study schools that directly addressed such issues and gave students and teachers the skills and personal awareness to deal with them.

The following characteristics of the program made it particularly powerful. They included:

- Use of outside facilitators who were in congruence with the school's social justice and activism philosophy
- Active backing of leadership team

I think young people, we sometimes underestimate their capacity to – they are the change ... So, I can go 'blah blah blah blah', but actually unless all the people take it on, then you've got a problem. So, the idea that we end up with experts who then are able to speak with our own kids. So, that idea of 'train the trainer', I think is very powerful. The content was really good, it was well presented – the presenters were fantastic. (School Leader)

- Awareness raising of all staff.

The fact that the program involved all staff including senior leadership and forced them to look at their own attitudes and behaviours was crucial. The community member explained:

We did a session with 120 staff where we used forum theatre as a way to, I guess, kind of recreate or create these kind of situations that happen amongst staff where, you know it might be an offhand comment, or a joke, or, you know a comment about a student or a parent and how do we, kind of hit pause and kind of unpack and have a conversation with someone or with a group of people about what kind of behaviours are acceptable within that culture... (Community Member)

- Active involvement of staff in student training

The community member remarked that

what I really enjoyed about School B is that they sent along quite a few staff [to the student training] which makes me really happy because I think, you know cross-aged learning is much more effective. So yes, at times we had three or four or five teachers in each group, which was really rich. (Community Member)

- Dispersed leadership

The commitment and dedication of the welfare coordinator and team, along with enthusiastic teachers who got fully involved was a key element in the successful design and delivery of the program:

Well [the Head of Welfare] is amazing. She's just passionate and she's a doer and she just doesn't stuff around. So, she's been my main contact person; so, I've ticked with her around the design of the program and I, you know presented to her my ideas and altered them, but also in designing the manual and the specific scenarios that we look at. (Community Member)

SCHOOL C

Question One: What do school leaders see as the key factors contributing to social disharmony in the community?

There were three distinct factors that staff, students and community members of School C viewed as contributing to social disharmony: 1) divisions arising as a product of ethnic or religious difference, 2) divisions arising through gender difference and 3) divisions arising through differences between the home and school culture

1. Divisions arising as a product of ethnic or religious difference

For many of the respondents, social disharmony was associated with division between distinct cultural groups who live by 'different values'. Such division, as the principal explained, characterized the school when she was appointed 14 years ago, reflecting the broken-ness of community: where 'groups and people' from different countries and linguistic backgrounds 'didn't mix'. The leadership team and teachers explained such division as associated with or produced by some of the exclusionary structures of the school and the broader climate of fear at the time - a climate that reinforced staff fears and social polarization. Social division and conflict were also associated with circumstances of poverty and limited education as well as the hierarchies of advantage and disadvantage within particular marginalised groups (e.g. Muslim groups).

2. Divisions arising through gender difference

A significant factor contributing to social disharmony for the principal, leadership team and teachers was gender discrimination. Several women leaders spoke of experiencing disrespect, harassment and abuse at the hands of a small number of 'Middle Eastern' men and some of the boys in their classes. For the leadership team, this gender discrimination was attributed to the patriarchal cultures in some families where 'being a man' is a privileged status and 'having a son' 'the epitome of success for a parent'.

3. Divisions arising through differences between the home and school culture

Another significant factor at the school noted by the teachers and members of the leadership team as contributing to social disharmony related to the differences between home and school culture. This was manifest in their accounts of abuse inflicted on them by some of the parents. It was also manifest in the disrespect they encountered in relation to some parents and students which reflected a gendered dimension. These women expressed feelings of being disrespected by some of the fathers and some of

their male students. They also observed some boys' disrespectful relations with their parents, especially their mothers.

Question Two: What are the challenging conversations that arise from these factors?

1. Divisions arising as a product of ethnic or religious difference

There were many challenging circumstances and conversations arising from the ethnic and religious differences described in the previous section. There was a specific story that was relayed in our interview with the leadership team that exemplified the challenges this school faced in relation to the ethnic and religious divisions in the community. One of the school leaders explained to us that a Muslim family had been 'chased' out of the area by an Anglo family who 'used to go in and trash their house at night. They got so scared that they moved' (School Leader). She described this family as 'very nasty' whose 'language was foul' and 'abuse was horrible'. This family's Islamophobia was expressed at the school with verbal abuse such as the father telling the principal that she was 'favouring the f-ing towel heads'. One school leader expressed her shame at being Australian with regard to this family's Islamophobia and fear of them in light of this abuse. The principal was forced to obtain an intervention order against the father to prevent him coming to the school.

There were other stories that members of the leadership team relayed that were associated with religious or cultural difference. Many of these stories related to the Muslim students at the school. For example, one teacher told of an incident between two Muslim girls in her class who had 'had a bit of an argument'. This argument was related to a disagreement these girls were having over being a 'good Muslim', as she explained:

...this one student has said to the other student, 'You're not a very good Muslim, because you're wearing shorts.' And then the other girl had said back to the first girl, 'Yeah, well, you're not a very good Muslim because you shouldn't be saying that to me, and good Muslims don't say that kind of thing to other Muslims.' (School Leader)

According to this participant, one of the girls was 'quite upset' because she is from a 'family that's very straight down the line' in terms of their commitment to their religion. She explained to us that she dealt with this incident by explaining to the girls, that 'we don't bring religion into school', that she was 'really disappointed' that the girls were arguing over religion because 'religion is personal'. She gave the girls 'five minutes' to 'sort out' their 'issues' and 'make [it] right.' After the five minutes, the girls came back to her and said they had sorted it out, they were 'fine' and 'that was the end of it'.

2. Divisions arising through gender difference

As noted in the previous section, a significant factor contributing to social disharmony for the principal, leadership team and teachers was gender discrimination. In particular, they retold stories of gender discrimination that related to some of the school's 'Middle Eastern' fathers. They were careful to present these accounts with the caveat that they did not represent the majority of their experiences with the Muslim families. Nevertheless, there were several worrying incidents relayed that for these women were associated with the gendered cultural attitudes of some of the Muslim fathers. The principal explained:

There were times in the very beginning when some of those males came into the school, didn't want to talk to me because I was a female. Did not respect any of that. I did have a father come

in to the school, and he was abusing my School Council president's two sons ... I had to go out to say – because he had one of them by the neck, and I had to say – ‘Please stop that, or I’ll call the police.’ [and he said] ‘I’m not talking to you, you’re a woman. I’m not talking to you.’ And I said, ‘You’ll have to stop that right now, I’ll call the police.’ He said that to me again. (Principal)

As the principal went on to say, it took one of her male staff to intervene on her behalf to calm the situation. This staff member stated to the father: ‘[Ms A. is] the principal here. You will have to listen to her.’ The principal told us that the father responded to her male staff member as ‘he was a man’. She also told us that his son (who was attending the school at the time) later went on to engage in terrorist activities.

Other incidents that the leadership team and teachers spoke of in relation to gender discrimination were associated with some of the boys who, as the principal noted, ‘have very strong beliefs about what women should be doing’ (Principal). Some of these incidents reflected minor oppositional behaviours while others were more serious such as physical assault. One of the teachers told us of incidents of female teachers being physically assaulted by some of their male students including being ‘kicked in the stomach and spat in the face’ (Teacher). She noted that such behaviour for these boys seemed ‘ok to do with women ... there’s no way they would pull that on [male teachers]’ (Teacher). This teacher also commented on her observation of some boys’ treatment of their mothers. As she explained, ‘I have parents in prep that the boys, physically will punch their mums, like, ‘Let’s go. I want to go to the playground,’ [they will] grab them by the throat or grab them by the hair’ (Teacher).

Gendered behaviour more broadly seemed to be taken-for-granted for the students at School C. In our interview, students spoke of gendered groupings in the playground and referred to their male and female classmates in highly gendered terms. One student noted that in the ‘yard’ at ‘break time’, the students ‘all split up’ and went to ‘different places and areas and groups’. She explained that their tended to be a ‘girls’ group and a ‘guys’ group, because ‘... they just don’t connect’. Other students characterised girls as ‘connective’ and ‘calm’ and ‘into makeup’, while boys were described as ‘rough’ and into ‘fighting’. These characterisations led to the tendency for girls to be devalued - manifest in their exclusion from activities dominated by boys (such as sport).

3. Divisions arising through differences between the home and school culture

The stories of gender discrimination in the previous section associated with boys demonstrating disrespect towards female teachers and mothers were associated with a disparity of expectations between the home and school environments, as one of the teachers stated: ‘a lot of these children, particularly the boys, rule the roost’ (Teacher). Another female teacher expressed her view that this disrespect was a product of these boys thinking, ‘so, at home, I live my life this way, and I’m valorised because I’m a man and I don’t have to do a thing, but at school, I actually do ... at home one thing is like this, and at school, the culture is this’ (Teacher).

Question Three (a): How are school leaders seeking to build social cohesion in response to these challenging conversations in ways that engage with young people and non-school actors?

There were many implicit and explicit structures, practices and relations at School C that could be seen as productive in responding to the challenges described in the previous sections. Central to the school’s efforts in this regard, was ensuring that the school itself reflected a climate of respect and inclusion where staff, students and parents felt a sense of agency and connection to the school. For many of the

respondents this was possible given the small size of the school where ‘everyone knows everyone’ (Student) and ‘everyone [was] on board’ (Teacher) with the school’s ethos. If the earlier highly positive descriptions of the school by many of this study’s participants are anything to go by, it certainly seems that these efforts were effective. The following describes how the leadership at School C supported the school’s vision of cultural inclusion in relation to 1) staff, 2) students and 3) parents/the community.

Strategy 1: Fostering a respectful, inclusive and agentic staff culture

For the principal, productively working towards the school’s vision required a particular kind of staff member. She stressed that the school’s ‘alive’, ‘happy’ and ‘inclusive’ atmosphere was attributable to recruiting the ‘right’ staff who were at the school ‘for the right reasons’, not just to collect their pay and ‘go home at the end of the week’. For her this meant staff ‘believing in’ the school’s many programs and practices (some of which are explored below) designed to create this atmosphere. It meant focusing on more than just the children’s academic achievement to building ‘that whole person’. The teachers similarly spoke of the principal being ‘very careful about who she [brought] into the school to teach’ in terms of ‘fit[ting] into the [school’s] culture’ (Teacher). They viewed this as important because ‘you don’t want people coming in and ... unravell[ing] everything that you’re trying to do’ (Teacher). They spoke of the ‘hard work’ that the principal and the whole staff had put in to create the school’s climate of inclusion and care.

Key here was the school’s explicit focus on promoting respectful relationships between and amongst everyone connected with the school. There were specific programs in place to foster these relationships and they will be elaborated on in the next sections. It is important to mention here the significance that the principal and her staff placed on recognition and respect in relation to incidental interactions with all members of the school where ‘welcoming’ and ‘friendly’ connections were ‘role modelled’. This, she explained was particularly important to ensure that parents (especially those who felt linguistically and culturally marginalised by the school) did not feel ‘threatened’. Also, key to creating a climate of social inclusion and cohesion, in the principal’s view, was approaching social conflict (such as that described in the previous sections) in non-aggressive, conciliatory and constructive ways.

Significant to facilitating this process at School C was a ‘growth mindset’. This mindset draws from research into neuroplasticity based on the recognition that the brain continually changes through various social and environmental stimuli. The principal’s view was that a ‘growth mindset’ – i.e. the willingness and capacity to think deeply, reflect and broaden one’s thinking – for students, teachers and parents had been an integral part of their ability to build such a resilient and supportive community’ where staff and students were open to learning and change.

Key to this focus on growth mindset was the principal’s endeavours to provide her staff with leadership opportunities. She spoke of believing in her staff and supporting them to ‘grow and believe in themselves’ through these opportunities. In this respect, she wanted to ‘promote’ the ‘best practice’ of her staff through ‘trusting and enabling them to have a go at stuff’ and follow their ‘passion’. She associated this sense of autonomy and trust to pursue opportunities with the staff ‘feeling very valued’. She also commented on the flow-on effects of this approach as good for the children, ‘the kids see the teachers inspired and curious and happy and sharing experiences with them about learning, and that keeps the kids up there, which is wonderful’ (Principal).

Strategy 2: Fostering a respectful, inclusive and agentic student culture

According to the staff we interviewed, and as mentioned earlier, all of the students benefited from these efforts to create a school environment of respect and inclusion. The principal's aim was to prepare the children to 'grow up and face' 'the tough world', as she noted, 'this is not utopia here where everything's beautiful and sweet and lovely' (Principal). In the main, she stated, the children were well behaved – 'polite, gorgeous kids'. The children were taught implicitly and explicitly about resilience, being respectful and valuing each other through 1) the climate and informal relations with teachers and students, 2) general rules and expectations within most classrooms around notions of safe and responsible behaviour and 3) specific programs and curriculum areas (which we will focus on in this section).

The student leadership and multi-age programs were seen to be significant in fostering respect, inclusion and agency for students. The Student Leadership Team included two students from each grade (24 in total) who were selected to lead by their peers and their teachers following the presentation of a speech to their class (about topics such as being caring or being responsible). The members of the Team were responsible for 'looking after each other, buddying and being a friend' (Principal) especially in the playground. They were also responsible for behaviour management. One teacher spoke of the leaders in her class as being:

...quite strict with the kids, so that if they see them doing something that is out of line, on the playground (e.g. something unsafe), they're very quick to reinforce that, that that's not okay, and the kids do listen. They're just used to listening to that, so, they do listen at that point, which is pretty impressive. (Teacher)

Student leaders were also responsible for running events such as assembly and graduation night and multi-age activities. Multi-age activities were designed to encourage students from different year levels to connect and involved the student leaders running activities for groups of 16-20 children every Friday afternoon. One of the teachers described the intention of these sessions as an opportunity for leaders to 'build relationships, to practice [their] leadership skills, and to groom the leaders for the next couple of years [through] modelling leadership skills' (Teacher).

These leadership roles seemed to be taken very seriously by many of the students which indicated their importance. There were sanctions for not behaving in accordance with leadership standards – i.e. students could lose their leadership badge for behaviour not 'fitting' the 'position'.

The principal commented on the confidence and sense of agency students developed as a result of their participation in these programs (especially their running of events and activities). This was fostered by the promotion of leadership roles 'right from prep'. The students spoke in positive terms about the Leadership and multi-age programs. They noted that it encouraged students from 'different age groups' to 'get to know each other' and 'get along' rather than always play in their own year level, as one student explained: 'you've got all the grades together and you're all playing and enjoying the time together. I feel like it just helps you all get along' (Student). The students also spoke positively about the sense of responsibility they gained in carrying out these roles and the skills they were building, as one student commented:

I feel like if you're in leadership ... those skills (e.g. organising events, managing people and public speaking) are going to somehow be needed in the future, and I feel like if you get to have a whole

year of practice, with lots of different skills and techniques, I feel like that's going to really help.
(Student)

For another student, leadership was a positive experience because it led to the 'older kids [having] a bit of a say in what goes on' – he mentioned here the planning and selection of activities and being able to propose ideas to the school such as holding a 'careers day'.

The children were also taught explicitly about resilience, being respectful and valuing each other through the school's participation in the Respectful Relationships pilot program. The school is a lead school in this program which takes a whole school approach to addressing gendered violence and explores issues of gender identity and stereotyping within the context of a broader focus on identity and resilience within and beyond the classroom.

Strategy 3: Fostering a respectful, inclusive and agentic parental/community culture

Just as the children benefited from the school's coordinated efforts to create a school environment of respect and inclusion, so did the parents and families who were affiliated with the school. There were, however, particular strategies geared towards parents and families that actively encouraged respectful and inclusive relations as well as a sense of connectedness and investment in the school, 1) parents were expected to be role models and exhibit respectful relations at the school and 2) they were encouraged to connect with the school through the community connection program and events like Harmony Day. Building respect and trust through these strategies had taken time and patience however. As the principal noted, this focus had worked to generate generally cohesive and positive school-community relations.

As mentioned earlier, staff made a point of acknowledging and welcoming parents when they were visiting the school and always approached conflict with parents and students in non-aggressive and conciliatory ways. They were role models of such behaviour and they also expected parents to be role models. This was made explicit at the first meeting between staff and parents on enrolment as well as being reinforced at other times when necessary, as one of the leadership team explained: 'the parents are told that [they] are leaders in the community and at the school and we expect [them] to act as leaders [and role models]' (School Leader). The principal noted that these expectations had led to a 'toning down' of some of the parents' 'rough' and 'outspoken' behaviour.

Parents were also encouraged to connect with the school and there were incidental ways in which this occurred for example, parents were consulted in relation to cultural and religious issues - e.g. there was an incident where prayer customs for the Muslim students needed clarifying resulting in a prayer room being set up for these students and parent-teacher meeting times were changed from evenings to mornings to ensure that some of the Muslim women were able to attend. The setup of a school-community social group was an explicit effort to involve parents who might be feeling marginalised and disconnected from the school and community. The instating of this group was driven by the principal's concerns about ten years ago that an influx of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) immigrants was creating racial and religious divisions and conflict in the community and school. It was set up in an attempt to close these divisions and encourage trust and understanding across the community. The group currently meets on a monthly basis with attendees from mixed cultural backgrounds (most are Muslim women). Facilitated by a staff member and parents, activities are social but also practical in terms of disseminating information and offering skills support.

The group, in the principal's view, has supported parents to have a voice, feel valued and become involved in the school especially through events such as Harmony Day which is a very important and large annual event at School C. The organisation of Harmony Day has been enthusiastically embraced by the community social group and has been a great success at connecting the school with the community through cultural activities and a huge school feast. For members of the Social Group, Harmony Day has strengthened their investment in, and responsibility towards, the school and opened up further opportunities for parents to connect with the school.

Question Three (b): How are school leaders seeking to build social cohesion in response to these challenging conversations in ways that engage with policy imperatives?

School C's relations with external agencies such as DET were mixed. While the school as a high achieving school (academically) was well regarded by the department, the leadership team felt unsupported at times by DET. Like School A, it seemed that the leadership team at School C felt that there was not enough response to, and recognition of, the challenges of building cohesive school communities. Given the volatility of some community/parent-school relations, staff at School C were forced to deploy immediate and practical responses to particular incidents. Circumstances of violence and serious or threatening behaviour from parents and students, meant that it was necessary the principal and the leadership team to consult and draw on the services of external support and agencies (such as DET, the Department of Health Services and the Police). The principal spoke of not feeling supported by DET, who in her view downplayed these situations and in fact tended to 'listen to the parent' and assume the school 'must be doing something wrong because the parent is angry'. She noted here the ethos of the school to 'have a damn good go' at supporting all of its students but that when things became abusive, the Department needed to support the school.

DISCUSSION

Schools are micropublics that have their own dynamics, values and practices but which also reflect macro developments in areas such as public attitudes, social context and policy. As we noted at the beginning of this report, schools are positioned in education policy as micropublics that must pursue a socially transformative agenda towards building more democratic, equitable and just societies (MCEETYA, 2008; Giroux, 2009). In so doing, we contend, they must recognise and challenge the broader inequitable status quo - the inequitable structures and relations that lead to social disharmony. In the three case study schools, such structures and relations were associated with cultural essentialism, racism, Islamophobia, sexism and homophobia. Privilege and marginalisation that circulated around these identity markers were clearly a challenge for these schools. The key approach to ameliorating potential disharmony for all of the schools in relation to these identity markers was holistic. Here, all of the leaders worked hard to instate a respectful and inclusive vision that permeated all structures and practices. It was this approach at all of the schools that was successful in generating not only respect and inclusion for staff, students and the community, but also a sense of agency, connectedness and investment in the schools. The following discussion draws together key aspects of this approach and its significance for generating three micropublics of social harmony. However, we also draw attention to the limitations of this approach in its lack of explicitness and criticality in addressing the inequities of privilege and marginalisation we have detailed in this report.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

The success of all of the schools in fostering social harmony can be attributed to a holistic approach. For School A developing this safe and secure environment required a culture shift within the school. As the principal noted:

what we've developed is ... really beautiful. But it comes at a cost and I think that ... this matters. It's really that cultural change happens with relationships and that's got to be valued as much as if you're going to get the best outcomes for the kids in terms of their learning they have to feel safe, they have to feel secure, they have to be known and known well and they have to be guided but teachers have to be able to deliver, you know, so there's got to be that sense of understanding. (School A Principal)

Supporting staff to build inclusive environments is important, not only to support them, but to maintain a cohesive perception amongst students and parents:

...even in situations when teachers do the wrong thing and get themselves into trouble because they've said the wrong thing to a student or they've done something whether it's sexist or racist or inappropriate - my job is to back that teacher and to help reach the problem. It's not to humiliate them. It's not to put them through conduct and ethics. It's actually to say to them look, you've screwed up, you've made a mistake, this is not what you need to do, do you understand it. Help them see that what they've done is inappropriate and then find a path forward and sort of work at mediating the situation between parents and staff because the minute you allow negativity to get into your organisation it just starts to build. (School A Principal)

Creating an inclusive culture at School C was similarly based on a prioritising of respectful relations that engendered a sense of agency and connection to the school. Familiar in many schools, staff, students and parents were expected to relate to each other in respectful ways, respect was modelled by staff in everyday interactions, in how conflict was resolved and in dialogue and communication. It was explicitly taught (e.g. through recognising it in students' behaviours and through the curriculum as part of teaching about the self). Other ways in which the school fostered an environment of inclusion and respect were ensuring that staff, students and the parent community felt a sense of connection to and investment in the school. For staff this occurred through the principal fostering distributed leadership to support capacity building, confidence and the pursuit of individual passions. For students it occurred through a leadership program where students from all year levels took responsibility for 'looking after each other' (School C Principal) as well as behaviour management and for running events such as assembly and graduation night and multi-age activities. Such efforts reflect a commitment to according teachers, students and parents with a voice in decision making about the school (see Fraser, 2009; Keddie, 2012a). There is recognition here that quality, democratic and respectful interpersonal relations are key to this commitment. This recognition is a long-standing thesis in much research across western contexts in terms of better including marginalised groups especially given that schools within these contexts are overwhelmingly populated by authority structures (including leadership and teachers) that are white and middle class and thus they tend to silence marginalised groups (see Gale & Densmore, 2000).

Against this backdrop, there were attempts at each of the schools to be culturally inclusive. At School C this involved being inclusive of the Muslim students and parents in particular. For example, the school set up a prayer room for the Muslim students. The teaching and leadership team also mentioned the school's sensitivity to not promoting Christianity by singing songs at Christmas that were not religious. The school was also inclusive in their consulting of parents in relation to cultural and religious issues (e.g. clarifying Muslim prayer customs), and the setting up of a social group for parents (most of whom were Muslim mothers) who might be feeling marginalised and disconnected from the school and community that met on a monthly basis and involved a range of activities to inform parents about school life and involve them in school events especially Harmony Day which involved a 'huge' feast and was immensely enjoyed by many of the school community.

Leadership was central at all of the schools in terms of embedding this holistic approach that: is multi-directional; actively constructs architectures of practice; acknowledges the everyday presence of conflict; and understands the school as a site of possibility that can bring about community change. Diversity is recognised and used to the school's advantage. There is a consciousness or intent in the approach of the leadership team based on a clear vision and set of values and expectations that are shared between all stakeholders through attention to language, structures and practices. This common, shared language is articulated through explicit school values that are constantly reinforced.

The holistic approach is inclusive, respectful and student-centred. Student agency is promoted within the ethos of the schools based on belonging and connectedness. Communities within communities are fostered through clubs that enable challenging conversations to take place. Student leadership, voice and responsibility are encouraged through student directed assemblies and events. Programs are used that actively engage and drive student learning.

The holistic approach is supported by structures and practices, such as:

- *Cultural-discursive arrangements* including School A's adoption and recognition of a common language, values and discourse of the school as a community. Other strategies noted by school participants included the introduction of uniforms; teaching and curriculum which sought to provide opportunities and safe spaces in which to have challenging conversations; teachers modelling respectful behaviour; and the provision of one-on-one support for students.
- *Material-economic arrangements*, e.g., making teachers physically accessible to students.
- *Social-political arrangements* which reinforced a sense of school solidarity, ranging from staff participation in shaping the values of the school, to student-led assemblies, and developing trusting relations with local government, student alumni and parents.
- The reflection of the respective ethos of the schools in the symbolic realm of posters and murals visible throughout the school. These material-economic arrangements include posters, flags and uniforms to signify what matters to the school community.
- The taking of pre-emptive action in responding to issues such as racism through the architectures of practice and ethos of the school.
- Promoting multiple events, activities and opportunities for engagement that were connected to a whole-of-school approach. They were authentic and ongoing and included cultural celebrations and excursions.
- Social-political arrangements which included respect, the school 'family' and community. These were fostered and embedded in relationships across the school and with the school community and student alumni. Expectations of parents were articulated. The schools sought to connect with family members to explore cultural issues and misunderstandings in pre-emptive ways, as well as political representatives, local council outside stakeholders to leverage influence and engagement with the school. Community outreach and engagement were actively pursued. Maintaining dialogue with stakeholders was a core function of this holistic approach. As the principal of one school said:

You're being paid to do a job and - like I don't mess around with people who are not - I'll bring them in. I have conversations with everybody all the time, it drives me bloody batty. But if we're going to deliver the best for these kids and if they're going to leave with a strong sense of self it matters. Every conversation matters. (School A Principal)

LIMITATIONS: A LACK OF EXPLICITNESS AND CRITICALITY

A holistic approach to respect and inclusion that permeated all school structures and practices was, as we have illustrated, central to generating school micropublics of social harmony. Importantly, within this approach we can see evidence in all three schools of a positive recognition of cultural diversity and, in particular, efforts to recognise marginalised or devalued cultures. As much research has articulated, such recognition is important in its potential to transform cultural injustices that lead to social disharmony and conflict (Fraser, 1997; Bishop, 2003; Sleeter, 2005; Keddie, 2012a). There are, of course, well recognised tensions and problematics associated with efforts in schools to recognise culture in this regard. In particular, attempts to privilege the funds of knowledge of students from culturally marginalised backgrounds can reflect a superficial and voyeuristic approach to multicultural knowledge (see Garcia, 2002; Keddie, 2012a). We saw a tendency for this in all of the schools. In School C, for

example, the focus on prayer customs, a social group for parents and Harmony Day may reinscribe cultural reductionism and otherness in relation to understandings of the Muslim community at the school (see Garcia, 2002; Banks 2007). We also saw a tendency in all of the schools to reinscribe marginality and otherness through everyday schooling practices. As Youdell (2003: 3) argues:

...it is through the apparently trivial moments in everyday life in school that students' identities [can] come to be constituted as undesirable, intolerable, far from "ideal", within the terms of the hegemonic discourses of the school organisation.

At School C, we saw such an 'apparently trivial' moment in the encounter involving the two Muslim girls who were 'arguing' over what it means to be a good Muslim. The teacher is reactive and dismissive in her expression of disappointment that the children would 'bring religion into school' and in her request for the girls to go away and sort their problems out as a private and non-school matter. We might also read this situation as 1) othering religion (i.e. Islam) in constituting it as inappropriate to be addressed within the school and as 2) reflecting unconscious bias on the teacher's part about the taken-for-granted status of Christianity in state schools (e.g. Christian customs guide the Australian school calendar in terms of weekends and holidays). We can also see a missed teachable moment that would lead to a more productive 'resolution' to their argument - through highlighting for the girls the multiple interpretive realities of religion and, in particular, in this case, the progressive women-centred readings of gender modesty in Islam (see Barlas, 2002).

Given the stories of cultural privilege and marginalisation presented earlier around race, ethnicity, religion and gender, such reductionism and otherness is a concern. While certainly varied, each of the schools is situated within and dealing with contentious issues of identity and culture. Such issues alongside the broader warrant that schools must teach for and about identity and culture in transformative ways indicate the significance of a more explicit and critical focus on these issues in schools. As much research has illustrated, teaching for and about diversity in socially just ways (i.e. in ways that challenge economic, cultural and political inequality) requires a critical understanding and approach to matters of diversity, privilege and marginality.

It is well recognised that requisite to the productive recognition of culturally marginalised groups is a critical approach that works with a nuanced theorising of culture and identity (Carrim & Soudien, 1999; Gillborn, 1990; Nieto, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Garcia, 2002; Enns & Sinacore, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Youdell, 2003). The important emphasis here, in relation to recognising non-dominant cultures, should be to cultivate 'culturally relevant ideas, conversations, and critical thinking about the way we live and experience culture in our communities' (Narez, 2002: 139). This cultivation is the central platform of a critical (as opposed to non-critical) multicultural education where students are supported to think critically about themselves and the broader social world. This is about connecting ideas to social action, which may include transforming oneself, the learning process, and the larger society (Dilg, 2003). Through this approach students

...can begin to learn something of the difficulty and the practice of civic discourse. They can learn to mediate conflicts and to manage the power of multiple opposing positions on significant topics ... Well-facilitated discussions enable our students to construct a vibrant multicultural community before our eyes. (Dilg, 2003: 192)

Pursuing this critical multicultural agenda presupposes particular kinds of leadership and educational practices that model an engagement in issues of cultural marginality, religious beliefs and spirituality as

well as cultural privilege. These practices are held in place by practice architectures in the school (such as student or teacher forums) that engage others in critical reflection and constructive dialogue about issues of privilege, marginality and diversity. In relation to efforts to recognise cultural diversity, this means negotiating the tensions between recognising and valuing marginalised cultures, on the one hand, and essentialising or unproblematically exalting them on the other. It means a critical reflection of all cultural identities and knowledge (whether dominant or marginal) in their potential to oppress (see Fraser, 2009). This necessarily involves educators engaging in ongoing critical reflection on themselves, their positionality and identity, their assumptions and practices about diversity and their potential contribution to oppressive relations (Ellsworth, 1992; Figueroa, 2000). For educators like those featured in this report (a number of whom are from privileged, i.e. white, western and middle-class backgrounds), this will mean being mindful of how their privilege can nurture blindness to the experiences and concerns of the 'other'. This involves a preparedness to recognise and disrupt their western epistemic privilege in connecting with and centring the experiences of students, parents, community and staff whose identities are non-mainstream (see Mohanty, 2003).

For example, despite their exemplary approach to social cohesion and inclusion, both Schools A and B are increasingly operating within a community of wealth and privilege. Though the sayings, doings and relatings, and arrangements in practice architectures described above foster cohesion within both school communities, the 'bubble' in which the schools exist may constrain interaction in the wider social world. For example, community members in School A noted that students are colour-blind:

All I can tell you [is] that a couple years ago I was having a conversation with one of the boys here. I knew which school he'd come from and I knew a bit about the school, and I was telling him a story about one of the girls that was in his year back at primary school. Now, in this small class, there were two Indian girls, and they may not have been both Indian, they might have been Sri Lankan or Pakistani, but they were very similar in their colouring, they looked a little bit different, but had the same build. And, I could remember one of their names, let's just call her 'A', but I couldn't remember the other one, and I said to this boy, "You know in your last year there, there was two girls who were friends of yours. They looked very similar, one was called 'A', what was the name of the other one?" Well, he gave me 'Mary', he gave me 'Anita' or 'Fiona' or something and I'm thinking, "Are you colour-blind?" And of course, he was. It didn't occur to him, it was another girl of the same colour. (School A Community Member)

Given the higher SES status of both schools, a question needs to be asked as to how the social and economic privilege associated with this status and non-problematic view of diversity can be disrupted. It is an issue that Schools A and B were aware of, mused about and struggled with. For instance, one of the school leaders of School B remarked that the school operated in 'sort of a bubble ... and so you can end up with behaviours and discourse that's actually unhelpful around community making ... for kids ... they don't even know what goes on' (School B leader).

Research suggests that a productive response to issues of privilege noted above is leadership and educative practices which embody a strong sense of social justice. These practices foreground leading and teaching as political acts and take seriously the supposition that in order for social arrangements to be otherwise, new practice architectures need to be brought into being that open up possibilities for educators and schools to think and act against the grain of the broader status quo. These educative practices connect the histories and experiences students bring to the classroom in ways that link schooling to social change. They include: a shared awareness of and commitment to challenging

oppression; cultural recognition and the promotion of knowledge of, and sensitivity to, a wide range of cultural realities; recognition of multiple and intersecting forms of privilege and oppression; and the creation of new forms of awareness and ways of seeing the world (Acker, 1994; Banks, 2007; Dilg, 2003; Enns & Sinacore, 2005; Gay, 2000; Keddle, 2012a).

Given the enduring and rising disharmony, discrimination and inequity of the social world, mobilising this vision necessarily requires an agenda of contestation and resistance. Whether through challenging the homophobic discourses at School A, the sexist discourses at School B, the Islamophobic discourses at School C or the unconscious discourses of white privilege at all of the schools, schools and educators must think and act against the grain of broader systems of domination and oppression (Giroux, 2003; Mayo, 2003; Keddle, 2012a).

Ways to intervene productively to support social cohesion and harmony in schools cannot be prescriptively understood. The challenges of social disharmony confronting schools, as we have illustrated, are profoundly contextual, dynamic and contingent. We contend that addressing such challenges requires an understanding of the conditions of social injustice that lead to social disharmony - including their political, cultural and economic dimensions (Fraser, 2009). It involves creating schools and learning environments that accord a political voice to those who are silenced; that express cultural respect and esteem to those whose cultural backgrounds are trivialised; and that provide the necessary material and human resources to those who lack these resources (Fraser, 2009; Keddle, 2012a). These frames of reference are helpful for schools in beginning to think about and remedy some of the injustices that lead to social disharmony (Keddle, 2012a).

CONCLUSION

Our study of the three case study schools suggested that overall they were doing well in terms of the Scanlon-Monash Index (SMI) measures of social cohesion, i.e., fostering amongst students a sense of belonging, social justice and equity, participation, acceptance, rejection and legitimacy, and worth (Markus, 2016). The educative measures of the schools suggest therefore that the students' vulnerability towards radicalisation would be reduced (Grossman et al., 2016). However, we sound a note of caution. Teachers commented on a small number of disengaged youth, who despite best efforts, were not experiencing a sense of belonging and appeared disengaged. The teachers noted that community supports beyond the school gates were less than had been in the past or perhaps were taking on a different form through, for example, interactions on social media. Sometimes, these interactions could be toxic. For example, as suggested above, a small number of students in one school exhibited behaviours that suggested exposure to alt-right radicalising messages. Support for this particular school in how to deal with this phenomenon was reported as less than satisfactory. This reminds us that schools are but one part of society, albeit a key one, and can only do so much.

We conclude in this report with 'take home' messages for policy makers and school practitioners along with future recommendations for consideration to strengthen and support schools in this critical work. Although we recognise this was a pilot qualitative study and thus the findings must be treated with caution, the messages and recommendations sketched below draw on a robust research base which we have gestured towards in our literature review, along with our case studies of schools' excellent practices in this area.

KEY MESSAGES

1. Leading for social cohesion in schools is an ongoing process, not an end-point

Challenging conversations about issues of social injustice/inequity and political and social volatilities are premised on the foundation that building social cohesion is not an endpoint for educators' practices. Rather, it is an ongoing process in which schools can and do play a crucial role. It cannot be taken for granted (Grossman, pers.comm.) and can also be a risky business which is why many schools may shy away from it. Yet, it cannot be ignored for it is a social phenomenon that is occurring in the day to day realities of schooling with which schools and educators wrestle.

2. Leading for social cohesion in schools is a crucial form of emotional labour which is largely invisible/overlooked

Leading for social cohesion requires considerable amounts of emotional labour and can take a real toll. All the principals noted working towards social cohesion was exhausting, albeit rewarding. Crucially, they also felt that such leadership work was invisible, despite the principals and other stakeholders such as community leaders recognising that it was a crucial part of educators' roles. Each of the schools had put in place a wide range of arrangements to support the process of building social cohesion, varying from School A's emphasis on transforming previous ethnic divisions between student groups; School B's emphasis on social activism with their students; and School C's emphasis on building powerful

relationships with their school community that were respectful, inclusive and agentic. Each school recognised that these set-ups could not be taken for granted but required continual emotional and intellectual labour, carried out in concert with teachers, students and community stakeholders. It is a form of leadership labour that needs to be recognised, made visible, promoted and actively supported by education systems through, for example, clear policies and processes and professional associations such as teachers and principal groups (see future recommendations below).

3. Leading for social cohesion requires challenging and interrogating the arrangements in schools that hold socially unjust practices in place

Building social cohesion means that an ‘add challenging conversation and stir’ approach is not sufficient. Rather, it requires a holistic, whole-of-school approach that places challenging social inequities at the core of its educational philosophy. This is no easy task. School leaders need to challenge the educational *arrangements* that hold socially unjust educational practices in place (Wilkinson, 2018). When leading challenging conversations, it requires paying attention to and interrogating the language and thinking (i.e., the *sayings*) that shape educators’ beliefs, values and attitudes in relation to their pedagogical practices. It requires paying attention to and interrogating the economic and material resources that may hold socially unjust educational practices in place (the *doings* – allocation of budgets, timetabling of classes, arrangements of classrooms). Finally, it requires paying attention to and interrogating the relationships within and between groups, for example, between educators and students and within groups of educators and students (the *relatings*) (Wilkinson, 2018). Leading challenging conversations then is but one part of a whole school approach that supports the building of socially just education. The case study schools provide powerful evidence of processes and practices that support this critical work.

4. Leading for social cohesion is a collective, not individual practice

The leadership required to hold challenging conversations and support the building of a socially cohesive school community is a collective enterprise. It is a critical, relational practice that cannot be confined to the principal or it will fail to be sustained over the medium to long term. Each of the case study school principals exhibited a clear disposition and philosophy towards social justice. Importantly, however, they concentrated their efforts on a whole of school approach that built the *collective capacity* of their organisation and its stakeholders (teachers, students and community members) for social and academic inclusion, participation and achievement. A sense of collective responsibility for this enterprise was clear from the participant forums. It was also clear that there was considerable ‘buy-in’ to the schools’ mission, clarity about what that mission was, and a collective leadership that infused the organisations. The latter was exhibited in a number of ways varying from parents’ participation and leadership of School C’s multicultural days and School Council; and middle leaders and teachers’ leadership and facilitation of the upstander initiative of School B.

5. Facilitating challenging conversations as part of leading for social cohesion is risky business

For school leaders, teachers, parent and students to engage in these kinds of conversations carries a large element of risk. As the principal of School A remarked:

I just think it's a really difficult thing to do, like, to bring the groups together to actually build a community. But you have to have really strong conversations with parents and sometimes they're

not pleasant and the complaints will come to the region and be in central office, they'll come. That's okay. I've got a file of complaints. I don't care. I'm still doing really significant work. But I think leaders are not strong in some instances and I feel very sad for the fact they're being hammered...by the Department and parents.

The risky nature of this initiative was also noted by the lead facilitator of School B who commented that the school was to be 'commend[ed]' for dealing with issues such as sexism, as 'it's probably an issue that most schools would probably just ignore, but for [School B] ... it's been a real priority'. On the other hand, to ignore or overlook such issues also runs the risk that toxic behaviours will be reproduced, unconsciously condoned and lead to the perpetuation of damaging social attitudes and behaviours.

The element of risk can lead to the assumption that leading for social cohesion is about managing/controlling/repressing challenging conversations. It can also lead to the misunderstanding that leading for social cohesion is about the elimination of difference through repression, silence or an unconscious assumption that difference is 'bad'. Rather, leading for social cohesion is about understanding how to live with differences caused by socio-economic status, faith, gender expression and other social factors. It is about facilitating conversations about differences in productive and enabling ways (Grossman, pers.comm.). But for schools to do so, requires threshold knowledge (i.e. necessary understanding), support and development.

6. Leading for social cohesion requires developing educators' (students' and parents') threshold knowledge and practices about how to have challenging conversations about social and political disharmonies and volatilities

The capacity to successfully facilitate challenging conversations about social and political volatilities and disharmonies is based on the assumption that educators have the necessary threshold knowledge and practices to do so.

Moreover, leading for social cohesion also requires a *self-reflexive* disposition that we described earlier in this report. This disposition cannot be prescribed, mandated from the 'top-down', nor be part of a technicist, instrumentalist prescription for schools. Rather it needs to be facilitated (not managed/controlled/repressed) in socially just and humanistic ways.

School B exhibited clear evidence for how this kind of threshold knowledge and 'awakening of consciousness' could be fostered. A partnership with the local council allowed the school to carry out an initiative focussing on training student leaders in relation to upstander behaviour, for example, in relation to sexism. Using a range of arts-based techniques, the outside facilitators led conversations with stakeholder groups about uncomfortable and challenging issues. Key components of this approach were that all staff were involved; the leadership team were present and actively involved in all sessions; the education materials were tailored to suit the school's specific needs and identified issues. The initiative was facilitated and collectively run by the Head of Welfare and the team, with active support from the principal. Other key components included the ongoing, long-term nature of the teachers' and students' professional development (it was held over two terms); the active interrogation of participants' beliefs and values about sexism which forced staff and students to confront their own unconscious biases; and the presence and active involvement of teachers in the student sessions. Importantly, our study suggests that this is an area where schools require far more support and professional development (see future recommendations).

7. Leading for social cohesion requires clear support for schools in regard to the small numbers of students who may be at risk of radicalisation

Only one of the three schools identified a tiny number of students whose behaviours suggested a propensity towards alt-right radicalisation and support from the school was indicated to be less than satisfactory. This suggests the need for clear structures of support for schools dealing with these kinds of issues.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Facilitating challenging conversations as part of leading for social cohesion is an ongoing enterprise that is difficult, contentious and emotionally taxing. It is a risky business that requires adequate support and resourcing for schools. The following details future considerations that we believe will maximise schools' capacities to productively and justly engage in this important work:

- Ongoing, regular and targeted professional learning for leaders and teachers around the knowledge and understanding required to carry out challenging conversations with students (e.g. understandings of identity, culture and diversity, privilege and oppression and social justice) to identify the issues of social disharmony specific to particular schools but also those that are dominant within the broader social world;
- Ongoing, regular and targeted professional learning for leaders and teachers about how to translate this knowledge to the classroom (e.g. through quality and critical pedagogy that is learner-centred, intellectually engaging, supportive and respectful) and beyond the classroom (e.g. through a whole school approach that is both inclusive and critical) to address the issues of social disharmony specific to particular schools but also those that are dominant within the broader social world;
- The provision of time and material resourcing for schools to properly implement and integrate their professional learning into existing school structures and practices (e.g. school policies, leadership and teaching relations and practices, behaviour management, curriculum planning, pedagogy, etc.)
- Provision of time and material resourcing for schools to engage in ongoing critical reflection on this implementation and integration on an individual basis and collectively through professional learning teams within their school and with other schools;
- Provision of time and material resourcing for schools to engage in action research within their schools and to develop and share innovative frameworks and resources to address local and global challenging conversations;
- Greater social and emotional support for leaders (and teachers) engaged in this work (e.g. through time/material provision to set up teacher and leader professional learning collaborations and support networks within and beyond schools; i.e. with other schools and organisations);
- The provision of time and material resourcing for schools to work with parents and their local communities and organisations to share their learnings and develop sustainable activities and programs that foster social connections and respectful relationships; and
- Broader economic and social policies that supports community cohesion and resilience. Schools are but a microcosm of the broader social world and thus the challenging conversations encountered within them are reflective of the divisions, inequities and disharmonies of society.

Economic and social policies committed to ameliorating these (increasing) divisions, inequities and disharmonies would mean that schools are more harmonious places – schools can neither be a panacea for society’s ills, nor work alone in the endeavour to create socially harmonious communities.

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