

Kingston University London

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Rm JG2010, John Galsworthy Building, Penrhyn Road

Dr Nina Burridge

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*Contested multicultural identities in post 9/11 Australia.
Challenges and opportunities of ethno-cultural diversity for the
education sector.*

In the post 9/11 and Bali bombings world Australians are no longer laid back and comfortable. The archetypical Aussie image of 'she'll be right, mate' is as figment of a past imagination. Since the 1950s Australia has evolved from a homogenous predominantly Anglo-Celtic nation that imposed restrictive immigration policies for non-white migrants, to a modern cosmopolitan representation of a global community. This is hailed by many as a great success for multiculturalism. However, in the current socio-political context, the policy of multiculturalism is being contested. There are undercurrents of doubt and contestation about its authenticity in its representation of diversity on the one hand, and its divisive nature on the other.

In creating the global village, technology and the market should have made communities more accepting of cultural difference – yet, a perusal of current news events both in Australia and overseas suggests that the opposite is the case.

The paper will analyse representations of ethno-cultural diversity based on a research project conducted in 2007 in four different schools situated in different geographic areas of Sydney. Through the voices of youth, their teachers and local community leaders it will discuss the challenges and opportunities for the education sector in dealing with the increasingly complex environments in which schools operate.

The findings affirm other research in the area that the challenges include the need for teachers and teacher educators to steer a balanced course between competing policy agendas so that students from ethnically and socio-

economically diverse backgrounds are not further disadvantaged in a 'one size fits all' education system. This is a particular challenge when the research suggests that teachers often inhabit a socio-cultural world that has more in common with monoculturalism than the culturally diverse world of the students they teach. The challenge is to provide adequate resources for professional training for all our teachers, including pre-service teachers, to better understand the pedagogical issues surrounding the links between culture, self concept, cultural maintenance and improved educational outcomes for students from ethno-culturally diverse backgrounds. These are challenges for all nations struggling with the complexities of ethno-cultural diversity.

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Dr Nina Burridge is Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Technology, Sydney. She has been involved in tertiary education since 1991 in various education faculties in Australian universities. Her main research interests centre on Indigenous education and more recently ethno-cultural diversity in schools and in communities. She was the founding director of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies and Research at Macquarie University from 1997 – 1999. She has published chapters and presented papers at national and international conferences on her main research areas.

She sees herself as an activist professional (Sachs, 2003) whose involvement in community organizations and social action groups informs her professional work in Education. Her work in the community and in politics has been recognized with several community based awards, the latest one (2007) being the Human Rights award from the Edmund Rice Centre for 'outstanding service in campaigning for human rights for 'Indigenous, Refugees and Asylum Seekers'. Her work in politics and advocacy has also been recognised with citations in Who's Who of Australian Women 2006 - 2008 and Who's Who Australia for the same period.

The seminar is being held as part of the **HE Seminar Series** being organised by Professor Mary Stuart, Deputy Vice-Chancellor. If you would like to attend please let Ellie Hibberd know on: E.Hibberd@kingston.ac.uk or 020 8547 8287 (ext 63287).