

Ensuring curricular justice in the NSW education system

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As the demographics of the Australian population changes, it is essential for the public education system to not only cater for the needs of the new community groups that form but also to help ensure that education is used as a vehicle to facilitate social harmony, understanding and equality. The link between disadvantaged and marginalised ethno-religious groups in the Australian community and their relative exclusion in NSW education curriculums cannot be underestimated, especially in the English and History curriculums which play a significant role in shaping students' understanding and empathy of "others". It is evident from growing research on discrimination and the disadvantage experienced by Australia's Muslim population especially where education and employment are concerned—that very little has been done by the educational systems to increase understanding and equality for this minority group. The lack of action is contributing to both the marginalisation and alienation of the Australian Muslim community, and resulting inequalities.

Keywords: sociology, Muslim, NSW education system, Australian curriculum, curricular justice, critical race theory, policy

INTRODUCTION

Curricular justice can be defined as treating pupils in school systems justly in order to improve the quality of education for all in the education system. This means acting in the interests or prioritising the needs of the least advantaged students where curricular content and student assessment is concerned; for example, by including the perspectives of the least advantaged in learning and assessment material. This type of justice is embedded in a democratic framework that expands the prospects of the least advantaged and creates a more equalitarian society (Connell, 1993).

Curricular justice in the Australian education system can only be achieved if the education system actively updates its curriculums to reflect Australia's diversity and promote social harmony through a greater understanding of others. The Australian public education system has left the responsibility of facilitating social harmony and justice, as well as counteracting racism predominantly with individual schools, disregarding the impact the systems' curriculums have on social understanding and racism (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), 2003). If the purpose of education is to inform and educate—research has constantly proven over the last decade that the Australian public constantly misunderstands and is misinformed about the

Muslim communities living amongst them (HREOC, 2003, Poynting, 2006)—then it becomes essential for the education system to accept the responsibility of being the key information provider. Relying on one-off school occasions, such as “Harmony Day,” is insufficient and has been severely criticized for its “depoliticized, reductive celebration of difference that ignores racial inequity” (Taylor & Hoechsmann, 2011, p. 1) and its failure to address how being different can advantage some groups and not others (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Such isolated school events also do not address how and why the dominant community group should “tolerate” and “accept” Muslims whom they have been taught are dangerous, unpatriotic terrorists with malign intentions (Poynting, 2006; HREOC, 2003; Poynting & Mason, 2007).

It has been proven that the inclusion of the histories and experiences of certain minority groups within the Australian school curricula has helped improve understanding and treatment of those groups. For example, the inclusion of Indigenous histories, cultures, languages and art in education has increased the Australian community’s awareness and understanding of Indigenous people. It has also allowed Indigenous Australians to reclaim pride in their identities, facilitating and improving their equal participation in Australian society (Reconciliation Australia, 2010). This noble precedent demonstrates the potential benefits of broadening the Australian curriculum to include the histories and experiences of Australia’s other marginalised minority groups, such as Australian Muslims, who number more than 280,000 or 1.5 per cent of the Australian population and come from diverse countries, such as Lebanon, Turkey and Indonesia. Significantly, the role education can play in reducing misconceptions and increasing cross-cultural understanding for this diverse group was acknowledged more than a decade ago (HREOC, 2003). As already noted, the incorporation of broader curricular material that expresses cross-cultural understanding would be much more beneficial than relying on tokenistic festivals alone (Parker-Jenkins, 1991). Considering that almost half of the Australian Muslim population belongs to an Arabic speaking background (when Australian born and overseas born Muslims are combined) and as the stereotyped Arab identity itself has been used as a vehicle to demonise Muslims in general (HREOC, 2003), any genuine attempt to discuss curricular justice must also consider the forces which act to disempower both Arabic and Muslim communities within Australia.

The startling Cronulla riots of December 2005 were a largely unheeded wake-up call to the Australian community and reflected a peak in Australia’s race relations crisis (Kabir, 2008). While many were caught up in expired debates about multiculturalism and whether the organisers of the protests were extremist supremacists or not, many missed the underlying cause, which was a culmination of decades of racial tension and poor intercultural relations (Poynting 2006, 2007). The Cronulla events question the effectiveness of current government strategies to facilitate social understanding and harmony, and the role education plays in ensuring that culturally homogenous communities, such as the Sutherland Shire’s understanding of minority groups, is not reduced to their experiences with a sub-cultural fragment of those groups. While politicians emphasized the teaching of Australian history and values in schools in the aftermath of the Cronulla riots (Calma, 2006), no political leaders mentioned the idea of a need for the wider Australian community to develop a greater understanding of minority cultural groups. Instead “community development projects” based on beach activities and a “Goodness and Kindness campaign” with a maximum of a few hundred school children participating, were seen to be the key solutions. The portrayal of racist acts by the media and politicians as merely *individual* acts also means that no real examination of government systems that contribute to such acts is possible (Dlamini, 2002). Research shows that many Australians harbour racist views towards others (HREOC, 2003, Medhora, 2011), indicating that there is a need for more proactive initiatives in our education system.

The impact of exclusive curriculums on social cohesion and curricular justice can be seen by examining the education system in New South Wales, in particular—the state in which most Australian Muslims reside and where racial tensions have flared. Within this education system, two particular policies have been relied upon to achieve equality and justice for students: the *Anti-Racism Policy* (NSW Department of Education and Training (NDET), 2005a), which superseded the Anti-racism Policy Statement of 1992; and the *Cultural Diversity and Community Relations Policy: Multicultural Education in Schools* (NDET, 2005b), which superseded the *Multicultural Education Policy Statement* of 1983. Analysis of these policies will show that the ambiguity and exclusion of detail in the documents restricts their effectiveness.

The exclusive reliance on these policies by the Education Department has generated limited benefits because their protective capacities have been undermined by a lack of support from curriculum documents, which, ultimately, render the policies ineffective. Thus, as will be seen, a more proactive intervention is needed rather than the singular reliance on the policies to achieve social justice outcomes. Ultimately, it is the role of educators to consider and reflect on how they are contributing to social problems or structural failures, such as unemployment and poverty, through existing educational programs (Purpel, 1989), and may be acting as oppressors by either consciously or subconsciously excluding minority groups from the curriculum. Unfortunately, as found by Kharem (2006, p. 46), “most multicultural educational courses do not prepare teachers to facilitate discussions on ‘race, power and class’ with a mere emphasis on tolerance of ‘others’.”

This article will give a brief overview of how the NSW Department of Education’s *Anti-Racism Policy* (NDET, 2005a) and the *Cultural Diversity and Community Relations Policy: Multicultural Education in Schools* (NDET 2005b) objectives have not been achieved in the NSW education sector. As evidence, the article will use the absence of statements of educational outcomes in the History and English curriculums (which play a significant role in increasing cross-cultural understanding) aimed at increasing understanding of Muslims, as well as research findings to support the argument that there is a need to include texts on the perspectives and experiences of Muslims in the educational curriculums. This paper also links the lack of inclusion of these perspectives and experiences in the education system with increased social tensions, and greater social inequalities and injustice.

Ultimately, this article follows the principles of critical race theory because it names and discusses the impact of racism, exposes ambiguous education policies that serve to entrench disadvantage, and promotes the voices of the disadvantaged in society (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Following social justice goals, this paper also interrogates school policies and curriculums that support inequality in the Australian education system (Tilley & Taylor, 2012) and identifies the need for a broader curriculum that is inclusive of the perspectives of Australia’s most marginalised minorities.

LIMITATIONS OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 2005, ANTI-RACISM POLICY

The legislative context and foundation for the NSW *Anti-Racism Policy* (NDET, 2005a) is in the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act (1977) and the Commonwealth Racial Discrimination Act (1975), which illegalize racial discrimination and vilification in New South Wales. Section 4.6 of the *Policy* (NDET, 2005a) states that “all teachers are responsible for supporting students to develop an understanding of racism and discrimination and the impact on individuals and the broader community.” The *Policy* also states that it is committed to eliminating racist discrimination in its

curriculum “including direct and indirect racism” (NDET, 2005a, s. 1.1). It also states that all “teaching and non-teaching staff must contribute to the eradication of racism by “promoting acceptance of Australia's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, challenging prejudiced attitudes and ensuring that sanctions are applied against racist and discriminatory behaviors” (NDET, 2005a, s. 1.4). The ambiguous nature of these sections combined with the exclusion of Australian Muslim experiences from curriculum content (Board of Studies, 2003, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2012a, 2012b) undermines the effectiveness of the *Anti-Racism Policy* document. That is, the 2005 *Anti-Racism Policy* does not specifically recognize the impact that exclusionary curriculums have on developing racist attitudes and impeding the social acceptance of minority groups. The ambiguity and exclusion of detail have impacted on the practical interpretation and implementation of the *Anti-Racism Policy* in education. More proactive measures and explicit goals need to be adopted and manifested in the curriculum to counteract alienating forces and cultural misunderstandings which breed social unrest.

Section 1.4 of the *Anti-Racism Policy*, quoted above, is the most questionable section. Clearly, unless school curriculums actively incorporate texts which convey the experiences of the most marginalized community groups in Australia, acceptance of Australia's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, and the need to challenge prejudiced attitudes are merely vague ideals that are difficult, if not impossible, to achieve by using policy documents alone. Policy goals must influence and be reinforced by curriculum documents and content in order to ensure that education goals are achieved in reality. In fact, as will be demonstrated, section 1.1 of the *Policy*, which aims to eliminate racial discrimination in the curriculum, can be considered a futile goal if educational curriculums include information on some marginalized community groups but not other groups which are also known to suffer from social marginalization—induced and exacerbated constantly by biased media and political rhetoric (HREOC, 2003).

Policy implementation is also problematic. The responsibility and delegation of policy implementation is a concern because the power of implementation is currently mainly at the principals' discretion. Section 4.4 (NDET, 2005a) states that “principals are responsible for examining school practices and procedures to ensure they are consistent with the policy, nominating an anti-racism contact officer and including anti-racism education strategies in school plans.” Section 4.2 (NDET, 2005a) requires the director-general, and regional and state office directors ensure that curriculum and policy documents are coherent and support each other; this has yet to be actualized. The manager of multicultural programs, who is responsible for the provision of advice on the interpretation and implementation of the *Policy* and support materials must also ensure that policy details are explicit, especially dealing with ambiguous and problematic terms such as “anti-racism education strategies” (s. 4.4), which can be interpreted in an almost unlimited number of ways. Even monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements, which focus on the number of complaints received and resolved, dealt with in section 5 of the *Policy*, is of limited value because not only do many complaints go unrecorded (HREOC, 2003) but the requirements also ignore the greater implications of the *Policy*, which is its impact on social understanding and harmony. Such positioning of authority and reporting requirements are short-sighted and do not take into account the link between what is happening in Australian schools and society. By separating the concept of anti-racism strategies from curriculum content or relying on anti-racist education alone, cultural racism, such as Islamophobia, is ignored—making it problematic (Cole, 1998).

LIMITATIONS OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 2005 CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS POLICY

Another relevant, related policy document that has been designed to complement the implementation of the Anti-Racism Policy and is hindered in its success by inconsistent educational curriculums is the NSW Department of Education's *Cultural Diversity and Community Relations Policy*. As will be seen, the NSW curriculum hinders the achievement of the *Policy's* objectives, where inclusive teaching is concerned, due to its exclusionary syllabuses (predominantly in English and History), which fail to incorporate the "Muslim voice" in the same way as they have incorporated other voices, such as the Indigenous, European and Judeo-Christian voices. The use of the term "voice" does not aim to imply the idea that a single common voice exists for a whole community group but that an underlying experience of discrimination exists and is "voiced" (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005; Delgado, 1990). This is significant because achieving the objectives of promoting community harmony and developing understanding of cultural, linguistic and religious differences to counteract racism and intolerance (NDET, 2005b, s. 1.1) currently mainly depend on isolated events, such as Harmony or Multicultural day or extra-curricular gatherings, which often compete with the implementation of demanding educational curriculums. The *Policy* also makes the assumption that Australia is a "democratic multicultural society" (NDET, 2005b, s. 1.2), although Australian Muslims face significant social prejudices and obstacles when trying to build houses of worship (Simmons, 2010; Al-Natour, 2010; Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007) or schools. This ignores the actual reality of unequal freedom to practice one's faith in Australia and the constant distortion and misrepresentation of the diverse Muslim voice by the monopolized Australian media (Reynolds, Rizvi, & Dolby, 2009). Section 1.2, which further aims to help students "develop the knowledge, skills and values for participation as active" citizens (NDET, 2005b) is also ambiguous in its wording and forces one to ask the questions: knowledge about whom or what? and what kind of values or active citizens? Moreover, how can students develop an "open and tolerant attitude towards different cultures, religions and world views" (NDET, 2005b, s. 1.3), if the only "education" students receive about specific minority groups comes predominantly from politically motivated news sources or politicians? How can "inclusive teaching practices" truly be applied if the most misunderstood and misrepresented ethno-religious minority group in Australia is not covered in the curriculum in terms of recent significant world events in the last century, which have left this group marginalized, oppressed and disempowered?

The effectiveness of the *Cultural Diversity and Community Relations Policy* has been hindered by political and educational obstacles, and a lack of reinforcement from curriculum documents. Section 4.3 rests the responsibility of implementation and consistency with school principals who are "responsible for ensuring that school policies, practices and teaching and learning programs are consistent with the policy and for including relevant strategies for multicultural education in school plans" (NDET, 2005b). Consistency is not addressed from the top of the educational ladder but delegated to those below who are left to interpret ambiguous policy goals and incorporate their own personal judgments as to what constitutes a suitable, relevant multicultural education strategy. However, school principals can seek "advice" on policy implementation, if they wish, from the Manager of Multicultural Programs because no explicit strategies are offered to schools. The ambiguity of the *Policy* outcomes, including the use of such terms as "multicultural education," means that real progress or policy success is difficult to ascertain; it is, therefore, difficult to meet monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements. Thus, there needs to be greater consistency between the departments' policies and curriculums to ensure that the

curriculums of subjects focusing on people, places and history reinforce policy goals rather than hinder them and that educational goals become a reality for all members of society.

THE NEED TO PROACTIVELY COUNTERACT MUSLIM STEREOTYPES IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Findings from a state-wide survey of 551 senior students on their attitudes towards the Australian Muslim community reveal that most school children view Muslims negatively and many schools are hesitant to discuss issues involving Muslims through the curriculum (Leung 2006, p. 1-2). Table 1 summarises the results:

Table 1: Senior student attitudes towards the Australian Muslim community (Leung 2006)

Statement	Proportion of students who agree (%)
Muslims are terrorists	> 70%
Muslims are not clean	40%
Muslims behave strangely	> 50%
Australian do not have “positive feelings” about Muslims	45%
Muslims are the most negatively stereotypes of all minorities	38%
Have learned little or nothing of Islam at school	80%

The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals and Dr Ata, a senior fellow at the university's Institute for the Advancement of Research stated that these findings mean that educationalists and policymakers need to more proactively improve racial harmony in society. The chairman of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, Phong Nguyen insisted that the survey findings suggest that learning about other faiths and cultures is just as important to a child's education as studying subjects like maths or physics (Leung, 2006).

In another study on the perceptions of many Australians of Muslims, the researcher found that the most common attributes given by those interviewed were “misogynist” followed by “fundamentalist” and “intolerant” (Dunn, 2005, p. 11). Thus negative stereotypes about Islam and Australian Muslims should be a concern for all state government education authorities; especially since a clear need has been established for developing multicultural perspectives within distinct subjects, predominantly in secondary settings, in order to improve the self-confidence of Muslim students (Parker-Jenkins, 1991).

Given the youthful demographic profile of Australian Muslims, issues relating to discrimination in schools and educational institutions become particularly significant for this affected minority group, and a growing concern (HREOC, 2003)—especially because these diverse groups are now forced to remain at school for longer due to policy changes (Kamp & Mansouri, 2010).

Furthermore, according to a government-funded report (CMMIPS, 2009), despite the fact that the Australian Muslim educational level as a whole is higher than that of the national average, Muslims still earn income below the national average. The socioeconomic status of Australian Muslims also compounds their marginalisation because students who come from families with low incomes generally feel alienated from the curricula they study, which fails to portray them

positively because of the low-income earning nature of their families (Hoffer & Coleman, 1985; Noguera, 2003).

The NSW Department of Education and Training has, in the last few years, developed websites and programs with the aim of assisting schools with multicultural and anti-racism education. For example, the: *Racism. No way!* website, *Making Multicultural Australia* website, *Cultural Exchange Program* and *Cooling Conflicts Program*. Not only are these websites and programs not compulsory to implement or even consider, they are also incredibly broad in their scope and list few, if any, learning experiences that directly target the issue of anti-Muslim racism. As Phelps (2010, p. 1) states: “schools have a legitimate and vital role in providing students with a better and more accurate understanding of the Muslim world.” This would allow students to appreciate the cultural and ideological diversity within Islamic communities. Phelps further argues for critical literacy, in which students’ assumptions and stereotypes are challenged, and in which they are required to consider multiple and contradictory perspectives, as well as focus on socio-political issues and become proactive in promoting social justice, such as by studying texts that deal with being bicultural in Western society. “Storytelling” strategies such as using biographies, which clarify diverse positionalities (Aveling, 2006), allow such goals to be achieved. Dunn et al (2007) also suggest that emphasizing the cultural and religious diversity of Australian Muslims is a significant step in helping to counteract their mistreatment. This mistreatment has been attributed to a widespread lack of knowledge within Australian society and unchallenged, frequent stereotyping of Islam, which has affected Australian Muslims’ participation and equality in Australia (HREOC, 2003). Therefore, schools play an important role for creating common multicultural knowledge that leads to respect, especially as they are the primary contributors to multicultural literacy (Taylor & Hoechsmann, 2011).

More in-depth qualitative and quantitative research on the lived experiences of Australian Muslims would contribute to our understanding of how widespread misunderstanding of Muslims influences everyday race relations and their lived experiences within Australian society. Comparing this to research on how the greater incorporation of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge within the curriculum has affected racism experienced by Indigenous people in Australia over the last decade would also be useful. To date, literature focusing on the concept of curricular justice has been limited, suggesting that there is a need for academics to address how the implementation of curriculums in the education system impacts on social justice and equity.

THE URGENT NEED FOR MORE INCLUSIVE HISTORY AND ENGLISH CURRICULUMS

Although education policies appear to strive for inclusive education, schools often struggle to implement practical plans that address cultural diversity (Johnson, 2003). In light of the current political climate, it is necessary to include in the curriculum studies that reconstruct students’ cultural identities in a more fair and supportive manner, and to consider students present and historical disempowerment (Nieto, 2000). Such critical pedagogy means that education can be emancipatory rather than just a source of domination over those who are marginalized in society (Nieto, 1995). This is an essential consideration because schools are considered to be cultural institutions that impact individuals and communities (Shnukal, 2002). For example, Howard and Perry (2007) argued that for Aboriginal students to achieve their potential, it is essential for Aboriginal culture to be accepted in the classroom. Learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, perspectives and people has been found to lead to greater intercultural respect and understanding, and to counteract the racism, mistreatment and exclusion that result from a

lack of understanding (Mooney, 2011; NDET, 2009). This finding was made almost 20 years ago by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC), which stated that it is essential for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and histories to be included in Australian school programs to improve social justice and equality (Reconciliation Australia, 2010).

Recognising the benefits of including information about disadvantaged minority groups in curriculums, the English and History curriculums, especially, should address the social injustices associated with racism, hegemony and the dispossession of the Arab and Muslim identity over the last century. They should include Arab and Muslim voices in the same way as they include others. Otherwise the curriculums ensure that Australia's multicultural acceptance is exclusively for some groups and not others, and that the *Anti-Racism Policy* is unsupported in its promotion of social justice and equality. In addition, imposing literature on dispossessed individuals, especially literature which only conveys opposing political viewpoints, has the same effect as teaching individuals why they should be submissive to those more powerful, leading to their high dropout rate in schools because the content is not inclusive nor relevant concerning their experiences (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). Such alienating practices become especially significant because many second generation Muslims come from families that have fled their homes in search of safety (HREOC, 2003). Alienation may also occur when sensitive topics such as the Arab-Israeli conflict are not presented impartially or when studies of key Muslim personalities are coupled with studies on fundamentalism rather than revolutions. For example, the personality study of key Muslim revolutionary figure, Imam Ayatollah Khomeini, in the Modern History Stage 6 syllabus (BOSN, 2009b) is coupled with the study of Muslim fundamentalism, which ignores a legitimate focus on Khomeini's revolutionary success in reducing corruption in Iran by overthrowing the Shah, who was a pro-Western dictator who engaged in the brutal repression of Iranians (Leigh & Evans, 2007). Coupling such personality studies with studies of fundamentalism only serves to obscure the Muslim voice and the global struggle of the Muslim population against Western-backed dictatorships and imperialism.

Furthermore, although the History K-10 syllabus offers teachers a teaching option in Stage 4 (The Ancient World, Depth Study number 4: The Western World and Islamic World) that focuses on the Ottoman Empire (BOSN, 2012a), its optional status means that it may never be taught in reality. Even if taught within schools, relying only on the study of Muslims in an ancient context may become problematic because limited studies or studies in isolation to the modern context may potentially encourage negative stereotypes, such as Muslims being out-dated and unable to cope with modern times. To ensure relevance and realistic information about Muslims, it is essential for the wider Australian community to understand the diverse linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds of Australian Muslims in the modern context.

A more inclusive curriculum becomes essential for disciplines that function to highlight empathy, understanding and critical thinking, such as the History and English disciplines. For example, many Australian schools have, in the past, included visits to the Australian Holocaust Museum as part of their studies; an experience which, while educating students about the history of the holocaust, evokes feelings of understanding and empathy towards the Jewish community (NDET, 2010, p. 4). Similar experiences aimed at educating students about Muslim modern history would provide opportunities for Australian students to have a greater understanding of Muslims; an experience that would indirectly lead to improved social cohesion and harmony (Taylor & Hoehsmann, 2011).

However school curriculums in Australia have yet to incorporate the Muslim experience of racism

in the same way as they have incorporated discussion of other forms of racism, even though Australian Muslims are currently the most marginalized community group in Australia (HREOC, 2003; Leung, 2006; Dunn, 2005; Dunn, Forrest, Burnley & McDonald, 2004). Indeed, the contribution of the NSW curriculum to racism and injustice in society through its exclusionary practices, which renders certain oppressed groups invisible and misunderstood, cannot be underestimated.

Furthermore, ensuring a positive *inclusive* portrayal of Arab and Muslim Australians in school textbooks helps counteract the effects of ongoing media and political attacks on Australian Muslims which are exacerbated when conflicts erupt in the Arab world. It is essential that they be considered concurrently as ‘the conflation of Arab and Muslim communities into a singular homogeneous category, constructed as synonymous with threat and terrorism’ works to disadvantage both community groups (Kamp & Mansouri, 2010, p. 739). This significantly impacts on the treatment of this ethno-religious group because, when educational leadership fails, media often intervene and misinforms the youth who have limited experiences in dealing with those from different ethno-racial and cultural backgrounds to themselves (Taylor & Hoechsmann, 2011). Making students more sensitive to Islamophobia in the media, thus, is a responsibility of educational institutions—otherwise Islamophobia and racism are likely to increase (Gardner, Karakasoglus, & Luchtenberg, 2008). Authentic Muslim “voices” must be put forward and not misrepresented in the form of the ambiguous opinions of Muslim spiritual leaders, which only serve to further disempower the Muslim community in work and educational settings.

ENSURING CURRICULAR JUSTICE THROUGH TEXT SELECTION

According to Connell (1993, pp. 1-3), in order for curricular justice to be achieved, three principles must be met to ensure social justice goals are accomplished in the curriculum: the interests of the least advantaged must be considered; there must be participation and common schooling; and there must be historical production of equality. The second criterion automatically “rules out curricula produced from a single socially-dominant stand-point” and requires the validation of the experiences of minority and disempowered groups in society. In light of these criteria, neither the English nor History curriculums achieve curricular justice; the English Stage 6 syllabus does not include any compulsory texts which validate the experiences of Muslim and Arab Australians, although there are recommended texts which highlight the Asian experience (‘Unpolished Gem’ by Alice Pung, cited in BOSN, 2007) and Indigenous experience (‘The Stolen Children’ by Carmel Bird, cited in BOSN, 2007). In addition, the political and social significance of including several texts on the Jewish experience and none on the Muslim experience means that one group’s identity and history is empathized with and prioritized, while the other is completely discarded. Students may learn to empathize with the Jewish experience in “Peter Skrzyneckis Immigrant Chronicles,” Sylvia Plath’s “Ariel” collection and “Maestro” by Peter Goldsworthy (BOSN, 2007) because of a high probability that teachers will select one of these texts because of their continuing inclusion as recommended texts. The probability of teachers selecting or even having the choice to invest in a new school resource that conveys any Muslim experience is low. There are, in fact, no recommended texts in the current senior prescription list—which will remain effective until 2014—that reflect the Muslim experience.

Furthermore, the goal of intercultural understanding in the national History K-10 syllabus (BOSN, 2012a) mainly covers understanding of “others” who are Indigenous or Asian and thus is selective when educating students about engaging with people from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. The syllabus outcomes of recognising differences, creating

connections between others and cultivating intercultural respect, in effect, are only relevant to a few cultural groups and do not incorporate greater understanding of the most marginalized ethno-religious group in Australia.

Syllabus outcomes must incorporate the Muslim experience in the same way as they incorporate Asian, European, Indigenous and Jewish experiences of oppression and marginalization in order to counteract their dehumanising portrayal by the Australian media. Otherwise, not only will social harmony, equality and justice be undermined, but future “Cronulla riots” may be inevitable.

Expanding the History curriculum to include studies on the significant Muslim mortalities in the last century due to war, oppression and economic sanctions would enable a more inclusive account of human suffering to be presented and allow a greater understanding of the alienated and marginalised minority groups living amongst us. It has been found that the lack of explicit teaching on Islam within school settings is responsible for rising Islamophobia and distorted perceptions of Islam (Ramarajan & Runell, 2007). A lack of explicitness can be seen, for example, in the generalised core study in the new Australian curriculum, *Migration experiences*, which does not yet include explicit teaching about the experiences of Muslim migrants (even though it briefly covers post-World War II migrations impact on Australia’s population growth due to the Vietnam War, the Gulf War and the war in Afghanistan). Such studies could be improved by following the examples set by more explicit studies on minority groups such as the Holocaust depth core study in the 2012 History K-10 syllabus, Stage 5 (BOSN, 2012a) which details the historical plight of the Jews. Exclusion on the other hand of such explicit studies, renders the Muslim experience of oppression as invisible in the curriculum and further perpetuates the marginalization of Muslim youth in public schools who, regardless of their maturity and education levels, are often forced into the role of “global Muslim spokesperson” to counteract accusations of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism (HREOC, 2003). Personal narratives including historical recounts can help relieve Muslim students of the ‘spokesperson’ burden and teach non-Muslim students essential skills required for living in a pluralistic and democratic society (Ramarajan & Runell, 2007).

The third criterion suggested by Connell (1993) states that equality and inequality are reproduced over time. Thus, unless active measures are urgently taken, the NSW education system will continue to fail to deliver curricular justice and equality. An alienating curriculum also inevitably means that Muslim students are more likely to disengage from and discontinue further study. The NSW English Years 7-10 syllabus, for example, requires that students must experience texts that give insight into multicultural experiences in Australia and texts that present a range of cultural perspectives. However, the syllabus does not mandate the study of particular texts. As a significant step forward, the Australian Curriculum English syllabus to be implemented by 2014 (BOSN, 2012b) includes a few recommended texts for Stage 5 which convey Muslim biculturalism (‘Tea with Arwa’ by Arwa El Masri) and historical insight (‘Where the streets had a name’ by Randa Abdel-Fattah). However, teachers have dozens of texts to choose from; giving them flexibility but increasing their chances of overlooking texts on the Muslim experience due to the numerous options available. In another advance of sorts, the Australian Curriculum History syllabus to be implemented by 2016 (BOSN, 2012a), includes the option to study the experiences of Afghan and Iraqi refugees on their journey to Australia and their treatment by the Australian media upon arriving in Australia. Yet, this option competes with the option of studying the experiences of Vietnamese refugees in Topic 5 “Migration experiences” which then competes with another two options (“The environmental movement” and “Popular culture”) in Depth Study 5 ‘The Globalising World’!

Hence, although the English and History Australian National curriculums offer an opportunity to further understand Australian Muslim experiences, they also do not guarantee any improvement in understanding Australian Muslims nor social harmony because of the non-compulsory status of learning about Muslim experiences in both syllabi. Both the English and History curriculums contain no explicit outcomes that deal with understanding Muslims, and existing related outcomes often frame negative discourse on Muslims, Islamic history and leaders. This is compounded by the lack of recommended resources that reflect the Muslim or Arab voice/perspective, rendering the Muslim and Arab experience invisible, irrelevant and effectively alien to educators and students in the education system. As neither the previous or the new national English K-10 syllabus prescribe particular texts for student learning K-11, teachers carry the responsibility of selecting texts appropriate for the needs, interests and abilities of their students, and the beliefs of their school and local community (BOSN, 2003, 2012b). However, this also means that teachers carry the duty of ensuring that students' cross-cultural understanding and knowledge is adequate for contributing to social harmony in Australian society—a task that is left to chance because text selection is carried out at the teacher's discretion. The notion of giving schools the discretion to determine which texts are relevant to their school communities (BOSN, 2003) to fulfil course outcomes is a problematic one. This is because texts which convey the experiences of Australian Muslims may be deemed “irrelevant” for students in predominantly Anglo-Saxon schools, even though these students are the most likely to develop unchallenged racist prejudices and negative sentiments towards this minority group as a result of the gap in their education. It is also plainly ridiculous if such texts are seen as relevant only for schools with a large Muslim population because it neglects the broader meaning of cross-cultural understanding and critical thinking in education. If “the profession is itself a major element of the curriculum” (Purpel, 1989, p. 141) then perhaps more needs to be done to educate teachers on the importance of considering and selecting texts which deal with the most marginalised groups in society, especially as many Australian Arabic and Muslim students perceive that racial tension exists within their school environment and that they suffer from poor teacher-student relations as a result (Kamp & Mansouri, 2010). In order to normalize “being Muslim,” educators need to rely not only on syllabus outcomes to achieve social justice, but also smoothly incorporate content on Australian Muslims into their curricular content in the same way as they do with other cultures and marginalized groups (Ramarajan & Runell, 2007). However, the non-compulsory and complementary nature of multicultural education in teacher training in Australia is currently still a huge obstacle for addressing Islamophobia (Gardner, Karakasoglus, & Luchtenberg, 2008).

In light of the fact that many public schools may struggle with resource funds (Bowden, 2012), schools may find it difficult to purchase new texts even if they hoped to present a more just curriculum to their students or avoid teaching unfamiliar non-western histories altogether (Parker-Jenkins, 1991). Thus, the NSW Department of Education and Training will need to help counteract the impact of resource constraints by providing public schools with texts online if the need arises. In this technological age, a new text need not be an expensive outlay since many works are now available online. The need to make such simple texts compulsory rather than voluntary is essential because social understanding should not be left to chance. Ideally, a panel of Muslim teachers should select the support materials because they will have both the knowledge of their communities' experiences and the professional knowledge of pedagogy and practices to make such crucial decisions and avoid harmful, tokenistic representations of Islam. In the end, good teaching practices require anti-racist teaching strategies (Parker-Jenkins, 1991) especially as such strategies build critical thinking skills which are necessary for achieving social justice in education (Housee, 2012).

CONCLUSION

NSW curriculums, especially the History and English curriculums, have a responsibility to educate all Australian schoolchildren and ensure that marginalized voices are heard. Unless they fulfil this duty, they will not only fail to facilitate social harmony and understanding but also may contribute to the marginalization and disadvantage of the Australian Muslim community and, indirectly, harness future Cronulla riots-type incidents. A more inclusive portrayal of marginalized voices in the English and History curriculums would also help to counteract the alienation that the curriculums impose on Muslim students. Through their exclusion of Muslim experiences, both the current English and History curriculums effectively render the Muslim experience irrelevant and, ultimately, invisible, and serve to ensure that Australian Muslims remain misunderstood, mistreated and misjudged. The key issue is not simply to replace traditionally-used texts with others, but rather to ensure a more balanced selection of texts that include the Muslim voice rather than discard it from the different modules and electives studied. Syllabus outcomes must also incorporate having a greater understanding of Muslim modern history and Muslim Australians in the same way as they have incorporated learning and understanding about other marginalised community groups. Both the English and History curriculums need to ensure that one of their key outcomes is to facilitate knowledge and understanding of Australia's marginalized community groups with the word "Muslim" not avoided. A more proactive revision of both curriculums would not only ensure curricular justice but also social justice. The responsibilities for implementation of the Australian governments educational policy goals have now been transferred to the new national curriculum which, despite changes to a few minor details, manifest the same failures where social and curricular justice are concerned.

More qualitative and quantitative research is needed to investigate the lived racialized experiences of marginalised minorities in Australia, and the challenges they consequently face in living with socially constructed stereotypes. The role of alienation and marginalisation in creating the consciousness of being an "other" and actualising stereotypes would also be worthy of investigation. More research on the contribution of other factors that create a "curriculum that is lived" (Tilley & Taylor, 2012), such as Eurocentric textbooks and teachers' commitment to the potential liberation of minority groups within Australia, is needed. Future research should also consider the impact of the poor representation of Australia's disadvantaged minority groups amongst school teaching staff in many schools on both the lived curriculum and developing intercultural understanding. Such research is essential as Australian Muslims face considerable discrimination in many employment sectors including education and a lack of representation of the Muslim community in both work and educational settings only exacerbates the alienating effects of exclusionary curricula. As Indigenous perspectives have been increasingly valued and incorporated into the curriculum, it would be worthy to investigate exactly how this has benefited Aboriginal communities in terms of work and education opportunities. Has the curriculum gone far enough to provide us with sufficient knowledge on Indigenous values and perspectives to guide our understanding? The extent to which current knowledge has manifested in the improved employment prospects and quality of life for Indigenous people has yet to be determined—especially when factors such as teacher training and pedagogies are considered. However, it is only through interrogating the lived curriculum that we can truly ensure that Australian students receive an education that not only promotes social harmony and equity but also a genuine democracy.

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