

ESRC Seminar Series: Diverse Teachers for Diverse Learners

Australia Briefing Notes

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## Background to Country and Education System

### Demography

Australia covers an area of 7.69 million square kilometres and stretches about 3700 kilometres from north to south and 4000 kilometres from east to west. It is one of the world's oldest landmasses and has been populated by human beings for an estimated 60 000 years. Before the arrival of European settlers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples inhabited most areas of the continent.

Australia's contemporary history is relatively short, with the first European settlement established by Great Britain on 26 January 1788. It is estimated that there were between 300 000 and 750 000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia at the start of European settlement in 1788 with an estimated 250 languages were spoken by the Indigenous people of Australia, including about 700 dialects. In the past 200 years, this number has dropped to around 145, of which an estimated 110 are considered severely endangered.

The population of Australia is currently 22,694,698. During 2010 the population grew by 1.5%. This represents a decrease in population growth from 2009 and a general decline in growth since 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). It is comprised of 6 states; Victoria, New South Wales; South Australia; Western Australia; Tasmania; Queensland and 2 territories; Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory.

**Table: Overseas Born Populations – 1996-2006 – Census Data**

|   | 1996       | 2001       | 2006       |
|---|------------|------------|------------|
| Overseas Born Population                            | 3,908,257  | 4,105,616  | 4,416,029  |
| As % of population                                  | 22.0       | 21.9       | 22.2       |
| Born in a Non-Main English Speaking Country (NMESC) | 2,362,535  | 2,502,964  | 2,740,709  |
| Australian Born                                     | 13,227,776 | 13,629,685 | 14,072,949 |
| As % of population                                  | 74.5       | 72.6       | 70.9       |
| With both parents born overseas                     | 1,473,785  | 1,503,689  | 1,586,390  |
| With one parent born overseas                       | 1,915,946  | 1,973,500  | 2,056,650  |
| <b>Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islanders</b>         | 352,970    | 410,003    | 455,026    |
| As % of population                                  | 2.0        | 2.2        | 2.3        |
| Speak a Language other than English At Home         | 2,657,751  | 2,853,829  | 3,146,183  |

|                    |      |      |      |
|--------------------|------|------|------|
| As % of population | 15.0 | 15.2 | 15.8 |
|--------------------|------|------|------|

At the 2006 Census, overseas-born people in Australia were from North-West Europe (1.4 million). Of those, 23.5 % were from Britain and Ireland. The next largest populations were from Southern and Eastern Europe (722 000), South-East Asia (553 000), Oceania (496 000), North-East Asia (389 000), Southern and Central Asia (268 000), North Africa and the Middle East (251 000), Sub-Saharan Africa (192 000) and the Americas (180 000). The biggest increases in population of overseas-born people between the 2001 and 2006 Censuses were from China (64 000), India (52 000), New Zealand (34 000) and South Africa (25 000). Of the country-of-birth groups that had a population of more than 1000 at the 2006 Census, the fastest growing were people from Liberia (up 1240 per cent from the 2001 Census), Sierra Leone (up 437 per cent) and the Sudan (up 288 per cent).

**Table: Top Ten Languages Spoken in Australia**

| 2006 Census – Languages Spoken | nos.    | % of pop. |
|--------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Italian                        | 316,893 | 1.6       |
| Greek                          | 252,226 | 1.3       |
| Cantonese                      | 244,558 | 1.2       |
| Arabic                         | 243,662 | 1.2       |
| Mandarin                       | 220,603 | 1.1       |
| Vietnamese                     | 194,855 | 1.0       |
| Spanish                        | 98,000  | 0.5       |
| German                         | 75,635  | 0.4       |
| Hindi                          | 70,0080 | 0.4       |
| Macedonian                     | 67,832  | 0.3       |

### **Australia's immigration policy**

Australia administers separate migration and humanitarian programs. The programs provide a balance between Australia's international humanitarian obligations and the Australian Government's economic, social and environmental objectives. The migration program has two main streams: a skill stream that targets skills and skill shortages which contribute to Australia's economy, and a family stream which recognises the value and importance of family migration. China was Australia's largest source of migrants with an outcome of 29 547 places or 17.5 per cent of the total migration program, up from 24 768 or 19.3 per cent in 2009-10. The next largest source of immigrants was the UK, followed by India, The Philippines and South Africa. The humanitarian intake comprised people from the following nations.

**Table: 2009-10 Humanitarian visa grants by top ten countries of birth**

| Countries   |      |
|-------------|------|
| Burma       | 1959 |
| Iraq        | 1688 |
| Bhutan      | 1144 |
| Afghanistan | 951  |
| Congo (DRC) | 584  |
| Ethiopia    | 392  |
| Somalia     | 317  |
| Sudan       | 298  |
| Liberia     | 258  |

## School Students

In 2010 there were 3,510,875 students in Australian schools; 66% of students attended government schools, 20% attended Catholic schools and 14% attended independent schools. Those who require English as a Second language provision receive it via withdrawal or mainstream programs taught by qualified ESL teachers. Some schools offer what are known as 'Community Language Programs', that is bilingual programs targeting the home language of immigrant children. However, generally, foreign languages are taught in both primary and secondary schools. The most common languages studied are Japanese, Chinese, French, Italian, German, Indonesian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic and Latin. The National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program promotes the study of four targeted languages in secondary schools – Japanese, Indonesian, Mandarin and Korean.

Educational outcomes vary for children from some minority groups. For example, Indigenous students are generally well below those of non-Indigenous students (South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2005; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2007) and they are also more likely than non-Indigenous students to be inappropriately placed in special education classes (De Plevitz, 2006) because their needs are misdiagnosed. Other groups that experience similar disadvantage in Australia are African students, those of Arabic and/or Muslim background and those from some Pacific Islands. These groups are less likely to gain university entrance and more likely to be unemployed or employed in unskilled occupations (Betts & Healy 2006; Singh & Sinclair 2001; Teese & Polesel 2003; Windle 2004).

## Teachers in Australia

Each state and Territory has responsibility for the provision of education with its own curriculum frameworks, qualifications system and the registration of teachers. Teachers in Australian pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools must hold a Teaching Degree and be registered with the registering body in their state although in 2013, teachers will be registered in accordance with a newly developed set of national standards (AITSL). Those teachers who have qualifications from outside Australia must seek registration and may have to do additional teacher education to meet registration requirements. "The large majority of Australian teachers were born in Australia: 86% of primary teachers and 81% of secondary teachers. The next largest group were those born in England (5%), which is close to the proportion of English-born people in the Australian population as a whole. The other countries generally had a lower proportion of teachers born in that country than their respective proportion of the Australian population. The Catholic sector has a higher proportion of Australian-born teachers than Government or Independent schools" (McKenzie et al 2008, P4). Only 1-2% of primary teachers and less than 1% of secondary teachers and school leaders are Indigenous. I would appear that there has been little growth in numbers of indigenous teachers since 1999 (McKenzie et al 2008, p.22). According to a major review of teacher education in Australia (Hartsuyker 2007, p.35):

According to researchers Skilbeck and Connell, ...teaching does not seem to be drawing fully on the multi-ethnic/multi-cultural diversity of Australia... [the] conventional image of teaching [is] as largely a lower middle class, Anglo-Celtic profession, feminine in the primary and lower secondary years and some subject areas (humanities and languages) and masculine in upper secondary years, some subject areas (science, mathematics) and senior leadership positions in schools. Teaching is in danger of being stereotyped through these features of the teaching force. Selection should draw upon the rich cultural diversity of Australian society.

**Information for this briefing paper was drawn from the following sources:**

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