

Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students in Australian higher education

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Equity Context

With the increase in numbers has come much greater diversity in the student body.

(Bradley et al p. xi)

The Australian Equity framework (Commonwealth of Australia, 1990) identified target equity groups to include people from **non-English speaking backgrounds**.

The Bradley Review again focussed a lens on this equity group. This study focuses on **NESB students** as it has been a group that has been largely overlooked by the literature and universities.

Research Focus

This study investigates the extent to which universities have sought to respond to NESB students and found that some universities have developed specific action plans or similar 'policy documents'.

This study explores how these documents might inform higher education as it grapples to understand how it might work more inclusively and proactively within the widening participation agenda to respond to NESB students.

Methodology

1st stage analysis: How do universities respond to NESB students as an equity group in terms of harnessing social and cultural capital?

Desktop review of how universities are responding to NESB students has revealed that some have adopted a strategic approach through cultural diversity/multicultural **action plans or a charter** (table 1).

2nd stage analysis: How do the documents provide scope for exploring how higher education positions itself to counter/reinforce the dominant traditional reproduction of cultural capital?

Drawing on Bourdieu, these documents were analysed thematically to explore how they sought to challenge aspects of cultural capital and field.

<i>Table1: Australian Universities with a Multicultural Action Plan</i>	Date
University of Western Australia (UWA)	2013-2015
University of Wollongong (UoW)	2014-2018
University of Southern Queensland (USQ)	2017-2019
University of Newcastle	2015-2020
University of Adelaide	2011-2013
<i>Australian Universities with a Cultural Diversity Charter</i>	
Swinburne University - Charter of Cultural Diversity and Objectives of Cultural Diversity	2017
<i>Australian Universities with cultural diversity plans/statements</i>	
RMIT University - Cultural Inclusion Action Plan	No date

Findings

Themes :

- The notion of field is through the rationale for the documents, types of actions identified in the action plans eg. audience, responsibilities accorded etc.
- Legislation and policy is drawn on to leverage relevance and opportunity to challenge habitus
- Cultural capital regarded as a commodity ie. workplace skills for staff and students
- Agency – various people and roles are identified to work with the actions/strategies providing an insight into the epistemological framing of the action plans /charter.



Images: Teresa De Fazio