

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Ethnicity and Compulsory Schooling

Associate Professor Carol Reid and Professor Christine Halse from the Centre for Educational Research are identifying the pressures that may impact on increasing the school leaving age for ethnically diverse populations in NSW public schools. This project is funded by the Australian Research Council Discovery Project scheme.

'17 years is now the age of compulsory education in NSW schools,' says Associate Professor Reid. 'This decision was made partially because early school leavers have traditionally had more difficulty securing long-term full-time work, are more likely to be unemployed in the year after leaving school and earn less than people who finish Year 12 or complete further training. South Western Sydney (SWS), one of the largest public-schooling regions in Australia, currently has low school retention rates, low socio-economic status and high ethnic diversity, so increasing the school leaving age could create new challenges for the local schools and the community. With recent ethnic tensions and a reduced youth labour market offering early school leavers fewer alternatives in employment and apprenticeships, understanding the effects of these complex factors is vitally important to enable the success of school retention strategies. This project aims to generate policies and practices that teachers find effective in meeting the needs of SWS high school students, considering their ethnic diversity and the socio-economic constraints of their environment.'

The interrelationships between individuals and groups of parents and students in different migrant and ethnic groups will be examined using interviews and focus groups to determine how these shape student engagement in schooling or further education. Focus groups and interviews will also be held with teachers, school education directors, school principals and parents to discuss school retention issues and strategies.



A regional symposium will be held in collaboration with the SWS region of the NSW Department of Education and Training to disseminate the study results and develop new strategies for schools and parents for retention of students at high school.

Giving young people the best chance they can have for a good education and better social cohesion, regardless of ethnicity, circumstance and socio-economic status can produce better employment prospects and workplace participation for school leavers, enhance community relations and contribute to the overall improvement of education levels of Australians.

Project Title: A Sociological Analysis of Ethnicity and Compulsory Schooling in NSW

Funding has been set at: \$110,000

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