Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools: Keynotes

Introduction

The following information is also relevant to this Introduction:

The Introduction: Background information outlining the context and purpose of the project. (This document.)

Keynote 1 – Violence and Conflict: Issues and Strategies for Schools: A theoretical background to understanding conflict and violence and how schools can address issues of intolerance.

Keynote 2 – A Whole-School Approach to Combating Racism and Prejudice: An audit strategy for schools to plan and monitor their approaches to combating racism. This is adapted from Racism No Way (www.racismnoway.com.au/strategies/framework/body-Schools.html); a web site aimed at teachers seeking to challenge and counter racism.

The following Keynotes cover the nine most significantly represented religions in Australia and include suggestions for classroom activities:

Keynote 3 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam
Keynote 4 – The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism
Keynote 5 - The Abrahamic Religions: Middle Eastern Christians
Keynote 6 – The Abrahamic Religions: Islam
Keynote 7 – Arabs and Muslims in Australia
Keynote 8 – Indian Religions: Hinduism
Keynote 9 – Indian Religions: Sikhism
Keynote 10 – Indian Religions: Buddhism
Keynote 11 – Bahá’í Faith

You can also download a full version of Combating Racism and Prejudice in Schools, which includes all of the Keynotes listed above. This full document, as well as all of the above sections can be downloaded from the Keynotes Explained (http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/tchkeynotes.htm) web page on the Multicultural Education http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/multicultural/default.htm) site.
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Introduction

Context

At a global, national and local level the world is changing. On the one hand globalisation means we live in an increasingly interdependent world with economic and technological interdependence between societies and nations and improved communication between peoples. At the same time we are seeing, in some parts of the world, increasing ethnic and sectarian conflict creating great political instability and extreme hardship for minority groups. The extended conflicts in the Middle East, the former Yugoslavia and more recently in Northern Africa have swelled the numbers of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who, fleeing oppression and political and economic instability, have sought settlement in more peaceful countries like Australia.

Schools in Victoria generally provide safe and supportive environments for their students with school policies and curriculum practices doing much to encourage positive relationships between students. Conflict in schools remains a reality, however, with some incidents of abuse or violence being fuelled by racist and prejudiced attitudes. Mistrust, fear of difference, lack of information and understandings of different cultures and faiths can lead to intolerance and prejudice sometimes resulting in violence.

The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century articulated the importance of schools developing in students a respect for cultural diversity.

Schooling should be socially just, so that:

all students understand and acknowledge the value of cultural and linguistic diversity, and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, such diversity in the Australian community and internationally.

The report of the UNESCO conference Education for Shared Values and for Intercultural and Interfaith Understanding (UNESCO, 2005), called on education systems to, “incorporate common and agreed values into curricula and to prepare education content capable of promoting intercultural and interfaith understanding” (Susan Pascoe, Keynote address to 2005 National Values Education Forum).

Schools can do much through their curriculum to develop in students an understanding of culture and a respect for diversity, which goes beyond a superficial understanding of aspects of culture and develops in students a capacity to view the world as others see it.

Culture means the way we see and do things. Culture is the set of shared meanings or the ways people agree to be (behave, act, respond) in order to respond to new and familiar situations in their lives. Culture becomes the filter through which people interpret reality and
perceive their future. As such any particular culture represents a coherent but distinctive way of looking at the world.


For many in our community, religion is an essential aspect of their cultural identity. Although Christianity is still the major religion in Australia, other religions, such as Islam and Buddhism, are growing at a more rapid rate. Fostering understanding and respect between different faith traditions, which share core values of tolerance, respect and compassion for others is an important aspect of educating our students to live peacefully and harmoniously in a culturally diverse society.

There is...a major responsibility and challenge for schools in Australia and worldwide to integrate principles, values and perspectives of inter-faith dialogue toward building a culture of peace into the curriculum and all dimensions of school life

(Professor Toh Swee-Hin, Director of the Griffith University Multi-Faith Centre and Laureate, UNESCO Prize for Peace Education, 2000).

Purpose of the materials

Sometimes teachers are unprepared for outbursts of prejudiced behaviour or racist opinions, or are uninformed about students’ cultures and religions. In these situations, teachers and other students can respond in ways that may make things worse. The keynotes aim to:

- contribute to teachers’ understanding of conflict and prejudice and ways of dealing effectively with them
- suggest action that school communities can take both to prevent conflict and to respond to it
- provide teachers with information on religions, which traditionally are associated with the Middle East
- provide teachers with basic information on the most statistically significant religions represented in Australian society
- provide ideas for related classroom activities.

Although the original focus of the keynotes was the Middle East, the number of religions has been expanded to include information about other significant religious communities in Australia. It is expected that teachers will use Keynotes 3–10 to familiarise themselves with students’ cultural and religious backgrounds and will build these perspectives into classroom programs. The source materials on different religious communities are also suitable for use by senior students.
The materials

The Keynotes were originally developed to accompany the text, *Combating Prejudice in Schools, The Middle East in Focus*, first published in 1992. They have been substantially revised and updated.

**Keynote 1** provides a theoretical background to understanding conflict and violence, and makes suggestions as to how schools should address the issue.

**Keynote 2** provides a framework for a whole-school approach to combating racism and prejudice in schools, which has been adapted from *Racism. No Way!* It includes an audit of school policy and practices, which schools can use for planning and monitoring purposes.

**Keynotes 3 to 11** are a series of succinct fact sheets providing information about significant religions represented in Australia. Sub-sections provide information on the origins, early history and spread of the religions, essential beliefs, religious observances, major festivals and celebrations, population, community structure and organisations in Australia. The section, *Considerations for Schools*, suggests aspects of the culture and religion schools need to be mindful of when developing policies and programs.

The Keynotes also contain suggestions for classroom activities. These are not age-specific, so teachers will need to choose and adapt activities as appropriate for their students. These Keynotes are intended for use by teachers from Prep to Year 12.

**Titles include:**

- Keynote 1 Violence and Conflict: Issues and Strategies for Schools
- Keynote 2 A Whole-school approach to Combating Racism and Prejudice
- Keynote 3 The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam
- Keynote 4 The Abrahamic Religions: Judaism
- Keynote 5 The Abrahamic Religions: Middle Eastern Christians
- Keynote 6 The Abrahamic Religions: Islam
- Keynote 7 Arabs and Muslims in Australia
- Keynote 8 Indian Religions: Hinduism
- Keynote 9 Indian Religions: Sikhism
- Keynote 10 Indian Religions: Buddhism
- Keynote 11 Bahá’í Faith
Legislative and policy framework

Legislation

The materials are consistent with the following state and federal legislation, which supports racial and religious tolerance and diversity, and prohibits vilification and discrimination on the grounds of race, culture or religious belief or activity:

- *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*
- *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*
- *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004*

Policy

Policy documents outlining school responsibilities in relation to supporting equity and diversity include:

Values education

The materials and suggested activities are consistent with, and support, the nine values outlined in the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (Commonwealth of Australia 2005) (http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values/default.asp?id=8758).

- Understanding, Tolerance and Inclusion
- Honesty and Trustworthiness
- Doing Your Best
- Freedom
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Integrity
- Care and Compassion
- Fair Go.

These values are particularly relevant in a global, national and local community context.

Victorian Essential Learning Standards

The overview to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VCAA 5, 2005) states that to succeed in a rapidly changing, globally-orientated world, “all students need to develop the capacities to:

- manage themselves as individuals and in relation to others,
- understand the world in which they live; and
- act effectively in that world.”

The source material and classroom suggestions in the Keynotes support curriculum programs that enable students to meet the Victorian Essential Learning Standards in the three strands of learning. They relate in particular to the following domains:

- Civics and Citizenship
- Interpersonal Development
- English
- The Humanities – History
- The Humanities – Geography
- Communication
- LOTE
- The Arts.