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Understanding racism / Discussion starters

## *Finding a place*

 Suggested time: 55 minutes

### Preparation

Over time, the local communities and drawing areas of schools and colleges can change. When this happens, the characteristics, needs and talents of the student enrolment can shift dramatically. Schools and colleges in the midst of these shifts can face a range of issues that they have never had to consider previously.

*Finding a place* highlights the responses of two schools where the needs, interests and talents of their diverse student populations have prompted effective adaptations and yielded benefits for both students and the school.

If necessary, view or review the *Finding a place* video and read the notes.

Copy the handout for each participant.

### Whole group activity

#### Introduction (2 minutes)

- Use the Purpose and Overview from *Finding a place* reproduced on page 3 to explain the purpose of this session.

#### Before the video (11 minutes)

- State that most Australians support the idea of 'a fair go for all'. Giving all students a fair go leads many teachers to take affirmative action to assist some students.
- Ask participants to identify one example of when they took 'affirmative action' to assist a student who was struggling or showed talent.
- Invite representatives from groups to briefly outline the range of affirmative actions taken by participants.

#### Preparation for watching the video (11 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of the discussion question handout for *Finding a place* to each participant.
- Ask participants to consider answers to the questions as they view the video. View *Finding a place* (9 1/2 minutes).

## Small group activity

### After viewing the video (17 minutes)

- Ask participants to make a personal response to the questions and then participate in a group discussion of the two discussion questions.
- Ask representatives from each group to summarise what their group considered teachers and educational communities can do to better cater for the needs, interests and talents of their students.

### Conclusion (1 minute)

*Finding a place* highlights the positive impacts that can occur when schools and colleges listen to and successfully adapt to the needs, interests and talents of students.

In addition to assisting students to greater personal success, such effective responses can also increase the reputation of the school or college within their local communities.

## From *Finding a place*

### Purpose

The purpose of *Finding a place* is to promote discussion about:

- adapting to changing characteristics of the student enrolment
- catering for the needs, interests and talents of students
- impacts of adaptations for students, staff and local communities
- strategies to promote community participation.

### Overview

The initial focus of *Finding a place* is Arthur Phillip High School. The principal, staff and students introduce their school and then highlight some of the ways that the school community has successfully adapted its organisation, school uniform, canteen foods and assessment policies and procedures to cater for the needs of students.

The second half of *Finding a place* focuses on the activities of Granville Boys High School. Again, the principal, staff and students introduce their school and then highlight some of the ways that the school community has successfully adapted its expectations, curriculum, sporting policy, staff induction and community involvement strategies to better cater for their students.

## Before the video

There are many occasions in life when our ability to discern and discriminate are essential to our safety and survival. For example, being able to discriminate between fast moving and slower moving traffic enables us to cross a road safely.

There are occasions in schools and colleges when individuals 'discriminate' among students and colleagues. This 'discrimination' offers support to students and colleagues when it is needed to overcome obstacles. At other times, 'discrimination' offers opportunities for individuals who show talent to extend their skills.

For example, a principal may offer support to beginning teachers on assessment techniques or classroom discipline strategies. Staff may identify the special sporting, dramatic or musical skills of students and offer opportunities for students to attend training camps, skills development sessions or talent showcases.

Considering this type of 'discrimination' or 'affirmative action' is to demonstrate that most staff already have experience with identifying the needs, interests and talents of individual students. This 'discrimination' is fundamental to schools and colleges assessing and adapting their approaches for catering for students.

# Handout discussion

**Question 1: During the video, Finding a place, what strategies did you observe being used to better cater for the needs, interests and talents of students from minority groups?**

## Arthur Phillip HS

- understanding of cultural mix of student population
- adaptations to cater for the needs of Muslim students
  - a prayer room made available
  - school uniform code amended to allow girls to wear 'veil'
  - port uniform policy adapted to allow girls to wear track-suit pants instead of tunics
  - no major assessments scheduled in Ramadan
  - care about expectations of student during peri-ods of fasting
  - range of foods available in canteen expanded to include appropriate foods
- including students in parent and teacher meetings.

## Granville Boys HS

- understanding of cultural mix of student population
- induction of new staff on:
  - issues of importance to community
  - strategies for developing English language skills during lessons
  - learning pronunciation of students' names and where they come from
- English language skills assessment of new arrivals
- 'a capella' groups to extend practical music skills of students
- sporting teams
- going to individual parents to seek ideas for community involvement strategies.

**Question 2: What positive impacts do you think the strategies had on: the students and staff at the school? relations with parents and carers? the school's 'climate'?**

## Students and staff at the school

- increased attention and participation by students
- better communication and fewer disruptions in the classroom
- greater awareness of the needs of students.
- improved student results
- less absenteeism
- increased self-esteem.

## Relations with parents and carers

- greater respect for the work of the school
- advocate for the school
- increased participation and involvement
- improved reputation of the school in the local community.

### The school's 'climate'

- more welcoming and accommodating
- greater understanding among staff, students and community
- improved capacity for negotiation
- fewer conflicts and discipline problems.

**Question 3: The actions of students, staff and community members in *Finding a place* led to transforming learning experiences for students. What strategies could your school or college adopt to identify and better cater for the needs, talents and interests of students from minority groups within your community?**

Responses to this question are dependent upon the answers that participants identify in Question 1 and Question 2.

It is likely that most school and colleges will initially need to establish ways to collect data to identify the needs, talents and interests of their students.

## Finding a place discussion questions

Speakers in the video	Your responses
Question 1: What is your cultural heritage?	
Question 2: Do you feel Australian? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If 'yes', list some of the things that help to make you feel Australian.</li><li>• If 'no', list some of the things that stop you from feeling Australian.</li></ul>	
Question 3: What groups and sub-groups do you belong to? Which ones exert most influence on you?	
Question 4: What is the role of teachers and school communities in promoting recognition of personal identity, cultural diversity and maintaining a cohesive Australian society into the future?	