



Supporting multicultural education






Lynley Qureshi, Relieving Multicultural Education and Community Relations Advisor and Eveline Mougialis, Acting Multicultural and EAL/D Education Coordinator, introduce the Multicultural Education Resources Reviews project and provide some guidelines to teachers for resource selection

This article introduces the Multicultural Education Resources Reviews project. This project is a partnership between the Equity team, Learning and Leadership and Learning Systems to support the implementation of

multicultural education in NSW public schools.

In this issue of *Scan*, the first of four multicultural education resource supplements is published.

The resources selected for review include both teacher professional learning and classroom resources in the following key multicultural education program areas:

-  Anti-racism education and community harmony
-  Community engagement and communication
-  Culturally inclusive curriculum and pedagogy
-  English as an Additional Language/Dialect education
-  Refugee student support programs.

Key concepts

Critical to effective multicultural education practice is the understanding of culture in contemporary Australian society and related concepts in modern multicultural education discourse.

The resources selected for review aim to assist in the development of transformative multicultural education practice and inform the conceptual framework which underpins this practice.

Culture

Culture is a widely contested term that is variously defined (UNESCO). Everyone has a culture (or a number of cultures) which influences their perspectives, values, behaviour, and along with other factors, their personal identity. Current research recognises that people are increasingly identifying with multiple cultures as a result of migration, globalisation and intermarriage and that culture, and expressions of culture, adapt over time, across generations and according to social, regional and geopolitical contexts (Noble & Watkins, 2014).

The dynamic and complex nature of culture in contemporary society means that traditional approaches that define culture or cultural groupings in simplistic ways or which reinforce generalisations about the perspectives,

practices and beliefs of people from similar cultural ancestries are largely irrelevant. Instead, understanding cultural complexity and the exploration of identity, belonging, citizenship and community relations are critical for achieving intercultural understanding, community harmony and social inclusion in Australian society.

Cultural diversity

Cultural diversity is a term that is generally used to describe the variety of cultural or ethnic groups that exist in a society. NSW public schools reflect the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of the communities they serve. Student enrolment data, such as Indigeneity, country of birth and languages spoken at home, are indicators of the diversity of NSW public schools, but do not provide a full picture of the cultural complexity in contemporary classrooms, where students collectively speak over 200 different languages as a first or additional language, identify with diverse ancestries and hold a range of religious and spiritual beliefs.

It should be noted that within commonly grouped cohorts of students, such as students from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) and students learning English as an Additional Language or

Dialect (EAL/D), there is a great range of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity as well as varying levels of educational need.

The nature of diversity is often seen in relatively straightforward ways, with student populations organised into lists of students' language backgrounds or countries of birth, for example. Yet diversity is much more complicated than that.... the nature of diversity in Australia is becoming increasingly diversified... due to intergenerational change, cultural adaptation, intermarriage, transnational mobility and the widening cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of Australia's immigrants and their children.

Noble and Watkins, 2014.

Intercultural understanding

Intercultural understanding is a key capability to be fostered through the Australian Curriculum and NSW syllabuses. In order for teachers to assist students to critically engage in curriculum based activities designed to promote intercultural understanding, they must first develop an understanding of the nature of culture themselves, its

complexity and its relationship with identity, diverse views and perspectives.

While intercultural understanding can be strongly promoted through explicit teaching in particular learning areas, students also receive messages about social norms and power relations through classroom interactions. For this reason, classroom management, teacher talk and modelling are critical factors in creating inclusive and harmonious learning contexts where issues of culture, diversity of views and beliefs can be explored in mutually respectful and constructive ways.

Culturally inclusive curriculum

Through culturally inclusive curriculum content and delivery, teachers provide rich opportunities for students to explore diverse perspectives and develop intercultural understanding.

Cultural inclusion is enacted at both the whole school and classroom level. At the whole school level, inclusive practice focuses on intergroup relations among students, relationships between the school, parents and the community, communication strategies, student leadership strategies, student voice and the acceptance of diversity as normal and comfortable. At the classroom level, culturally inclusive practice encompasses both curriculum

Selecting resources

The selection of appropriate resources requires careful consideration to ensure that teaching and learning materials are inclusive and culturally relevant. The following criteria and key questions provide guidance for teachers and other educators when making choices about which resources to use.

Accuracy

- Do the resources present accurate and contemporary information?
- Do resources reflect the cultural diversity of Australian society?
- Do they make generalisations or over-simplifications which may lead to stereotyping?
- Are there indications of racial bias or stereotyping?
- Are appropriate or biased messages conveyed by illustrations and photographs?

Balance

- Do the resources reflect a wide range of perspectives?
- Do they include a cross-section of people in diverse cultural contexts both within Australia and other places?
- Do the events, topics or issues presented reflect a range of historical,

social and cultural perspectives?

- Is there an overemphasis on difference?
- Is there a focus on culture as exotic or foreign?
- Is there an over-emphasis on problems?

Theme

- Do the resources illustrate intercultural sharing and understanding?
- Do they address significant and relevant contemporary issues?
- Do the resources present positive images of people from diverse cultural backgrounds?
- Do the resources accurately reflect Australia's Aboriginal and colonial past and history of migration?
- Do resources stress the equality of all Australians in a democratic society?
- Do they address issues of social justice?
- Are minority groups introduced in a natural way?
- Do they create a feeling of belonging?
- Do they complement other material on similar topics?

Omission/Inclusion

- Is the portrayal of minority groups

tokenistic?

- Are different points of view presented or is any one point of view more prominent or more favourably represented than others?
- Are some cultural groups represented in limited settings or contexts?
- Are significant aspects of history omitted?
- Where there is reference to significant cultural information, is sufficient detail included to foster intercultural understanding or promote understandings of the complexity of one's own and others' cultures?
- Do they provide opportunities for all students to identify with a variety of characteristics and situations?

Use of language

- Is appropriate terminology used?
- Does the language used reinforce stereotypes?
- Does the language used in resources foster biased interpretations and views?

Adapted from *Multicultural education: resources for teachers K-12*, NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004.

content and pedagogy. It ensures that the materials and examples used in teaching and learning activities avoid bias and prejudice and challenge stereotypes. It also ensures that all students have equitable opportunities to learn, share experiences and succeed at school.

A culturally inclusive curriculum is one that reflects the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of society. It ensures that each student is able to learn in a supportive environment free from prejudice and discrimination. It provides opportunities for all students to identify as Australian and explore their own cultures and beliefs as well as those that may be different from their own.

For more information regarding multicultural education programs and resources in NSW public schools, see the NSW Department of Education [multicultural education](#) intranet site.

Many of the resources in the resource review supplements are available from the [Henry Parkes Equity Resource Centre](#) (intranet).



References and further reading

Henzler, J 2014, [Promoting intercultural understanding in English](#) *Scan* 33.4, pp. 31-35.

Noble, G and Watkins, M 2014, *Rethinking Multiculturalism, Reassessing Multicultural Education. Project Reports 1-3*, University of Western Sydney, Penrith South, NSW.

Noble, G and Watkins, M 2014, *Rethinking Multiculturalism, Reassessing Multicultural Education. Project Report 2, Perspectives on Multicultural Education*, University of Western Sydney, Penrith South, NSW.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2015 ['Cultural Diversity'](#) UNESCO, accessed 17 July 2015.

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