

BUILDING INTERFAITH AND INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Eeqbal Hassim and Jennet Cole-Adams



Building interfaith and intercultural understandings in Australian schools
Eqbal Hassim and Jennet Cole-Adams

Publisher

National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies

Postal address National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies
Asia Institute, The University of Melbourne
Victoria 3010 Australia

Telephone: +61 3 8344 3559

E-mail: nceis-office@unimelb.edu.au

Web: <http://www.nceis.unimelb.edu.au>

May 2011

ISBN 978-0-9805183-1-3 (CD publication)

© National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies, The University of Melbourne

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without the written permission of the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies (NCEIS). Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction rights should be directed to Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh, NCEIS.

Disclaimer

The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of its authors and the people who took part in the case studies. They do not necessarily represent the views of NCEIS or its staff, or the views of the schools studied or their staff. Comments, questions, and permission to cite should be directed to the authors.

Copies may be obtained from the Australian Curriculum Studies Association at www.acsa.edu.au or by e-mail at acsa@acsa.edu.au

Images

Front cover: main image, Berthold Werner (Wikimedia Commons); image on right, Berwick Grammar School. Image on this page and top of front and back covers, Eqbal Hassim. Inside back cover, Azlan Mohamed (Wikimedia Commons). Back cover image of books, Isik College. Images on the following pages were sourced from Wikimedia Commons and are used under various licenses — page 4, Maupie; page 6, adapted from Fabos; page 18 blue image, Gertha; and back cover, Shane T. McCoy.

Design Angel Ink

FOREWORD

Training the next generation of responsible citizens is an important task that our teachers and educators carry out with pride, expertise and innovation. The future of Australia is moulded in the classrooms and schoolyards of today. Respect, understanding and humanity are integral to our future prosperity and wealth. They add value to us, as individuals and as a society. That is why it is important to note the strategies and techniques adopted at schools to help overcome prejudice. Building trust and respect among students to overcome religious and cultural barriers is a necessary step for discovering shared human values that bind us together. Knowledge and familiarity with the lesser-known cultures and religions contribute to a holistic education. The initiatives noted in this collection point to laudable energy and good-will on the part of the teachers, principals and students for an inclusive and humane society. These efforts are immeasurably valuable in creating a sense of solidarity across different ethnic and religious divides. Common values, civic solidarity and commitment to a shared future are essential for Australia's capacity to grow and be self-confident in its engagement with the world. This collection highlights a small sample from a wide range of initiatives that contribute to Australia's prosperity. ♦

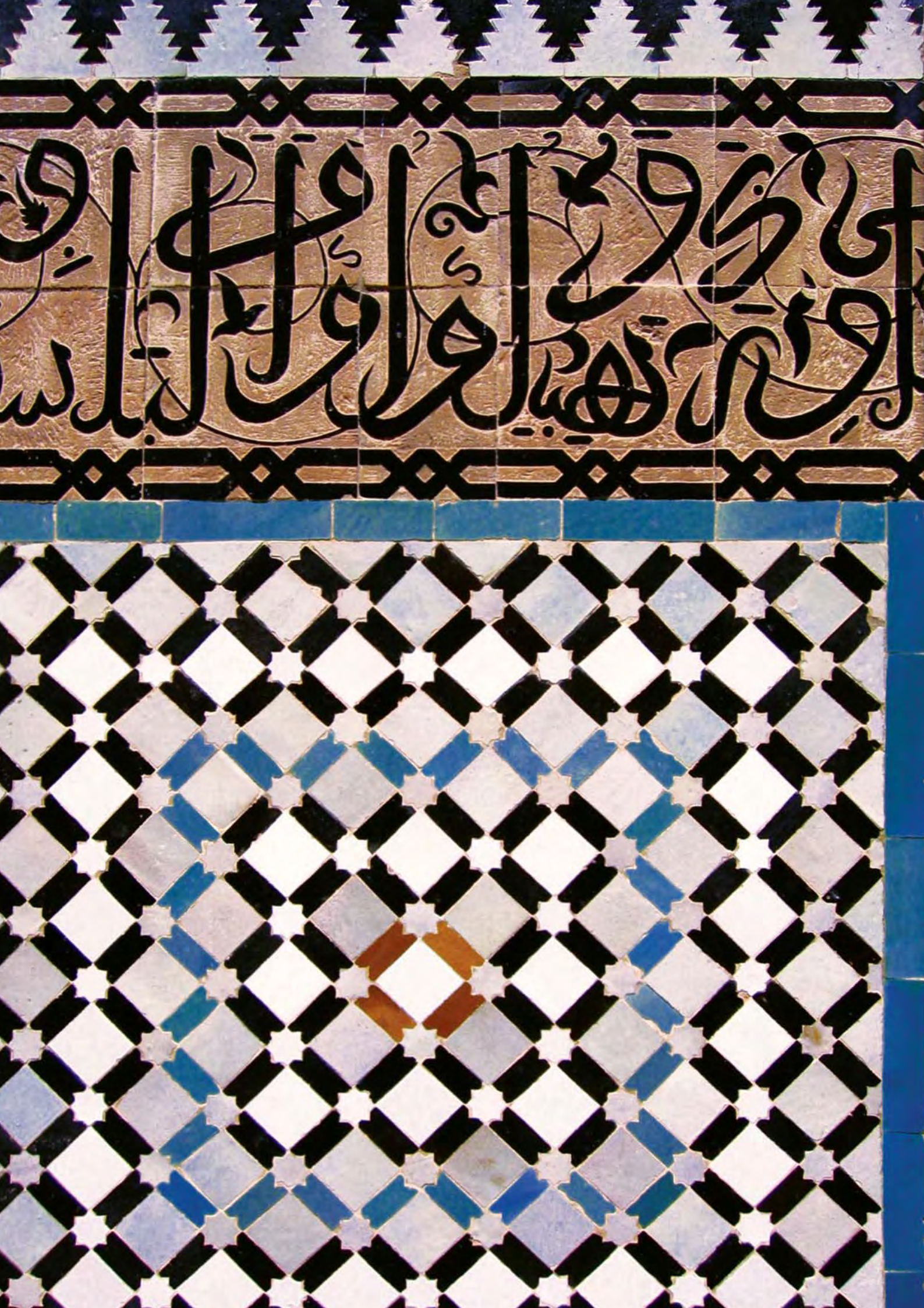
Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh

National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies
The University of Melbourne



CONTENTS

Introduction	7
Berwick Grammar School, Officer, Victoria <i>This independent boys school has established a whole-school approach to fostering intercultural and interfaith awareness with neighbouring schools.</i>	9
Birrong Boys High School, Birrong, New South Wales <i>This government high school is multicultural and a majority of the students are Muslim. Its teachers have implemented a number of strategies to meet the diverse needs of all their students.</i>	13
Corio South Primary School, Corio, Victoria <i>This government school has witnessed a marked increase in the diversity of its student population, and is meeting this challenge through whole-school initiatives to foster intercultural awareness.</i>	16
Heidelberg Primary School, Heidelberg, Victoria <i>This government primary school is located in a predominantly Anglo-Saxon area but has recently seen a slow yet steady increase in cultural diversity amongst its student population.</i>	20
Isik College, Broadmeadows, Victoria <i>The majority of this independent school's primary students are Muslim, but it does not identify as being Islamic. It is committed to meeting the religious and cultural needs of its students.</i>	23
Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Enfield, South Australia <i>Located in a low socio-economic area, this Catholic school has a long history of meeting the educational needs of girls from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds.</i>	27
Redlands College, Wellington Point, Queensland <i>This is a Christian school where senior students are encouraged to think deeply and critically about all religions and their contemporary contexts.</i>	32
St Laurence's College, South Brisbane, Queensland <i>The Homework Help Club is an initiative of this Catholic boys' school, which sees senior students volunteering their time to work with ESL students at several primary schools.</i>	37
St Rita's School, Victoria Point, Queensland <i>This Catholic primary school does not have any Muslim students but it is striving to broaden perspectives by introducing content about Islam and other religions across curriculum areas.</i>	40
The Friends' School, North Hobart, Tasmania <i>This progressive independent school has a rich array of curricular and co-curricular initiatives aimed at increasing intercultural and interfaith understandings.</i>	43



INTRODUCTION

Australia is an increasingly globalised nation, with a rich variety of cultures and faiths represented in most classrooms. This diversity is reflected in the curriculum that is being taught in Australian schools. The Melbourne Declaration and the emerging Australian Curriculum clearly recognise the importance of providing young Australian students with a broad education that encompasses knowledge, awareness and respect for the diverse values, beliefs and cultures found in Australia and beyond. While many schools are embracing this challenge, this resource focuses on the initiative and commitment of 10 very different schools.

This resource has emerged from the *Learning from One Another* project, which has, to date, delivered teacher professional learning workshops and an accompanying resource to over 500 teachers nationally. Beginning in 2009, this project was the initiative of the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies (NCEIS) at the University of Melbourne and the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA). It has been generously funded by the Myer Foundation. The objectives of the program are to:

- Equip teachers with the skills to meet the needs and expectations of Muslim students and their parents in education
- Facilitate a whole-school approach to supporting healthy relationships and engagement with Muslim students, parents and communities
- Offer teachers a greater awareness of the diversity of Islam and Muslims, nationally and globally
- Develop an appreciation of Muslim history and cultures in Australia.

With a large number of teachers now having participated in the *Learning from One Another* workshops, this publication has been developed to supplement and broaden the program. The case studies enable us to assess how the program objectives have been implemented in various schools and also provide a rich sharing opportunity for educators. Another aim of the case studies is to broaden the scope of the project beyond Islam by highlighting initiatives in schools that enable better understandings between all faiths.

The schools selected for these case studies have all been involved in the project, and also represent a diversity of locations, sectors and levels. Some of the schools have students from many faiths while others do not. The initiatives implemented at the schools are also diverse; some focus solely on curriculum content while others look at whole-school approaches to building interfaith and intercultural understandings. We hope that educators using this resource will focus on the case studies and examples that relate best to their situation.

Lastly, our thanks go to the wonderful teachers who offered to share their wisdom and experience by allowing us to include their school as a case study. We hope many others will benefit from their efforts! ♦



In only its third year of operation, this independent boys school has established a whole-school approach to fostering intercultural and interfaith awareness with neighbouring schools.

The school context

Berwick Grammar School is a non-denominational, independent boys' school located on a large 20-acre block in the suburb of Officer, within the south eastern growth corridor of Melbourne, approximately 60 kilometres from the central business district. This Year 5–9 school is currently in its third year of operation and has 180 boys and 20 teachers from fairly diverse backgrounds.

The school, which started out with 43 students, is the brother campus of St Margaret's School, which is located a short distance away in Berwick and houses a co-ed P–4 primary school and an all-girls Year 5–12 high school. Berwick Grammar School reflects Christian values and ethos, but because it is non-denominational no formal religion is taught.

At present, most of the school's students come from Berwick, with others coming from Officer, neighbouring Narre Warren and Beaconsfield, and as far east as Warragul. Approximately 50% of the school's current cohort has come from St Margaret's and the rest have come from other local schools.

One of the key features of growth corridors is a culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse population. This feature is reflected in the school's student population, which includes students of Anglo-Saxon, Indian, Sri Lankan and Chinese backgrounds. The students come from a range of religious backgrounds, including Christian, Catholic, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim.

The principal as a manager of diversity

Doug Bailey is Foundation Head of Berwick Grammar. He was appointed six months before the school was launched, and given responsibility for appointing staff, developing curriculum, building staff capacity, and supervising the school's building project. Bailey is also committed to promoting intercultural and interfaith understanding within the school and the broader community. He mentions that the school wants its students 'to be good to one another and to be a good person in the community'.



Bailey states, ‘The boys simply have to understand each other; early on, one boy made a joke about another boy’s mother, not thinking that this is considered an insult in some cultures.’ He recounts how the offending boy thought it was normal to joke in that manner, just as he had done with his other friends. Yet, the other boy and his family were deeply offended. This incident, though isolated, reflected the need for a diverse group of students to learn more about one another.

Bailey mentions that there are currently four Muslim boys at his school that have fasted during Ramadan and one has taken time off school to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca. But, to date, no specific requests have been made to meet their cultural or religious needs. He says that other than their enrolment details, the fact that they are Muslim does not affect teaching or learning. Like other students, these boys attend the school because their parents want opportunities for their children to succeed in work and community life.

Building Harmony in the Growth Corridor Project

As part of its commitment to intercultural awareness and global education, the school is a key partner in the ‘Building Harmony in the Growth Corridor Project’. This project, the first of its kind in Australia, looks at cultural diversity during the formation stages of a growth corridor, in particular, how communities within the corridor handle diversity and grow as a result. The educational aspect of the project explores how teachers can be better trained to deal with cultural diversity in schools.

The project is a partnership between the Cardinia Shire Council, Monash University, and Windermere Child and Family Services, and is funded by the Melbourne Community Foundation.

Five schools situated within a 2 kilometre radius of one another take part in the project. These include Berwick Grammar School, St Brigid’s Catholic School, Officer Primary School, Minaret Islamic College, and Manaratha Christian School. After six months of preparation, the first stage of the project was launched towards the end of 2010 and will be completed at the end of 2011.

The project aims to build the capacity of children and young people from diverse backgrounds in a growth corridor to live harmonious and productive lives. To do so, it will facilitate partnerships between schools in the Officer area to develop strategies in order to further raise cross-cultural awareness and understanding. According to Windermere’s website (www.windermere.org.au/news-events/news-and-events), other objectives of the project include:

- Providing information/orientation sessions to families of children and young people to raise their awareness of diverse faiths, and showcase good practice harmonious relationships of children and youth at the different schools within the area.

- Identifying migrant/refugee community members, who will be trained as peer educators and mentors for at risk children and young persons, and who will work with local services such as Windermere and others in delivering the social and educational programs within, and across, schools.
- Implementing cross-social and educational programs between the Muslim, Christian and other faith schools and activities aimed to create racial harmony, understanding and tolerance between children and youth.
- Sharing the project findings and learnings with other growth-area housing estates.

The partnership between local government, a non-government officer, academia and local schools makes the Harmony Project both a powerful and compelling initiative for the South Eastern growth corridor. Bailey observes that the 'name of the project and it's goals almost make it compulsory to participate. We are all part of a harmony group so we have to display harmony. By joining the group, you are committing to it; to sever your ties is to say that you are not interested in harmony'.

Bailey's observations are supported by how the project has brought neighbouring schools together. He believes that having higher-level managers at each school committed to the project has been vital to the success of the project.



Casey Weekly,
23 November 2010

Bailey recalls receiving a call from Windermere in 2010 inviting his school to take part in the project. He had already started a network of school principals in the area and this project gave them further impetus to keep coming together to achieve a common goal. He proceeded to invite other schools to participate in the project and most of them got on board.

The Harmony Project was launched in 2010 by the Governor of Victoria, Professor David de Kretser AC, and showcased students talking about what it meant to them to be Australian. Since then the participating schools have had joint cultural days and principals' meetings. Students from Minaret, a Muslim school just across the road from Berwick Grammar have also visited the school.

In 2011, the schools will hold a round robin sports day involving tabloid sports such as rounders and sand bag races. The idea is to bring the local communities together through sport. In addition, a student leadership day has been planned for the year. This initiative will see four student leaders from each school attend a half-day leadership program and the local mayor will be present a keynote address on the day.

Bailey observes that there have been no major challenges in Harmony Project thus far. He says the key is to understand each school's needs to see how they can best work with one another. For instance, he recalls, 'Just by speaking with the head of the Muslim school (Minaret), we realised there were some inflexibilities. So they won't go to musical day for instance. We have to understand what they can and can't do and work around that. We need better understanding to build a better program'.



The project has received a positive response from students and parents of Berwick Grammar. It has enabled them to celebrate differences in faith and culture. Bailey remarks, ‘All the feedback I’ve received thus far has been positive.’

A longer-term goal for the project is to use the data gathered to help schools and the community deal more effectively with difference and diversity. Another goal is to set up an association to help ensure that the project has a lasting impact on the community. In Bailey’s words, ‘Our dream is for the students to meet down the street and say so and so is alright, because they know each other.’

Some lessons learnt from the Harmony Project

Bailey says that the most important lesson he has learnt from the project is to never make assumptions; ‘if you want people to get along, it has to start with understanding ... when you ask questions and listen, you then begin to understand’. The Harmony Project also enables the school to define its place in the local community, as Bailey puts it, ‘We’ve gone into a community ... we have to run a school but it’s how we interact with the community that is going to define the school’.

Finding a common uniting cause is another key ingredient for successful cross-school initiatives, as Bailey describes, ‘Once we had a cause to get together upon, it’s amazing how we were able to get things going, despite the building projects going on at our school.’ For example, he recently met with the new head of Minaret College and discovered that the school does not yet have a library on site. The two heads agreed that Minaret students would use the library at Berwick Grammar until the situation was rectified. This was possible because the timetabling at Berwick was conducive to the arrangement. ‘It’s all about talking’, Bailey says, adding the two schools now use each other as emergency evacuation sites, as the area is prone to bushfires and flash flooding.

Finally, Bailey advises schools that are keen to take part in initiatives such as the Harmony Project to be realistic with respect to both time and curriculum constraints. He says, ‘When you’re arranging meetings with principals, the shire, and Monash University, time is very tight. It’s high priority but we’re still running a school, so we have to be realistic ... Global education still requires maths, English and science.’ ♦



BIRRONG BOYS HIGH SCHOOL

BIRRONG, NEW SOUTH WALES

This Sydney government high school is multicultural and a majority of the students are Muslim. The teachers at Birrong Boys High School have implemented a number of strategies to meet the diverse needs of all their students.

The school context

Situated in the inner southwest of metropolitan Sydney, Birrong Boys High School is a government school with approximately 440 students. The school is situated in an area with a large Muslim population, and over 75% of the students identify as Muslim. It is also a very culturally diverse school. It has a significant number of students with a Lebanese heritage and also has many 'newly arrived' students, particularly from Afghanistan, Iraq and, increasingly, African countries. 85% of the students speak English as a second language.

The school motto is 'From each his best' and this is very much a focus for Mohamed Derbas and Saroona Sharma, two teachers at the school. They are working to meet the particular needs of the mainly Muslim students, as well as to engage them both academically and with the broader community.

Diverse needs

Both Derbas and Sharma have had long associations with the school. For Derbas, the relationship began more than 10 years ago when, as a community member, he became involved in the school council and the parents and citizens' association. He went on to become a teacher, believing he could contribute 'as a member of the local community and as a Muslim'. He is now the Deputy Principal, Curriculum. Sharma has been at the school for over 10 years and, as Head Teacher for Welfare and the Social Sciences, has been meeting the challenge of building student engagement and assisting 'at risk' students.

Both teachers identify a number of challenges that students at the school face. For many of the 'newly arrived' students, there are issues around English language, educational levels, and displacement. For other students, many of whom are second-generation migrants, there are also unique challenges. As an example, Derbas explains that many Australian-born students of Lebanese parents 'feel that they don't fit in anywhere'. They perceive that they are neither accepted as 'Australian' nor do they consider Lebanon home. Sharma adds that these students can also have issues meeting the often-conflicting demands placed on them by their parents and peers.



Religious requirements

Although it is a government school, Birrong Boys strives to cater for the religious needs of all its students. With the advantage of eight Muslim members of staff, the school ensures that all teachers are aware of Muslim practices. While the Muslim boys generally pray on the oval throughout the week, a sermon is held in the school hall for Friday prayers for those who wish to attend. The canteen serves *halal* food for Muslims and vegetarian selections for Hindu and other students.

Ramadan is marked with a formal assembly involving all students and staff. Last year, the staff celebrated the end of Ramadan with a lunch prepared by the Muslim staff.

On occasion, meeting the religious needs of Muslim students has required more specific interventions. Some Muslim students, due to their beliefs, are sensitive about playing music and participating in the visual arts. This can, at times, make it difficult for a student to meet both religious and curriculum requirements. In these circumstances, staff have needed to arrange meetings between the student, their parents and the NSW Board of Studies to negotiate, what is in most cases, a successful compromise.

Inclusive curriculum

Within the classroom, staff are encouraged to provide an inclusive curriculum. When teaching commerce and business studies, for example, Derbas has found the students are more engaged when he relates the content to the students' beliefs around the subject, encouraging students to compare Islamic and Western forms of banking. Similarly, in legal studies, divergent ideas around systems of law are discussed.

While encouraging broad perspectives in the classrooms at Birrong Boys, both teachers emphasise the need for great care when discussing some issues. While the school has many Muslims, the huge cultural and political diversity that exists in the Muslim world means there can be varying perspectives around politics and other matters. In their position of authority, the Birrong teachers need to be particularly aware of perceived bias. They also need to be on the look out for conflict between Muslim students, which is generally more common than between Muslim and non-Muslim students. A whole-staff awareness and proactive anti-bullying policy at the school 'means most matters are nipped in the bud'.

Reaching out

While being respectful of the students' religious or cultural needs, Derbas and Sharma recognise the importance of embedding their students within their broader community and a contemporary Australian context. The school, for example, always holds an ANZAC day ceremony. The students reflect on the significance of this day for Australia and Australians. Last year, the program was enhanced with a student of Turkish descent offering an alternative perspective about what the day meant to his community.



An important initiative at the school to broaden intercultural and interfaith understandings is the annual city-country link camp with Merriwa Central School. Each year, 20 students from this provincial school visit Birrong for three to four days, and 20 students from Birrong visit Merriwa, in western NSW, for three to four days. This is a rich cultural experience for the students involved. The Merriwa students, of mainly Anglo-Saxon heritage, experience the city, visit a mosque, eat new foods, and get to know the diversity that exists amongst the Birrong Boys. For the Birrong students, the rural setting is equally enlightening.

Recently, the school has also begun a new program to broaden community and parent engagement. The program offers parents at the school computer skills classes one morning a week. Last term, it was attended by about 10 mothers and will continue in the future. As Sharma reflects, 'hopefully with new skills the parents will be more willing to engage with the school'. While parents will generally respond to requests from the school, both teachers feel most parents are hesitant to get involved in the school community.

Change and the future

Derbas and Sharma are proud of the work they have been doing at Birrong Boys High School over many years. On average, a third of their graduates are offered university places, a third go on to TAFE courses, and the rest enter employment. Thanks to the work of the staff at the school, most of these boys will become productive members of their society.

Both teachers, however, are realistic about the challenges that lie ahead. They have seen the demographics of the school change during their time there, with many more students of European and Asian heritage enrolled in the recent past. They recognise that this change will keep occurring and that the school will still be meeting the particular needs of migrants and refugees into the future. They have also seen enrolments drop, which they believe is due partly to the opening of many Islamic schools in Sydney.

Derbas and Sharma are grateful that, as a disadvantaged school, funding is available for extra staffing and programs. This assistance together with the committed staff should see Birrong Boys High School continue to meet the diverse needs of all its students. ♦

In the last four years, this government school has witnessed a marked increase in the diversity of its student population, and is meeting this challenge through its exemplary English language programs, as well as whole-school initiatives to foster harmony and intercultural awareness.

The school context

Corio South Primary School is a regional P–6 government school located in Corio, just north of the regional town of Geelong and approximately 75 kilometres south west of Melbourne. The school is in the process of merging with eight other schools in the Corio/Norlane area to become the Vermont Avenue P–6 Campus of the multi-campus Northern Bay P–12 College.

The school services a large residential area and is situated in a low socio-economic area within the City of Greater Geelong. The school's Student Family Occupation (SFO) is currently 0.72, which means that most of its 445 students come from families with low- to very low-incomes. Some students also come from single-parent families, families facing unemployment, or those facing social issues such as gambling, drug use, and alcohol abuse.

The school currently has a total of 45 staff, including teachers, integration aides and administrative staff.

Rapid rise in cultural diversity amongst students

Five years ago, the school's student population was predominantly white Anglo-Saxon, with a very small number of Singapore-born Chinese students. In the last four years, however, the student population has become much more multicultural, with around 20 different cultures now represented.

The school has seen an influx of refugee students from Burma (mostly of the Karen people), Africa (particularly from Liberia and the Congo), and Pakistan. But the school's principal, Neil Lynch, points out that it is not just the refugee children that make the school multicultural; there are also migrant children from Croatia, Serbia and other European countries.



Geelong English Language Centre and ESL Transition Program

Due to the school's changing demographic, the (Victorian) Department of Education and Early Childhood Development established the Geelong English Language Centre (ELC) at the school two years ago to teach English intensively to new arrivals (less than 12 months in Australia) who have little or no command of the language. The language centre staff also work with other schools in the area. There are currently four staff at the ELC, two full-time and two part-time.

Newly arrived students who are non-English speaking are entitled to 12 months intensive tuition at the Geelong ELC. These students study English for about three hours a day.

However, recognising a need for ongoing support as students make the transition to mainstream classes, the school established an ESL Transition Program, housed in a different building to the ELC. Two teachers and three integration aides work with children as they come from the ELC new arrivals program. They provide intensive English teaching for as long as the children need, at least for another year. These children spend about two hours a day in the program, in small groups of no more than eight children.

With its special ESL Transition Program, non-English speaking newly arrived students at the school have the benefit of at least two years intensive English training. Lynch believes that this kind of support is vital in helping these students to make a successful transition to Australian schooling and community life.

There are currently 34 children in the ELC and around 40 in the school's ESL Transition Program.

Turning diversity into a positive learning experience

The school is proud of the way it manages the cultural diversity of its student and parent population. Lynch explains how the school strives 'to provide an atmosphere, culture and environment that makes the kids want to be at school; and when they want to be at school, they will learn'.

The diverse nature of the school community also allows it to focus on developing understanding and harmony among students, teachers and parents. Lynch mentions that incidental cultural learning and understandings happen in the classroom all the time at the school. An annual Multicultural Day that involves the whole school community supplements this incidental learning.



The Multicultural Day involves a one-hour Friday morning assembly where students come in their national costume, talk about their culture, sing in their native language and/or showcase traditional dances. After the assembly, students of all grades work in their individual classrooms to study different cultures. The older grades do this for a whole week while the younger grades generally spend a day or so on it. The Multicultural Day initiative began two years ago in response to the school's changing demographic and reflecting a desire for a harmonious multicultural community.

Lynch believes that the Multicultural Day is a highlight of the school calendar like other whole-school events such as the sports carnival. He comments, 'When you have a whole school celebration, there's always a great buzz; when it's well organised everyone learns and it is a very positive experience for all involved; we really look forward to those days.'

In addition, the school's 40 or so Karen students and their parents have since had their own special day at school. They have brought their traditional food to school or cooked it at the ELC to share a social lunch with the teachers.

Another way that the school discussed cultures with its students was to raise money, during its Multicultural Day last year, for the Mae La Refugee Camp orphanage located on the Thai-Burma border. The orphanage needed a new roof and many schools in the Geelong area supported the project. Corio South raised a total of \$1211 in five cent coins for this initiative.

Lynch points out the newly arrived students, whether from Burma or Pakistan, generally come from very supportive families who want the best for their children. He mentions that the parents seem happy that their children are happy at school. He adds, 'We know from the non-English families that their kids feel comfortable; they rarely miss a day at school and their parents are respectful; we provide opportunities for them to speak through interpreters and we've had multicultural days; as we learn, we try new things to make everyone more comfortable.'

COFFEE & CHAT—Afternoons
Any parent interested for a casual chat and would like to meet other new parents drop in on **Tuesdays between 2.15 and 3.00pm**. Not just for the ladies, men are also welcome for a chat.
Julie Heard and John Richardson will be there also to chat. Everyone welcome—located in the support centre.

Harmony Day
A wonderful celebration of the many cultures represented at Corio South PS occurred at last Friday's assembly. We had the pleasure of and in watching the Haka from New Zealand.
There was an amazing response to the 5 cent drive to raise money for the Mae La Refugee Camp Orphanage. These words were made many times over to accommodate all of the coins that were donated. The huge amount of \$1,211 was raised!
Thanks to Ms Van Etten and all the students who made Harriette the Harmony Helper who reminds us that we should strive to be harmonious every day of our lives. Harriette is on display in the foyer. Can you find your photo on her?
Congratulations to Mrs Gove and to all who participated in the entertaining assembly and a huge thanks to everyone for contributing so much money to the 5c drive.
Fran Fleming, Geelong English Language Centre

Harmony Day
Last Friday we celebrated a special day at school called Harmony Day. This was about thinking how special each person is and where they have come from.
I liked the Karen Dress and I liked the Karen children singing. I liked my Karen scarf.
After assembly we went to class and we raised money for an orphanage to be built at the Mae La Camp. I liked when Mrs. Gove spoke English.
Then we came to ESL and Mrs. Fleming read us the story of the Rainbow Fish. I like the rainbow we made with our coloured hands.
Eh K'Paw Shee

Harmony Day
Last Friday our school celebrated Harmony Day. Harmony Day is about being happy and joining in with everyone else that is in our school.
Our Karen children were singing at assembly and we were dressed up in our Karen costumes. I liked watching Lincoln dance and sing.
Then we came to ESL and we had the story of the Rainbow Fish. We made a rainbow using our cut out hands in lots of different rainbow colours. On each finger we wrote a friend's name.
Then in the afternoon the Geelong College school came to our primary school and we made a t-shirt story with them.
Mae K'Paw Say 5G

Harmony Day
On Friday I went to assembly and some Australian people were singing. Then some Karen people were singing. Some people were dressed in their national costumes because we were celebrating Harmony Day. This is about sharing and being friendly with everyone.
Mr. Lynch talked to the school and we went back to our classroom. We did our fitness training and we played soccer. Then we went to E.S.L. Mrs Fleming read us a story about the Rainbow Fish. Then we all made a rainbow from our hands and in lots of rainbow colours. We wrote the names of our friends on the fingers of our hands.
Later The Geelong College students came to visit and we made t-shirt stories with them. It was a fun day working all together.
Chris Mae Say 5G

we make kids smile

I would just like to wish all families of Corio South Primary School a safe and happy holiday and hope that the Easter Bunny doesn't cause too many chocolate tantrums in your home....
Tomorrow School will be let out half an hour early with the After School care program starting half an hour early as well, children will make their way too ASC as normal as soon as the bell goes.
Have you booked in for the break up Party we are having tomorrow, if not this is your last chance to get in and join in the fun.
Come and join in the fun of it all at OSHC vacancies exist in all sessions Morning and Afternoon, contact Narelle on OSHC
Ph Number: 0402 274 422

OSHCH it's where we keep the kids smiling!! Narelle & Staff

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Program Coordinator: Narelle Lawrence MOB: 0402 274 422 COP: 407 381 033K					

Outside School Hours care with Camp Australia

The language barrier

Lynch believes that the language barrier is the biggest obstacle to open interaction with newly arrived students and parents who are non-English speaking. Because of their limited command of English, they often come across as shy or closed. The school addresses this challenge through the ELC, the ESL Transition Program, and its use of interpreters for parent-teacher nights or any other occasion of need.

Lynch explains that the key to overcoming shyness on the part of newly arrived parents is to be welcoming, and he commends his staff for being quick to do this. He says that 'it's not hard to do because the children are just lovely'. Lynch often goes outside to say hello to parents at drop-off and pick-up times, and tries to converse with them although 'it's OK if it doesn't work'. While his staff converse with all families, they make a special effort with the new arrivals, sometimes using the help of interpreters.

As a result of the school's effort to break down the language barrier, some newly arrived parents overcame their shyness and participated in last year's Multicultural Day; they came in their national costumes, spoke to the crowd and paraded with their children. According to Lynch, this kind of learning and sharing creates a good feeling within the school community.

Meeting specific religious and cultural needs

Some of the newly arrived students, such as the Karen, appear quiet in the classroom. But apart from the language barrier, Lynch believes their shyness is out of respect for the teachers. These students come from communities that hold teachers in high regard and where students do not initiate conversation with them out of respect. Understanding this culturally specific behaviour is important; otherwise it could easily be confused as student disengagement.

Muslim students also present particular religious needs at the school. Last year, some Muslim girls did not participate in swimming, which left teachers searching for answers. After discussion with the families, a couple of girls participated in swimming attire modified to meet Islamic dress requirements. However, a few of them still did not participate. To some extent, the language barrier prevented the teachers responsible from taking the issue further for fear of offending the parents. But because the communication channels were kept open, teachers did find out that one Muslim boy refused to participate, not because of his beliefs but because he was afraid of water.

Ramadan is also a concern for teachers as some Muslim children fast even though they are not required to in Islam. They do so to get used to the fasting regimen so that they do not struggle with it as adults. The teachers' concerns mainly revolve around exhaustion and dehydration, as the children still want to run around despite not having had anything to eat and drink since the early morning. The school recently organised a professional learning session for staff to help teachers deal with these sorts of issues.

Moving forward

The school has made an impressive attempt to respond to its changing demographic; a change that only began four years ago. Already, it has an exemplary intensive English language program for new arrivals, runs multicultural days, and raises money for a refugee camp overseas.

The school's immediate mission is to do everything it can to improve the English language skills of its newly arrived refugee students. Staff are also determined to find ways to get more cultural communities, particularly those with little English, involved in the school life.

But Lynch remains humble about his school's achievements in the area of intercultural awareness. He says, 'We're evolving, we're not perfect; we think we're doing it well but are always open to suggestions because we're learning at the same time'. ♦

HEIDELBERG PRIMARY SCHOOL

HEIDELBERG, VICTORIA



Like many schools in Australia, this government primary school is located in a predominantly Anglo-Saxon area but has recently seen a slow yet steady increase in cultural diversity amongst its student population.

The school context

Heidelberg Primary School is a P–6 government school located in a mostly Anglo-Saxon and higher socio-economic area 10 kilometres north of Melbourne. Established in 1854, it is one of the oldest primary schools in Victoria with around 320 students and 22 teaching staff. The last two years in particular has seen a steady increase in cultural diversity amongst its students, with 22 cultures currently represented. Although the large majority of these students are Australian born, many of their parents are first-generation migrants from places including India, China, Somalia, Japan, Korea, Ireland, Germany and Norway.

Like the majority of schools in Australia, only a small number of Muslim children attend the school. Significantly, however, these Muslim students represent a diverse range of cultures including Somali, Indian, Turkish, Arab and Malay.

The cultural diversity within the student population makes the school a rich environment for learning and one that encourages mutual respect. The school functions within a set of core values — integrity, care, cooperation and respect — that underpin its work to support students to develop social competence and thus participate as active members of their community.

Meeting the challenges of increased diversity

Janet Ringrose, Principal, has been at the school for the last two years. She has taught in the United Kingdom and filled leadership roles in a range of primary schools in Melbourne, including one that has a majority Arab and Turkish student population. Graham Jackson, Assistant Principal, has been at the school for 10 years and has provided useful insights into how the school's culture has evolved in recent times.

The school's core approach to its diversity is one based on humanity, to treat each student as unique but equal, regardless of his or her background. The school presently conducts the Start-Up Learning program annually in Term 1, which focuses on the core values of integrity, care, cooperation and respect. These values are inclusive, transcending religious and cultural boundaries, which, according to Ringrose and Jackson, is what makes the program so successful and well received by the school community. Student backgrounds and questions of identity are addressed as part of this program. It is conducted in classrooms at all year levels in the school and is aimed at preparing students to participate as successful learners and active members of the school.



In 2011, the school will introduce a whole-school unit on identity in recognition of its growing cultural diversity. During the unit of learning that will last one term, students will explore their own cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and share their personal stories with their peers. While the school has in the past held a multicultural day — which allowed students and families to share their stories, background, customs, language and food — the whole-school unit is a more substantial initiative in addressing cultural diversity.

Exploring religious and cultural diversity

Both educators believe there is a place for exploring cultural diversity through the school curriculum. LOTE (Japanese) has been offered at the school for 15 years and is now taught across all year levels by a part-time teacher. The LOTE program includes a cultural awareness day called Matsuri Day, where students of all year levels learn more about Japanese art, calligraphy, customs and food through structured in-class activities. When the school could not source a LOTE teacher in the two years prior to Ringrose's arrival, a cultural studies program was offered, demonstrating the school's commitment to exploring intercultural perspectives within the curriculum.

An approach for exploring religious diversity that Ringrose and Jackson both favour is looking at how different people manifest their faith in real life, focusing on lived experiences rather than learning about a religion. This approach de-emphasises religious belief and focuses more on the various cultural manifestations of a faith, which is more compatible with Australian schooling.

Avoiding blunder and offence

According to Ringrose and Jackson, the main reason why teachers in Australia feel uncomfortable tackling religion or culture in the classroom is not wanting to blunder and cause offence to students, parents and/or the wider community. The school had first hand experience of this in 2010 when a member of staff attempted to increase her students' awareness of Indigenous Australian culture. She brought a didgeridoo to school and showed it to her students unaware that traditional Aboriginal customs do not permit women to touch the instrument. A member of the local Indigenous community kindly pointed out the oversight and came to the school to talk to the students about the didgeridoo and demonstrate its use.



Responding to the religious and cultural needs of students

Both Ringrose and Jackson mention that the school's past efforts were limited because there was no pressing need. But as diversity within the school community burgeons, the leadership team is moving towards better planning. The whole-school unit on identity starting in 2011 is an example of this desire, as Jackson highlights, 'Although we see people as people in this school, we need to equip students with the skills to manage diversity, understand their identity, and prepare them for the new workforce.'

There have not been any noted cases of racial or religious discrimination at the school, amongst students, parents or staff. Staff and parent satisfaction is at its highest ever levels and well beyond the state average. The students' NAPLAN results are climbing and school social events are very well attended, all of which demonstrate a healthy and vibrant school community.

Ringrose says that while teachers do acknowledge cultural and religious difference in the classroom, particularly during the Start-Up Learning program, it is used as an asset, not an impediment. Jackson sums up the school's attitude to difference by saying, 'Kids are flexible when they are allowed to be; they don't make a big deal out of difference, especially if the school doesn't and their parents don't.' ♦



Although the vast majority of its primary students are Muslim, Isik College, an independent school, does not identify as being Islamic. Yet, it is committed to meeting the religious and cultural needs of its students through its pastoral care program, as well as promoting greater intercultural understanding through the primary classroom.

The school context

Isik College is a non-denominational, P-12 independent school, spread across six campuses in Victoria. Despite the low socio-economic status of most of its 2000 students, it is a high-achieving academic school. The largest of its campuses is in Broadmeadows, to the north of metropolitan Melbourne, and caters for P-6 (co-ed) and 7-12 (girls only). This case study focuses on the P-6 school, which has 500 students.

Over 90% of Isik's primary students and teachers at Broadmeadows are Muslims of Turkish heritage. The school follows the ideas of Fethullah Gulen, the Turkish educational philosopher committed to interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Gulen is a proponent of the idea of *hizmet* (working together towards a common good). Isik is part of a network of schools established by the Selimiye Foundation in Australia, with the others located in Sydney (Sule College), Brisbane (Resha College), and Perth (Damla College).

Isik College is not an Islamic school; it believes that Islam should be separate from the curriculum. Islamic education is provided only as a part of the pastoral care program for those students who seek it.

Cultural identity and sensitivity

Serap Sinik is Deputy Principal of Pastoral Care and a Turkish teacher at Isik. Previously, she taught Khmer students at one of Isik's sister schools in Cambodia. She is passionate about increasing student awareness about their faith, culture and language by fostering strong reading habits. As a Gulen-inspired school, Isik is proud of its Turkish heritage and believes that to know others, one should know oneself first. The pastoral care sessions, where students study about Islam, are conducted mostly in Turkish. Sinik's pastoral care department is made up of 13 teachers and nine mentors from different universities in Melbourne. She emphasises that all decisions and initiatives in her department are made as a team.

Islamic principles do permeate through the day-to-day running of Isik even though it is a non-denominational school. For example, boys and girls are separated at high school for Islamic reasons. This segregation also occurs amongst primary students during pastoral care sessions.



Pastoral care

Religious education at the school is entirely optional; students are encouraged but not forced to attend. The school does not believe that students should be forced to practise their religion; rather, teachers should only encourage and advise. This is particularly the case in Australia, considering the majority non-Muslim environment and education methods that are based on discovery learning. This philosophy sets Isik apart from Islamic schools in Australia.

The pastoral care program at Isik provides a form of Islamic religious education and is offered to students in Grades 4 to 6. It aims to support the religious, spiritual and cultural needs of the students, and is targeted at personal development. To engage students with the program, the school endeavours to make it fun; for instance, tea parties are organised to attract students to the program. There are also weekly after school gatherings (*sohpets*) for each grade 4 to 6 class. At these *sohpets*, lead by teachers, students learn about Islamic morals, read moral storybooks, and discuss any issues that concern them. Students can even learn how to pray and read the Qur'an, which gives them the confidence to perform their prayers at school during lunchtime. On occasion, *sohpets* can involve optional excursions, with parental consent.

Prayer at school is encouraged, but not compulsory. An optional Friday prayer is conducted in the prayer room, which doubles as the pastoral care room.

Due to its large Muslim population, Isik organises *Id* (Islamic festival) programs for its students, parents and teachers through the pastoral care program. Gifts are given out to all students and an *Id al-Adha* (*Id* of sacrifice) celebration is conducted each year at the primary school with farm animals, jumping castle, rides, a sausage sizzle and market stalls.

The success of the pastoral care program is depends mainly on the commitment of individual teachers. The school believes if a teacher is willing to learn about a student and shows genuine concern to his or her wellbeing, s/he will earn the student's trust.



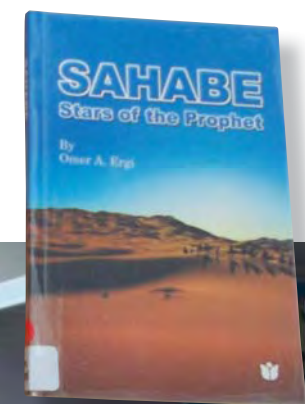


Sinik believes students at the school are particularly responsive to this care as many spend limited time with their parents. She explains that many of the first generation of Turkish migrants to Australia struggled to fit into the society, lacking education and needing to work long hours. Sinik and her colleagues believe this situation has impacted on the family life of many of their students. They try to make up for this through the pastoral care program so students can discuss more personal issues such as identity.

The school is aware of the need for students to develop intercultural and interfaith understandings that take students beyond their Turkish-Muslim heritage in line with Gulen's philosophy. Isik's high school students already take part in interfaith gatherings with neighbouring schools. Presently, Isik is seeking to build these programs at the primary level.

Increasing cultural understanding through literacy

Sinik believes literacy is a powerful tool for learning about faith, identity and culture and says her students 'do not read enough'. She and her colleagues are attempting to counter this problem through their pastoral care initiatives. For instance, they organise optional reading camps each term that last for two to three days where students read books in Turkish and English. They also hold reading challenges to encourage students to read more. In 2010, after finishing a prescribed number of storybooks (20–25) dealing with moral issues, they took their Grade 6 students on a trip to Queensland as a reward.





Curriculum content

While the pastoral care program at Isik is robust, Sinik believes that Muslim perspectives should also be incorporated, as appropriate, into the core curriculum. After Sinik attended one of the *Learning from One Another* workshops at the University of Melbourne in 2010, the Deputy Principal, Evla Han, requested a specific in-school workshop as part of the school's cross-campus curriculum day. Sinik and Han recognise that many of their staff do not deal with Muslim perspectives in the classroom due to a lack of familiarity with the content, or because they think that it is something solely for religion teachers.

To overcome this challenge, teachers have worked in subject area groups to prepare lesson plans based on ideas and strategies suggested in the *Learning from One Another* resource. These strategies mainly involve adding value to the existing curriculum. The teachers' lesson plans now form part of the Isik curriculum.

Sinik believes that her teachers and students need to be more aware of current issues facing the Muslim world. She provides, as an example, the lack of focus on the catastrophic Pakistan floods of 2010 at a time when there was much hype about the Commonwealth Games in Delhi. In response, her pastoral care team initiated an awareness program to get children involved in fundraising for flood victims. She hopes the new curriculum initiative will help empower teachers to show more familiarity about the Muslim world in their teaching.

Future plans

Sinik is pleased with the progress her pastoral care team is making but they continue to plan new initiatives. Her current desire is to incorporate study sessions and homework help as part of pastoral care. She believes that this is a useful way to get closer to the children and establish mutual trust. To do this, she will invite her pastoral care mentors and teachers to help supervise the after-school study sessions. With the commitment of Sinik and her team, more pastoral care initiatives are likely at Isik in the future. ♦



OUR LADY OF THE SACRED HEART COLLEGE

ENFIELD, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Located in a low socio-economic area, this Catholic school has a long history of meeting the educational needs of girls from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds.

School background

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College is a girls' Catholic school located in a low socio-economic area to the north of Adelaide. It has around 600 girls, with a small number of international students. The school was founded by the Daughters of the Lady of the Sacred Heart nearly 60 years ago. It is a very multicultural school, with 52–54 different cultures represented.

The school has around 100 students that they refer to as 'AIME' (Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi and Middle Eastern) girls, of whom the majority are Hazara refugees from Afghanistan. There is a room for prayer at the school that is mainly used by the girls, particularly during Ramadan.

Most of the AIME girls are Muslim and many of them wear the headscarf at school. The school's dress policy makes specific allowance for the headscarf and amendments to the school uniform to conform to *hijab* requirements. This includes wearing long sleeved shirts and trousers, or tights underneath summer dresses, which conform to the school colours.

A long history of managing diversity

Joy Bedford, Principal, came from London in the early 1960s. She recalls that there have been various waves of migrants at the school, such as Italian, Croatian and Serbian. This was the result of the school's proximity to temporary housing. Following these waves, Bedford witnessed a large number of Vietnamese girls come to the school. The first Afghan students only began arriving at the school five years ago.

In the last five years, Bedford has seen growth in the number of initiatives tailored to meet the specific religious, linguistic and cultural needs of her AIME students. But she admits that some initiatives were reactionary — she wanted simply to ensure that the girls could access whatever they needed to succeed at school and in life. A secondary reason was that her school had already established a reputation with the Adelaide Secondary School of English as a leading provider of education to English as a Second Language (ESL) students. She says, 'Obviously most of the parents are seeking a girls school and I suppose they started coming and we started doing things, then more started coming so we started doing more things.'



Bedford says that the school has always had a good number of Indigenous girls for whom they appointed a key teacher. Using that precedent, she appointed a key teacher for her African students and, later, her AIME girls. The AIME girls' key teacher has been awarded the Knights of the Southern Cross Social Justice Award for her work with the students.

Bedford is quick to highlight that all the good work the school does with its ESL students is testament to a concerted team effort by her staff. She says that her teachers are always willing to undertake professional learning in the area of ESL for all subjects, including literacy in Maths and Science.

Responding to student needs

The school is often quick to respond to the needs of its AIME girls. Bedford established that she needed to translate letters to parents into Dari 'and that you need quite a different pattern of subject selection with interpreters; not just interpreting the subject selection process but almost tailoring it to the students' aspirations or the Afghan community's knowledge'.

Bedford utilises different translators and interpreters for the Afghan parents, saying that 'there's almost a pecking order'. Depending on need, level of complexity and confidentiality, translators and interpreters can range from her Year 11 and 12 Afghan students to costly professional ones. On a recent information night, Bedford successfully used one of her Year 12 Afghan girls as an interpreter. The school has a dedicated team of young ESL teachers, who ran the majority of sessions at an ESL conference held in Adelaide in 2009. The School of Languages also teaches Persian two evenings a week at the school.

Bedford says that the parents/guardians of the AIME girls do not allow the girls to take part in many activities for religious, cultural and monetary reasons. In response, during the long Christmas holidays and term breaks, Bedford organises a specific holiday program for them. With funding from various sources, such as the Catholic Education Office or the Port Adelaide/Enfield Council, the AIME girls have undergone swimming and driving programs as well as outward bound courses.





A few years ago, the school accidentally held a camp during Ramadan that turned out to be an interesting learning experience for all involved. The staff and students got up and cooked the pre-dawn meal, and stayed up to prepare dinner together for the breaking of the fast at almost 9 pm. The school now runs camps specifically for the AIME girls where all staff are female. As a result of this initiative, Bedford says that more AIME parents are now willing to let their daughters go on camps.

Despite their good work, Bedford stresses that the school does not have a strategic plan to cater for the needs of its AIME students, preferring to work on the principles of common sense and 'student-centred learning'. In addition, a lot of her staff are Greek or Italian and have lived through the same migrant experience, including the challenges of marginalisation.

Bedford says it is all about spotting a need. She says, 'In subjects that we're meant to teach coastlines ... we realised that we were teaching sand dunes but the girls haven't even been to the sea. So you learn to have your coastal excursions at the beginning of your unit rather than at the end.'

Similarly, while teaching comparative religion to her Year 11 students, where Islam is one of the main religions studied, Bedford is aware of her student's needs. Her students learn about the basics of Islam as well as the visible symbols of Islam, such as mosques, prayers (*salat*) and the call to prayer (*azan*). For Bedford, the most important aspect of their study is focusing on Muslim communities and knowing their background.

Challenges

While the AIME girls' fathers are generally comfortable with participating in school-related events, Bedford says the school is trying to get more mothers to parent-teacher nights. She adds that the older brothers of AIME girls tend to be the ones most protective of their siblings. She recalls a time when some brothers were unhappy that their siblings were being ranked by the school at the lowest end of the ESL scales. Two years ago, the school had a large intake of ESL girls in Year 8. The best way to meet their learning needs was to create a class comprised entirely of these girls. The girls studied all their core subjects using ESL methodology. The older brothers felt their sisters, having already been marginalised in society, were experiencing another form of marginalisation by the school.



But Bedford was firm; she argued that this approach was necessary for the girls to have any chance of doing Year 12 subjects that would lead them to tertiary study. It turned out that the AIME girls did just as well as the other girls in common testing at the end of the year, thus earning the trust of the parents and families. The AIME girls are now progressing through the year levels with their newly found confidence.

Bedford also understands that her AIME girls come from families with limited resources. They pay minimal fees but Bedford encourages parents to pay with the idea that if they do not, other refugee girls cannot be feasibly accepted to the school. She says that this payment is often about \$20 a month, and the school does not ask them for extra. The school receives minimal funding to cater for its students' diverse needs, which does limit its ability to expand on its current initiatives.

The school works closely with the AIME girls and their families to help meet the costs of study. To keep cost down, for instance, the school has an 'opportunity shop' of past years' graduation dresses. And, if the students do not wish to wear their traditional dress to graduation, the school provides them with a dress and matching shoes. Likewise, because the AIME girls cannot afford to go on expensive excursions, the school simply does not run them, which is often a cause of tension with other parents. To make up for this, the school conducts a large multicultural night where each group cooks their traditional food.

One of the challenges for Bedford is overcoming failed initiatives and seeing the bigger picture. Bedford does not shy away from talking about her school's failures to engage its migrant students. For example, she talks about her Sudanese students and how attempts to engage with them through art groups and choir have not been self-sustaining. But she also says, 'I think they just love being at school.' Bedford believes that her AIME girls have been the most responsive to the school's initiatives to cater for their learning needs.

The school holds parents' art groups that the AIME mothers attend. In these groups, the mothers create artwork that is from their particular culture, such as silkscreen, sewing and mosaics. The school has a number of sophisticated sewing machines that the mothers use and is looking into teaching them textile design. There is also Afghan dancing and, to a lesser extent, African dancing. Bedford says that the African mothers have been more reluctant to attend these groups than the Afghans; she believes that many of them have had a more traumatic journey to Australia and thus have more trouble adjusting to life here.



Bedford mentions that there are some attendance issues with the AIME girls. For example, their parents take them back to Afghanistan for extended periods during which they may or may not be getting married. Although the girls have not shown signs of rebellion, unlike Bedford's experience with other migrant students in the past, three months away from school in the senior years is concerning. She tries to negotiate this challenge with the parents but recognises the reality, saying, 'I can't change thousands of years of culture, and the family units are so good that I wouldn't want to.'

Diversity as a privilege

Bedford says that the main thing she stresses during her graduation speeches is, 'the greatest thing the student's learn and the greatest privilege of being at the school is growing up with all these different cultures'. Through her many years as principal, she has developed a culture of harmony and mutual respect despite the diversity within the school. Her school manages this diversity well by celebrating this richness through a whole-school approach.

To showcase this diversity, the school received funding from the Government of South Australia (Multicultural Education Committee — which has been constantly generous with funding for art projects), to produce a short DVD called 'Windows and Doors'. In this DVD, students at the school were encouraged to think about their language and culture as part of their identity, and how language can create unity or divisions within communities. The school is now engaged in a project about the value of students' first language.

For all of the students at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, diversity is certainly a great privilege. ♦



Redlands College is a Christian school where senior students are encouraged to think deeply and critically about all religions and their contemporary contexts.

The school context

Redlands College is an independent, Christian, co-educational P–12 school. Located in the east bayside area of metropolitan Brisbane, it has around 1200 students. The college, which follows a Protestant tradition, has as its motto ‘Christ-centred excellence’. While the majority of students attending the school identify as Christian, some students do not identify with any religion and a small number identify with non-Christian faiths.

William Hunter is a Senior Teacher at the school with responsibility for developing and delivering the Religious Education (RE) curriculum to the senior students. While acknowledging the underlying Christian philosophies of Redlands College, Hunter emphasises that the school is ‘equally committed to an education grounded in critical inquiry’.

All students at the school attend bible studies classes until Year 9. From Years 10–12, students must select from the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) courses Religion and Ethics, an accredited course, or Study of Religion, a tertiary entrance level course. While these are two-year courses, Redlands offers Religion and Ethics over the longer period of three years.

A critical approach

Since coming to Redlands College six years ago, Hunter has overseen a change to the RE curriculum, which has included the implementation of the QSA Religion and Ethics course at the senior levels. He felt that offering the QSA courses would ensure academic rigour, and enable a critical inquiry approach to be adopted. The Study of Religion syllabus specifically calls for an inquiry approach that ‘aims to develop students’ investigative and thinking skills and contributes to their ability to formulate ideas, make judgements and reach conclusions’. The Religion and Ethics course, while less demanding, also requires the development of critical literacy skills and an appreciation and respect for diverse value systems, beliefs and cultures. Hunter has taken these learning outcomes into consideration in designing units for the college.

While both QSA courses stipulate that a number of religions must be studied, Hunter always selects Islam as one of the religions to focus on. Given the contemporary context, Hunter believes the inclusion of Islam is ‘obvious and needed’. He also suggests that the many divergent voices around Islam provide a rich opportunity for critical analysis.



Hunter is quick to point out, however, that the critical approach is not only used with Islam. When looking at Judaism, Hunter mentions, the mainly Protestant students are often challenged by a critical analysis of the text, *On the Jews and their Lies*, by Martin Luther, Protestantism's 'heroic' reformer.

Divergent voices

When focusing on Islam, the Religion and Ethics course involves students in critically analysing several divergent 'voices' and what they say about Islam. Hunter has gathered a rich and varied selection of sources — including books, websites, images, podcasts, and YouTube clips — for the students to engage with. The voices include: Pope Benedict XVI; Australian Muslim social and media commentator, Waleed Aly; actor Will Smith talking with Muhammad Ali; Sydney Muslim cleric, Sheikh Tajuddin al-Hilali; Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; British writer, Karen Armstrong; Islam critic, Ayaan Hirsi Ali; former Pakistan Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, and European spokesperson for Islam and academic, Tariq Ramadan.

Once students have engaged with and analysed the voices, they are asked to 'evaluate the validity of the voices in light of Islam's primary sources of authority (the Quran and the life of Muhammad)'. Finally, students draw tentative conclusions and raise further questions. One of the conclusions students draw, Hunter explains, is that 'adherents of Islam, like adherents of Christianity, hold diverse viewpoints and understandings'.

Hunter believes the unit has been very successful in engaging students. Rather than being 'spoon-fed uncritical positions', the students have found it 'refreshing and freeing' to explore contemporary and varied perspectives. He adds that the students respond particularly well to the audio and video clips. He acknowledges, however, that as a non-tertiary course it is very challenging, with some students finding the texts too complex and feeling uncomfortable with the idea of drawing their own conclusions. Several pages of the unit are reproduced on the following pages.

Divergent voices is also a theme explored by students undertaking the tertiary entrance level Study of Religion course. When looking at rituals in world religions, Hunter focuses students on the Islamic ritual *salat*, or prayer. The first part of this assignment involves students in 'critically analysing divergent retellings of the story of Muhammad'. Hunter requires students to use primary sources — including the eighth-century biography of Muhammad by Ibn Ishaq, the Quran and Hadith — and secondary sources that the students locate themselves. As well as this critical analysis, the students also relate this knowledge about Muhammad's life to the origins of *salat*. One of the learning outcomes from this activity is an appreciation that 'primary authoritative sources are able to arbitrate differences'.

TO BE DONE TOGETHER AS A CLASS

5.3 **another voice** Listen to Will Smith and Muhammad Ali. (<http://www.islamictube.net/watch/2032947898/Muhammad-Ali-and-Will-Smith-Message-of-a-Muslim>)

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

 source of ideas: _____

Analyse independently two or more of the following voices to identify

1. the stated or implied ideas about/within Islam, and
2. the source/grounds of the idea.

5.4 **another voice** Read *Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI* (handout three) to identify what is being from within Islam.

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

 source of ideas: _____

5.5 **another voice** Listen to Waleed Aly,² debate against the proposition that 'Islam is incompatible with Democracy'. ('Islam is incompatible with Democracy' *Big Ideas* 9.03.08 from 0.00 to the end of the first speaker and then from the 44.50 minute)

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

 source of ideas: _____

² Waleed Aly is a lecturer in politics at Monash University, where he also works within the board member and spokesperson for the Victorian Council of Islam. Teachers see Episcopi (and Christopher Hitchens) are panellists.

Religion and Ethics 'World religion: Islam' Year 11, 2011

5.6 **another voice** In Sydney, Sheik Taj Din al-Hilali delivered a Friday Ramadan sermon in Arabic in which he made statements concerning female clothing and female responsibility in unwanted sexual encounters. The background of the sermon was the Sydney 2000 gang rapes.³

"Those atheists, people of the book (Christians and Jews), where will they end up? In Surfers Paradise? On the Gold Coast?"

"Where will they end up? In hell. And not part-time. For eternity. They are the worst in God's creation. Who commits the crimes of theft? The man or the woman? The man. That's why the man was mentioned before the woman when it comes to theft because his responsibility is providing."

"But when it comes to adultery, it's 90 per cent the women's responsibility. Why? Because a woman possesses the weapon of seduction. It is she who takes off her clothes, shortens them, flirts, puts on make-up and powder and takes to the streets, God protect us, dallying. It's she who shortens, raises and lowers. Then it's a look, then a smile, then a conversation, a greeting, then a conversation, then a date, then a meeting, then a crime, then Long Bay jail. (laughs)."

"Then you get a judge, who has no mercy, and he gives you 65 years."

"But when it comes to this disaster, who started it? In his literature, scholar al-Rafihi says: 'If I came across a rape crime — kidnap and violation of honour — I would discipline the man and order that the woman be arrested and jailed for life.' Why would you do this, Rafihi? He says because if she had not left the meat uncovered, the cat wouldn't have snatched it."

"If you take a kilo of meat, and you don't put it in the fridge or in the pot or in the kitchen but you leave it on a plate in the backyard, and then you have a fight with the neighbour because his cats eat the meat, you're crazy. Isn't this true?"

"If you take uncovered meat and put it on the street, on the pavement, in a garden, in a park or in the backyard, without a cover and the cats eat it, is it the fault of the cat or the uncovered meat? The uncovered meat is the problem."

"If the meat was covered, the cats wouldn't roam around it. If the meat is inside the fridge, they won't get it. If the meat was in the fridge and it (the cat) smelled it, it can bang its head as much as it wants, but it's no use. don't happen."

"That's why he said she owns the weapon of seduction."

"Satan sees women as half his soldiers. You're my messenger to achieve my needs. Satan tells women you're my weapon to bring down any stubborn man. There are men that I fail with. But you're the best of my weapons."

"The woman was behind Satan playing a role when she disobeyed God and went out all dolled up and unveiled and made of herself palatable food that rakes and perverts would race for. She was the reason behind this sin taking place."

(This is an edited transcript, by SBS translator Dalia Mattar, of Sheik Taj Din al-Hilali's speech, *The Australian*, 27 October 2006.)

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

source of ideas: _____

³ In Sydney in 2000, a series of gang rapes by a group of men identified as Lebanese Australians inflamed anti-Muslim sentiments. There was public debate about the motives behind the rapes. Some said it was male Muslim attitudes towards non-Muslim women 'underdressed' women.

Religion and Ethics 'World religion: Islam' Year 11, 2011

5.7 **another voice** View the photos of **Yemen**. Identify any implied or explicit ideals as captured by the photos.

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

source of ideas: _____

5.8 **another voice** View Iran's Islamic President Ahmadinejad on the Holocaust.
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykd-syzZ4ZY>)

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

source of ideas: _____

5.9 **another voice** Read 'Teachings and Defeat' in Tariq Ramadan's⁴ book *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad* (handout four) and listen to Tariq Ramadan on women and women's rights in Islam. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrN-Dkl-5bs> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVQJy7egDZU>)

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

source of ideas: _____

5.10 **another voice** Analyse what Karen Armstrong has to say in her book, *Muhammad Prophet for Our Time* (see handout five).

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

source of ideas: _____

⁴ Tariq Ramadan is a spokesperson for European Muslims. He completed an MA in Philosophy and French Literature, and a PhD in Arabic and Studies at the University of Geneva, and then went on to study classic Islamic scholarship at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. He has been refused entry into the United States, despite the offer of the position of Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. His grandfather, Hassan al-Banna, set up the Muslim Brotherhood, an Egyptian-based group that has since come to be associated with the birth of modern Islamism. Currently he is a Senior Research Fellow at St Antony's College, Oxford. Teachers view http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tariq_Ramadan some further details about Professor Tariq Ramadan and listen to ABC's *Encounter* podcast 'Tariq Ramadan' 9.03.08 to hear him.

5.11 **another voice** Analyse what Irshad Manji has to say in her book, *The Trouble with Islam* (see handout six cf. and Appendix One if time).

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

source of ideas: _____

5.12 **another voice** Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a Somali-born former Dutch politician who grew up in a traditional Muslim family. But she has become one of Islam's most outspoken and formidable critics. In 2004 Dutch film maker Theo Van Gogh was murdered by a Dutch-born Moroccan who was enraged by Van Gogh's film, *Submission* about women and the Koran. That film was devised by Hursi-Ali and Van Gogh's murderer left a note saying that she would be the next victim. To this day she remains under heavy security and is unrepentant in her critique of Islam. Her recent autobiography, *Infidel*, was a best seller. As you listen to Imp3 'Ayaan Hirsi Ali' *The Spirit of Things* ABC RN 10/06/07 and 'Ayaan Hirsi Ali' *RN Breakfast* ABC RN 31/05/07) and read *Hursi Ali* (handout eight), write down the assertions she makes about Islam.

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

source of ideas: _____

5.13 **another voice** Read through pages 2–7 of booklet from the Lutwyche Mosque, *The Key to Understanding Islam* (handout seven).

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

source of ideas: _____

5.14 **another voice** Read through what Benazir Bhutto has to say about Islam and democracy in her *Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West* (handout nine).

stated/implied ideas about/within Islam: _____

source of ideas: _____

This assignment has been popular with students and Hunter mentions that students have found Ibn Ishaq's biography, which is available online, particularly engaging. The version used by Hunter is *The Life of Muhammad: Apostle of Allah* by Ibn Ishaq, edited by Michael Edwardes (London: Folio Society, 2003).

Rich resources

The success of Hunter's courses is largely the result of many hours spent locating suitable source material to engage students. Hunter has a rich personal library of books and endless online references. He is generous in passing on his resources to other teachers, explaining that new teachers can find it quite daunting to get sufficiently familiar with the content prior to teaching these courses.

His resources are also shared with the students. Hunter believes it 'is important that the students are able to read for themselves the sources and for the students themselves to analyse what is being said and on what grounds it is said'. In the future, Hunter would like to take this idea further. He thinks that it would be ideal for students to work independently through these learning processes, identifying their own sources and working at their own pace, with the teacher taking on the role of 'facilitator not adjudicator'.

Whatever the future does bring, the senior students at Redlands College will continue to be encouraged to think critically and independently about the world they live in. ♦





ST LAURENCE'S COLLEGE

SOUTH BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND

The Homework Help Club is an initiative of St Laurence's College, a Catholic boys' school, which sees senior students volunteering their time to work with English as a Second Language (ESL) students at several neighbouring primary schools.

The school context

Located in central Brisbane, St Laurence's College is a Catholic boys' school for students in Years 5–12. It has approximately 1400 students and 200 staff. The school is, according to teacher Leah Maxwell, 'a middle-class inner-city school, but by no means exclusive'. The student body has some cultural diversity with around 13% identified as ESL students. Over 70% of the students identify as Catholic. There is a very small number of students from non-Christian faiths.

The school follows in the traditions of Edmund Rice who, Maxwell says, was 'concerned with the education of all children, regardless of their status, believing that education could liberate the poor'. His philosophies are reflected in the school motto — *facere et docere* — meaning 'to do and to teach' and in the school commitment to Service Learning.

Service Learning

Leah Maxwell is a teacher with responsibilities for senior level Study of Religion and middle school Studies of Society and Environment classes at St Laurence's. She is also passionate about Service Learning and appreciates the status that it is given at the College. Maxwell believes Service Learning is about more than community service or fundraising for charities; it involves 'students volunteering their time to establish a relationship with an identified group in society'.

The Homework Help Club, which Maxwell played a critical role in developing, is a good example of Service Learning in action. The after-school program involves senior St Laurence's students volunteering their time at local primary schools to help ESL students, mainly African Muslim refugees, with their homework.

To do and to teach

There were several reasons that prompted Maxwell to focus her efforts on developing the Homework Help Club. Firstly, the school already had an internal Homework Help Club, where senior students help tutor ESL students. In the past this had been adapted, on a small scale, to involve students at other schools. Maxwell recognised she could build on these experiences. She had also attended the Brisbane *Learning from One Another* workshop in 2010, and took from it that 'it was one thing to tell students about other faith traditions, but another to actually get out there and be involved in their lives'. Familiarity, she believes, is the most effective way to develop students' interfaith and intercultural understandings.



Establishing the club

Establishing the Homework Help Club was a timely exercise, involving many people and resources. Maxwell particularly acknowledges the assistance she received from Donna Heffron, an ESL teacher at Junction Park State School, which was the first primary school to be involved in the program. It was establishing contact with Heffron that started the process.

Maxwell and Heffron settled on a model that involved students from St Laurence's being transported to Junction Park State School by bus after school one afternoon each week, for a six-week block each school term. The one-hour sessions would involve a short playtime outside, sharing afternoon tea (provided by St Laurence's) and 30 minutes of one-on-one tutoring. The students from St Laurence's would work with the same student from Junction Park each week.

One of Maxwell's initial challenges in establishing the club was recruiting St Laurence's students to be involved. As sport is a co-curricular focus at the school, Maxwell was concerned about her ability to interest a sufficient number of students in the entirely voluntary program. Maxwell relied heavily on targeting students that she thought would have an interest or benefit from being involved. In doing so, she was easily able to get over 20 boys to participate in the first program.

There were a number of logistical considerations. Maxwell had to arrange funding, a bus to transport the students and afternoon tea. Parental permission forms were needed for all students involved. Maxwell also recognised the need to prepare her students and ran a training session where she talked about cultural sensitivities and expectations.

Energy

The Homework Help Club has now run for three terms with Junction Park State School and will continue in the future. The thing that excites Maxwell most about the club is the energy that it creates each week when the students, generally from very different backgrounds, get together. She reports there is always a real buzz amongst all the students. For the St Laurence's boys there is pleasure in 'doing' and 'teaching' but also in broadening their own understandings of other faith and cultural groups. As Maxwell says 'the boys realise the Junction park students are not foreign to them, but part of their community'.

For the Junction Park students there are also significant benefits. Many students come from families where English is not spoken and/or education levels are low, so the benefits of one-on-one tutoring to assist with homework are very real. To ensure the initiative is worthwhile, Junction Park staff help students to select work to complete with the older students. Social and emotional benefits are also apparent; Maxwell believes the older boys become role models for the younger students, helping them engage with their studies. They also play an important role in helping the newly arrived students connect with their broader community.



Maxwell believes establishing a routine has been key to the success of the program. Her and Heffron realised early that the sessions ran more smoothly when all the students were aware of the structure and purpose. She also suggests that adequately preparing the St Laurence's boys prior to the sessions was essential. This prepared them, for example, about possible sensitivities around male students interacting with Muslim female students.

Increasing interest

The success of the program at Junction Park has resulted in rapid expansion of the Homework Help Club. It now involves over 80 St Laurence's boys visiting four different state and Catholic primary schools each week.

The growth was mainly a result of enquiries from other primary schools asking if they could also be involved. However, the expansion was only possible because of the popularity of the club with St Laurence's students; Maxwell reports that most students who have been involved return to the program each term. She no longer needs to target students as the club has sufficient momentum that enough students participate each term.

Maxwell has also been very grateful for continuing support from St Laurence's staff. Several other teachers have volunteered their time to assist in the expanded program, with a different teacher needed to accompany the students to each school. School funding has also been made available for buses and afternoon tea snacks.

Future plans

Maxwell is very aware that the Homework Help Club cannot endlessly expand, despite interest from other local primary schools. She has given some thought to incorporating it into the formal curriculum, particularly religious education courses, but is concerned about making the program non-voluntary. She is also keen to increase involvement of the parents and families of the primary students, perhaps by hosting a family picnic at St Laurence's each term.

Whatever the future brings, there is little doubt that the Homework Help Club will continue to benefit all involved. ♦

Although St Rita's School does not have any Muslim students, this Catholic primary school is striving to broaden perspectives by introducing content about Islam and other religions across curriculum areas and levels.

The school context

Located in the southeast of metropolitan Brisbane, St Rita's School is a co-educational, Catholic primary school with approximately 600 students. St Rita's offers programs in religious education and the eight key learning areas of the Queensland syllabus. It also has a number of initiatives aimed at promoting student wellbeing through emotional and social development. As a parish school, it values engagement with parents, carers and the broader community.

The school is predominantly mono-cultural: nearly 90% of students were born in Australia and less than 1% identify as speaking a language other than English as a first language. Over 70% identify as Catholic, and none of the remaining students identify with non-Christian religions.

Colleen Hughes is an experienced class teacher at St Rita's who has taken on a leadership role in the area of religious education. In this capacity, she attended one of the Brisbane *Learning from One Another* workshops in 2010 and has risen to the challenge of bringing Muslim perspectives into the relatively homogenous classrooms at St Rita's School.

Broadening perspectives

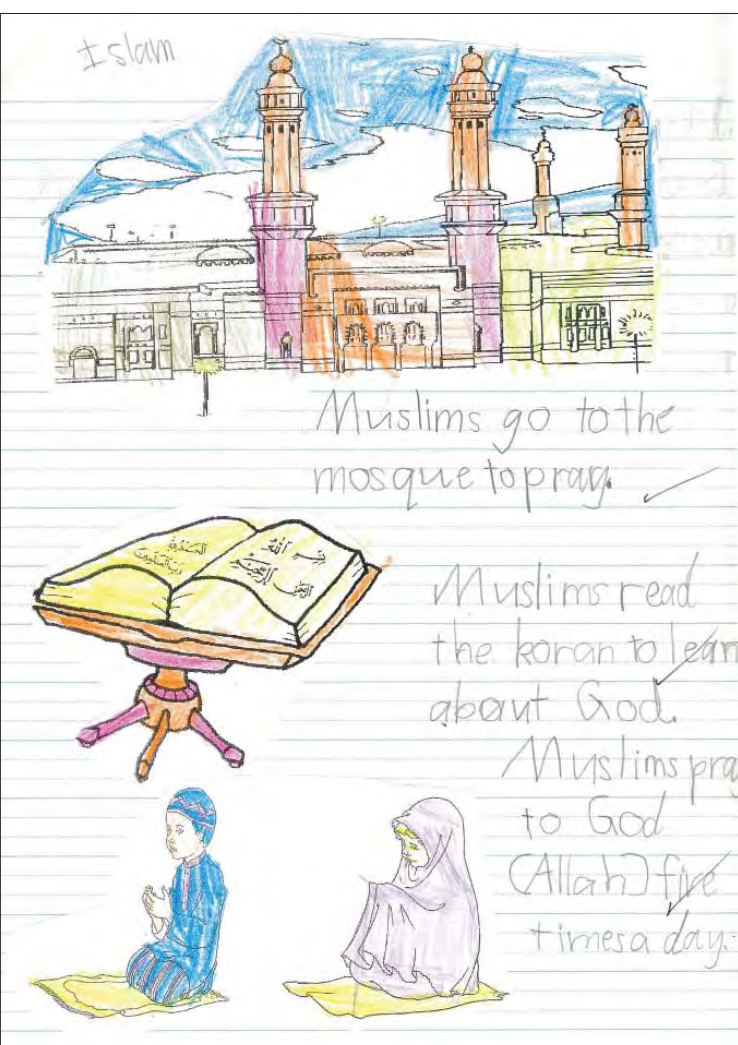
For Hughes, there are important reasons for incorporating multifaith perspectives into St Rita's classrooms. With a personal interest in world religions, Hughes recognises that most students at St Rita's have limited exposure to people from non-Christian faiths and cultures, which is reflected in their understandings and perspectives. She is particularly interested in the students' perceptions of Islam, which often reflect the stereotypes portrayed in the mass media. She feels that 'as teachers we are well placed to adopt a counter-cultural approach and to provide students with a more balanced and fair view of other faith traditions'.

The desire to increase interfaith understandings also reflects the Augustinian Fathers' traditions that are central to the school ethos, and which emphasise social justice as a means of confronting injustice and oppression.



Cross-curricular approach

Having represented St Rita's School at the *Learning from One Another* workshop, Hughes began her efforts by organising an optional after-school workshop for interested staff based around the *Learning from One Another* resource. Her focus was on Islam and the curriculum content ideas in the resource. As no Muslim students attend the school, she did not cover meeting the needs of Muslim students. She also identified, with the help of the teacher-librarian, a number of other relevant curriculum resources that could be used with various levels and contexts, and shared these with the other teachers.



The workshop was well attended and teachers showed a keen interest in learning more about Islam and incorporating it into their teaching. Teachers looked at their own classes and identified areas where content around Islam and Muslims could be incorporated.

As a Catholic school, St Rita's was able to use religious education as one of the areas to introduce the new content. Hughes took the opportunity to introduce Islam, and other faiths, through a unit of work on 'prayer' with her Year 2 class. Visual material was particularly effective for this unit and Hughes located various posters and images to stimulate discussion. She also found two web resources helpful: a site called *Islamic playground* and a YouTube clip called *Crazy places I have prayed*.

Hughes found that a focus on similarities and differences between faiths worked well as students could relate the new content to their own lives. She noticed that the students' curiosity about the veils they had seen Muslim women wear was a good way to explore Muslim practices. She was able to compare these to traditional Catholic practices, which sometimes involved covering the head, daily prayers and fasting. It also enabled students to complete literacy activities involving comparing and contrasting.

Studies of Society and Environment was selected as the learning area to incorporate new content at the Year 6 level. While completing a unit on immigration, Muslim migration to Australia was highlighted, including a focus on the Maccasan traders, early cameleers and Malay pearl divers. With empathy being an important learning outcome, students were involved in activities requiring them to take on an immigrant persona and perspective. Interestingly and disappointingly, for the teachers, most students selected an English-speaking Christian migrant perspective to focus on. Next year, this component of the unit will be changed to encourage students to empathise with migrant stories they are less familiar with.

At Year 7, the final year of primary school in Queensland, Islam and Muslim perspectives were highlighted in a unit on world religions. This unit incorporated the text *Parvana*, a children's novel about a girl living under Taliban rule in Afghanistan. Students were involved in creating empathetic artworks inspired by a character in the text. Another successful, but challenging, aspect of the unit was an exploration of the wearing of the Burqa by Muslim women, which was gaining much media attention at the time. Students became very engaged and passionate about this debate. The teachers reflected that the issue provides a rich opportunity to focus on the role of the media and writing persuasive texts.

Well received and worthwhile

The initiatives at St Rita's, which took a substantial amount of time and commitment to implement, have been well received by teachers and students. While the changes were subtle, their impact has been significant in developing interfaith and intercultural understandings for St Rita's School students. Hughes reflects that incorporating the extra content into the existing syllabus was what made the initiative successful. Teachers at the school were supportive because the changes were easily implemented. This is also why she believes the changes will be lasting, with teachers already focusing on how they will adapt and improve the units next year. Nonetheless, Hughes has plans to look at other ways of increasing awareness of non-Christian faiths and believes Harmony Day could be used as a useful event to try new initiatives next year.

In the meantime, Hughes continues to search for new curriculum materials and texts, and emphasises the importance of sourcing a variety of appropriate resources. These are not only essential for creating meaningful learning experiences, but also for increasing the knowledge and confidence of teachers. ♦





THE FRIENDS' SCHOOL

NORTH HOBART, TASMANIA

This progressive independent school has a rich array of curricular and co-curricular initiatives aimed at increasing intercultural and interfaith understandings, such as comparative religion and Asian studies, and interstate and overseas visits to different communities.

The school context

The Friends' School, situated in North Hobart, was established in 1887. It is a K–12 school with 1300 students spread over two campuses, situated about five minutes from each other. The school has a reputation for academic excellence and a long waiting list for enrolment.

The school is built on Quaker values although out of 200 staff, only four are Quakers. Teachers, however, are expected to broadly be in sympathy with the values of The Society of Friends. Very few students come from Quaker families; the vast majority of parents send their children to the school because of its excellent record of academic achievement.

The students at the school generally come from high income, well-educated families. The school attracts international students from Asia and Europe — it is the only Tasmanian school that offers the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma program — and has a small boarding house that accommodates some 30 students. Some students come from mainland Australia but the vast majority of students are from the Hobart area.

The school has a values statement that reflects the philosophy of The Society of Friends to promote tolerance and understanding. It is within this framework that the school allows, for instance, comparative religion to be taught at Years 10–12.

Life experiences as a practical teaching tool

Peter Jones is a well-travelled and widely read educator who has sought to turn his life experiences into a valuable learning tool for his students. Jones teaches at high school and college level (Years 11–12) at Friends'. At Years 11 and 12, he teaches studies in religion, which includes units on Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and ethics and environmentalism. In some years he teaches a modern world history course Australia in Asia and the Pacific (AAP). AAP is linked to the University of Tasmania where students who have completed the subject get credited for a first year unit of study.

At high school level, Jones teaches Year 10 comparative religion, which is when students at the Friends' School first have the option of studying religion formally. This subject is divided into two semesters and it is in the second semester that students study the monotheistic faiths, including Islam.



Jones is heavily involved in co-curricular activities, organising school trips to Asia, alternating between India and Vietnam. He is taking a group of 30 students to Vietnam at the end of 2011. In addition, he does a lot of work with public speaking and debating, and initiatives by the One World Group and Amnesty International.

Practical learning

Jones' main contribution to teaching comparative religion at Friends' is making it practical for the students. He aims to help students see the different religions as living faiths and not just sets of ideas. He has taught it for 15 years and recalls the time when he first inherited the course from a colleague: 'I inherited the course as a Quaker; it made me laugh because my knowledge of interfaith practices was limited even though I had lived all over the world. So I decided to make it as hands on and as practical as possible.'

Jones gets his students to network with the local Muslim community. Until recently, he took them to the Sufi centre in Hobart to meet the community and take part in the Friday prayers. The Sufi community has now relocated to Broken Hill. To supplement these experiences, Jones uses a range of DVDs on Islam and Muslims, particularly those by National Geographic and Compass (e.g. *Women on Parade* and *Muslim Education in Schools*). He aims to get his students to understand why there is so much hostility towards Muslims and to counter stereotypes. He does the same when he teaches other religions, such as Judaism, preferring to stay away from just teaching facts about a particular faith.

In 2010, Jones began to take his Year 11 and 12 students to Melbourne to give them a taste of a vibrant Muslim community, as there are few Muslims in Hobart. They spent a day at the Australian International Academy of Education (AIA), an Islamic school. They had a *halal* lunch, and paid a visit to Coburg mosque to meet the Imam and watch the afternoon prayers. Jones described the trip as very successful and aims to repeat it annually.

When he teaches Australia in Asia and the Pacific, he arranges meetings for his students with Malaysian university students so they learn first hand what it is like being Asian Muslim students in Hobart. Jones argues that at the age of 15–16, students need practical learning, especially because ‘Tasmania is still the most Anglo-Saxon of the British colonies — there’s a link between fear and hatred of Islam and complete ignorance.’ By encouraging his students to experience Islam, Jones’ believes he is making a small contribution to combating the climate of fear.

Each year, Jones invites his Iraqi friend, whose children received bursaries to attend the school, to come and teach his students how to write *Id Mubarak* (‘Blessed Id’) cards in Arabic. His students then send them to The Friends’ School in Ramallah, Palestine, where Jones used to teach and where two-thirds of the students are Muslim. The students at Ramallah also send cards to Jones’ students in reply.

Freedom to converse

Jones’ students are given the freedom to lead their own conversations when they meet people of other faiths as part of their school activities. He says that it is significant enough for his students to meet other people and simply converse, ‘They don’t [often] meet Aborigines, Muslims or Jews ... they love it when they get to meet people.’ He says that these conversational meetings allow his students to focus on the more practical aspects of a faith rather than the deep philosophical issues that are inappropriate for their age. For instance, he recalls how it was an eye opener for his students when they visited AIA; they were intrigued by Muslim women’s different interpretations of what it means to dress modestly; they were interested in Islamic food rules; they even talked about how Islam views sex before marriage, alcohol and gay relationships, which are common in society. The students were particularly interested in the five times a day prayer, considering that some of them have never been to a church. What appealed to the students the most was the difference in perspectives and worldview offered by the Muslim students.

Through these conversations and in his teaching, Jones tries to emphasise the diversity within Islam. He says that this is important because his students, being in Hobart, rarely get to appreciate that there are 70–80 different Muslim communities in Australia.

Different perspectives through a variety of resources

With a supportive leadership team, Jones has acquired a lot of books and DVDs for his school library, which offer a variety of perspectives about the religions he teaches. Some of his favourites for Islam include DVDs from *ABC Compass* programs, Abdullah Saeed’s *Islam in Australia* (Crows Nest, New South Wales: UNSW Press, 2003), and Manar Chelebi’s *The Australian Muslim Student* (Terrigal, New South Wales: David Barlow Publishing, 2008). He keeps his eye out for new resources and subscribes to e-mail lists of recent publications worldwide. He also has a large personal collection from his own Islamic study that he draws on in his teaching.

Jones believes in getting his students to read books by credible authors. He believes students are over-reliant on websites and is hesitant about students using them because too many religious conservatives and extremists use them. He provides a recent example, when half his class used an anti-Semitic website for a project on Judaism without realising.

Jones does not shy away from providing the spectrum of views within Islam. He says, ‘The kids often ask me, “Where does al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden fit into all this?” So I tell them the story of the Bin Laden family, the geo-political aspect of it, the origins of Wahhabism, and what happened in Afghanistan [during the war with the Soviet Union].’ Jones experienced the Six Day War first hand as a student, and uses this to help explain the Arab-Israeli conflict to his students.



Developing as a teacher

Jones felt that he needed to improve his knowledge of Islam if he was to teach it properly to his students. He undertook a Graduate Diploma in Islamic Studies, which was paid for by his school as part of professional development. He wrote his thesis on Islamic schools in Australia and is now writing it up as a PhD.

Jones mentions that by studying Islam formally, he has been able to become better acquainted with a range of Islamic resources and with people working in the field. He endeavours to pass on the materials he has gathered to other religion teachers in Tasmania whenever they meet.

Lasting impressions

Jones runs into or keeps in touch with his former students from time to time. They often tell him that the knowledge they gathered from learning religion proved practical and useful as they started travelling and going to university. They see the knowledge as a living reality and it then remains etched in their minds.

Jones plans to keep up the successes of his initiatives and the growing pool of resources that he can draw from in his teaching. He knows that his school will support him in his endeavour because of its philosophy of tolerance and understanding. He says that the parents are supportive and the kids are engaged because 'if they weren't interested they wouldn't do it'. He hopes that his teaching will play a role in combating stereotypes and extremism: 'Quakerism teaches tolerance and that we haven't got all the right answers ... I've argued for years and years ... particularly when people have attacked Islam, that the problem is extremism, regardless of religion. Most people aren't like that. Muslims are embarrassed by their extremists just as other people are.' His main advice to increase understanding is to get out there with the students and network with people of different faiths and cultures. ♦



