

## THEM

Refugees, asylum seekers, boat people, displaced people and visa over stayers. How do primary teachers and secondary teachers of geography, history and English deal with the controversial issues that these labels bring? What approach should Christian teachers take to the issues that arise?

### A brief reminder of our history

The history of Australia is laced with racism. First Aboriginal people, then Chinese on the gold fields and Kanaka on the sugar coast and then after World War 11 waves of migrants from Europe, then Vietnam, the middle east, China, India and Africa making Australia a truly multicultural country. Yet, throughout this process there has always been opposition, most exemplified in the “White Australia” Policy after Federation and in later times concern for the changes immigration has brought. These people were different and clashed with contemporary practice. Australia does not have a good record on accepting such differences. But despite this, migrant groups have become part of Australia and British background Australians have learnt to embrace features of their cultural, not only food. Throughout this process there has been the *them and us*, but expressed in a most Australian way. For example, I have an adopted Indian son and people would sometimes comment to me about how migrants were taking Australian jobs. When I replied “like my son”, they would often respond, “No, he’s one of us”. A strange acceptance. But often it’s the people we know that are accepted, irrespective of their background, but all those others out there, well, that’s a different story. Australians express a fear of the other as observed in attitudes towards the latest migrant group. They don’t know THEM. There is little point teaching about refugees, migration, asylum seekers, boat people, displaced people and visa overstayers unless we know our history, however uncomfortable much of it might be.

### Numbers

When teaching about population, migration, refugees and displaced people, background history is needed if contemporary issues are to be addressed. Then the facts. What are the figures on the ethnic backgrounds of Australians? What are the numbers for the current intake of migrants and refugees? Which countries are represented in this intake? How many asylum seekers have been granted refugee status and how many are being held in detention? How many, and from which countries, are estimated to have overstayed their visas and are living in the community? Knowing the facts can help diffuse some stereotypes.

### What is the focus?

Knowing the background and having the facts can be brought to bear on the issue or question at hand. Some examples might include:

- Can Australia sustain the current rate of increase in population?
- What are the implications of decreased immigration and refugee intakes?
- Can Australia develop a cohesive society with diverse migrant and refugee inputs?
- Is it desirable to break up migrant ghettos?
- How does Australia deal with asylum seekers?
- How does Australia compare with other nations on migration, refugees and asylum seekers?
- How many is too many?
- How do Australians support migrants and refugees?
- What problems are created for Australia by its intake of migrants and refugees?

- What have been the benefits and problems created by developing a multicultural Australia?

These and other questions are all legitimate for study. Knowing the history and having the facts available will help any classroom discussion and debate. However, students like their parents, are likely to have strong opinions often based on prejudice, media stereotypes and ignorance. Teachers will need to follow guidelines for dealing with controversial issues like the NSW Department's policy document <https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/controversial-issues-in-schools>

## **Christian teachers**

So, what does a Christian teacher do when preparing topics that cover this subject matter:

### **1. Provide context**

Students need to understand why they are studying in this area and how these studies will contribute to their greater understanding of the world they live in, and, in particular, the Australian society. The Christian teacher will be particularly interested in helping their students to understand others and how their own lives connect with other people and fit into current circumstances. Understanding "the other" is fundamental to relationships and sharing faith. They will want to address stereotypes, media perceptions and fallacies of composition - what one person does is what the whole group does.

### **2. Provide background**

As argued above, students need to know some history of Australia involving migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Without some understanding of this history it will be difficult for them to understand the attitudes of different groups within Australia. The Christian teacher will be concerned that their students recognise the histories of people groups in Australia as a way of bridging the gap of understanding and removing the threat of the other. Some understanding of the cultures they come from will also help.

### **3. Explore cultural differences**

To understand the background of many of the people new to Australia it will be necessary to study aspects of their culture, including religion that is a key motivating factor for many. The Christian teacher will be concerned that students learn to accept difference, but not all differences are good, and learning to respect the right of others to live differently can be a key to acceptance. They should learn about different religions, but not engage in their practices.

### **4. Let the facts speak for themselves.**

Truth is particularly important for Christian teachers because it relates to the very nature of God. Pursuing truth is fundamental to Christian teaching. In this topic, in which there will be conflicting opinions and adopted prejudices, the Christian teacher can point students to study factual information which will address many of their prejudices and concerns, cut through their stereotypes and give them a sense of empowerment to look further at the issues.

### **5. Control discussion**

Students with diverse opinions or minority opinions may feel intimidated within the whole class setting. Providing discussion questions and using group structures will help promote discussion and force students to justify their opinions and seek consensus within their groups. Christian teacher will want students to be involved in authentic discussions, not simply the sharing of ignorance and prejudice. To understand others, students will need to engage and not be passive listeners.

### **6. Include Bible reference for discussion.**

The scriptures have a lot to say about caring for outsiders and for neighbours. Select a couple of passages and have the students discuss them in reference to the focus of the study. There is nothing to stop Christian teachers in public schools using this approach as long as it is non-denominational and aimed at promoting open-ended discussion relevant to the topic. Knowing what Christians think can be helpful for all students.

At a time when many Christians seem focussed on their rights to freedom of religion, there would appear to be much more in scripture about the needs of the poor, the foreigner and the outcast. Teachers should not shy away from difficult or controversial topics in the curriculum or treat them superficially to avoid argument and conflict. These are the very topics that allow Christians to impact on their students through approaches that show integrity and respect for others. Lessening the THEM and uplifting the US is consistent with promoting the love of Christ in a community where all individuals need acceptance, love, and forgiveness.

John Gore

## **Working with refugee students**

Lyn Searle, Teacher, Chester Hill Intensive Language Centre

### **Schools**

Schools play a vital role in supporting students with refugee backgrounds to resettle into a new country. Supportive school cultures can improve students' mental health and wellbeing, enhance educational outcomes, and promote social connections between families and school communities. Schools are uniquely positioned to support recovery, build resilience, and reduce the vulnerability of students of refugee backgrounds.

Schools, beyond their role in providing education, are well placed to promote social inclusion, support freedom from discrimination, and provide important life and work skills. By taking a whole-school approach, schools can implement a range of strategies to support these students.

### **Teachers**

Teachers play a key role in supporting students from refugee backgrounds to reach their academic potential and improve wellbeing outcomes. The impact of teachers provides additional and proactive support to assist students to improve their English language skills.

Loneliness and isolation are common feelings for students. The positive impact of teachers and school staff can help students of refugee backgrounds to form new friendships.

Motivating students by providing help can show significant language improvements in as little as a month. In any class, everything depends on the teacher. The way they teach, matters to the students.

In supporting these students, teachers also need to take an approach based on students' strengths to make informed decisions regarding careers and other future education pathways.

### **Learning**

Students from refugee backgrounds benefit from the provision of extra learning support in a school. For example: setting up mentors and homework clubs.

Teachers have an important role to play in creating a classroom environment where students feel confident to participate in class discussions.

Students feel supported in their learning when teachers utilise EAL (English as an Additional Language refers to learners whose first language is not English) strategies, such as using glossaries and visual cues to support written content; hands-on activities and provide students with opportunities to attend excursions.

Students of refugee background may also need additional support to access and use technology.

Students want to be actively involved with their teachers in developing plans to address the gaps in their learning (for example, choosing between modified or unmodified work).

## Challenges for schools in supporting refugee students.

Does your school:

- celebrate cultural diversity/multiculturalism for example, Harmony Day
- use learning materials that show people from different cultures
- believe there is a problem with racism at your school
- employ a Multicultural Education Aide (MEA)
- partner with the *Refugee Action Support (RAS) Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation* to use trained literacy tutors to provide weekly one-to-one or small group support
- provide information for refugee families to access medical services and programs for immunisations, hearing, sight, oral health, general physical health and mental health
- assist refugees prepare for when they finish school, for example, work experience, course counselling, career counselling
- encourage parents/caregivers to interact with the school and speak to the school with an interpreter
- encourage students to speak up if they feel uncomfortable at school
- assist teachers/parents to get help
- inform students about what to do if they feel unsafe/concerned/worried about things?

## Support Services and Resources

Supporting Refugee Students - Extensive list of education, health and community support services.

- <http://www.roads-to-refuge.com.au/refugees-australia/supporting-education.html>

Teaching Strategies for EAL Students - speaking & listening, writing, reading & viewing.

- <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/support/diversity/eal/continuum/Pages/teachstrat.aspx>
- <https://www.eal-teaching-strategies.com>
- <https://www.aitsl.edu.au/tools-resources/resource/eal-d-reading-strategies-illustration-of-practice>

6 Tips for Teaching EAL Pupils

- <https://www.readandspell.com/teaching-eal-pupils>

## ARTICLE REVIEW:

### ***Teaching our students about integrity, courage and human rights.***

<http://www.tcfonsw.org.au/htmarticles/teaching-integrity.html>

By Erin Hick, Shellharbour Christian College.

This is a challenging article by Erin Hick. Its focus is teaching about the Holocaust and is based on the foundation that forgetting or ignoring this event is to be guilty of complicity in its causes.

Erin advocates teaching about the Holocaust is more than the facts and retaining history. It is about working with students to mould attitudes and explore values. In this methodology students can gain a growing understanding of the character of God.

From an early love for the Diary of Anne Frank, comes a desire to use English classes as a medium to develop students' understanding and actions. *I have found that grappling with this intensely challenging subject matter is something that has created significant overlap in most of my teaching areas. Furthermore, as a Christian, I have really found that my image of God and understanding of human behaviour and free will has been developed by reading about it, studying it and critically questioning.* She also acknowledges that teaching in a Christian school gives her considerable latitude for these studies. However, I am not so sure that Christian teachers in public schools could not follow a similar non-denominational Christian approach to exploring values and still be acting with the Department's values policy and Education Act 1990.

Erin emphasises the need for an age appropriate approach to the content. She parallels teaching about the Holocaust with a growing understanding of God, a move from simple language and familiar concepts to those of increasing complexity and challenge. She cautions about introducing too many horrific details too early and recognises that *none of our students are on an even playing field when it comes to their knowledge and experience of God*. This section of the article could be assisted with some examples from both primary and secondary classes.

A theological framework is provided for secondary students to help them through the issues of the Holocaust and students' understanding of God. Her focus is on five central ideas:

1. Why does God allow suffering to happen?
2. How can you keep following God in times of suffering?
3. Bystanders
4. Nations who ignored or followed their religions command to care for others
5. How have Christians tried to repair their relationship with Jews?

Erin makes clear the goal: *for students to be more accepting of people of other faiths and to realise that passive complacency can be as destructive as inaction*.

While this article is a helpful contribution to teaching controversial issues from a Christian perspective and a welcome approach to teaching the Holocaust through English, it raised some additional questions for me:

1. The broader curriculum  
Where is the Holocaust mentioned in the Australian curriculum, particularly history and in the NSW curriculum namely the primary history syllabus and the modern history syllabus? Surely history is the key vehicle to carry the content of this topic.
2. Optimism  
This can be a very depressing study and lead students to feel hopeless and powerless to bring about change. As with the teaching about disasters in geography in the 1980s, students can feel that they have little hope of influencing world events and bring about change. How can students take action to prevent anything like the Holocaust happening again? What other cases of genocide could be related and where are the good stories of successful action? Perhaps teaching about the Holocaust needs to occur within a bigger context of world history and current events.

Erin has made a significant contribution to teaching about the Holocaust and supporting the values of integrity, courage and human rights. Perhaps someone can build on this work to see its inclusiveness across the broader curriculum, especially history in both primary and secondary schools.  
John Gore

## MISSIONARY NEWS

### Suzanne Rowe

(Suzanne was originally from NSW and now lives in Melbourne with a heart for the Tibetan community there. She continues to keep her links with China. Interserve is her connecting agency.)

*Life is like a box of chocolates There is plenty of variety, and you never know what you're going to get.* (Forrest Gump).

Here is some of what I do:

- Learn the Central Tibetan language and get to know people in Melbourne from that part of the world
- Teach English for Bible and Theology (weekly) at MST (Melbourne School of Theology)
- Networking galore (ie meetings), often online

- Writing... I always dream of doing more but at a bare minimum, I blog regularly at [www.aussie-rambling-rose.com](http://www.aussie-rambling-rose.com)
- Proof-reading, some editing, providing resources
- Translation (Chinese to English, written) mostly for Christian organizations doing excellent work in Asia
- Be part of a team which trains candidates for short-term cross-cultural work experiences
- Study at MST (whatever I learn has to be useful right here and right now ... that is my philosophy and it's been good so far)
- Administration ... it never ends... ..
- Miscellaneous other (the catch-all category).

I plan to make a quick trip to NSW to visit family, friends and supporters (many of whom are the one and the same). In September, I hope to return to China for a few weeks to visit some very special people and places. After that I am enrolled for a week of classes at the Melbourne School of Theology (MST) on 'Cultural Exegesis'. That's the plan, anyhow. As Proverbs 16:9 says, "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps" (NIV).

### **Colin and Cathy McKay** (serving in South East Asia.)

As we begin a new school year in South East Asia, after a trip back to Australia, we are thankful that we serve a faithful God.

We thank God for His resolution of our health issues. Colin underwent 2 surgeries and Cathy 2 cataract operations. We thank God for our short break with family. We praise God for his faithful, generous servants who provided us with a place to stay during all this. We also praise God for you, those who pray for us to endure and see His amazing grace.

MSG kicked off on September 9, without a Maths teacher. We thank God for our Director, Jeff, who has stepped in to teach the Maths classes, so Colin doesn't have to. In December, our Administrator returns to her home country and will not be back. The school continues to need teachers, an Administrator and Houseparents/Dorm parents.

Please pray with us:

- Pray that God enables Jeff, as he struggles the many roles he has as Director of MSG and his teaching load.
- Pray for a High school English teacher, Maths teacher, an Administrator and Dorm parents.
- Pray for our language skills, especially for Cathy, as she will use it in her role.
- Pray for team unity as new people join us.
- Pray for times of refreshing in the busyness of life.

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