

Diversity in society



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1. Recognise and value individual differences

1.1 Explore diversity to identify attributes that may be of benefit to the school and its community

Diversity in society is the unique differences of each individual. Different people have different values, behaviours and approaches to life.

Diversity can include:

No matter where you live and work in Australia today you will be in constant contact with people from a wide range of diverse backgrounds. This means that you will be in constant contact with people who choose to live their lives differently from the way you do. To take just two indices of diversity – birthplace and language spoken, Australia is recognised as a highly diverse society. According to the 2001 Australian Census

- There are 50 separate major Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages
- One in four Australians were born overseas
- Four in ten Australians are migrants or the children of migrants
- People from over 200 countries live in Australia
- 14. 2% of Australians were born overseas in non-English speaking countries
- 15% of Australians over five years of age speak a language other than English at home

While diversity in the workplace brings about many benefits to an organisation], it can also lead to many challenges. Diversity can be a source of tension, division or conflict within a workplace if difference is associated

with exclusion, disadvantage or racism. However, diversity can be beneficial to both the organisation and the members. Diversity brings substantial potential benefits such as better decision making and improved problem solving, greater creativity and innovation, which leads to enhanced product development, and more successful marketing to different types of customers.

Diversity, the idea, is not only prevent unfair discrimination and improve equality but also valuing differences an inclusion include ethnic, age, race, culture, sexual, orientation of physical disability and religious belief. By encouraging staff to realise that cultural, social and linguistic diversity are assets, they will be less likely to resist working with differences and when staff feel that their differences are being respected, they are more inclined to reach their full potential, thus increasing productivity and minimising stress and absenteeism.

Schools are now seeking to become more effective by responding to the diversity within their community.

This is occurring through a better understanding of the diversity of the school's workforce, students, parents and the wider community.

School strategic plans articulate values, vision and activities for building inclusive educational and workplace environments and can also identify opportunities to improve school performance through a range of diversity initiatives. Diversity initiatives can be incorporated into workforce planning, recruitment and retention strategies, leadership mentoring and professional

development. A number of Victorian schools are piloting diversity management strategies and processes.

Strategies for managing diversity give effect to the principle of Equal Employment Opportunity and aim to achieve a workforce that reflects the diversity of the broader community.

Diversity strategies within the Department and schools include actions that enable target groups who experience disadvantage to have increased access to opportunities in education, training and employment

Students who attend racially diverse schools benefit from the experience. Students in diverse schools are more likely to interact positively with other ethnicities. The earlier the better, as the younger a student is exposed to diverse student bodies and teaching staff the more likely they are to develop relationships without focusing on ethnicity or differences. Where children's understanding of diversity is shaped with a positive manner, problems such as negative stereotyping, racism and other groupings can be easily eradicated or minimised. Diversity in the classroom offers students opportunities to learn from each other and to learn about different cultures, languages, backgrounds and disabilities.

1.2 Assist colleagues to acknowledge and use their diverse attributes to contribute to work teams, educational outcomes and delivery services

In an educational setting, colleagues may include:

- peers
- teachers
- aboriginal and/or Torres Strait education workers

- indigenous language and culture teaching assistants
- education assistants
- language/literacy workers
- special needs teachers/assistants
- tutors
- teacher aides
- school counsellors
- school support staff
- work experience personnel/student teachers
- supervisors and school management (eg principals, subject coordinators)

Amongst all of these colleagues there is likely to be cultural and other differences. When a workforce has a lot of cultural similarities where their attitudes, values, beliefs and communication styles are similar it is usually relatively easy for people to give and receive instructions, to discuss problems, work out solutions and to express and accept new ideas. It is likely that workforces will also have some important cultural differences between the employees that can make a difference to how employees get along with each other and work together.

As an educational worker and as a member of a diverse community you have a responsibility to behave in a way that shows respect for other people's cultural practices and beliefs. Equally you have a right to expect that your own cultural practices and beliefs will be respected by others.

Diversity is not about focusing on the nature of the differences between us all. It is about promoting a culture of fairness, respect, recognition and empathy.

There are two main challenges in diverse work environments:

- for individuals to recognise the similarities that they may have. Attitudes, values, and beliefs maybe similar, even the differences in the languages spoken may not be all that large.
- to identify the differences of individuals and find ways to accommodate them. An important step in this process is to work out which differences are important to your work as a team and which are not. For example communication is important, the way people dress may not be.

The most obvious differences in culture between members of a workforce is appearance:

- clothing
- headwear
- cosmetics
- jewellery
- and other body adornments

These differences may show that a person has a particular set of attitudes, values and beliefs. These differences may be part of rituals or activities that may be deemed important or sacred to them.

Another obvious cultural difference is in the ways in which individuals communicate. Some individuals:

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- may not have English as their first language
- may speak with a strong accent
- they may speak softly, slowly or quickly
- they may avoid using certain words – especially bad language – or be offended by bad language, dirty jokes or blasphemous expressions.
- they may use different gestures, touch and body language
- they may avoid giving eye contact
- they may prefer greater or less personal space
- they may seem unusually shy and quiet.
- they may act differently towards different workmates, according to their rank or position.
- they will also have diverse abilities and skills

There are numerous definitions of ‘ culture’ that refer to patterns of behaviour and belief, for example:

· The complete way of life of a people: the shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize a group; their customs, art, literature, religion, philosophy, etc.; the pattern of learned and shared behaviour among the members of a group.

www.digonsite.com/glossary/ag.html

· Learned behaviour of people, which includes their belief systems and languages, their social relationships, their institutions and organizations, and their material goods – food, clothing, buildings, tools, and machines. www.nde.state.nv.us/sca/standards/standardsfiles/social/geoglos.html

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· The learned values, beliefs, perceptions, and behaviours of specific groups of people;

www.gainsctr.com/curriculum/juvenile/glossary.htm

- – the customs, beliefs, and ways of life of a group of people. www.wy.blm.gov/cultural/definitions.htm

What these definitions tell us about is a learned way of life that is shared by a group – and that the group may be bound together because of their ethnic origins, professional status, religious convictions, gender, the area they live in or a shared interest.

Our cultural values are so ingrained in us that we automatically behave a certain way. This is part of the reason why we sometimes find it difficult to understand behaviour that is not the same as ours. For example if you are brought up in a society where it is polite to avert your eyes when talking to other people, you will probably be quite uncomfortable when people look straight at you during a conversation. And on the other hand, if you are brought up in a society where looking people in the eye when talking is the accepted practice, you may think it rude of someone not to do this when you are talking with them. You may interpret this as an act of defiance against your authority that they are not listening or are not interested in what you are saying

Culture influences:

- how you act when you meet people for the first time
- who made your breakfast

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- whether you live at home with your parents or not
- whether and how you prayed this morning – and to whom
- how you ask to speak to someone on the telephone
- what you think about men and women
- what sort of social functions you attend
- how you relate to co-workers who are younger or older than you
- how you apologise and the things you feel you should apologise for
- what you believe is polite behaviour
- the way you express anger
- what you think will happen to you when you die
- who or whether you will marry
- what you chat about with people
- how you greeted your partner or family members this morning

Every culture has its own set of rules. Many of us feel discomfort or confusion when faced with behaviour we don't understand, especially if it does not confirm to our own culture. We have a tendency to believe our way is the right way.

There is no right and wrong in these situations. What seems automatic and correct to you could be quite strange to a person from a different culture. The really important point to remember is that we don't all define ourselves in the same way.

The individual differences created by diversity can be significant. It is important to respect each individual and their differences to enable you to work closely with your colleagues and you should make an effort to find out what the really important ones are for colleagues

Australia has seen different cultural and ethnic groups arrive on our shores as a result of:

- changing immigration policies – Australia eliminated the ‘ White Australian policy’ which was a fundamental change in Australian society and subsequently changed the ethnic population of this country
- labour shortages in Australia – both skilled and unskilled
- economic and humanitarian hardship in overseas countries (e. g. Vietnam after the Vietnam War).

Diversity of culture has made an impact on Australia in terms of:

- cuisine
- contributions to the skills of our national workforce
- economic benefits from increasing need for services and goods
- increasing the available pool of labour
- cultural diversity in Australia
- fostering language studies and language acquisition for all Australians
- assisting with establishing trading links and business opportunities with other countries.

The reasons that it is important to understand how to interact with others in today’s diverse society include that:

- the competitive markets in which Australia trades are now very different from the reliance we had in the past on trade with the United Kingdom and Europe (25% of our markets are new markets)
- beliefs and tolerance have changed as Australia matures as a society

- people will not accept behaviours that were considered ‘ Ok’ in the past
- legislation is in place with regard to harassment and discrimination and understanding the diversity of culture is a fundamental building block to eliminating discriminatory behaviour.

These benefits have made Australia come to be recognised as a nation that has benefited from the diversity of its people and as a desirable place to live.

Cultural Differences

Below is a list of things that we have in common but do differently:

Language spoken -

- Australians speak many different languages at home.
- English is not always a persons first language.
- Religious and Other Beliefs
- Religious beliefs of co-workers and clients will vary enormously.
- Religious beliefs fundamentally affect how we behave, what we eat, how we dress.

Attitudes to family

- Relationships between family members vary between cultures.
- We all have different attitudes to the young, to the old, to parents, brothers and sisters

Attitudes to work

- The relative importance of work and family varies between cultures.
- Attitudes to ‘ The Boss’ change between cultures

Roles of individuals in society

- Different cultures have different beliefs about the roles of individuals.
- Men, women, young people, old people, sick people or children are treated differently within different cultural groups.

Food

- Different cultures have different food preferences.
- People eat at different times and in different ways.
- Some foods have special significance in certain cultures
- Some foods are not eaten by some cultural groups

Holidays and celebrations

- Different cultures have different holidays.
- We all celebrate major events in different ways.

The way people communicate with each other

- Body language varies – amount of touching, forms of greeting, eating habits, sneezing, spitting, belching, walking past people.
- Every culture has taboo subjects.
- The way we ask and answer questions will depend on our culture.
- The way we begin and end conversations will depend on our culture.
- The way we seek information will depend on our culture.

Diversity in society will always exist it is important to understand that diversity will directly affect the ways in which the members of your work team interact.

Educational workers need to have an understanding of diversity, and how the differences in individuals and their ways of life can contribute to work teams, educational outcomes and delivery of services.

Diversity awareness means realising that not all people are the same; people have different values, behaviours, and sometimes fundamentally different approaches to life. We all need to be aware of the diversity in our population because awareness and knowledge are the first steps to understanding and making allowance for differences. By being aware you will be able to identify the diverse skills and knowledge of others. Once you have done this you can encourage them to use these qualities to contribute to ensure that organisational goals are achieved.

Different groups of people have distinctive worldviews, behaviour and belief patterns, languages and ways of existing and interacting with their environments. They might be entirely opposed to your own worldviews. Yet they have as much right to hold those views as you do to hold your own views. Respect the right of other people to be different.

Each culture has its own ways of doing things, its own set of rules. If we are honest, most of us experience feelings of confusion, fear or even anger when we are faced with behaviour we are not familiar with; especially if the behaviour does not follow the rules of our own culture.

We tend to automatically believe that our way is the right way and to fear or denigrate difference because we do not understand it. In some cases another person's behaviour might offend our own values and we often forget that

others have the right to hold values that differ from our own. This is when misunderstandings, conflicts and prejudicial responses can occur.

Key points about cultural awareness and understanding

Some key points to help you in developing the skills to work more effectively with people from all cultures are:

1. Understand that many people in the world are different from you. Do not expect other people to automatically share your values.
2. Understand our culture influences your understanding of every part of your day-to-day lives.
3. Respect the diversity in our population and respect individual's rights to do things differently.
4. Accept the fact that you will never fully understand a culture which is not your own.
5. Understand that cultural awareness and understanding won't come easily. It requires constant work.
6. Be prepared to challenge your initial reactions to people from other cultures. Be aware of the fact that your reactions are based on the rules of your own culture.
7. Avoid stereotyping and labelling people. Treat people as individuals.

Culture is a vital and significant part of an individual: who they are, how they see the world and how they interact with it. It is not possible for someone to simply put aside their culture, in order to be more like you or more acceptable to you.

Workplaces can see diversity as an asset and work towards making the services of the enterprise easily accessible. Similarly, the employment of people from different cultural backgrounds can be made more accommodating.

Some of the ways that enterprises can make their services more accessible or user-friendlier include:

- having signs in other languages
- providing wheelchair access through ramps, lifts and with facilities set at the height appropriate to people in wheelchairs (public phones or service counters set at a lower height)
- employing staff of a socially diverse background (e. g. speaking a community languages, wheel-chaired, Auslan abled)
- having and providing access to telephone interpreters
- translating information into community languages
- training staff not to make assumptions based on religion, race, sexuality, marital status
- taking account of cultural taboos and accommodating these with sensitivity (e. g. in some cultures a man cannot interact with a woman unless another woman is present)
- providing graphic images for public information rather than using words (e. g. using a symbol for a phone/lift/etc rather than the words ‘ phone/lift/etc’).

These strategies consist of both using positives measures and removing negatives or deterrents to colleagues, students and families.

Respect for diversity in the workplace is the recognition and exercising of acceptance of the different qualities, skills, qualifications, experiences and attitudes of people. Valuing and seeing the advantages in diversity can improve the workplace for staff and students, in addition to enhancing the overall performance of the organisation. That is, your work colleagues will be a group of diverse people/ individuals with ideas, skills and attributes that are unique to themselves, and as such, each will make valuable contributions to the workplace and to relationships with colleagues and with students and their families. In recognising the value of these differences you understand that such differences are necessary. If everyone in an organisation were the same, there would be massive skill gaps and organisations would not be able to deliver adequate education to its students.

Whenever we begin to discuss the differences between cultural groups, there is a danger that we start to assume that all people within a particular group are the same. We begin to generalise and fail to treat people as individuals.

The following list of statements provides some classic examples of stereotyping:

- Looking after children is women's work
- All elderly people are conservative
- All accountants are boring
- All unemployed young people are lazy
- All Americans talk loudly
- All English people drink tea

A stereotype is a fixed mental impression. It is based on a pre-conceived notion of how a person will act because of a characteristic of that person, such as their gender, race, disability, religion etc...

Stereotyping allows the social perception of individuals in terms of their group membership rather than by their personal attributes. It ignores personal record, and works on assumptions. This can lead to discrimination.

Stereotyping removes the individuality of a person. In your job, you have a duty to effectively and efficiently to work cooperatively and responsibly with diverse groups of people. It is your responsibility to gain an understanding of what skills and competencies are required for your work performance. To be an effective team worker you need to use these competencies to help to meet the needs of all people, and to be aware of behaviours that may inhibit relationship building, or may damage a relationship. You may build good working relationships through effective communication and self-monitoring.

1.3 Use work practices that are inclusive and benefit educational outcomes, community relationships and the work environment

To ensure that a workplace is discrimination and harassment free an organisation should develop and implement workplace diversity plans to ensure that the workplace is inclusive.

What is a Diversity plan? Diversity plans come in all shapes and sizes. Some are highly textual, philosophical and reflective. Others are a complex matrix of goals, strategies and action steps. Some emphasize process; others focus on percentages. Some are lengthy documents; others are only a single page.

A Diversity plan is a strategic plan that identifies and addresses problems associated with Diversity of an organisation. A Diversity plan should be specific, measurable, and realistic and show real commitment. Excellent diversity plans abound in a variety of formats. The most common format lists goals and action steps with an introduction. A few plans are in essay style. Some programs create complex matrices that list objectives, responsible parties, dates to achieve, and benchmarks for success.

Diversity plans should include measures to address employment related disadvantages of all diversity groups including but not limited to women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people of non-English speaking background and people with disabilities. A Diversity plan should also address improvement in employment conditions, compensation and benefits, training and educational opportunities, promotions, transfers, terminations and all other aspects of employment.

Workplaces that implement diversity plans provide staff and students with an environment without threat of harassment and discrimination that enables staff to work to their full potential and students to enjoy an educational experience.

Work practices that reflect respect for diversity might include:

- providing flexible work arrangements
- respect for different cultures and diversity
- acknowledgment of religious and cultural celebrations
- culturally appropriate mixing of staff
- actively recruiting people with disabilities

- a dress code which allows people to wear clothing and other items that are important to them, but which takes into account the need to keep everyone
- information about the organisation's diversity plan, policies and procedures in induction training
- training in anti discrimination
- professional development activities
- consideration of staff and students with special needs
- healthy and safe a policy that ensures that everyone is treated equally
- actively recruiting people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including indigenous Australians
- programs to help improve written and spoken English skills

When an organisation is developing their policies and procedures it is important to involve all members of staff in the decision-making process. This is beneficial for two reasons.

1. You can identifying all of the cultural issues that affect each team
2. When staff have been involved in creating these policies and procedures they have a sense of ' buy in' and are more likely to comply with a set of policies and procedures.

An organisation should also source as much previous organisational information as possible when developing organisational policies and procedures. Information to consider is:

- organisation's current environment.
- business plan

- demographic profile of employees and the diversity groups within the organisation
- external factors which may affect the organisation during the plan
- assessment of the prevailing culture and business requirements of the organisation
- previous workplace diversity (or Equal Employment Opportunity [EEO]) performance
- available human resources policies and practices, such as recruitment and selection practices, anti-harassment strategies and performance management schemes
- rate of promotion of employees from diverse groups
- how to implement the Diversity plan.

This information is baseline data that will be used to measure the success of the workplace procedure and diversity plan.

Outcomes to aim for could include:

- awareness of, and commitment to, workplace diversity principles and prevention of discrimination
- recognition of the positive value of a diverse workforce to the organisation
- integration of workplace diversity principles in business and human resources practices and systems
- a harmonious and supportive work environment
- treating all people as unique individuals and not as pertaining to a certain group, religion or race

- respecting the unique customs and traditions of people of other races, religions, culture
- integrating and welcoming people with difference and diversity into the organisation

Once an organisation has developed a Diversity plan the organisation should ensure:

- all employees receive a copy
- all employees receive a thorough explanation/ training of how the policy applies to an employee's work.
- The diversity plan is monitored ensure that outcomes and objectives are met and that diversity policies and practices are being observed.
- Adjustments are made to Diversity plan as required.
- That a Workplace Diversity officer is appointed.

A Workplace Diversity officer has the responsibility of:

- articulating how diversity can enhance the organisation
- promoting the benefits of diversity for the organisation, its staff and its students
- identifying an organisation's workplace diversity needs
- ensuring all staff are aware of workplace diversity issues
- ensuring all staff are aware of workplace diversity policies and practices
- ensuring all staff are implementing workplace diversity policies and practices
- monitoring the organisation's compliance with relevant laws and regulations

Diversity in teamwork can present some challenges. Diversity requires each individual to become more aware of their own attitudes, values, beliefs and communication processes, in order to understand how these affect their relationships and communications with others. They will need to develop understanding and tolerance of the way that other people express their cultures and differences and to identify which differences are important..

1.4 Identify and respond to student diversity in accordance with legislation, policy and guidelines

In Australia students have rights that are protected by laws and policies. There are legal and moral imperatives for ensuring that the learning and working environment is free of racist behaviour and that those policies and practices neither directly nor indirectly discriminate on the basis of culture, language, ethnicity or religion.

All Australian laws (Commonwealth and State) impose some responsibility on schools and individuals, be they teachers or students, to take steps to prevent and combat racism. The Australian laws are aimed at protecting individuals from racism at school and also to protect those individuals who make complaints about racism. Commonwealth and State laws make it unlawful for a person to racially discriminate against another person at school and also make it unlawful to encourage, incite, permit or allow racist acts to occur. For this reason, the Australian laws do impose an obligation on everyone to be vigilant about racism and to take action when incidents of racism occur, particularly where those incidents might be unlawful.

Schools need to be positive about diversity and create an environment that makes it possible for everyone to contribute. The range of values,

perceptions and ways of interacting with the world that all members of the school community bring must be both acknowledged and accepted. Effective partnerships between students, staff and parents will only be effective and prejudiced attitudes broken down in an inclusive working and learning environment.

Australian laws make it illegal for people to engage in racist activity or to encourage, incite or permit racist acts to occur. It is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of race, colour, nationality, and descent, ethnic or ethno-religious background. Discrimination against a person on the grounds that the person has a relative or associate who is of a particular race is also unlawful under Australian legislation

The Racial Discrimination Act (1975) and its 1995 amendment the Racial Hatred Act are the Commonwealth laws relating to racial discrimination. In addition, all Australian states and territories have anti-discrimination laws that cover racial discrimination. Australia is also a party to a number of international conventions and decl