

EDUCATION DIALOGUE PROJECT PHASE ONE (2005-2008)

Aims and objectives

The Education Dialogue Project has promoted the use of *dialogue* in order to heighten intercultural awareness within the secondary school setting in Victoria. This dialogue based project has not only contributed to a revival of a concept that has been enunciated by many leaders and theoreticians, but has devised unique methods and practices that institutionalize the notion within an educational setting. The project has helped to build educational programmes that mitigate community tensions and promote multicultural dialogue and co-operation.

Philosophical foundation

The project leaders established a framework that helped prompt changes to practices and mindsets. They found specific ways of applying the dialogic method to the question of intercultural relations at a small community level; in this instance, a community constituted by senior year secondary school educators in and around Melbourne.

The Education Dialogue Project has stressed the importance of the following:

- the need to hold up to scrutiny traditions and worldviews in order to discover their basic ethical impulses, and their potential for adaptation;
- placing emphasis on engagement with, and not merely recognition of, the other;
- encouraging processes that invite open inquiry, taking risks when doing so, while maintaining equality/fairness;
- emphasising both speaking and listening, with particular importance placed on listening;
- stressing both humility and mutual respect as essential aspects of one's disposition;
- discovering one's self through discovering the other;
- nurturing empathy and compassion through telling and listening to stories.

Methodological framework

Of primary importance throughout the life of the project has been direct engagement with educators *via*:

- training workshops at La Trobe University that promote intercultural dialogue to secondary school teachers and other education professionals throughout Victoria.
- ongoing collaboration with a select group of schools with a view to devising initiatives informed by the idea of intercultural dialogue. These initiatives have related to one or more of the following areas of school life: School Ethos, School Curriculum, Professional Development, Extra-Curricular Activity, and Parental Involvement.

Project Stages

Stage One: building foundations (early to late-2005)

This stage commenced in early 2005 and was finalized towards the end of that year. It was dedicated to laying the project's foundations and entailed the following important initiatives:

- consultation with professional bodies that constitute the education establishment in Victoria.
- extensive research into government reforms that radically effect the delivery of the secondary school curriculum.
- communications with approximately forty school principals with a view to determining which schools were to constitute a small network committed to ongoing collaboration. The network comprises: Cleeland Secondary College (now known as the Cleeland Campus of the new Dandenong High School), Coomoora SC (Springvale South), Northcote HS, Marian College (Sunshine West), Catholic Ladies' College (Eltham), and Lalor North SC.
- designing and disseminating a range of important resources and guides that convey the philosophy underpinning the project, as well as the recommended methods.
- establishing an advisory committee comprising leading figures within the education establishment in Victoria. The participants include representatives from the School of Educational Studies LTU, the Victorian Association of Social Studies Teachers, the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority, the Victorian Association of State Secondary

Stage Two: exploring dialogue in education (late-2005 to late-2007)

This stage commenced in late 2005 and featured a series of events and initiatives designed to promote intercultural dialogue. It also entailed building on relations with kindred projects and organizations in order to enhance the project's aims. Initiatives have focused on professional development (on and off campus), partner school-specific projects, curriculum development, and conference presentations.

Professional Development – on campus

- educators' workshop held at La Trobe University (November 2005).

The program for this workshop – entitled 'The Culture of Dialogue and the Dialogue of Cultures' – featured the themes of intercultural dialogue and civilizational change within the European setting. It featured specialists who provided insights into how various cultures interact, and into how each might be characterized in terms of attitudes to difference.

- educators' workshop held at La Trobe University (May 2006).

The project's second workshop – entitled 'Applying the Principles of Inter-cultural Dialogue to the School Experience' – featured a specialist from the School of Educational Studies at La Trobe University and discussion about how best to a) encourage more inquisitive and empathetic approaches to unfamiliar cultures, and b) how to accommodate the needs of students and parents who are newly arrived to Australia. It also provided insights into developmental psychology that bear directly on how young adolescents might be introduced to the notion of dialogue and intercultural difference.

- educators' workshop held at La Trobe University (November 2006).

Entitled 'Intercultural Dialogue in the Teaching of the Humanities, English, and related Domains', this workshop focused on practical initiatives aimed at introducing the dialogue approach *via* classroom teaching. Specifically, it showed how a dialogue approach was, in many respects already woven to the existing curriculum guidelines. Presenters pointed to those areas of the curriculum guidelines that were tailor made for the educator looking to promote intercultural dialogue. The workshop also featured guest specialists: one of whom relayed his experiences of how to improve listening techniques; and the other on the theory and practice of restorative justice techniques in schools.

- educators' workshop held at La Trobe University (May 2007).

This workshop was entitled 'Inter-Cultural Dialogue: from the classroom to whole school'. Sessions included: 'Dealing with religion in senior secondary teaching using the intercultural dialogue approach', 'Teaching 'Communication' and 'Thinking', and International Studies using the intercultural dialogue approach'. This workshop also featured a panel discussion with leading principals – from Victoria's more culturally diverse schools – who discussed their ideas about change in relation to intercultural dialogue in the secondary school setting.

- educators' workshop held at La Trobe University (November 2007).

The workshop was entitled "Inter-Cultural Dialogue: in the classroom and beyond" and drew on the experience of educators in schools that have fostered unique relations with peoples and communities of different cultures. It showcased outstanding examples of how our partner schools have fostered relations with communities from both near and far. It also featured a session on using a dialogic approach when teaching International Studies, as well as a presentation on a new 10 lesson unit designed for the purpose of teaching about intercultural relations with dialogue in mind.

- Promoting dialogue with the assistance of trainee teachers.

Talks were held (in early 2006) between the Centre for Dialogue and La Trobe University's School of Educational Studies in order to explore ways of introducing trainee teachers to the dialogue approach. It was

agreed that the School would encourage trainee teachers to use the Education Dialogue Project to fulfil the fieldwork component of their degree (fifteen days per year).

Subsequently, the project coordinator facilitated the participation in Education Dialogue Project events by LTU Diploma of Education students (July-August 2006 to October 2007). Sixteen students were placed at participating schools in 2006, and a further fourteen in 2007. Importantly, four trainee teachers were engaged in developing teaching materials that enable teachers to teach using a dialogic approach. More details on this aspect of the project appear in the section below headed 'Curriculum Development'.

Professional Development – off campus

- a professional development event at Coomoora SC (June 2006)

The theme of this 'in-service' at Coomoora SC was 'Applying the Principles of Inter-Cultural Dialogue to the School Experience' (emphasis on the Sudanese community). At this professional development event a guest of the Centre for Dialogue, Associate Professor David Dorward (Director of the African Research Institute, LTU) addressed the entire school staff at Coomoora SC, comprising approximately seventy teachers and support staff. The school principal had requested guidance on how to best accommodate the anticipated influx of students from the Sudan and from Africa in general. David Dorward provided invaluable insights into familial structures, culturally specific attitudes to education, and the relevant community's likely approach to engaging with the school.

- a professional development event at Lalor North SC (July 2006)

At this event – entitled 'Key Principles of Inter-Cultural Dialogue: Implications for Secondary Education' – the Director of the Centre for Dialogue, Professor Joseph Camilleri, addressed the entire school staff. The audience numbered approximately eighty, and it was introduced to the notion of dialogue, its increasing relevance to teaching, and the important role that teachers play in ensuring intercultural harmony through the dialogic approach. The workshop also entailed intensive group work involving all staff who were asked to respond to a range of questions and tasks aimed at improving intercultural relations through teaching.

- an intensive 'Curriculum Reform' workshop for senior 'partner school' teachers (March 2007)

This workshop was designed specifically to cater for sixteen leading teachers from the Education Dialogue Project's partner schools. The aim was to discuss and formulate specific approaches to teaching with intercultural dialogue in mind. The curriculum areas discussed were Years 9-10 English and Humanities, as well as interdisciplinary teaching *via* the Victorian Essential Learning Standards. The workshop also provided an opportunity for representatives from each school to showcase dialogue oriented initiatives at their schools.

Partner School Projects

- the project coordinator addressed Northcote High School's (April 2006) 'Cultural Dialogue Forum' and participated in intensive group discussions focusing on the meaning and application of dialogue in the school setting. This event was very rewarding to those who attended (numbering approximately fifty), including teachers, community leaders, parents, and professionals concerned with intercultural relations.
- assisting Cleeland SC establish a parent network with the Sudanese community (10 August 2006)

In collaboration with senior school staff - and with contributions from LTU trainee teachers - the project coordinator helped organize an event designed to strengthen relations with the parents of the school's Sudanese students. This entailed research into community organizations and the various agencies assisting refugees from Africa. It also entailed securing interpreters for the event which was held in the evening. Teachers and students prepared a banquet for the parents and also arranged the venue with culturally specific decorations. The dialogue proceeded – with a good number of parents and children in attendance – and focussed on improving awareness of the school's services, the parents' expectations, and on strengthening overall relationships. Importantly, this pilot event will serve as a model for engaging with parents of a wide range of non Anglo-Saxon communities.

- assisting in the planning of a collaboration between Marian College (girls) and Catholic Ladies' College (commencing 5 September 2006, and resuming in mid '07)

The project coordinator played a key role in establishing the relationship between these school communities, and in laying the groundwork for an ongoing collaboration between them. The feature of this initiative was a dialogue/encounter between two quite different school communities: one, a working class and very ethnically diverse school; and the other a relatively affluent school comprising students of a predominantly Anglo-Saxon heritage. Preparations for the most recent encounter between the schools – one that will include discussion on questions central to intercultural dialogue – were conducted with the assistance of LTU trainee teachers.

- collaborating with project partners – municipal council and other service providers – in Lalor North SC’s cross-generational ‘Intercultural Narrative Project’.

Through the agency of LTU trainee teachers, and with assistance of the project coordinator, the project contributed to Lalor North SC’s School Focused Youth Service Intercultural Project, ‘In My Shoes’. This is a collaborative project with a neighbouring school, and entailed chronicling and celebrating the cultural traditions and experiences of students from very diverse cultural backgrounds. The accounts from each participant are to be posted on a project-dedicated website. The trainee teachers assisted mainly by conducting interviews of participants.

- A joint conference presentation at the Department of Education’s Values Education conference (May 2007)

At this conference the project coordinator teamed with partner school teachers to provide an outline of the project’s philosophical trajectory, as well as summaries of the most significant contributions to the Project’s professional development workshops. This presentation was complemented by accounts from partner school teachers who were able to provide ‘on the ground’ examples of how the dialogue approach manifests in the school setting. Contributions to the conference were made by staff from Northcote High School, Cleeland SC, Coomoora SC, and Marian College.

- Late: 2007 – LTU trainee teacher activity, listed according to partner school

Northcote High – two LTU trainee teachers are currently conducting interviews with students in order to gain a better understanding of how to improve communication between the school and students/families of non-English speaking backgrounds. The trainees are also working on strategies to improve the numeracy skills of students from this background, as well on an initiative that assists Muslim girls at the school to better express their needs.

Catholic Ladies’ College – in addition to the above mentioned Marian College collaboration, LTU trainee teachers are presently assisting the school prepare for its annual Indigenous Immersion journey to central Australia.

Marian College – two LTU trainee teachers are making preparations for the second encounter between Marian College and Catholic Ladies’ College.

Cleeland SC – LTU trainee teachers will assist in further establishing the program (mentioned above) aimed at establishing strong relations with parents of a non-English speaking background. The Afghani community is now the focus of attention. Trainee teachers have also designed and produce two units of lesson plans (totally approx 18 hours of teaching) that emphasize the notion of intercultural dialogue. At time of writing, these are being trialled at the school.

Lalor North SC – two LTU trainee teachers assisted in the planning of the school’s ‘My place in the world expo’, as well as the preparation of curriculum material that is to accompany the expo.

Curriculum Development and other collaboration

- **Curriculum Development via trainee teachers**

From June 2007 the project began to design aids for teachers for use in the classroom. This material will be the product of a collaboration between Centre for Dialogue staff and a team of LTU trainee teachers. Three resource packs will provide practical guidelines and lesson plans for the teaching of intercultural dialogue in schools. They will take the form of teaching ‘units’ comprising up to thirty lesson plans enabling teachers to introduce the notion of dialogue to students at a senior secondary school level. These teaching units will feature guides to the process and organization of dialogue, as well as suggested topics of discussion from across the humanities.

- **Inter university collaboration**

The project leaders hosted an all day workshop of university-based research teams who are also engaged – directly or indirectly – in exploring ways of improving intercultural relations. Teams from Deakin University, The University of Melbourne, and La Trobe University met to discuss their respective research into intercultural relations in the primary and secondary school settings. Participants resolved to work collaboratively where/when appropriate in the future.

Stage Three: evaluation and outcomes (early-2008)

A key feature of each initiative – in particular, the workshops and the professional development visits to schools – has been an accompanying feedback questionnaire. This method of evaluation has provided invaluable feedback from those intimately engaged with the relevant event. On another level, the aforementioned Advisory Group has played an important role by providing ongoing review of the project. The first meeting of the Education Dialogue Project Advisory Group was held in March 2006, the second in July, the third in November 2006, and the fourth in July 2007.

In early 2008 the Advisory Group – along with key personnel at the participating schools – will be called upon to provide a detailed review of the project. This will form the basis of the final component of the project.

That component entails formulating recommendations for those seeking insights into, and participation in, programmes aimed at improving intercultural relations in the school setting. Such recommendations will first appear in draft form and be distributed to project participants and partners for discussion. Subsequently, a set of formal recommendations will emerge and be made available to key bodies and policy makers: these would include, but not be limited to, the Department for Education and Training, the Catholic Education Office, the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority, the various peak teachers' and principals' associations, the Victorian Institute of Teaching, the relevant labour unions, Scanlon Foundation, and Myer Foundation. In addition, the project coordinator, in collaboration with LTU trainee teachers will produce a teachers' aid, comprising a 6-8 lesson teaching unit introducing students to various aspects of the dialogue approach.

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