

## Advice for schools when teaching about cultural diversity

Cultural difference is an extremely complex and sometimes highly personal and emotive subject. Thinking about differences is not just about 'them'. It is also about 'us'. It touches the very essence of who 'we' are, the core of our own identity.

When educators bring this issue into their classrooms, they can easily create as many problems as they solve. If the teaching and learning objective is to encourage a positive, constructive and optimistic approach to differences, here are some general dos and don'ts:

DO	DON'T
Do start with positives, such as the benefits of cultural difference.	Don't start with negatives, such as racism or prejudice. These imply a kind of accusation – an approach unlikely to change attitudes.
Do start by discussing the range of possible attitudes to cultural difference, without allowing students to align themselves personally. Then, in a somewhat more detached way, they can then work through the consequences of different attitudes.	Don't start by having students voice their attitudes to cultural differences. This might be the first time they have been asked to voice their feelings on this subject in a formal or public way, and once they have voiced them they may feel that they have to remain committed to them. This may fix in place and simplify views that are probably more complex and fluid.
Do emphasise social cohesion: the way differences can complement and benefit each other. Focus on shared and core values, such as respect, acceptance, generosity and freedom.	Don't overemphasise 'ethnic colour'. The 'spaghetti and polka' approach often creates more stereotypes than it debunks.
Do talk about everybody's differences. Teaching about cultural difference must be inclusive of all students, at all times.	Don't single out particular groups, such as 'ethnic groups'.
Do link the question of cultural difference to the main themes across VELS domains including Interpersonal Development and Thinking Process and Communication.	Don't let it seem that talking about difference is an afterthought, an add-on to the curriculum.
Do talk in such a way that difference means all of us: who we are compared to others, and how we relate to others in our local and global environments.  When we look very closely at all the parts of our identities, we are all minorities, and we all deserve to be part of the mainstream. Teachers need to build on every student's self-interest and the benefits to all Australians of making the most of our differences.	Don't give the impression that the reason you are discussing differences is so that the 'mainstream' or the 'majority' will feel better about 'minorities'.
Do deal with the facts and the practical skills and attitudes we need to succeed in a future of local and global cultural diversity.	Don't be moralistic. There is no point in accusing people of having bad attitudes, or even implying that they do.
Do start with words that students relate to, such as 'differences', 'acceptance', 'respect', 'justice' and 'freedom'. Use these to begin the discussion about why schools and governments gave policies on diversity and multiculturalism.	Don't be heavy handed with difficult 'authority' words, such as, multiculturalism, tolerance and diversity.

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