



MULTIFAITH EDUCATION
COLLABORATION

**MultiFaith Education Collaboration (MFEC)
Multicultural Framework Review Submission**

Summary

Australia's multicultural diversity is the most concentrated of the OECD and Western nations. The ability to maintain both the fruitfulness and harmony of such a rich multicultural nation is a priority that would serve all Australians. Social harmony is built upon the heavy lifting of social inclusion and belonging. People from different cultures, languages and faiths need to feel understood and respected if we desire our cultural diversity to sustainably produce social cohesion and a sense of belonging. Investing in religious literacy through GRE (General Religious Education) would ensure the next generation of Australians respect rather than fear the religious diversity embedded within our multicultural communities.

The natural context for this to take place is through school classroom education experiences aligned to the national curriculum. Having spent two years consulting with multifaith community leaders across Victoria, the MFEC & FCCV recommend the development and provision of GRE resources that support the National Curriculum to enable GRE modules to be taught to primary school students by their classroom teacher as a religious literacy pathway for students to raise their respect & understanding of faith based multiculturalism and assist their fellow students who come from such lived multifaith experience to feel better understood and connected (Belonging) to their school, fellow students and broader community.



Context

Australia is one of the most multicultural and diverse countries globally with over half (51.5%) of its residents either born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas.

Education is a central pillar in maintaining respect for diversity and human rights. Yet, while the Victorian curricula recognise opportunities to learn about cultural diversity, with some references to religious practises the curriculum does not provide a coherent understanding across our multicultural faith traditions of how faith is expressed in our community settings.

This has led to the unintended consequence for students who come from diverse faith and cultural backgrounds feeling less included due to the lack of confidence by teachers and the lack of in-class resources to enable an open and inclusive discussion across the Worldviews-General Religious Education (GRE) continuum.



Who we are

We are a collaboration of multicultural and multifaith representatives with a shared common vision that all Victorian school students develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of the cultural and religious diversity that underpins our Victorian society. The growing diversity of the State of Victoria requires enriched educational resources and interfaith understanding to continue to preserve and build upon our cohesiveness.

We believe a community endorsed GRE resource portal could develop religious literacy for better interreligious and intercultural relations in the classroom, strengthening engagement for students from multi-faith backgrounds, leading to more social cohesion in a multicultural society. A GRE resource portal would educate about religious worldviews, religious themes and traditions, it is not 'in-Faith' religious education, rather it bears the responsibility to better educate young Australians about our increasing diversity as well as helping students and teachers make sense of their own worldviews.

Rationale for GRE

Why GRE needs to be taught in schools:

- A multicultural society will flourish with the recognition, understanding and appreciation of the various faith traditions.
- GRE will ensure students develop a well-founded understanding of world religions, which will help combat current hate-filled racial and religious bullying and vilification. This will contribute to social cohesion and is a prerequisite to respect for religious practise.
- Increased understanding of religious faith means more acceptance for students so they can flourish in their education setting and develop their potential with reduced bullying.
- GRE will expose students to religious and non-religious worldviews and provide a safe space for students to explore their own and others' worldviews.
- GRE will expose students to develop an appreciation and understanding of the values that underpin a multicultural and multifaith Australian society.

Victorian and Australian context for GRE

- 27.6% of Australians are born overseas, which is twice more than that of the UK & USA*
- 49% of Australians have a parent born overseas**
- 53% of Australians identify with a religious faith**
- 54% of Victoria's population identify with a religious faith***
- 84% of the world's population identifies with a religious group****

* McCrindle, 'Strategic Insights Report 2021 – Australia towards 2031' (https://mccrindle.com.au/wp-content/uploads/reports/Strategic-Insights-Report-2021-Australia-towards-2031.pdf?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Here+s+your+report+)

** <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/cultural-diversity-census/2021>

*** Victorian Government, 'Victoria's diverse population: 2021 census' (<https://www.vic.gov.au/discover-victorias-diverse-population>)

**** The Guardian, 'Religion: why faith is becoming more and more popular' (<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/27/religion-why-is-faith-growing-and-what-happens-next>)

Research supporting GRE approach

- *Australian Generation Z study revealed the worldview complexity of young Australians, as significant numbers of them are strongly non-religious (23%), religiously indifferent (15%), spiritual but not religious (18%), religious and spiritual (8%), nominally religious (20%) or religiously committed (17%). **
- *In the same study, Students who had experienced GRE overwhelmingly endorsed its benefits:*
 - **93 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that it helped develop an understanding of other people's religions; ***
 - **86 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that GRE helped make them more tolerant of other people's religions***
 - **82 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the proposition that GRE was something important to study. ***
- *This measure of the student voice shows how students manage at the forefront of change, given Australia is more culturally and linguistically diverse than ever:*

The AGZ study also reveals that students who receive a more comprehensive education about diverse religions, mainly in religious schools, have a more positive view of religious minorities (Singleton et al. 2019). Increased religious literacy can also improve interreligious understanding and therefore social cohesion. GRE is needed now more than ever for developing religious/worldview literacy and countering negative stereotypes (Singleton et al. 2019; Halafoff et al. 2020). *

*Worldviews of Australia's Generation Z, AGZ Study. (2019). Singleton, A, Rasmussen, M.L, Halafoff, A. & Bouma, G.D. The AGZ Study: Project report. ANU, Deakin and Monash Universities, 2019.

Research supporting GRE approach (cont.)

- **'Worldviews education can contribute to the 'public good', personal well-being and democratic citizenship'** – reflections from UK education system from the book *Conceptualising Religion and Worldviews for the school*.**
- **'Education plays a critical role in strengthening inclusion in our community. Schools provide an environment where respectful relationships, acceptance of diversity, knowledge of other cultures and an understanding of global and local issues can be developed and championed.'** - Victorian Government response into Anti-Vilification Protections 2021***

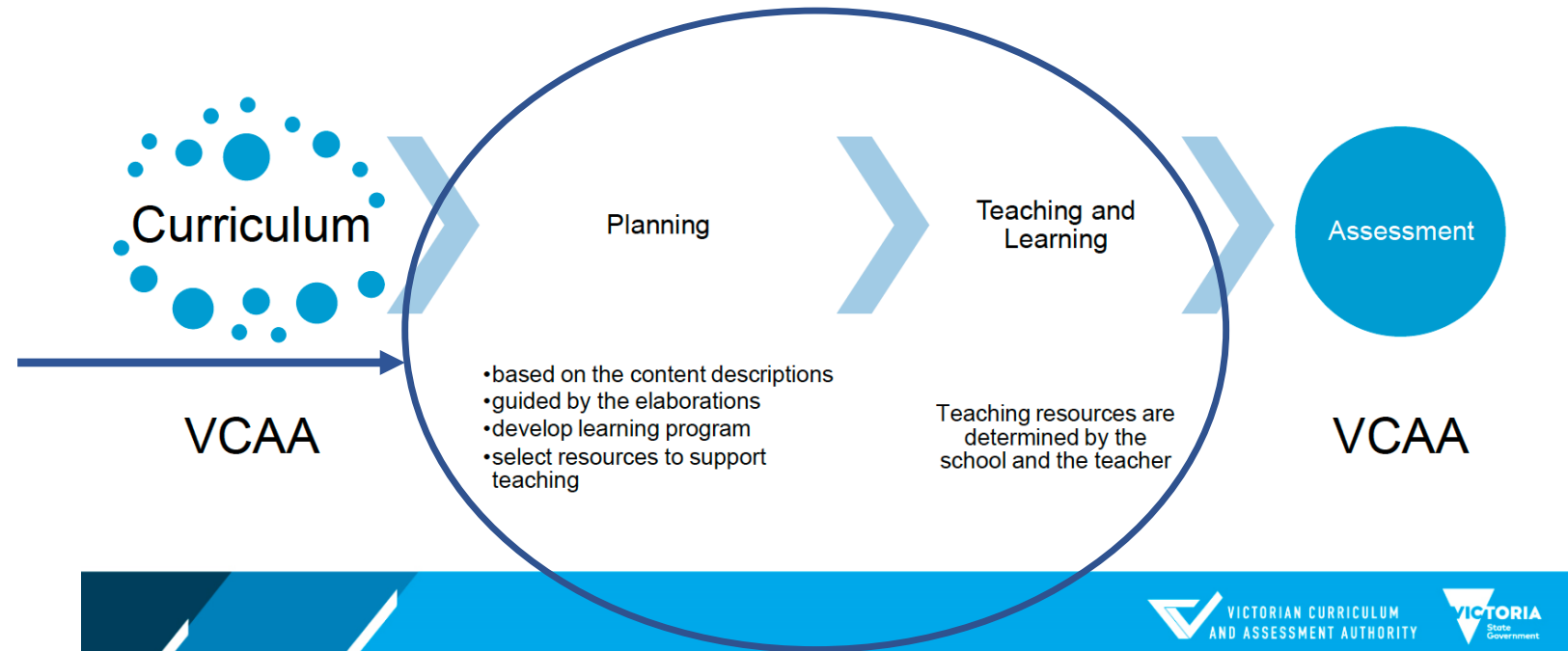
***Conceptualising Religion and Worldviews for the School* (2022) <https://www.routledge.com/Conceptualising-Religion-and-Worldviews-for-the-School-Opportunities-Challenges/OGrady/p/book/9781032046198>

****Victorian Inquiry into Anti-Vilification legislation* (November 2020). <https://www.vic.gov.au/response-inquiry-anti-vilification-protections>

'Teachers need access to high quality curriculum materials' – Grattan institute's report*

Victorian Curriculum F–10

The MFEC seeks to develop usable curriculum aligned GRE resources, and professional learning materials for teachers, to meet the Grattan Report (2022) recommendations.



*Hunter, J., Haywood, A., and Parkinson, N. (2022). Ending the lesson lottery: How to improve curriculum planning in schools. Grattan Institute

Our Vision

For all young Victorians to be provided quality Worldviews GRE in schools in order to flourish in a successful and cohesive multicultural society.

The 'Big' picture plan

GRE online portal

1. GRE Curriculum resources

2. Worldviews methodology

3. Lived experience

Professional Development

1. In-school Teachers

2. Pre-service Teachers

3. School Leadership

Research

1. Barriers for teachers – enacted curriculum

2. GRE Resource design

3. GRE Outcomes

Advocacy & Communications

1. Public perceptions of GRE

2. Influencing Government policy

3. Education sector GRE advocacy

Multifaith engagement

Buddhist

Christian

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Others

Barriers to our vision

Religious illiteracy of students and teachers in Victorian schools

MFEC members & advisors

Members:

- George Savvides – *Chair of SBS Australia*
- Dr Bulent Hass Dellal – *Executive Director of Australian Multicultural Foundation*
- Adel Salman - *President of Islamic Council of Victoria*
- Surinder Jain - *National Vice President of Hindu Council of Australia*
- Rev. Tim Costello - *Faith Values*
- Frances Prince – *Executive Member of Jewish Community Council of Victoria*
- Soo-Lin Quek – *Exec Mgr., Knowledge, Advocacy & Service Innovation of Centre for Multicultural Youth*
- Sandy Kouroupidis – *Multifaith Officer of Faith Communities Council of Victoria*

Secretariat:

- Herbert Um - *CEO of Faith Values (Christian Edu resources for GRE Vic)*

Advisors:

- Claudia Prescott – *Curriculum consultant*
- Prof Larissa McLean Davies – *Deputy Dean of Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE)*
- Dr Amanda Burritt – *Honorary Research Fellow of MGSE*