

Enhancing Relationships in school communities (ERIS)

Final Report

**Creating culturally respectful primary schools:
Enhancing relationships through strategic professional learning**

July 2007 - October 2010



Australian Government
Australian Research Council



**MELBOURNE GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

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ERIS Phase 1(Pilot)

- Scanlon Foundation
- Australian Psychological Society, Psychologists for Peace Interest Group
- The Melbourne Community Foundation's Morawetz Social Justice Fund

ERIS Phase 2: Australian Research Council Linkage Grant Partners

- Scanlon Foundation
- Catholic Education Office, Melbourne
- St Anthony's Primary School, Alphington
- Haig St Primary School, Heidelberg
- Australian Psychological Society, Psychologists for Peace Interest Group

Acknowledgements

The ERIS team would like to thank the primary schools that volunteered to participate in this research project for their commitment and support.

Executive Summary

The *Enhancing Relationships in School Communities* (ERIS) project aims to support primary schools to develop their processes for promoting respect for cultural diversity and for increasing use of a cooperative problem solving approach to manage differences and conflict. The ERIS project has evolved over two main phases: a pilot project phase working with 12 schools and then an ARC Linkage Grant funded Phase 2, the *Creating culturally respectful primary schools: Enhancing relationships through strategic professional learning* project, working with 10 further schools. In both phases, core teams of 3-5 staff from primary schools (including senior leadership) engaged in professional development over 18 months and then supported staff in their schools to learn and implement new ideas and skills.

In Phase 2, the main focus of this report, schools were supported in developing school cultures that: respect and value cultural diversity; oppose racism and discrimination; and handle differences and conflict between individuals and groups in ways that enhance relationships. Schools were also supported to enact curricula on these topics to increase students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in respecting diversity and managing conflict constructively. This work enriched the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) focus in the domains of interpersonal learning; civics and citizenship; the humanities (history); languages other than English; and communication.

The project evaluation showed that the diverse range of participating schools were able to clearly articulate benefits to their staff, students and school communities, which they attributed to their participation in the ERIS project. The following outcomes were reported:

- Teachers felt more confident and competent to proactively and systematically address cultural diversity in their school communities. This included:
 - Reflecting on their own practice
 - Reflecting as a group on school policies and practices
 - Improving engagement and relationships with families
 - Having the knowledge, skills and confidence to work with children from prep to grade 6 in the area of cultural diversity
 - Explicitly teaching ERIS cultural diversity curriculum to students
 - Having greater confidence and skills to respond to racism and discrimination
- Teachers felt more confident and skilled to proactively and systematically address conflict in ways that enhanced relationships. This included:
 - Developing consistency in how conflict was managed throughout the school
 - Teaching the ERIS conflict resolution curriculum to students
 - Having the confidence and skills to more effectively resolve conflict with other staff and also with parents and carers
- Outcomes for students:
 - Increased opportunities to have their voices heard/their stories told
 - An increase in empathy and respect for different cultures
 - Increased confidence to speak out against racism and discrimination
 - Improved knowledge, skills and confidence in managing conflict more effectively

In addition to achieving positive outcomes for school communities, this project also achieved its aims of adding to the national and international research literature in the areas covered by ERIS. This project served to highlight potential areas for further research and partner opportunities, particularly in the area of student, staff and parent/carers and families 'voice' in relation to cultural diversity issues in the Australian context.

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Enhancing Relationships in School Communities Project (ERIS)



Why ERIS?

The growing cultural diversity of Australian communities promises many benefits but also creates significant challenges, including the potential for conflict that reduces social cohesion. School communities are increasingly being called on to respond productively and proactively to these challenges. However, there is little research-based evidence of what best supports schools in this work.

The ERIS project sought to redress this by:

- researching how best to support schools to:
 - navigate the challenges and grow the benefits of living in culturally diverse communities
 - build more respectful, inclusive and productive school communities
- supporting schools and teachers throughout the education system (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Catholic Education Office schools) to:
 - implement evidence-informed/research-based primary school level curricula and practices, and school-community programs in cultural diversity and conflict resolution

The ultimate aim is to begin at an early age through an important social system (i.e., schools) to encourage a more peaceful society that embraces differences between people and cultural groups and has the skills to integrate differing values, interests and needs in constructive ways. This work will also enable schools to optimise learning outcomes for the diverse range of students in their communities.

The ERIS Project has been undertaken in two phases to date. The Creating Culturally Respectful Primary Schools program (2007-10) was preceded by a pilot program (ERIS Phase 1: 2004-2006):

ERIS Phase 1: July '04 – June '06

In July 2004, with funding from the Scanlon Foundation and the Australian Psychological Society (Psychologists for Peace interest group initiative), 12 primary schools enrolled in an 18-month ERIS program, which assisted 3-5 person professional learning teams to nurture culturally respectful communities and to develop inclusive relationship-building and constructive conflict-handling processes in their schools. Results suggested that the full program was effective in encouraging teachers to implement cooperative conflict resolution methods and teach students relevant curriculum (Trinder, Wertheim, Freeman, et al., 2010; Wertheim, Freeman, Trinder, Sanson, Richardson, & Hunt, 2006). Staff in the full program also placed a higher value on the teaching of cultural diversity programs to all students.

The ERIS Project (Phase 1) received the Australian Psychological Society Robin Winkler College of Community Psychologists Award. It provided the foundation for a successful application for an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Grant to conduct further research on innovative approaches to assist primary teachers to create school cultures and curricula through which children respect and value cultural diversity and address constructively interpersonal and intergroup differences.

ARC Linkage Project – Phase 2: July '07 – October '10

Creating culturally respectful primary schools:
Enhancing relationships through strategic professional learning

One of the many challenges for school staff is that there are limited opportunities in either pre or post service training to increase knowledge and skills in the areas of Cultural Diversity (CD) and Conflict Resolution (CR). Taking a socially just stance towards respecting cultural diversity includes being aware of one's own attitudes, values and behaviours towards individuals and groups with backgrounds different from one's own. It also means being alert to the effects of race and racism in everyday life. The ERIS program was designed to encourage teachers to reflect deeply on their own beliefs, values and assumptions as well as those of the institutions in which they work. The ERIS program aimed to explore with teachers what they knew, understood and practised in terms of building culturally respectful school communities, while also introducing the most up to date national and international research and ideas about how these could be understood and enacted.

Project Aims

To offer Primary schools the opportunity to explore, learn and rethink ways to:

- build a whole school culture that respects and values cultural diversity and opposes racism and discrimination
- develop a school culture that handles differences and conflict between individuals and groups in ways that enhance relationships
- enact curricula on these topics
- increase students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in respecting diversity and managing conflict constructively
- enrich VELS focus in the domains of interpersonal learning; civics and citizenship; the humanities (history); languages other than English and communication

How?

Drawing on the most recent evidence on whole school change processes and the learnings from the Phase 1 ERIS project, the focus was on working intensively with core (professional learning) teams of staff who could in turn work with their whole school staff as an effective and efficient way of impacting on whole school culture. It was anticipated that with increased knowledge, confidence, skills and resources, school staff would then be in a better position to have a proactive and consistent approach in teaching what they had learned to students and engage better with families. The strategic and evidence informed approach used by the ERIS team is outlined below:

1. ERIS team → Core teams

- The main target group was a core team of 3-5 staff (including the Principal) from each of 10 program schools. For these core teams ERIS provided the following:
 - Six days of professional enquiry and learning in cultural diversity and conflict resolution over an 18-month period
 - Ongoing support throughout the project for program development and implementation (i.e., site visits, phone and email contact)
 - Resources to enable core teams to conduct professional learning with their whole staff

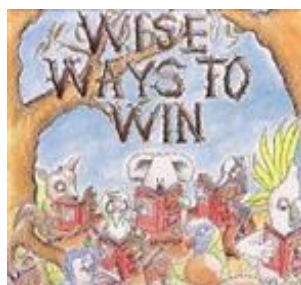
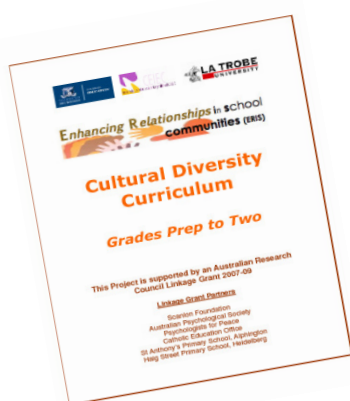
2. Core team → All school staff

- For all school staff ERIS provided the following:
 - A more knowledgeable, confident, skilled and well resourced core team
 - The opportunity to attend one full day of professional enquiry and learning in cultural diversity and conflict resolution

3. All school staff → Students

- ERIS curricula for all students in both cultural diversity and conflict resolution, provided for each of 3 levels (Prep – grade 2, grades 3-4, grades 5-6)

ERIS curricula and resources





Who was involved?

All schools in the Melbourne Metropolitan region from all three Education sectors were invited to participate. Thirteen primary schools applied to participate. Schools were grouped according to size, SES, etc., and randomly allocated to either the program or control school groups. This allocation resulted in three groups of participants:

- **Core team teachers** – 3-5 staff from the 10 program schools who attended 7 full day professional learning sessions over 18 months (including 1 full day with all staff)
- **Other teaching staff** – remaining staff from the 10 program schools who attended 1 full-day professional learning session and received professional learning (PL) and resources disseminated by the core team at their school
- **Control school teachers**– staff from 3 control schools who received only ERIS curricula materials

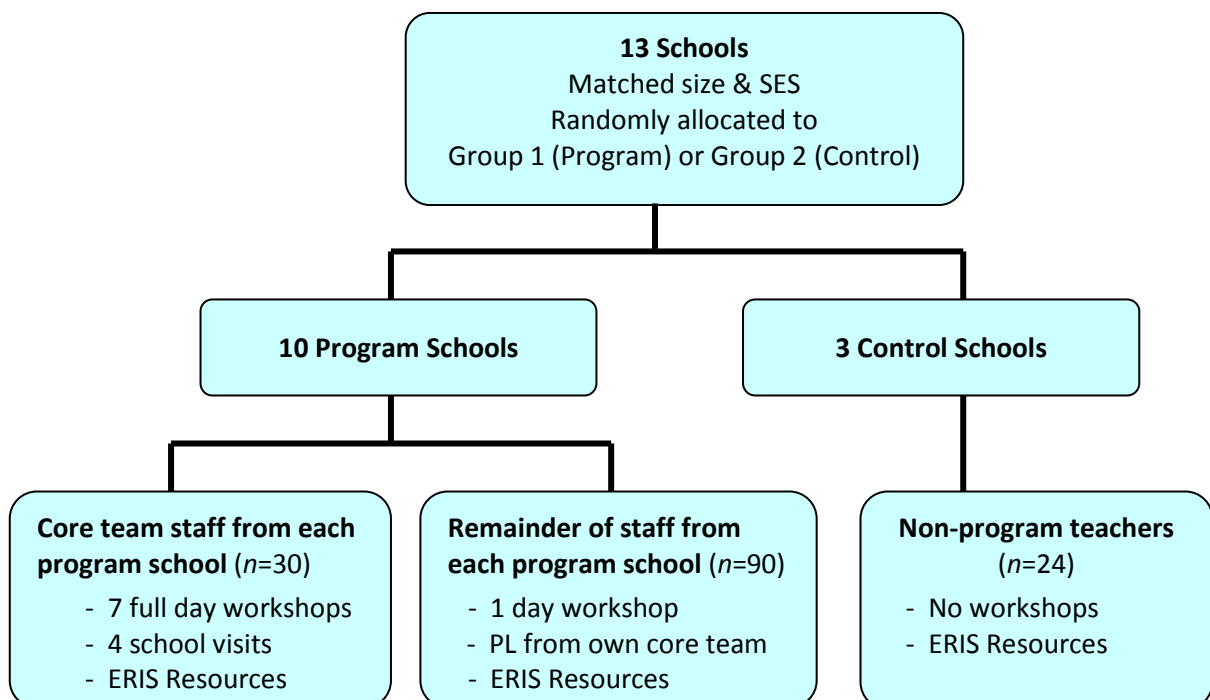
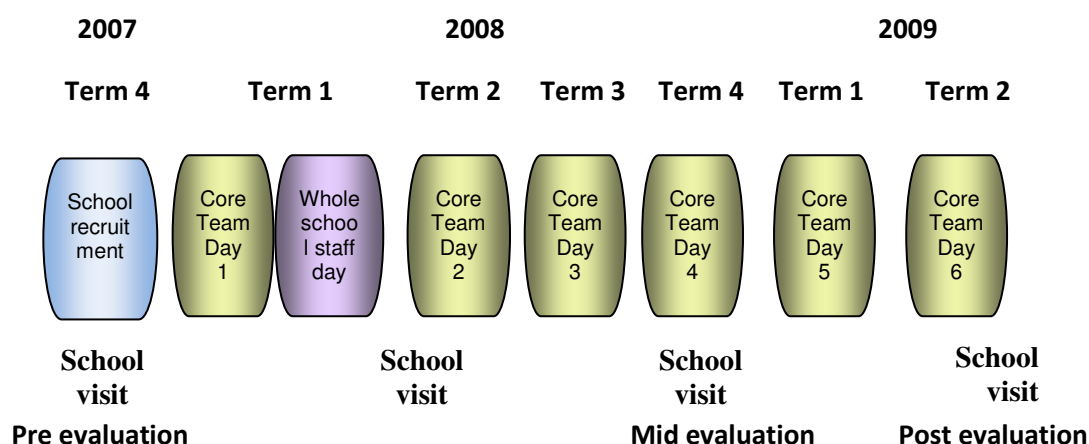


Figure 1. Allocation of schools and types of participants

Project Components



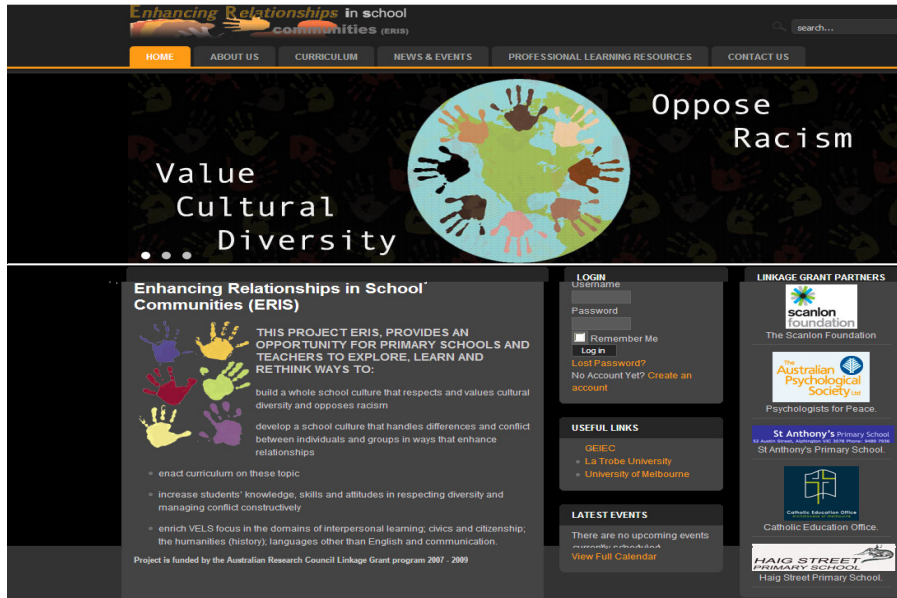
The Program

Throughout an 18-month period core teams attended six core team centred days of professional development focussing on fostering respect for cultural diversity, methods for addressing differences, and a cooperative approach to conflict resolution. In addition, core team and non-core team staff from each program school attended one whole school professional development day focused on those topics. Sessions included the following:

- Theories on cultural diversity, including introduction of specific concepts described as justice alerts or justice watchpoints, such as homogenising, essentialising, privileging, othering, silencing, safety, prejudice, racism and discrimination. These concepts were used as a basis to approach relationships in general, to explore existing school policies and practices, and to stimulate adjustment of policies and practices.
- Conflict resolution theory covering constructive versus destructive conflict styles and approaches, and an integrative problem solving approach to resolving conflict designed for primary schools, and methods of applying it through negotiation, mediation, and coaching
- Integrative models to link concepts from cultural diversity, conflict resolution, and restorative practices approaches
- Activities to stimulate reflection, discussion and learning
- Interactive role plays integrating conflict resolution skills and a problem solving model
- Resources and relevant materials such as websites, books, prompting sheets, and curricula materials
- Sharing of research results and student feedback by ERIS researchers from the 'diversity doll' data collection phase of the project that investigated student perceptions and experiences of diversity within their school contexts
- Opportunity for schools to report and learn from each others' experiences, as well as experiences from principals from past ERIS program schools
- Time allocated to planning how to embed ERIS ideas and materials into school practice to ensure a whole school approach

During core team workshops, schools were given access, through handouts and the ERIS website, to materials to support their teaching of non-core team staff the skills the core team had learned.

ERIS website www.ERIS.org.au



School Priorities

Schools that chose to participate in the ERIS project were diverse in terms of size, SES, cultural diversity, and change history. Schools were attracted to the project for a variety of reasons:

- Schools with culturally diverse communities wanted to work more effectively with their communities
- Schools who had found themselves with changing populations wanted to review their school practices
- Less culturally diverse schools wanted to ensure that their students were well prepared to play an active role in creating a harmonious and just multicultural community
- Schools also wanted to:
 - improve relationships (as measured by responses on their annual survey data), e.g.,
 - better ratings for student connectedness
 - less unresolved conflict amongst children
 - better communication with parents and carers
 - increase home-school engagement
 - achieve a consistent approach to managing conflict throughout school

School entry statements

“We applied for the ERIS program with a view to improving relationships between the school and the local communities and to gain a better understanding of the diverse cultures, beliefs and traditions that are part of the lives of our children.

We are also very interested in developing a more collaborative approach to how our school operates, with more involvement and input from our local families and community.”

ERIS also appealed to schools with very little cultural diversity as the principal quote below illustrates:

“We wanted to give an opportunity for our students to explore just how diverse our community is... the different stories that different cultural backgrounds bring to our community that we possibly haven’t been exposed to, but that we feel we have a responsibility to ensure that our students are [exposed to]. We feel that they have an enormous impact in the future to make some changes in that regard.”

Diverse school communities



EVALUATION

Data was collected from:

- *All school staff*
 - Questionnaires at pre-, mid- and post program from both program and control schools
 - Teacher evaluation of whole school professional learning day
- *Core teams (in addition to 'all school staff' data)*
 - "Significant change stories" - 40 minute individual interviews with 30 staff (three from each of the program schools) at the end of the project.
 - Teacher evaluations of six professional learning days
 - Field notes taken at meetings during school visits
- *Students*
 - Focus groups to determine their experiences and attitudes around cultural diversity using 'diversity dolls'. (The diversity dolls are a tool used by researchers at the Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood. The dolls have been used internationally to explore issues of diversity with children and the CEIEC have further used these within research projects involving young children to support discussions and raise issues of diversity, equity and discrimination respectfully and appropriately)
 - Individual teacher assessment of changes in students and for student body following participation in ERIS-related curricula



Findings

The findings (both qualitative and quantitative) will be reported against the project aims (see p. 2). Findings indicate the positive impact of the ERIS project on teachers, students, and whole school policy and practice. The key outcomes are summarized below and illustrated by quotes from data from the core team teachers' "significant change stories". Quantitative findings included statistical comparisons at post-program between core team, other program teachers and control teachers, after controlling for pre-program status. These findings, where relevant, are illustrated with *.

1. Building a whole school culture that respects and values cultural diversity and opposes racism

Impact on core team teachers

Outlined below are the main themes evident in the significant change stories from 30 core team teachers (highlights added in some quotes):

- A deeper awareness and understanding of cultural diversity issues
- A heightened awareness of stereotyping, prejudice and racism
 - *"I think the concepts that were portrayed **got everybody thinking and everybody questioning their own perceptions and prejudices...** so it's always thinking about what it's like for the other person and where they might be coming from."*
- Critical reflection
 - *"It **made me more aware of the kinds of things that [were] happening and probably disempowering some of our parents where it probably wasn't meant...** So there are some issues we really need to work on and ERIS has made me more aware of that ... kids from very different cultures were expected to access their literacy and everything through our eyes really. **I didn't see that at all until we've been doing ERIS...that's made a huge difference and it's made me look at things totally differently...**"*
- Increased knowledge, confidence and skills
 - *"It's given me the knowledge to tackle [discussions and incidences around cultural differences] more effectively... I would never have brushed it aside, but **I just feel that I can tackle that more effectively with more confidence... Obviously I learned that from our professional learning days.** That enabled me to put that learning into action when I came back here to school..."*
- Changes in teacher practice
 - Teachers reported reflecting more critically on their practice, roles and relationships with a shift towards proactively teaching about cultural diversity and explicitly teaching about racism:
 - *Responding to racist comments:* For example, one of the challenges facing teachers is how to respond to racist comments. Many teachers reported that in the past they had not felt comfortable to go beyond a "don't say that" response, because they were concerned that if they opened up a conversation about skin colour, prejudice or discrimination, they would make matters worse. For teachers, the introduction of research evidence in the program that highlighted the importance of teachers initiating conversations and engaging in dialogue with children around issues of cultural diversity helped them to develop confidence to continue these discussions in their own classrooms. Once teachers initiated these

conversations, they were often surprised by the maturity and sensitivity with which the children addressed these topics.

- More listening and empathy for students
 - *“Just even in the comments that the children sometimes say, **maybe in the past I would have ignored it, and would have thought oh well, they’re just children. Whereas now, I know well there’s something deeper there.** I think I’m more confident in dealing with that and picking that up. In that sense, I think it has changed the way that I deal with issues within a classroom setting, or for that matter out in the yard.”*
- Confidence to proactively teach cultural diversity curriculum to students*
 - This finding was supported by significantly more cultural diversity curriculum being taught in program schools than in control schools

2. Developing a school culture that handles differences and conflict between individuals and groups in ways that enhance relationships

Impact on teachers addressing conflict and differences

Ways in which the teachers found the ERIS project helpful for addressing conflict in schools were found in both the quantitative and qualitative data. Key findings include:

A significant increase in knowledge, skills and attitude, particularly for core team staff: *

- Core team members (compared to control staff and other program staff)
 - reported better knowledge and skills (knowing and using more effective conflict resolution processes with students, staff and parents/carers) *
 - perceived conflict having potential to be more constructive (seeing conflicts as opportunities to more effectively address issues and enhance relationships) *
- Program teachers used a more collaborative / integrative approach *
 - *“So that’s probably been the significant change for me personally, and to the school.... With the girls in class, **if we’re having an incident, we sit them down and pull out the conflict resolution model and have it there...everything’s about a resolution, but the kids decided that and it’s got nothing to do with me imposing detentions and everything to do with them deciding there’s a resolution.** I’m not having to be the dictator anymore. So we spend probably about 40 minutes on class meetings now, and the 40 minutes is the discussion on how we solve things.”*
- A more consistent approach /a common language
 - *“**The teachers were crying out for a structure and something that was consistent through the school. They were asking for it. This seems to have done it.** The conflict resolution, we were looking for structure and a process and we got it.”*
- More positive perceptions of student capacity to resolve conflict* and the desirability of allowing them to do so
 - *“**We didn’t think they could solve their own problems, we are surprised.** There was certainly a lot of negativity that no, you can’t possibly solve things this way because these kids are used to people just sorting them out, ‘off you go’, and it’s a whole lot quicker. They’re right. In some ways it is a whole lot quicker but it’s not nearly as powerful for the children to actually do it that way and it’s not helping them the next time that they come up with something.”*

Changes at a whole school level in both cultural diversity and conflict resolution areas

While the ERIS professional learning program included 6 days of professional learning for core team staff, there was evidence that the learnings from these days were successfully disseminated to other staff. Data was collected on the effectiveness of a core team approach to disseminating ideas and skills:

- Core teams that provided most professional development in their schools (e.g., at staff meetings, PD sessions) were more effective in disseminating ERIS information*
 - Non-core team staff in those schools showed greater increases in understanding of the cooperative conflict resolution approach to conflict, as assessed by the researchers, and greater increases in self-reported knowledge and skills

Increased awareness throughout the school:

A consistent theme throughout the significant change stories was that the awareness of cultural diversity had increased across the school. This included increased awareness about the importance and necessity of teaching about cultural diversity, as well as a new appreciation for the diversity of members of the school community:

- ***“It’s (ERIS) definitely made a change not just in the ERIS [core team] staff but through the rest of the staff, and even into the specialists. Like I know it’s not just classroom teachers, it’s specialist teachers as well who’ve incorporated it into some of the things that they’re doing.”***
- ***“I think there have been great changes in people’s thinking and in actually talking about things and it has happened through this work that we’ve been doing ... I think it really ... has filtered down through the school...I don’t think we had the depth...that we have now I just think with ERIS the understanding that we’ve got now with the cultural diversity just gives you that more confidence to be able to say ‘well if they say that well I know where to go here’.”***
- ***“That’s been a significant change. I think we incorporate far more culturally rich resources into our program in everything that we do.”***
- ***“There is much more discussion and much more openness and ...a lot of celebration of people’s own cultures. I think the kids are ... much prouder of their culture than they were before. This whole term, you know, we’ve done this whole celebration of cultures and it’s really interesting.”***

Increased awareness of racism and discrimination and a proactive and consistent approach to dealing with it:

- ***“I think it has definitely made people more aware of issues that they may not have seen before ... But I think the cultural thing - we sort of went, oh, we don’t have that. Like, we don’t have that problem, but I think it’s made all the staff more aware that there are things out there that they just hadn’t seen before, and that they can now recognise those things to start with and then go on to deal with them, you know, in a way that they’re comfortable to do and have some resources to help back them up.”***
- ***“I wanted to find out the cultural things that were hindering our community from coming in [i.e., into the school] ...- it was really interesting to think that our staff thought that they were ahead of all this racism stuff and ‘no, no, no that doesn’t happen here’, but in the conversations it actually drew out a lot of stuff...it was a very good conversation starter and that has continued on, which I’ve found to be really positive.”***

A coordinated approach at the whole school level led to a decrease in ‘silencing:’

- “...we are openly talking with the children about [racism and respect]. Children are now probably more, feel more, comfortable to come and say it. Whereas **before I think they just took it and it went underground**. Now kids are standing up and saying – and they’re standing up for each other too. They’re saying, **so and so said something to my friend and it was racist and we don’t like it. So, yeah, I think it’s out now.**”
- “...that other extra level of [students] becoming comfortable and feeling supported in their surroundings and knowing that if they have got an issue they can go and approach me or another teacher and that that teacher will deal with their issue...yes, the students are really comfortable with it - **there’s a sort of big change in it all that they can approach teachers and know it will be dealt with...**”

ERIS enhances existing school policies and practices:

The following quotes from significant change interviews show the importance of having school leadership involved in the core team and how this can help bring about changes in policy and practice at a whole school level.

One principal’s description of a change in the way that she expected staff to integrate cultural diversity into their teaching:

- “One of our **principles of learning and teaching, our PoLT principles** that we [use to] create our atmosphere for the learning, talks about providing for different backgrounds and different perspectives. So ... the teachers are asked to come for a PoLT interview [self-audit] with me and one of the questions is, what does that look like in your room and how do you do that? **It’s gone further from being differences in their knowledge of language patterns to differences in their backgrounds, so not so much their learning, but how do you modify your curricula so that these kids can engage more?** That’s been good too. [In the past] I’ve said individual differences and backgrounds, thinking single-parent family, modify their work because they can’t do this sort of maths but not specifically to the nature of the cultural diversity. I’ve changed that in - it’s made me look at that PoLT principle differently.”
- “...ERIS sort of came at the right time, **it just fits in beautifully** with everything else that was happening within the school **with the school’s improvement plan...**”
- “Support from leadership, we were committed to it, we’re going to make it work, we’re going to give it a chance to work. I think that’s a key in anything we do and also making it Prep to 6. **It wasn’t just this level or that level it was everybody.** We discussed how it would work around each of the levels. I think that was the key and just to make it work to somehow build it in so we were reminded of it and prompting each other of how to go about it, I think that was the key, yes.”

Professional learning program evaluation

All schools remained engaged in the project over the 18 months of the professional learning program. Each professional learning day was evaluated to ensure that the program continued to meet participant needs over the 18 month period. Participant evaluations assessing teacher satisfaction with the program at the end of each day were consistently high, with 72% rating the professional learning sessions as very good to excellent. Overall, program school teachers viewed ERIS professional learning offered as more useful than control teachers rated professional learning they had received.*

3. Enacting curricula on these topics

ERIS curricula implementation

Two curriculum programs were offered in Phase 2 of the ERIS program, one on cultural diversity and one on conflict resolution. At the end of the first full school year of the program, nine out of 10 intervention schools had taught some ERIS-developed curricula, and ERIS program core team ($n=19$) and non-core team teachers ($n=89$) reported teaching significantly more hours of curricula on these topics than comparison teachers ($n=31$) from three control schools that had applied to do the ERIS program and were given the curricula but no professional learning program or support. *

The comments below from the core team teachers' "significant changes stories" highlight how the work done in the core team days, coupled with the ERIS curricula materials helped teachers develop the knowledge, confidence and skills to work differently with their students:

- Many teachers spoke about how ERIS had enabled them to "go a little bit deeper", by explicitly teaching about cultural diversity:
 - *I never had a unit of work where we really explored it in depth and that's when I went through that material [the ERIS cultural diversity curriculum]... I could see – oh, this is really fitting in with what we need... It **was the first time I felt that I as a teacher had explored all areas really well and the children had spoken honestly...** in the past perhaps I might have let [children's comments about skin colour] go, thinking, 'oh that's a sensitive thing'. [Now] we would talk about our coloured skin and I had never felt that I could do that before..."*
 - *"So, in the past I might have casually spoken about stereotypes etc., **now I specifically teach it** and as I'm teaching, the words and the language, the phrases, they get put up for them – we ... use the words like 'stereotypes' and 'homogenising', yes."*
 - *"We all feel more ready to take the lessons on it, number one, and also to address it incidentally. We would have addressed any issues that were brought to our attention ... but yeah **the actual teaching of it is probably the most significant part of the ERIS program I think.**"*

The following quotes illustrate that the ERIS curricula were viewed very positively by both teachers and students:

- *"I looked at all the units and [thought] **these are absolutely brilliant, these are fantastic.**"*
- *"[Students] were excited when they'd talk to me in the corridor. We've got the [ERIS CD] session this week and they'd come and talk to me about something they'd seen on TV or in the paper - **just their engagement and enthusiasm when they came in. The teachers would come back and tell me that they were very interested** - they took it back to the classroom teacher and were talking about it."*

4. Increasing students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in respecting diversity and managing conflict constructively

Impact of ERIS on students

Core team and other program teachers reported that their students understood and used significantly more concepts related to respect for cultural diversity and cooperative conflict resolution at post-program, compared to control teachers.* In the significant change interviews, teachers consistently reported the following changes in students:

- Openness– students took up opportunities to speak about culture, race, difference, etc.
 - *“...an appreciation that **it’s okay to have different beliefs.**”*
- An increase in children speaking out about cultural diversity to the teachers and having confidence that the teachers would deal with the issues
 - *“... the kids have perhaps been more open in coming out with if there has been an incident of addressing it themselves and saying something or at least bringing it to our attention. If they can’t address it themselves, they’ll bring it to our attention. So that’s good, so then we get onto it straight away... **Yeah definitely a shift in the silence, considerably.**”*
- Children being more respectful and accepting of one another - improved relationships
 - *“All I can say is that when you talk about prejudice, when you talk about stereotypes, when you actually talk about their hair and their colour, you find out. Yeah, they mind.... so when you talk about all these things and the understanding of one another grows, so much stuff comes out of their mouths and so much support for one another, or honest comments like, ‘I had no idea that that happened in your life’. **They start to have a bond and they look out for one another.** That’s all I can say. It happens anyway to a point, with the culture of the classroom, but **when you specifically address the things that we were taught to address in ERIS, more comes out.**”*
- Creating change
 - *“Because Australia is a multicultural society and especially in our area there have been some quite racist incidents and people being labelled more for their colour or their background and not as people. So I guess it’s **giving the students the opportunity to try to understand what is happening in society and to build on that for their future.**”*

Student responses to conflict resolution curriculum

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the conflict resolution curriculum was undertaken. A group of 54 students (from two schools) who had been taught the curriculum by their teachers were compared to 54 students who had not been taught the ERIS conflict resolution curriculum. This evaluation indicated that students who had been taught the curriculum:

- were better able to articulate what conflict is
- understood better the elements of a constructive, cooperative approach to managing conflicts that arise
- were better able to generate positive constructive ways of handling conflict when it arises such as the need to use a cooperative approach and generate possible options to satisfy both parties

Teachers also reported an improvement in student knowledge, skills and attitudes* and consistently noted the following:

- increased language to talk about conflicts
- greater willingness to discuss conflict openly e.g., *It's okay to talk about conflict*
- an increase in conflict resolution skills
- knowledge of a process (model) to address conflict effectively
- increased perspective taking and empathy
- a greater sense of fairness
- more effective and fair resolution of conflict

One school collected their own data and were able to identify a decrease in conflicts in the school yard since the introduction of ERIS. Other schools also noted a decrease in conflicts as a significant change since implementing the conflict resolution model throughout the school.



Challenges to implementation identified by participating teachers

Participants were asked to identify challenges they confronted in implementing the ideas from ERIS. The aim was to add to the literature on program implementation challenges and to find ways to address them.

- **Dissemination – time and support**
 - Core team members had some success in disseminating what they had learnt to the rest of their staff. Nonetheless, transforming small group/core team commitment to engagement of the whole staff can still be a challenge for staff, and future work needs to focus specifically on this aspect of the school change process
 - There was great variation across the schools in the level of dissemination from the core team. Specific challenges identified included:
 - The crowded curriculum – how to prioritise ERIS
 - How to link/integrate ERIS with other school agendas
 - Finding dedicated time to conduct professional learning with all staff
 - How to ensure effective staff learning
 - How to effectively condense the 6 day core team professional learning into smaller segments for use in staff meeting times
- **Challenging content**
 - Some core team staff commented on the resistance of some staff to a focus on cultural diversity issues. They found that some staff believed that there were no cultural diversity issues in the school and/or that talking about these issues might create problems that didn't exist. This experience of resistance by adults to working on cultural diversity is consistent with challenges identified in the research literature.

Some promising developments by the ERIS team in response to these issues

- Conducting the project over 18 months enabled the core teams to try out new approaches and then come back to the ERIS project team and other schools to help problem solve around specific challenges
- Core teams were provided with activities and slides that they could easily use with their staff
- The ERIS curricula were continually reviewed in response to feedback from staff to ensure they could be more easily integrated into what the schools were already doing
- Some schools were already using Restorative Practices to address conflict in their schools. The ERIS team were able to work with core teams to show how the ERIS conflict resolution model and restorative practices were complementary and could be integrated to enhance what the schools were doing
- Using the Diversity Doll discussions with students to gather information about their understandings and experiences of cultural diversity proved very powerful in alerting core team teachers to the presence of cultural diversity issues in their schools. Where resistance was encountered amongst the broader school staff, the core team could use this data as a way of presenting a clearer picture to their staff of issues around cultural diversity and/or conflict that had previously been hidden
- Core teams were supported in considering systematically what the sources of staff concerns about new ideas might be, and how to address those in creative and positive ways

Successful components of the ERIS project

Program participants and researchers identified a range of factors that contributed to effective implementation:

- Inclusion of leadership staff on core team enabled
 - prioritising of ERIS on the school agenda
 - providing dedicated time at the school to work with staff on ERIS

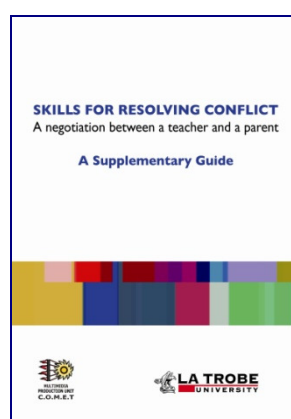
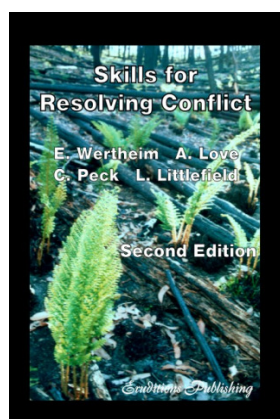
- Ongoing professional learning for core teams over 18 months
 - High quality of professional learning program evaluations
 - Opportunities for teachers to build on previous knowledge and reconnect with issues over time in a supportive, consistent professional learning environment which is particularly important when working on contentious and emotive issues like cultural diversity and discrimination
 - Opportunities to learn, gain broader perspective on issues from other schools, share and showcase achievements

- Use of the core team process
 - ERIS research outcomes supported the use of a core team model as an efficient and effective way to disseminate knowledge and skills and impact on attitudes
 - Schools in which core team members provided more professional learning to fellow staff had better outcomes in terms of knowledge and skills of staff in their school, supporting the ability of core teams to disseminate knowledge and skills throughout the school

- In school support from ERIS team (field visits)
 - Flexibility to address the individual needs of a diverse range of school communities
 - Responsiveness to school issues
 - Feedback loop – issues raised by schools in field visits could be addressed at professional learning days

- Useful Resources
 - *Curricula for students*
 - *Professional learning sessions for core team to use with staff*, including Powerpoint presentations, learning activities, visual models, spreadsheets, role play activities and a DVD modelling a parent-teacher negotiation.
 - *ERIS website*: An ERIS website was developed for the project. The website included password protected webpages for use by schools participating in the ERIS project and also includes information for the wider education community

Resources for adult learning



Dissemination and Continuing Partnerships

The outcomes of the ERIS project have been disseminated through publications in national and international (ERA ranked) journals and book chapters, and through national and international conference presentations. Some publications have been specifically targeted for broad dissemination through schools nationally, including invited papers in *Learning Matters* and *Education Horizons*. A list of presentations and publications to date, and in preparation or submitted, is included at the end of the report. The ERIS website includes information and resources available to the public as well as a participant-only area with specific resource materials for core teams and ERIS schools.

The partnership with the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne (CEOM) has continued beyond Phase 1 and 2 of the ERIS project. Working together with the CEOM, the Restorative Practices and ERIS models have been integrated, so that now ERIS concepts and skills are included in the CEOM Restorative Practices Strategy, allowing a much broader impact in that system. The Restorative Practices Strategy in 2008, 2009, and 2010 included this integrated model and included an ERIS team member conducting professional learning workshops for core teams from over 40 primary and secondary schools (who had not completed the full ERIS program). Materials and resources were provided for core teams to disseminate ERIS methodology in their schools. Evidence of schools disseminating ERIS can be found in school references to using the ERIS cultural diversity concepts during CEOM Student Wellbeing Drama Festivals. In addition, the ideas have been further disseminated in the Catholic Education system through an article in *Learning Matters* (Wertheim, Freeman, & Trinder, 2009).

Links established with the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development at the start of the ERIS program have continued, through the Senior Project Officer and Manager of the Multicultural Education Unit, and also through contact with the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre (LMERC). These associations have informed us of continuing opportunities, such as cultural diversity grants that ERIS schools have been able to apply for.

The ERIS team has also developed links with Foundation House, The Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture. Representatives of Foundation House attended most of the ERIS professional development workshops, gave positive feedback about the innovativeness of the ERIS approach to creating respect for cultural diversity and have kept the ERIS team informed about opportunities to promote the ERIS program.

The ERIS program, including reference to the ERIS website, has been included in a review of strategies and resources to address race-based discrimination and which support diversity in schools. The review was part of a Victorian Health Promotion Foundation project. (Greco, T., Priest, N., & Paradies, Y. (2010). Review of strategies and resources to address race-based discrimination and support diversity in schools. Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Carlton, Australia.)

The team is currently in the process of building further collaborations with schools to advance the ERIS methodology. We have submitted a funding application to undertake a project in 2011 which will provide a process for a geographical cluster of schools in the north west area of Melbourne, with culturally diverse communities, to listen to their communities' voices. The aim of this project is to address a lack of Australian data exploring primary school staff, student and family perceptions of the challenges they face, as well as the support they receive in developing respect for cultural diversity. This information will provide the foundation for the development of further professional learning, curricula and resources to deepen the work of the teachers in developing inclusive and culturally respectful school communities. The proposed project presents an opportunity for a new collaboration with Broadmeadows Communities for Children (Broadmeadows CfC), and continues the successful collaboration in the *Enhancing Relationships in School Communities (ERIS) Project* of Melbourne Graduate School of Education, the Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, La Trobe University and the Australian Psychological Society.

Discussions have also commenced with the McCaughey Centre, Melbourne School of Population Health, The University of Melbourne, about possibilities for collaboration on planned research and intervention projects.

Participating teachers have the final word

"What I've learnt myself, is that this is vital and this is where we're heading and it is so important, so to keep driving it! ... Australia is such a great country and we've got all this diversity, we need to really tap into it and use it in a positive way... it's really rich and vital and exciting and it can be taught positively."

"...this is a very big issue and we are a multicultural society and I think we as teachers have got this opportunity to try and change these things especially with our young children..."

ERIS Reference Group

We thank the following reference group members for supporting the work of the project. We are particularly grateful that a range of reference group members have gone on to become full partners in our work, continuing and elaborating their support of the ERIS project.

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Dr Trevor Batrouney	Adjunct Professor, School of International Community Studies, RMIT University (Melbourne)
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Mr John Roberts	Student Wellbeing, Northern Metropolitan Region, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Ms Philippa Lovell	Student Wellbeing, Catholic Education Office Melbourne
Ms Elleni Bereded-Samuel	Victorian Multicultural Commission/Victoria University
Ms Jadwiga Siwka	Former Principal, St Anthony's Primary School, Alphington
Ms Leanne Sheean	Former Principal, Haig St Primary School, Heidelberg Heights

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Publications

Publications

Trinder, M., Wertheim, E. H., Freeman, E., Sanson, A., Richardson, S., & Hunt, S. (2010). Comparison of the effectiveness of two forms of the *Enhancing Relationships in School Communities* program for promoting cooperative conflict resolution education in Australian primary schools. *Journal of Peace Education*, 7 (1), 85-105.

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Davis, K., Kotsanas, C., Srinivasan, P. & MacNaughton, G. Working with primary teachers to support inclusive schools: Impacts of a professional development program. To be submitted to the *British Journal of Sociology of Education*.

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