



CIS EVENT

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Anti-Semitism in the Schoolyard: Combatting Racial Prejudice Early On



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This presentation is part of a broader, qualitative research project, which began in 2006 and is continuing to date. This research includes six Australian Jewish schools, three in Sydney and three in Melbourne, two Jewish schools in Hong Kong, one in Singapore, one in Auckland, one in Beijing and Shanghai, as well as the Australian Boards of Jewish Education. In addition, Professor Gross has researched six Jewish schools in Paris, three in Brussels and one in Geneva.

Although our research initially only focused on the private Jewish day schools, we decided to extend it to the Jewish Special Religious Education/Special Religious Instruction (SRE/SRI) offered in government schools and known colloquially as "scripture classes". In our planning, we did not even consider the issue of antisemitism. This was especially so in Australia, with its multicultural ethos, where we thought stereotypical antisemitism was a phenomenon of the past.

To our amazement, both primary and high-school Jewish students in state schools spontaneously told us that they loved to attend SRE/SRI classes because they found them to be a "safe place" in the face of the antisemitism that they were experiencing in the playground.

In this presentation we will:

1. Provide a brief background re racism and anti-Semitism;
2. Discuss research about racial bullying and exclusion of NESB children in the schoolyard;
3. Explain our methodology before outlining our findings and discussing their significance;
4. Discuss a more specific study in Canberra; and
5. Discuss and make recommendations.

Educating for multiculturalism is a major challenge for migrant societies across the world. Some politicians, such as the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, have claimed that efforts to create a multicultural society have failed. Whilst these views were also reflected in statements by former Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, the Australian government is still investing significant resources in multicultural education. We argue that such an approach is needed in order to counter racial bullying in the playground.

Old Racism

Old Racism has a long history in Australia and has taken three major forms:

1. Fear of "Asian hordes" or the "Yellow Peril";
2. Discrimination against and repressive treatment of the Indigenous Australian people; and
3. Suspicion of separate ethno-cultural identities among migrant or non-Anglo-Celtic groups

As is well known, hostility to Asians was major factor in Australia's Federation. The various anti-Chinese colonial laws were combined in new legislation strictly limiting migration, in what has become known as the White Australia Policy. Founded in the 1890s, the Labor Party was particularly opposed to Asian migration and the party supported these racist policies.



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f6/1886_Anti-Chinese_Cartoon_from_Australia.jpg

Australian policies followed a similar pattern to other colonial societies. Protestant beliefs fostered the view that coloured people and pagan cultures were inferior to white, European culture. Sociologist Mervyn Hartwig argued that the individualist ethic also prevented Australians from treating Aborigines as equals. It is important to remember that the indigenous Australians were only recognised as citizens in the 1967 referendum.

Xenophobia in the form of antisemitism also has a long history in Australia and crossed party lines. In the yellow press, such as the cartoons in *The Bulletin*, Jews were portrayed as "hooked-nosed money lenders".



Old Moses: 'Ah! Ikey, my poy, your old fater's got to tie fery soon now'.

His Son Ikey: 'Nonsense father, you'll live another twenty-five years yet'.

Old Moses: 'No, no. Die Alighty von't take me at a 'undred, ven he can get me at seventy-five'.

Source: *The Bulletin*, 11 Nov 1899

Cited in Suzanne D. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora:*

Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia

Sydney: Brandl & Schlesinger, 1997, p. 96

Left-wing anti-Jewish attitudes manifested themselves in Frank Anstey's *The Kingdom of Shylock* published in 1917. These negative views again came to the fore in the anti-Jewish refugee hysteria in the 1930s and 1940s, which led to restrictions on Jewish refugees and later Jewish Holocaust survivors.

Multiculturalism: A Major Sea Change

In the 1970s, Australia experienced a major sea change under Gough Whitlam's Labor government. The White Australia policy ended and multiculturalism was introduced. Liberal PM Malcolm Fraser reinforced this policy. By the 1980s support for cultural pluralism was endorsed by government policy and embedded in educational philosophy. Despite these efforts, racism continues to be of concern, especially with the emergence of the 'New Racism'

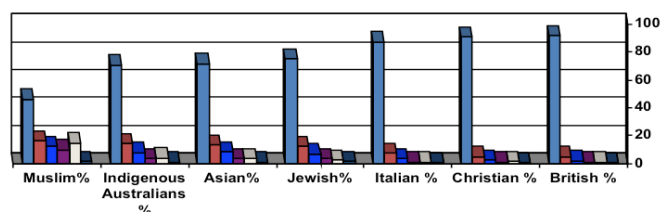
The New Racism

"Cultural racism" is the new form of racism. According to Dunn et al, it is based on "the insurmountability of cultural differences". People from different cultures are seen to be creating the problem of "threats to social cohesion" and "national unity" (Dunn K. M. et al 'Constructing Racism in Australia' *Australian Journal of Social Issues* Vol 39, No 4, Nov 2004, p. 410). This raises concerns about out-groups; cultural diversity; and national cohesion and issues of normalcy and privilege. As the following bar graph indicates, the greatest levels of concerns and racism found in their study was against Muslims, followed by indigenous Australians, Asians and Jews.

They also found that there was a positive association between age groups and level of intolerance to Muslims, Indigenous Australians, Asians and Jewish Australians. Older people most intolerant but the level of intolerance decreases progressively for younger age groups except for Jews, as seen in the following bar graph on the right.

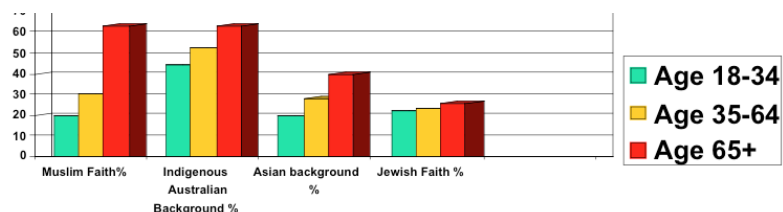
With the issue of countering the new racism the key question is what role can education play in the face of cultural racism?

Levels of concern regarding out-marriage of a relative, to specific groups



Source: Dunn K. M. et al 'Constructing Racism in Australia' *Australian Journal of Social Issues* Vol 39, No 4, Nov 2004, p. 410

Stated concern regarding inter-marriage, to selected 'out-groups by age



Source: Dunn K. M. et al 'Constructing Racism in Australia' *Australian Journal of Social Issues* Vol 39, No 4, Nov 2004, p. 415

Australian Jewry

The Jewish community in Australia is the oldest non-indigenous ethnic group in Australia, with the first Jews arriving with the First Fleet in 1788. The largest waves came before and after World War II and the Nazi Holocaust, bringing a total of 35,000 European Jews. Smaller numbers have arrived since 1960 from South Africa, the Soviet Union and Israel. Today's Jewish community numbers 112,000, accounting for 0.4% of the population with the majority living in Sydney and Melbourne.

Despite the benefits of multiculturalism, Australian Jewry has experienced an increase in antisemitic incidents since 1990. It is unclear whether this is due to extreme right wing groups, the radical left or Islamic extremism. This has placed a huge security burden on the Jewish community.

During the last five years communal statistics have indicated a further increase, but there is a debate as to whether this indicates a rise in anti-Semitism. Andrew Markus and Jessica Taft dispute this and argue that the increase in the number of incidents is due to the proliferation of hate mail (2011). They claim that from GEN08 findings the majority of Australian Jews are not seriously affected, with only 5% claiming to be seriously affected, and a further 22% occasionally.

However, 58% of respondents experienced or witnessed some form of antisemitism and this percentage increased to 71% for age group 18-24. This is the relevant statistic for our study – although GEN08 did not include school aged students.

Methodology

This is an ethnographic, qualitative study, including classroom observations and interviews with SRE/SRI classes in state schools. It is based on grounded theory, which enabled us to follow interactions grounded in real life. In-depth interviews were conducted with all key players: students, parents, teachers and principals.

As discussed, we did not ask specifically about anti-Semitism – we simply asked why the children chose to come to SRE/SRI – but sometimes unexpected data can emerge, leaving the researcher stunned. This is exactly what happened since our main focus was the interrelationships between organizational structure, power allocation and identity in Jewish education.

Even though we came from outside the state school system, we were an inside group for the interviewees, and we could be more sensitive to the data we heard and collected. The fact that the students felt safe enough to reveal to us explicitly their negative playground experiences was a clear acknowledgement that they saw us as "insiders". They felt that they could be honest with us and tell us something that was considered not to be "politically correct".

Population

In Sydney, the main state schools offering Jewish SRE are Bellevue Hill Primary, Rose Bay Primary, Vaucluse Primary and Rose Bay Secondary College, in the eastern suburbs, and St Ives Primary, St Ives East Primary and Killara High on the North Shore. In each school, 20–50 per cent of the school population is Jewish. In Melbourne, the situation is the same for Jewish SRI in Elwood, Caulfield and St Kilda.

Findings

As mentioned, we did not ask specifically about antisemitism – it just emerged. We heard the same stories and the same stereotypes in Sydney and Melbourne, with the situation worsening at high school. One male student said without prompting:

... if you are Jewish you are teased. They call you stingy. They throw five cents at you. Or they throw money on the ground and call out 'who is the Jew?' Or they will say: 'That's a Jew nose.' They say something about payot [sidelocks]. Then they have a brit set [circumcision set]. Or they take scissors and go like this [demonstrating scissors cutting with his hands]: 'do you want another brit?' (2009).

The Coordinator of the Jewish Student Network told us:

... they're in an environment where we are, as Jewish people in the world, we are a minority, but they very much stick out in their school as the Jew. They talk to me often.... and have concerns about the Jew jokes and some of them will have a five cent coin.... dropped on the floor and a student will be like: 'Hey, Jew, you should pick that up.' Their friends say this to them. They say it jokingly, but it hurts them a bit. It does hurt. They say it hurts them, but they know their friend is joking (2011).

She also reported on the experiences of a child who shared this story with her at a camp:

CHILD: A boy once said to me that in his English [class], he hated going to English. He hated it and I said to him: 'Why do you hate going to English?' He said: 'Every time I walk into English, two boys stand up and go Heil Hitler to me!'

INTERVIEWER: They what?

CHILD: Said Heil Hitler.

INTERVIEWER: Heil Hitler, oh!

She commented that in schools that were more multicultural, the antisemitism was "more under the surface", but it still existed. As a result, she was greeted as a "celebrity" when the visiting the schools.

Similarly, the CEO of the United Jewish Education Board

(UJEB) in Melbourne stated:

I would argue that every single child at secondary school, if they identify themselves as Jewish, is receiving some sort of—or has been bullied because of that and has undergone those sorts of experiences because of that. I don't think it's an occasional thing. I don't think it happens here and there. I think it happens constantly (2012).

Whilst this is a very strong statement, it reflected his feelings at the time.

In junior high school Jewish students can suffer because of the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They are seen as being "Zionists", a word which has very negative connotations today, and supporters of Israel, so that the antisemitism takes on a political connotation. As the same CEO commented: "When Israel's in the paper, that's not good for the Jewish students in secondary schools. Especially if there's some sort of conflict or something going on, that never bodes well for our students."

Responses to Antisemitism

We found that the students had two main responses. Many do not to admit to being Jewish at school and go to non-Jewish scripture so that the other students will not know that they are Jewish. Others identify strongly as Jews and look forward to their SRE/SRI classes. They told us that this is where they meet their friends and find a "safe place".

The parents and teachers had to be prodded to comment. They tended to minimise the significance of the anti-Jewish incidents. As one of our respondents explained: "Whereas I think, for a lot of the kids that are promoting antisemitic activity through their bullying, [they] are just ignorant and they're just regurgitating something that they heard their parents say or they heard someone else say." The principals' response was also one of denial or minimisation and they tend to be very defensive about the issue.

Some teachers noted that the government does have policies in place in regard to racial bullying but these tend to be very broad and do not specify groups, apart from the indigenous Australians. One teacher told us:

Sadly, as far as I know, Jewish students and anti-Jewish feelings in schools have never been addressed. Bullying is so entrenched in school environments that teachers often do nothing about it and students do not tell teachers or their parents about it either ... The other problem is that, in my brief experience, I've noticed that some teachers do hold deep (and sometimes well-hidden) anti-Jewish feelings. Even if something is raised, I'm not sure anything would be done about it.

Thus, whilst officially the government has clear policies against racism, these are not implemented effectively in schools.

The nature of Schoolyard Antisemitism

Our interviewees told us that there are a number of factors which contribute to this antisemitism. These are:

1. Religious anti-Judaism, relating to the accusation of deicide in the New Testament.
2. Racial anti-Semitism, based on the negative image of Jews as a race. This was the most common at primary level, presenting Jews as greedy and evil.
3. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where legitimate criticism of Israel morphs into an irrational hatred of Jews, tended to appear more in secondary high schools.

By far, the most common story narrated by the students was the 'coin story'; we heard this from the children in both Sydney and Melbourne. This antisemitic canard appears to have been passed down in the school playground for over 100 years as this cartoon shows:



CAPTION: HARD CASH

Scene – outside an old clothes shop.

Two boys (Jew and gentile) fighting.

Old Jew (from the doorway): "Ikey, my boy, v'y don't ye go for 'im – foller 'im around?"

Little Ikey: "I can't fader. I've got my foot on a penny he dropped!"

The Bulletin 25 December 1897.

Australian Jewish Historical Society Archives, Sydney, AB204.

Canberra Study: Professor Danny Ben-Moshe

A similar study was undertaken in 2011 at the request of the ACT Jewish community. This study was requested after a child shared with her Jewish Studies teacher at the community centre an antisemitic experience, with other children then joining in. Not all the children there had personally experienced antisemitism, but all had heard of it and feared it. Professor Ben-Moshe revealed similar findings reflecting the "deep-seated stereotypes of Jews" with comments of Jews being greedy and stingy. The presence of swastikas was also noted in the interviews.

The children did not tell their parents about their negative experiences because they feared their reaction would aggravate the situation. The parent focus-group stressed that they were very concerned about what they had heard, including in relation to the impact of the Israel/Palestinian conflict.

Discussion

Our findings have shown that there is a strong disconnect between the official levels of classroom practice and what is happening in the playgrounds. As Kathy Shollenberger noted in her study:

Because the age [of middle school students] is a difficult one, the adult vision of change can vary [with different visions]: a school without bullies, without homophobia or sexism or racism, a school in which students take the lead, a school which functions as a genuine community. This is an important conversation, but the author [Shollenberger] states that she has often been frustrated by the lack of concrete success, whatever the reason—student or adult resistance, an already jam-packed plate of activities and missions, or lack of follow-through.

We found that the disconnection was due to both student and adult resistance. On the one hand, the students were reluctant to take action and report the incidents. Many preferred to deny their Jewish identity and even attend non-Jewish SRI/SRE classes. Similarly, the Canberra study found that the children were disinclined to report such incidents.

The students also tended to accept the antisemitism as a normal part of life and to focus on those friendships that were accepting of their Jewish backgrounds.

In Canberra they only shared their experiences with their Hebrew schoolteacher after one of the students volunteered the information in 2010. In Sydney and Melbourne, they confided to the Jewish Student Network coordinators when they felt they could tell them within an environment of trust.

Most adults in Sydney and Melbourne simply denied that there were any specific problems of antisemitism. There could be two reasons for the parents' reluctance in talking about this issue: it could be a matter of repression and/or the fact that they accept the existence of such racial prejudice as normal and do not feel they need to comment on it. In Canberra, there was a more honest appraisal of the situation, with an unexpectedly high level of participation in the parent focus group.

However, while they did admit to the problem, the research findings stressed that they thought it was just due to bullying and not related to anti-Jewish feelings. The study specifically commissioned by the ACT Jewish community claimed:

A child was more likely to experience antisemitism if they were generally less popular and were being bullied anyway. The antisemitism being expressed did not appear to be based on religious or ethnic hatred per se, but was rather another tool to intimidate someone who is already being bullied in multiple ways.

While there may be some truth in this statement, the nature of the attacks reported by Jewish children across three Australian states indicates that they are rooted in classical racial anti-Semitism.

The denial looks like a defence mechanism. Obviously, if the existence of a problem is not even recognized, it is not possible to develop teaching strategies to resolve it. The denial by educators of Jewish children being attacked in the playground on the basis of their ethnic identity is, therefore, very problematic. "Playground spaces remain important sites in which children learn about social hierarchies, and encounter cross-sections of society..."

In a South Australian study, the teachers denied that there was no interaction between newly arrived students (NAPs) and non-NAPs in the playground, claiming that such interactions occurred frequently. This claim did not match the researchers' observations.

Jewish students accept verbal bullying, which they take for granted and believe that they have to adjust to, as if it were normal behaviour, probably because the undercurrent of antisemitism in the playground is endemic and longstanding. Jews feel that, as long as it does not manifest itself in violence, they need to cope with it. This reaction is typical of the way people manage bullying.

Only recently has verbal bullying been classified as violent behaviour; previously, the community focused only on physical violence. It is recognized that incitement to hatred is a form of 'low-level violence' that can eventually lead to physical as well as verbal attacks.

It is important to stress that, while we only studied the bullying of Jewish students, other minority ethnic and religious groups in Australia also experience verbal racial attacks in the playground and school environment.

Recommendations

The Teachers

There is a need for a better understanding among teachers of cultural diversity, and any specific cultural and religious issues facing their own school population. The teachers need to be aware of the importance of providing a secure zone. The teaching-learning experience can be seen as a matter of security and protection, as a protective shield against possible storms in the outside world. SRE/SRI fills an important role for minority groups, such as the Hindus, Bahais, and Jewish children. The teachers also need to take action when a problem is revealed and develop strategies through simulation games; group discussions; creative drama; and other informal education techniques.

Overall, there it would be valuable to learn from case studies of different ethnic groups and their racist experiences. In addition, it is valuable to bring children from different ethnic groups together so that children can learn to understand other cultures and not fear ethnic and religious differences.

School Principals

It is also important to educate not only classroom teachers but also school principals about how to respond in a positive fashion to problems of racial discrimination that occur in the playground. Our findings show that the principals involved responded with denial. Hence better strategies need to be developed to enable principals to acknowledge racial problems in the playground and to establish better policies for handling complaints.

Department of School Education

While there are many programs in schools that attempt to address the issue of bullying and racial discrimination, our research has demonstrated that these are generally not followed up; they do not refer to specific ethnic groups; and are not successful in relation to Jewish students and antisemitism. Schools need to educate children explicitly about the problem of negative Jewish stereotypes, as revealed in the 'coin story' discussed above, and initiate systematic intervention programs to combat STEREOTYPES of all ethnic groups. These include the two other traditional groups who were under attack, the Asians and the indigenous Australians, as well as today the Muslims.

Conclusions

Bullying is first and foremost a violation of human rights. While there is a general understanding that this phenomenon should be an integral part of the school curriculum and teacher education agendas, there is less awareness, and in many cases actual denial or minimization, with regard to the bullying of Jewish children. The claim is consistently made by principals and teachers that such attacks were just part of normal children's behaviour in the playground, but this is an inadequate response.

The prevalence of racial stereotypes in Australia could also apply to Asians and the indigenous population, both of whom are associated with longstanding negative images dating back to nineteenth-century Australia. There has been insufficient research as to how this phenomenon manifests itself in the playground, both in relation to general racism as well as specific anti-Jewish racism:

- To what extent are the children influenced by their peers?
- And to what extent are they influenced by their home background and other factors in society?

Through our research, we have shown that Jewish children are being racially bullied and that this is an ongoing phenomenon that has occurred over generations. However, more research is needed on playground racism, including the reasons why children need to display racial prejudice and the ways other ethnic groups are affected by racial stereotyping. This will contribute to the development of strategies to break this vicious generational cycle.