

UNESCO Conference Report

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Education for Shared Values for Intercultural and Interfaith Understanding. Adelaide, 28 November to 3 December 2004

The Australian National Commission for UNESCO, in partnership with National Commissions in the Asia Pacific region, UNESCO offices in Bangkok and Apia, the Asia Pacific Centre for Education for International Understanding in Korea, the World Education Fellowship (WEF), UNESCO, Asia Pacific Network for International Education and Values Education, APNIEVE, Rotary International and other local and international partners, hosted a major international conference on Education for Shared Values for Intercultural and Interfaith Understanding, held at the University of Adelaide from 28 November to 3 December 2004.

The conference was attended by over 250 educators, faith representatives, and young people from 51 countries across the Asia Pacific region and beyond, with representatives from every continent. In addition to the plenary sessions, there was a Youth Forum attended by over 120 young people and 30 concurrent workshops, where participants heard about case studies from throughout the region, and had the opportunity to discuss innovative curriculum approaches and teaching strategies, to promote intercultural and interfaith understanding for peace through shared values in education.

The reports from the workshops contributed to the final conference communiqué which contains recommendations to be forwarded to UNESCO for action to be implemented world wide in this important curriculum area. The conference communiqué is a Call to Action for:

1. Education systems and institutions to explore ways of incorporating into curricula, common and agreed values, and educational content capable of promoting intercultural and interfaith understanding.
2. Education systems to review, build and promulgate knowledge about the most effective ways of promoting values and intercultural and interfaith understanding through pre-school, school and tertiary curricula, including out-of-school and non-formal education programmes.
3. Recognising the importance of establishing institution-wide cultures that model and support intercultural and interfaith understanding.
4. Recognising the necessity of preparing and supporting teachers to model and promote values for intercultural and interfaith understanding.
5. Governments and UNESCO to support the development and exchange of quality teaching resources for intercultural and interfaith understanding.
6. UNESCO to hold an international conference on the theme of Education for Shared Values for Intercultural and Interfaith Understanding every four years with the next one to be held in China in 2008 to coincide with the International Olympics.

During the first day of the conference, key speakers and panel discussants addressed the issues and challenges faced in the current global context for achieving shared values for intercultural and interfaith understanding. Leaders from all leading world faiths had the

opportunity to comment on this topic from their faith perspective, together with leading academics in the field who introduced the implications for education.

On the second and third days, senior educators from throughout the region specifically focused on the implications for education, in relation to curriculum development and design, innovative teaching and learning methodologies and pedagogy, teacher training and research, school culture and the learning environment and the supportive role of Information and Communication Technology.

The thirty workshops which followed the plenary sessions, provided the opportunity for keen participation and discussion covering the following themes:

Content

Appropriate content for promoting shared values for intercultural and interfaith understanding.

Values in Education

Shared values for intercultural and interfaith understanding as foundations for education systems and curriculum frameworks.

The Teaching and Learning Process

Alternative teaching methodologies for peace, tolerance and understanding.

Curriculum Approaches

Innovative approaches to curricula for education for shared values for intercultural and interfaith understanding.

Supportive Learning Environments

Developing a whole-school community culture sensitive to learning for intercultural and interfaith understanding.

Implications for Teacher Training and Research

Exploring teacher training and research issues for education for shared values for intercultural and interfaith understanding.

Case Studies

Sharing case studies of alternative approaches, methodologies and student learning experiences leading to intercultural and interfaith understanding.

Engaging Young People

Fostering positive interactions among teachers and students for promoting intercultural and interfaith understanding. A Youth Forum consisting of over 120 young people from many diverse cultural and faith backgrounds was also held in relation this theme.

On the final day, the written reports from the workshops were collated by theme, and were reported upon in plenary session, with opportunities for delegates to comment. The final communiqué, which became the Call to Action, included the recommendations from all the workshop themes and the comments made in plenary. In the closing plenary session, conference delegates had the opportunity to comment on the final conference recommendations which were then endorsed collectively.

In addition to official proceedings, conference participants were also treated to a number of special events such as:

- A multi-faith service where representatives of each faith joined together in a shared service calling for peace and harmony through shared values;
- A welcome BBQ hosted by Rotary International to reinforce the Director-General's signed agreement with Rotary to collaborate for peace;
- A conference dinner and also home-hosted dinners to experience life in the homes and communities of Australians of many diverse cultures and faiths;
- A welcome reception hosted by the Lord Mayor of Adelaide and a farewell reception co-hosted by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Adelaide;
- Visits to South Australian schools showcasing innovative programs in practice relating to the conference themes; and
- Many cultural performances, local cultural tours and a visit to the local wildlife park to see Australian fauna in nature.

Key speakers included:

- Dr Mary Joy Pigozzi, Director Quality Education, UNESCO Paris
- Mr Sheldon Shaeffer, Director UNESCO Regional Office, Bangkok
- Dr Samuel Lee, Secretary-General, Korean National Commission for UNESCO
- Dr Fe Hidalgo, Undersecretary for Education in the Philippines
- Professor Gary Bouma, UNESCO Chair Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue Asia-Pacific
- Mrs Esiteri Kamikamica, University of the South Pacific Institute of Education in Fiji
- Professor He Guanghu, Renmin University, China
- Mr Bruce Wilson, Chief Executive Australian Curriculum Corporation
- Dr Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge, University of Malaysia
- Professor Srivastava, former Dean, National Council Educational Research and Training, India

and many other speakers, panel members and workshop presenters from throughout the region.

The conference programme featured messages to delegates from:

- The Director-General UNESCO, Mr Koichiro Matsuura
- The Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Alexander Downer MP
- The Premier of the State of South Australia, Hon Mike Rann MP
- The Chairman of the Australian National Commission for UNESCO, Prof Ken Wiltshire AO.

The plenary sessions were chaired by members of the Conference Steering Committee from throughout the Asia Pacific region. The Chief Rapporteur was Professor Geoff Masters, Chief Executive of the Australian Council for Educational Research. The workshops were chaired by senior educators from throughout the region.

During the conference, meetings of UNESCO Associated Schools Project (ASP) network, (ASPnet) educators and coordinators were held with the assistance of Ms Yayoi Segi-Vltchek from the Apia office and Ms Sigrid Niedermayer from UNESCO Paris. There was a combined Regional meeting and sub regional Pacific and Asian ASPnet meetings, all of which produced recommendations related to the conference themes.

The recommendations call upon the Director-General of UNESCO to ensure that the UNESCO ASPnet is reinforced, supported and resourced in order to significantly contribute to Education For All goals and quality education, and produce and disseminate quality learning materials for the children of the world and intensify teacher training as a contribution to intercultural dialogue and values education.

The conference represents a significant initial step forward for values education for intercultural and interfaith understanding, which has led to an offer from the Hwazan Satellite TV Station to regularly telecast programs on values education throughout the world. It was also recommended that a conference on this theme be held regularly every four years with the possibility of the next one being held in either Iran or the People's Republic of China, in conjunction with the Olympics.

The final conference report and Call to Action were presented to the Director General of UNESCO in April 2005 by the Chairman of the South Australian National Commission for UNESCO, Professor Kenneth Wiltshire.

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