LOVE THY NEIGHBOURS:

Racial Tolerance among Young Australians

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Professor Thomas AM is Professor of Psychology at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. She was former full-time Chairperson of the Victorian Multicultural Commission. She has published several research papers in both international and Australian journals. Her effort in maintaining harmony among ethnic communities enabled her to develop a deep understanding of the importance of promoting tolerance.

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Executive Summary

Racial prejudice can lead to friction, disharmony and even physical violence. It is a major social problem in many societies and one from which Australia is not immune . However, evidence is accumulating that living in harmony may be better served by increasing understanding about tolerance and acceptance rather than focusing on decreasing prejudice.

The Australian Research Council and the Australian Multicultural Foundation funded this project, which aimed to study racial tolerance among young Australians. The value of the current study was its focus on the positive aspects of social perceptions and behaviours in contrast to the large body of research into the negative aspects of prejudice.

The study used three short dilemma-like stories to assess tolerance. Each story dealt with an event depicting a form of intolerance/tolerance relevant to the Australian context (Aboriginal, Asian and English people).

The outcomes of the project examine how age, gender and situational and behavioural contexts, influence racial tolerant judgements. It also examines the kind of justifications young people used to support tolerance and intolerance. Participants were children (aged 11 to 12), young adolescents (aged 14 to 15) and young adults (16- 22). They were asked to make judgements and justify them on two aspects. First, to whom and under what circumstances were they willing to extend their tolerance. Second, whether they were tolerant of people's *beliefs, speech* or *actions* within each story.

This study found that the majority of students supported racial tolerance. They also showed tolerant judgments equally towards people from Aboriginal, Asian or

English backgrounds. Students of 11 to 12 years of age found to be more tolerant than the older two age groups. There was a tendency for females to be more tolerant than males overall. When both age and gender were considered, the least tolerant of the three groups were males in the two older age groups.

Students rejected *acting* with intolerance, or discriminating against others, more often than either holding such *beliefs* or *talking* about them It appears that acting intolerantly or discriminating against others was rarely permissible, but holding prejudiced beliefs at times and talking about them often seemed more permissible.

Young people used of several kinds of justifications in support of racial tolerance. The most common response to endorse tolerance was based on issues relating to fairness, which was expressed through appeal to equality, rights and merit. This form of justifications was used consistently by all the three age groups, but more often by the two younger age groups. The second set of justifications concerned the need to be reasonable, rational and even reflective. Thus students expressed opinions that racial intolerance was due to holding stupid, silly, and unreasonable ideas The third set of justifications was appealing to empathy such as personal feelings, perspective taking and harm to society.

The major constraint to tolerance that emerged, was not prejudice towards others, but beliefs *in freedom of speech* as a democratic right. Some students in this project felt it was permissible to *speak* about prejudiced beliefs and, at times, hold them. They justified such judgements and decisions with a spontaneous appeal to freedom of speech for themselves and others. They assumed that it was permissible to express prejudiced beliefs openly 'because we have free speech in this country'.

The appeal to freedom of speech as justification for holding and speaking prejudiced beliefs increased with age.

There are implications for curriculum design and education programs to be drawn from the findings of the data.

It is evident that pre-adolescents are able to understand about tolerance and intolerance, and that they reject intolerance vigorously. Harnessing pre-adolescents' strong rejection of intolerance and support for tolerance should not be underestimated in designing curriculum for primary school students.

Educational programs need to be developed that take the multifaceted nature of racial tolerance into consideration. The finding that adolescent males and young adult males are the least tolerant groups indicates that we need targeted, innovative educational programs to challenge these groups into reflecting about their thinking towards others who are different from them.

Educating for, and promoting, forbearance is very different from educating for consciously rejecting intolerance and promoting acceptance of others. Programs need to aim for a conscious rejection of prejudiced attitudes, beliefs and responses.

In conclusion, education aimed at promoting tolerance may need to focus more on developing socio-cognitive skills which enables people to consciously assess and reject their own and others prejudiced beliefs; de-emphasising the racial characteristics of people; and, especially for young males, developing the ability to empathise with others and to understand the potential harm that intolerance causes.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1   Background to the Research about Racial Tolerance

'Toleration makes difference possible, difference makes toleration necessary' (Walzer, 1997, p. xii).

We live in a complex world that is racially and culturally diverse, but not necessarily harmonious, as current events remind us. Multinational migration of either ethnic workers or refugees, whether for economic or political reasons, is becoming more and more prevalent (Iram, 2001) resulting in a world where monocultural societies are virtually extinct today (Walzer, 1997). Thus, globally, cultural and ethnic diversity has increased the need for tolerance of racial differences. Tolerance is necessary when difference or diversity is present because it is only when confronting diversity that our acceptance of others is truly tested (Robinson, et al., 2001; Vogt, 1997; Witenberg, 2000a). Unfortunately, our knowledge and ability to reduce prejudice and discrimination has proved to be a very difficult task (Aboud, 1993; Aboud & Doyle, 1996). Therefore, understanding more about tolerance when it is applied to racial and cultural characteristics is an important research goal, both theoretically and practically. Such insight may help to shape the debate and practice of social policies related to productive diversity in a multicultural environment and provide a basis for the design of community and school-based education programs (Thomas, 1998).

Evaluations of education and/or intervention programs aimed at reducing prejudice have yielded mixed results. Programs aimed to promote tolerance may be an alternative route to a more harmonious society. Some researchers have suggested that

a fuller, separate understanding of each process may offer unique implications for educational and social policy (Robinson, et al., 2001; Witenberg, 2000, 2002a).

To expand the limited knowledge available concerning the age-related difference about racial tolerance, we asked children (aged 11 to 12), young adolescents (aged 14 to 15) and older adolescents (aged 17 to 18) to consider and make judgements about dilemma-like stories based on real-life incidents that could be resolved using either tolerant or intolerant judgements. In the current study we assessed racial tolerance, using a cognitive developmental approach and methodology informed by domain specific theories (Case, 1992). We also asked a different set of questions about tolerance than those proposed by the research about prejudice. That is, when tolerance manifests itself, what is the pattern of responses for racially tolerant judgements and what is the effect of story context and age on the pattern of judgements? Possible gender differences were also explored.

This research involved students making judgements and justifying them on two aspects. First, the study examined the content of three stories, asking to whom and under what circumstances the participants were willing to extend their tolerance. Second, the study examined three different responses to the same event within each story. Specifically, students were asked to make judgements about people's beliefs, speech and actions within each story. How tolerance is defined was also considered. Tolerance is an ambiguous and complex concept open to several interpretations ranging from forbearance to full acceptance. The next section addresses the complexity of definitional issues of tolerance (Mendus, 1989; Newey, 1999; Oberdiek 2001).

2   What is Tolerance?

The meanings of racism and racial prejudice are relatively straightforward, as is the meaning of discrimination. 'Prejudice reflects an unfavourable judgement towards a particular group. Discrimination involves behaving differently, usually unfairly, toward the members of a group'. In comparison, tolerance is a much more ambiguous and complex concept open to several interpretations (Robinson et al., 2000, p. 5).

The most commonly accepted definition of tolerance emphasises forbearance, endurance or more simply 'putting up with' that which is disliked, threatening, or which involves negative feelings without interference. Vogt (1997) notes that such form of tolerance always involves compromise. Tolerance defined as *endurance* involves a recognition that other people have different opinions and practices but it does not entail any form of acceptance or support of the difference. Similarly, Burwood and Wyeth (1998) define tolerance as 'an intentional choice not to interfere with conduct which one disapproves' (p. 465). These definitions of tolerance imply that a person can be tolerant and prejudiced simultaneously. One can endure and refrain from acting intolerantly, but remain biased, disapproving or judgemental. For example, a schoolteacher may hold prejudiced beliefs towards students from a different racial or cultural group, but may act in a tolerant way in order to maintain his or her position. We tend to assume that tolerance and prejudice are opposites of each other, when in fact we can have both simultaneously.

'Tolerance as endurance' carries with it the connotations of superiority at worst and patience and fortitude at best. Embedded in the idea of 'tolerance as endurance' is the notion that what is endured is barely legitimate, or even socially or morally wrong.

Who of us wants to be tolerated/endured because of our skin colour, our culture, or for that matter our gender, or our religion?.

However, tolerance can also be defined as the *absence of prejudice* towards those 'whose practices, race, religion, nationality, etc., differ from one's own' (Robinson et al., 2000 p. 3). This definition focuses on absence of prejudice and goes beyond simply enduring or refraining from interfering. This conceptualisation of tolerance has been adopted by much of the research into prejudice, particularly with children. However, as pointed out earlier, absence of prejudice does not imply tolerance. It is hard to argue that the absence of discrimination is necessarily evidence of tolerance, particularly in a young child who may not have even noticed the markers of racial or cultural difference (Robinson et al., 2000). Prejudice and tolerance are most likely different psychological concepts and the lack of one does not necessarily entail the presence of the other (Witenberg, 2000). Burwood and Wyeth (1998) argue that we should reach an intentional position where each one of us disapproves of fewer things. Without conscious deliberation and intentions, tolerance is thoughtless and devoid of value.

The strongest and, perhaps, most ideal way to think of tolerance depends on full acceptance of others when differences between the 'others' and oneself are recognised. This involves a conscious rejection of biased beliefs and behaviour, and the valuing of others irrespective of their colour or creed. Acceptance of differences and diversity also entails 'enthusiastic endorsement of difference' (Walzer, 1997, p.11). Although seemingly an ideal form of tolerance, indiscriminate acceptance in its most extreme form could also lead to acceptance of questionable practices and human

rights violations, such as if freedom of speech is extended to all forms of intolerant views, including neo-Nazi propaganda (Oberdiek, 2001).

Thus 'an alternative view of tolerance is that it involves a conscious rejection of prejudiced attitudes, beliefs and responses. That is, one's own negative stereotypes are recognised, judged against experiential knowledge or value systems, and rejected' (Robinson et al., 2000, p. 4). Recognising and rejecting prejudiced views moves a person from simply being 'a narrow-minded bigot who shows restraint' (Burwood & Wyeth, 1998, p. 469) to a person who is tolerant both in judgement and conduct. We adopted 'reflective tolerance' for the purpose of this research because this definition involves an active, conscious, reflective agent. Reflection allows for consideration of both tolerance and intolerance.

3   Past Developmental Research about Tolerance

In a series of studies using a cognitive developmental approach, Enright and Lapsley (1981) asked children from grade one through to college students to judge people who held dissenting beliefs from them on a range of social, moral and political dilemmas. Belief-discrepancy tolerance involves judging the value of others who hold opposing beliefs, or the characters in the scenarios who hold very different beliefs, from those of the participants in the research (Wainryb, Shaw & Maianu, 1998). They concluded that tolerance involved an age-related progression from less to more tolerance towards those holding dissenting beliefs, consistent with Piaget's developmental model. However, no consideration was given to the influence of the different contexts (social, moral and political) in which the stories were set. More recent studies have indeed taken the different contexts into considerations. For example, Sigelman and Toebben (1992) examined the development of both political

tolerance and dissenting beliefs tolerance in children of grades two, five and eight. Political tolerance involves a willingness to allow political expression to a range of opposing groups, such as neo-Nazis (Owen & Dennis, 1987). They found that tolerance increased with age, but was mediated or influenced by the kind of contexts or setting the participants were asked to consider. Whether dealing with political or dissenting beliefs, the participants considered whether tolerance was a social, moral or political issue and made judgements accordingly.

Research also found age-related differences were mediated by the context or setting the participants were asked to consider. Wainryb et al. (1998) examined what behaviours and under what circumstances students from Grade One through to college undergraduates would extend their tolerance to people who held dissenting beliefs from their own. An example of circumstances used for Wainryb's American students was a father's *right to believe* that his daughter should not play outside because of his cultural beliefs about the role of females. This statement was followed by his *right to tell* others about it and finally *his right to stop* his daughter from playing outside because of his cultural beliefs. Wainryb and her colleagues found that, irrespective of age, holding dissenting beliefs was the most sanctioned behaviour, while engaging in acts based on these beliefs was least sanctioned. Clearly, tolerance was influenced by the kind of behaviours about which participants were asked to make judgements. However, tolerance judgements were also influenced by the context, as well or whether the family of the story above were living in America or within their own culture. Generally, students sanctioned these behaviours more often if the family lived in a culture where such behaviours were seen as culturally appropriate.

Recent Australian research utilising a similar approach reported that racial tolerance has its own unique developmental trajectory that is mediated by the given situation. Contrary to research on belief-discrepancy and political tolerance, where tolerance level increased with age, the shift in racial tolerance with age occurred in the opposite direction than anticipated (Witenberg, 2002). Children aged between 6 and 7 years tended to respond globally, always endorsing racial tolerance (Hogan, 2003) followed by 11 to 12 year olds who rarely disaffirmed tolerance. Whilst on the whole the older students expressed high level of tolerance, racial tolerance was sometimes not expressed in the responses of the 15 to 16 year olds and intolerance peaked in the responses of the 19 to 24 year olds (Witenberg 2002a).

Beyond the age-related shifts, important contextual influences also emerged in the Australian studies, corroborating findings about political and dissenting belief-tolerance. Variability in response patterns to the different behaviours involved in the stories used in the research was also found. Young people rejected other people *holding* intolerant beliefs and *acting* on such beliefs considerably more often than they rejected others *speaking* about such beliefs. It has been argued that the older respondents' more organised and abstract thinking ability allowed them to distinguish different story contexts. Younger respondents' global responses may have stemmed from their less developed knowledge and experience, which may have lead them to overlook much of the contextual information, whereas older students could observe and consider the contextual information when making judgements (Bjorklund, 2000; Schneider, 2000). Gender differences also emerged, particularly an overall tendency for females to be more tolerant than males. Interestingly, the findings showed that when gender was considered, young adolescent males, between 15 and 16 years of

age, tended to be more intolerant than females of that age, as well as more intolerant than both older and younger males and females.

In general, racial tolerance research to date suggests that human judgements are contingent upon contextual information and that people are generally neither globally tolerant or intolerant. The conclusion that can be drawn is that tolerance and intolerance do indeed appear to coexist and the way judgements are made depend on what we are asked to tolerate and under what circumstances. Further, the research about tolerance indicates that age affects tolerance, and that in the case of racial tolerance it seems to decrease with age. The current research aimed to re-examine these findings about the way contextual information, age and gender influence judgements in order to to assess whether they form a common path for racially tolerant development.

Another important aspect of the research was to assess how these judgements are justified by the students. In her study, Witenberg (2002) found that there were several ways students supported their judgements. The most commonly used justifications were related to beliefs in fairness, empathy and being reasonable. To understand more about how tolerance is viewed and supported, the current study also examined the kind of justifications the students used to support tolerance and intolerance when it was evident. Understanding more about underlying personal beliefs about tolerance (and intolerance) is the basis on which decisions and judgements are made. Beliefs are used as a form of personal yardstick for how we choose to live our lives, therefore they are ever present, and involved in the judgements we make.

CHAPTER TWO: THE STUDY AND FINDINGS

1   The Study

This project used three short dilemma-like stories to assess tolerance. Each story dealt with an event depicting a form of intolerance/tolerance relevant to the Australian context and based on real-life incidents. Material for the three stories was taken from reports in newspapers, individual experiences and from official sources such as the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (1991) study of racial prejudice. Each story could be resolved using either tolerant or intolerant views. The key figures in these stories were people from Aboriginal, Asian or English backgrounds. To avoid responses that were given to be socially acceptable, the stories were presented with competing considerations, that is, the first question was presented with both the tolerant and intolerant views (see below for a more detailed account of the stories). The order of the presentation of the stories was also varied.

One story concerned a person from an Aboriginal background who was not allowed to move into a street on the grounds that people from an Aboriginal background are dirty and drunk. Another story involved a person of an Asian background not being allowed to join a sports club on the grounds that people from an Asian background sell drugs. The final story was about a person from an English background refused work on the grounds that people from an English background are lazy. A pilot study found that the use of the terms Asian, English and Aboriginal posed no conceptual or ethical problems to the participants. Students were asked to make confidential, written judgements about the beliefs, speech and actions of people presented in the stories, justify their decisions and express their own ideas about the event.

To explore racial tolerance of different behaviour, each story was presented three times and each presentation dealt with a different aspect of the behaviour: holding prejudiced beliefs, expressing these beliefs, and acting on these beliefs. In the first instance the protagonist of the story *holds prejudiced beliefs*, in the second the protagonist *tells* others about these beliefs and in the final presentation *acts* on these beliefs (Wainryb et. al., 1998).

For example:

Beliefs: I know this person who *believes* that people from Aboriginal backgrounds shouldn't be allowed live in this person's street because people from an Aboriginal background are dirty and drunk.

Speech: This person I was telling you about wants to *tell* all the other people in the street not to let people from an Aboriginal background move into their street, because people from an Aboriginal background are dirty and drunk.

Act: This person I was telling you about always *stops* anyone from an Aboriginal background moving into this person's street because people from an Aboriginal background are dirty and drunk.

The issues in the stories could be viewed from either a tolerant or intolerant perspective. Participants were asked to make judgements about the events in the stories. They were then asked to explain their judgments on the basis of the following questions.

1   'Do you think it is all right or not all right to believe in, speak about or act on (stopping) Aboriginal people moving into their street because they are dirty and drunk.'

2   'Can you explain why you gave that answer?'

3   'What do you actually think about holding (talking about and acting

on) such beliefs?'

4   'If I told you I would do the very opposite, how would you convince

me that you made the right choice and my choice is wrong?'

Thus students were asked the same sets of questions three times for each story to cover the three dimensions of racism.

Data Coding and Reliability Assessment

Responses were assessed using a four-point rating scale that was developed across a series of pilot studies and used in previous research (Witenberg, 2002a,b). The four-point rating scale was developed to capture levels of tolerance within each story and across the three behaviours. In the first instance, a response was categorised as either tolerant or intolerant on the basis of each participant's affirmation or disaffirmation of tolerance when responding to Question 1 for each behaviour (belief, speech, act) for each story. For example, affirmation of tolerance included responses such as 'It's not okay to believe such a thing' or 'What the manager did was not right at all.' Disaffirmation included such comments as 'It's OK, I have no problem with it' or 'It's fine with me. He can believe what he wants'.

Level of tolerance for each situation and each behaviour depended on the number of responses that were coded as tolerant or intolerant. This was achieved through the application of the four-point rating scale.

As indicated by Table 1 below, we assigned a score of 1 if students made three intolerant judgments. In other words, they scored 1 for the story if they made intolerant judgments regarding *all three behaviours* (belief, speech, action) for an individual story (i.e., the column score). Participants also scored 1 if they made intolerant judgments regarding one specific behaviour (e.g., belief, belief, belief) across *all three stories* (i.e., the row score).

We assigned a score of 2 if the student made one tolerant judgment and two intolerant judgments for either the situation (the column score) or specific behaviour (the row score) across all three stories.

We assigned a score of 3 if the student made two tolerant judgments and one intolerant judgment either situation (the column score) or for specific behaviour (the row score) across all three stories.

We assigned a score of 4 if the student made tolerant judgments on all three behaviours (belief, speech, action) for an individual story (the column score), or for specific behaviour (the row score) across all three stories.

This meant that each participant received a total of 6 scores. That is, an individual score was assigned for each story (Aboriginal, English Asian) and similarly an individual score was assigned for each behaviour (belief, speech, act) across the three stories (belief, belief, belief). These scores were used for all subsequent analyses. (More detailed scoring directions are available from the authors.)

Table 1: Scoring Matrix

	Aboriginal	English	Asian	Behaviour score
Belief	T	T	I	3
Speech	T	I	T	3
Action	T	I	T	3
Story score	4	2	3	

Note. Responses to the presentations of each set of questions received a score of either T = Tolerant or I = Intolerant.

Content Analysis

The transcripts were analysed for the kind of justifications students used to endorse tolerance. This was achieved by dividing each transcript into sections based on the responses to the questions. The transcripts were then read several times with each reading serving as a tool for assessing different forms of justifications colour coded accordingly. Colour coding system devised by Brown, Tappan, Gilligan, Miller and Argyris (1989) for interpreting moral narratives, conflicts and choices was adopted for this analysis. The content analysis of the current study revealed the use of several kinds of justifications in support of racial tolerance. In order to assess inter-rater reliability, a second rater coded about one fourth of randomly selected transcripts for agreements with the first rater. An 85 per cent agreement was found between the two raters.

For the purpose of measuring the use of each justification, the frequency with which each justification was used to support tolerance was rated. Only one frequency count was accorded a particular justification within each section. This process was repeated for each behaviour type within the stories and for each story separately. For the purpose of measuring the overall use of each justification, frequencies were summed across the three stories to create a global measure for each justification (summed justification score).

2   Findings of The Study

Patterns of racially tolerant judgements: the influence of situations, age and gender*[1]

One of the questions this research wished to assess was the pattern of responses that students of 11-18 year of age made to stories that could be resolved from either a tolerant or an intolerant perspective. Table 2 presents the percentages of tolerant, intolerant and mixed responses for each story according to age group.

As shown in Figure 1, this study found that the majority of students supported racial tolerance. The pattern of responses was comparatively similar across the three stories with students making consistently strong appeal for tolerance. Overall, 79 per cent of students responded with tolerant (a score of three) or very tolerant (a score of 4) judgments for the Aboriginal story, 76.2 per cent for the English story and 77.6 per cent for the Asian story.


[1] Please note that a detailed account of all statistical analyses can be obtained from the authors.

Table 2: Percentages of Tolerant, Intolerant and Mixed Responses for Context by Age

| Context | Response pattern | Age Levels | | | |
		11-12	14-15	17-18	Total
Aboriginal	1	2.9	11.4	11.4	8.6
	2	4.3	18.6	14.3	12.4
	3	21.4	20.0	35.7	25.7
	4	71.4	50.0	38.6	53.3
English	1	2.9	10.0	8.6	7.1
	2	8.6	22.9	18.6	16.7
	3	20.0	27.1	28. 6	25.2
	4	68.6	40.0	44.3	51.0
Asian	1	4.3	8.6	8.6	7.1
	2	8.6	22.9	14.3	15.2
	3	12.9	25.7	34.3	24.3
	4	74.3	42.9	42.9	53.3

Figure 1: Percentage of tolerant, intolerant an mixed responses for situational context
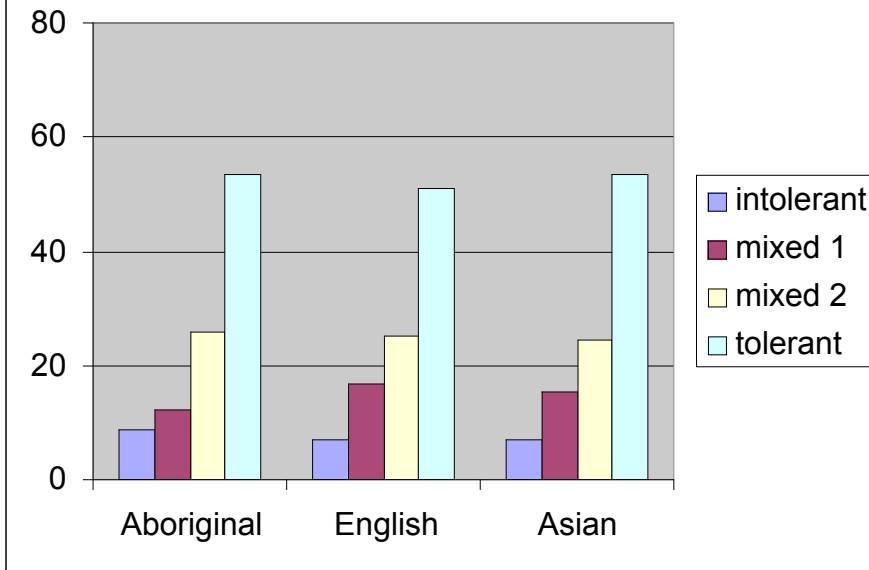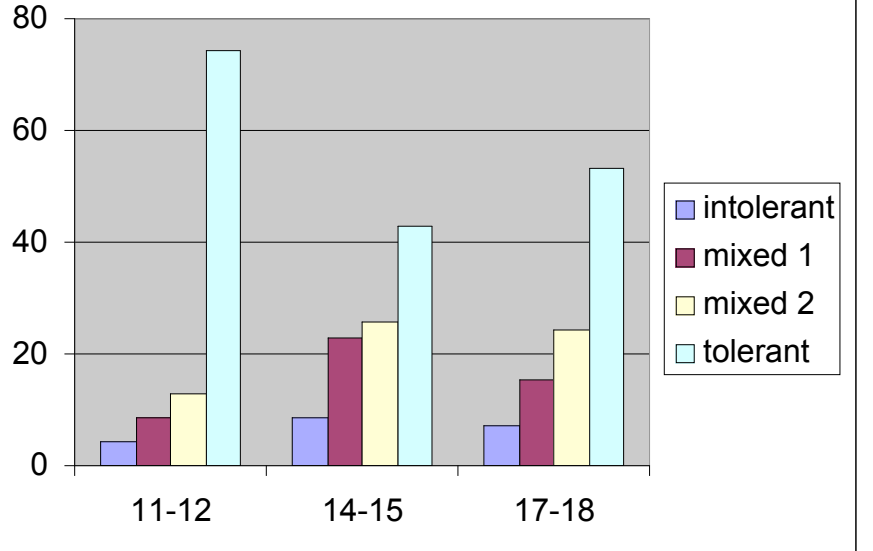
Figure 2: Percentage of tolerant, intolerant and mixed responses for Aboriginal context by age
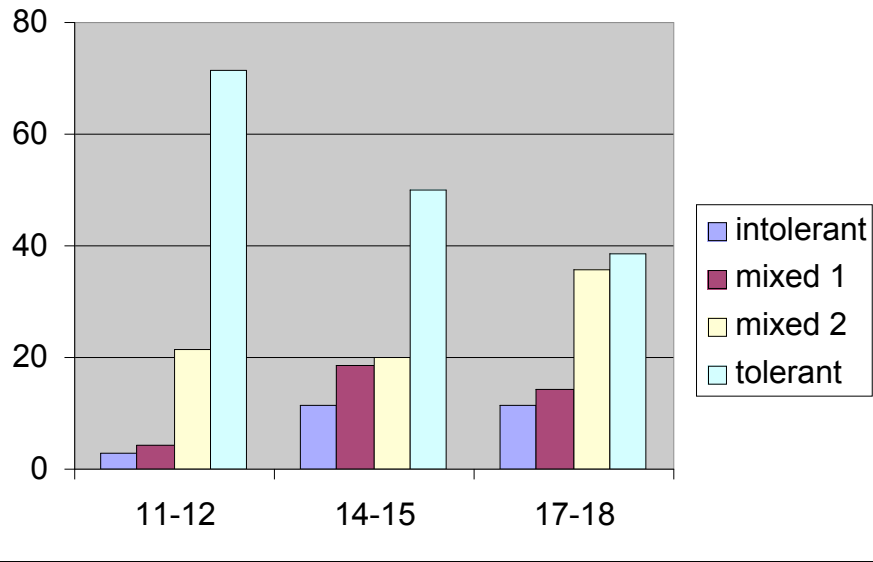
Figure 3: Percentage of tolerant, intolerant and mixed responses for English context by age
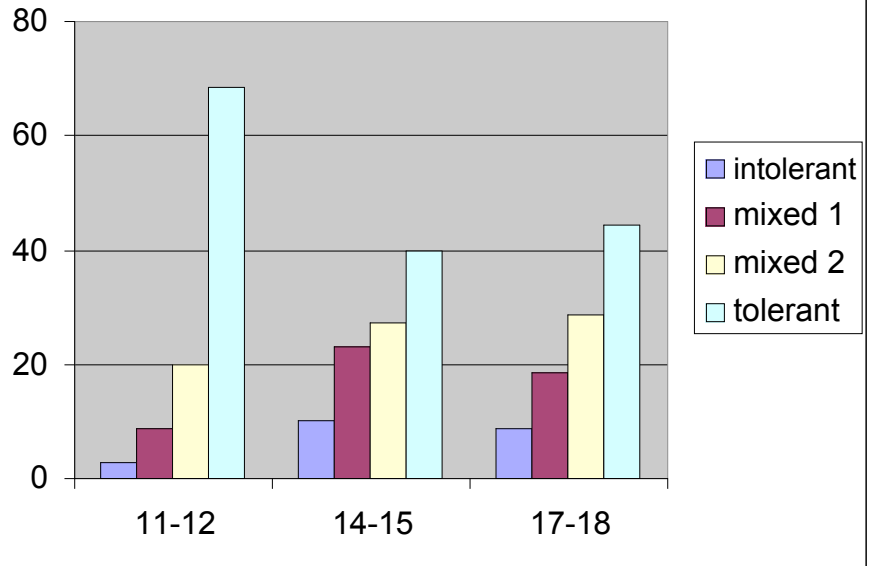
Figure 4: Percentages of tolerant, intolerant and mixed responses for Asian context by age

Figures 2, 3 and 4 present the response pattern for each individual story indicating a similar pattern of responses across the three stories. Further analyses showed that there was no statistical difference in the responses for the three stories.

In this study, the specific racial backgrounds and situations did not influence judgements. One plausible explanation may simply be that all three stories in the current study dealt with exclusion. The content of each story was about excluding a person from either living in a street or getting work or joining a sports club. The stories may have evoked a global idea reflecting students' experiences and knowledge about excluding others, overriding more specific person/situation aspects. What is more conclusive is that, overall, the students in this study tended to make racially tolerant judgements more than 70 per cent of the time for each story. To whom and under what circumstance young people extend their tolerance had no bearing on their judgements as a group. Young people in the study showed tolerant judgments equally towards people from Aboriginal, Asian or English backgrounds.
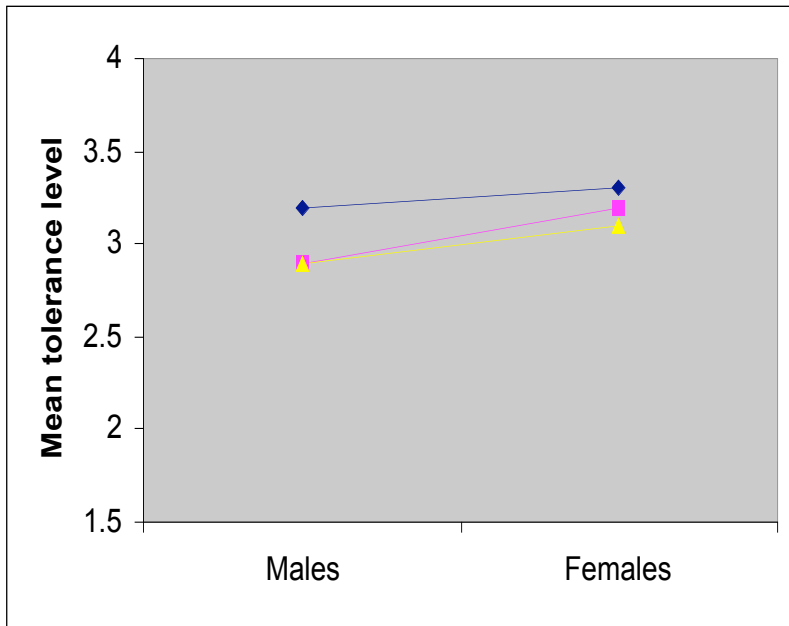
Another question this research aimed to explore was how age influenced racially tolerant judgements. As Figures 2, 3 and 4 indicate, the response patterns can be seen to vary with age. Age related differences were found to be statistically significant with students of 11 to 12 years of age found to be more tolerant than the older two age groups. This finding can be seen as controversial. The literature on child development elicits the general expectation that cognitive maturity will lead to increasingly better outcomes. However, from the findings of this study, we suggest that a decrease in racial tolerance is likely to happen because of cognitive maturity – the ability to think more abstractly and consider different aspects of the same

problem. We know from the developmental literature that younger children encode a situation more narrowly and tend to focus on the most salient issue, often disregarding the complexity of the problem, in contrast to older people whose processing capacities allow them to consider several aspects of a problem simultaneously. The stories used in the current research presented competing considerations where the students had to consider both sides. They had to consider the rights of the main characters to hold prejudiced beliefs, express them openly and act on them, and the right of the people who were the recipients of such behaviour. It appeared that older students had a more developed understanding of the competing considerations in the stories and reflected on them.

Finally, there was a tendency for females to be more tolerant than boys overall. The least tolerant of the three groups were males in the two older age groups. Similar findings were evident in previous studies (Witenberg, 2002a; Witenberg, Cinamon & Iram, 2003). Prejudice needs to be understood within the environment and culture of the developing adolescent. Do young adolescent males focus on different aspects of their environment compared to females of a similar group? This is a question only future research can clarify.

Figure 4b: Mean tolerance level for situational context by gender

***Patterns of racially tolerant judgements for the three behaviours and the influence of age and gender***

Another question that this research aimed to assess was the pattern of responses that students of 11-18 years of age would give to holding prejudiced beliefs, expressing them openly and acting on them. The pattern of responses for the three behaviours was more complex than the response patterns for the content of the three stories, as Table 3 indicates. The patterns here show clear indications that which behaviours the students were asked about affected their judgements.

As shown in Figure 5, students rejected acting intolerantly or discriminating against others (i.e. people from Aboriginal background being stopped from living in a street, stopping people from an English background from being employed and stopping people from Asian background joining a sports club) more often than either holding such beliefs or talking about them. The most permissible intolerant behaviour was expressing openly prejudiced beliefs. Statistical analysis showed that younger students made more tolerant judgements for both belief and speech dimensions in the current study.
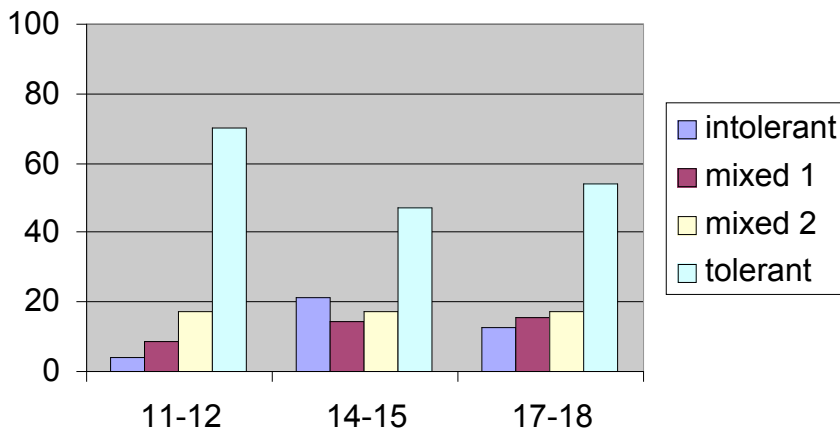
Table 3: Percentages of Tolerant, Intolerant and Mixed Responses for the three

behaviours by Age

| Behaviour | Response pattern | Age Levels | | | |
		11-12	14-15	17-18	Total
Belief	1	4.3	21.4	12.9	12.9
	2	8.6	14.3	15.7	15.7
	3	17.1	17.1	17.1	17.1
	4	70.0	47.1	54.3	57.1
Speech	1	4.3	17.1	25.7	15.7
	2	14.3	27.3	21.4	21.0
	3	18.6	24.3	20. 0	21.0
	4	62.9	31.4	32.9	42.4
Action	1	1.4	8.6	5.7	5.2
	2	4.3	7.1	5.7	5.7
	3	7.1	11.4	22.9	13.8
	4	87.1	72.9	65.7	75.2

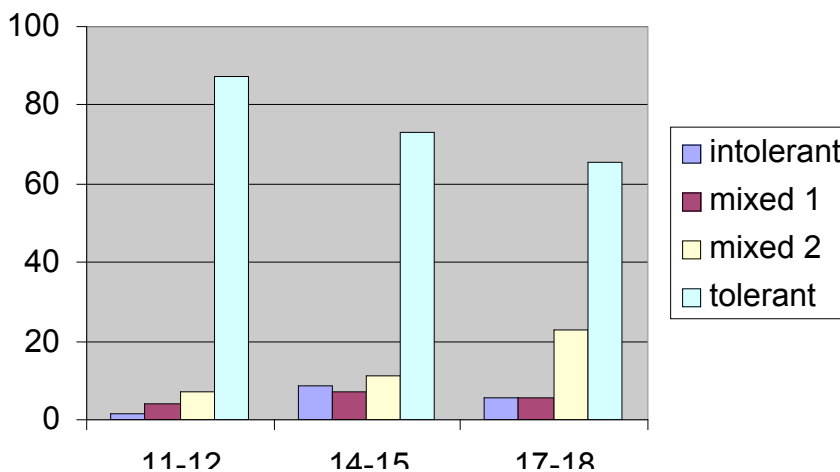**Figure 5: Percentage of of tolerant, intolerant an mixed responses for the three behaviours**
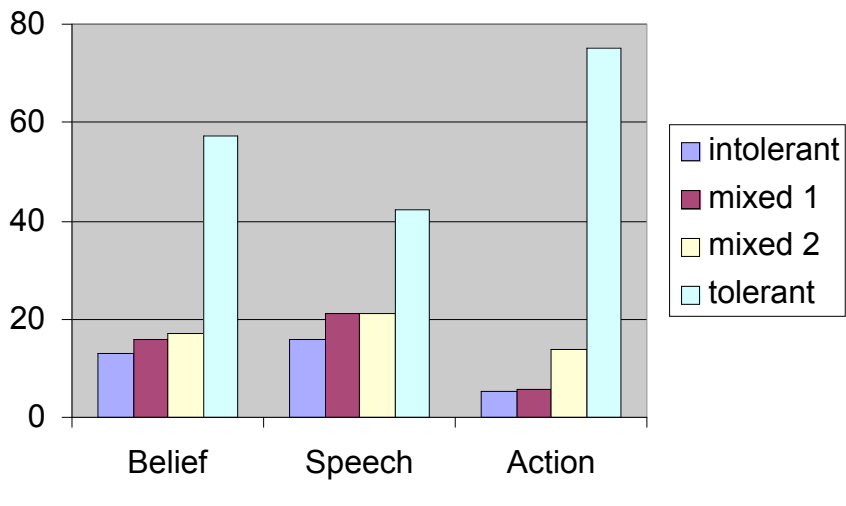
Figure 6: Percentages of tolerant, intolerant and mixed responses for belief by age

Figure 7: Percentages of tolerant, intolerant and mixed responses for speech by age
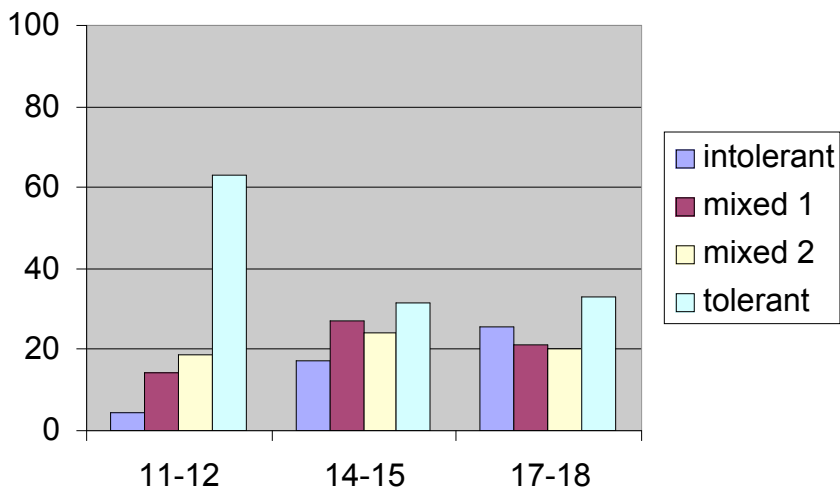
Figures 8: Percentages of tolerant, intolerant and mixed responses for action by age

Figures 6 and 7 show that students aged 14-15 and 17-18 years made less tolerant judgements in regards to speech, with the 14-15 year olds being the least tolerant, and this finding was found to be statistically significant. However, no significant differences emerged for action, as shown in Figure 8. That is, irrespective of age, all students affirmed tolerant actions and rejected intolerance or discrimination. On the positive side, it appears that acting intolerantly or discriminating against others was rarely permissible. On the negative side, holding prejudiced beliefs at times and talking about them often seem more permissible. It could be suggested that the students participating in this study had considered the possible harm each of the behaviours could cause. In contrast, Witenberg (2002) found that students in her earlier study appealed spontaneously to freedom of speech and argued that it is admissible to openly express intolerant beliefs and at times also to uphold them on this basis. Overall, she found that appeal to freedom of speech was least evident in 11-12 year olds and most pronounced in the 18-22 year olds. Finally, no gender differences were observed in the response patterns to the three behaviours. In other words, being either a male or female did not affect racially tolerant judgments, whether it was about holding prejudiced beliefs, expressing them openly or acting on them.

3   Findings: Key Beliefs in Support of Racial Tolerance

In addition to assessing patterns of judgements, the transcripts were also analysed for the types of justifications students used to endorse tolerance. The content analysis of the current study revealed the use of several kinds of justifications in support of racial tolerance. These justifications could be further categorised into three key sets of beliefs: fairness, reasonableness and empathy. Each of these is described

below and is followed by several examples to illustrate specific responses within each category:

Fairness (Justice factor)

The most common responses to endorse tolerance were based on issues relating to fairness, which was expressed through appeal to equality, rights and diversity. This form of justifications was used consistently by all the three age groups, but it was used more often by the two younger age groups. Appeal to fairness was highest in 14-15 age group (70 per cent) and lowest in the 17-18 age group (60 per cent) with the 11-12 age group falling between these two group (65 per cent). Appealing to fairness on the basis of 'sameness' was one of the ways this justification was expressed and often, but not always, favoured by the youngest age group as the following examples illustrate.

> 'It's wrong because black people are just the same as us,
>
> no different.' (Female, 11-12 years).

> '….because they are exactly the same as everybody else,
>
> but only are different skin colour.' (Male, 11-12 years).

Between the ages of 14 to 15 the emphasis is on fairness directly or the lack of it as illustrated in the following examples.

> 'I think everybody should get a fair chance. Because
>
> everyone deserves a fair chance.' (Male, 14-15 years)

> 'Anybody young or old, native or migrant, English-
>
> speaking or non-English speaking has a right to apply for a

job. If they are being discriminated against then it is very

unfair.' (Female, 14-15 years)

Not surprisingly issues of rights is more prevalent in the responses of the oldest age group and is demonstrated in the following examples.

'They are human just like everyone else. They deserve the same human rights and privileges as everyone else. So why treat them differently?' (Female, 17-18)

'Because everyone is equal whether they are English or Australians and they have the same rights as anyone else. I would tell you that it doesn't matter whether they are English or not.' (Male, 17-18)

The final example also expresses equality of rights.

'The only difference between them [People from Aboriginal background] and us is skin colour. I would tell you that your choice is wrong because it doesn't matter whether they are black or white. They have the same rights as everyone else.' (Male, 17-18)

Appeal to fairness on the basis of diversity and difference rather then 'sameness' was another way that students justified taking a tolerant stance. The use of such justification was found in all three age groups. This is how a female student in the youngest age group acknowledged diversity.

'People are different from each other……It doesn't matter

if you are black, white or Asian.' (Female, 11-12 years)

The same idea is encapsulated in the following two justifications of a male and female in the 14-14 year olds age group,

'Our country has multi-cultural civilians. It doesn't matter

what race you're from because each of us is an

individual.' (Male, 14-15 years)

'People have to start learning that everyone is different.'

(Female, 14-15 years)

Yet another way to appeal to fairness was on the basis of merit of quality or worth. The reasoning underlying this approach was that people should be judged by the quality of their efforts or character, and not by racial or cultural attributes. The following two examples exemplify the use of appeal to fairness on the basis of merit.

'They [people from English background] have the right to

be considered for a job based on their skills, not their

nationality.' (Female, 14-15 years)

'If they [Asians] are proven of selling drugs - then kick

them out, but otherwise they should be allowed to join.

We should all be judged by what we do not who we are.'

(Male, 17-18 years)

In conclusion, the most commonly used justification based on fairness depended on equality, diversity and merit. Justice, equality and fairness are also critical for

moral development (Kohlberg, 1984). It is therefore not surprising that there has been studies to show that higher cognitive moral reasoning was associated with political tolerance (Avery 1988) and that the nature of moral beliefs influence political tolerance and intolerance (Wagner, 1986).

Reasonableness (cognitive factors)

Another key set of beliefs, which was used 20 per cent of the time by the youngest age group and increased in use to 30 per cent by the two oldest age groups, concerned the need to be reasonable, rational and even reflective. Thus students expressed beliefs that racial intolerance was due to holding stupid, silly, and unreasonable or un-reflected ideas. For example, one student observed:

> 'I think it's a terrible way to think that people from aboriginal backgrounds are dirty when their skin is just that way.' (Male, 11-12 years)

> 'I would say you are very stupid. And you shouldn't be driven by other people's ideas especially if they are wrong.' (Female, 14-15 years)

The following examples again illustrate the strong belief that racism is illogical and misguided.

> 'I personally think that it's stupid that a person can think like that.' (Male, 11-12 years),

> '…because racism is bad and it's stupid and illogical.' (Female, 14-15 years),

'This person is misinformed. I think that this is a really

irrational attitude.' (Male, 14-15 years)

Students expressed their belief in the irrationality of intolerance through challenging generalisations and assumptions about the events and people in the stories. What the students were doing is questioning the validity of assumptions or generalisations we so often make about other people, and upon which the basis for prejudice is formed. The following three examples illustrate this form of reasoning.

'Some English people are lazy but also some aren't. There

have been lots of great English inventors who work really

hard….I know some English people who work really hard.

You can't just say that they are all lazy some work really

hard.' (Male, 11-12 years)

Similar reasoning was evident in the two older age groups. This is how an older student reasoned.

'This person is making a rash generalisation. I would point

out that not all Asian people sell drugs.' (Female, 14-15

years).

Again the same ideas are evident in the reasoning of a student in the oldest age group.

'Because it is stereotypical of a small minority of

Aboriginals [being drunk and dirty].. It is really only true

for a small minority. I would ask if you know any

Aboriginals, or what you base your argument on.'

(Female, 17-18 years)

In summary, the ability to think and reflect critically on our beliefs and conduct may be the key to understanding tolerance. In contrast, dogmatism, 'a way of not thinking' diminishes our ability to be tolerant (Vogt, 1997). Reflective thinking may also be important in setting appropriate moral limits to tolerance. Without reflective thinking and deliberation, tolerance can become an unquestioning acceptance of practices that should not be sanctioned, such as the perpetuation of racism by another individual or group. Clearly the students who used freedom of speech as a justification for expressing intolerant beliefs have not yet understood the moral limits of freedom of speech.

Empathy (Emotional factor)

Appealing to empathy such as personal feelings, perspective taking and harm to society was another way students endorsed tolerance. Between 5 and 10 per cent of the students used this kind of justification to support tolerance. One way to express this justification was to personalise it with the expression 'how would you feel?' with the youngest age group tending to favour this way of expressing empathy. This is seen in the following examples.

'Your choice is wrong because if all the Aboriginals are

living on one street and they didn't let you live there, how

would you feel?' (Male, 11-12 years),

'If you were an English person that worked hard everyday,
how would you feel to hear a comment like that one said
[that English people are lazy]?' (Female, 11-12 years)

While older students also personalised empathy, they often also appealed to perspective taking using expressions such as 'put yourself in their shoes'. The following examples illustrates the use of perspective taking.

'How would you feel if you went to another country and
couldn't get a job because other people with your
background have been seen lazy…..I would ask you to put
yourself into the position of the English person. It would
be hurtful to not get a job because you are thought to be
lazy due to your English background.' (Female, 14-15
years),

'I would ask you what you would do if you stood in the
Asian's shoes when they were told they couldn't join the
netball team. How would you feel?' (Male, 14-15 years)

The final two examples also illustrate how students appeal to perspective taking:

'I would tell them to reconsider the actions and put
themselves in the Asian person's shoes' (Male, 17-18
years),

'How would you like someone doing this to you? Treat
others as you would like to be treated!' (Female, 14-15
years)

Another way that empathy was expressed was through a more general belief in the harm that may ensue as a result of intolerance. Here students focused on the harm that can occur either on a group of people or on society. The following three examples illustrate how the students expressed this.

> 'They shouldn't be allowed to say these sort of things because it could make Asian young people depressed.' (Female, 11-12 years),

> 'It can be hurtful and give them [people from Aboriginal background] a complex.' (Female, 14-15 years),

> 'Aboriginal people are going to become very bitter and hurt about this and there'll be a big blow up over it, which will increase racism amongst that society.' (Male, 17-18 years)

In each case, the students here referred to a larger issue beyond the interpersonal feeling they expressed in the examples earlier that related to more personal feelings ('how would you feel?') and perspective taking ('put yourself in their shoes').

Perspective taking and empathic orientation are means by which we can interact with others more successfully and respond to other people's needs more readily. We know that empathy is a motivator of pro-social and altruistic behaviour (Hoffman, 2000) and that empathy and perspective taking are both implicated in moral development (Kohlberg, 1984). However, it is too early to predict the relationship between perspective taking and tolerance.

4 Findings: Constraints on Tolerance

Freedom of speech

Surprisingly, another set of responses that emerged spontaneously was the *appeal to freedom of speech*. Students tended to reject *holding* intolerant beliefs and *acting* on them considerably more often than *speaking* about them. That is, some students in this project felt it was permissable to speak about prejudiced beliefs and, at times, hold them. They justified such judgements and decisions with a spontaneous appeal to freedom of speech for themselves and others. Those students who took such a stance assumed that it was permissable to express prejudiced beliefs openly 'because we have free speech in this country' (16 years old), and to think how we want 'because it is up to people to decide for themselves not for him/her [others] to tell them what to think'. Some students argued for the right both to hold prejudiced beliefs and to speak about them, as the following example illustrates.

> 'Everybody has the right to have their own opinion and
>
> talk about them.' (Male, 11-12 years)

Other students placed freedom of speech as a right within free, democratic societies as the following example illustrates.

> 'If this person wants to tell such things he can do so
>
> because this is a free society and we have no right to
>
> persuade him otherwise – he has the right to say what he
>
> wants.' (Male, 18-19 years)

At other times some students endorsed the right of others to express themselves openly and freely, even if they were in disagreement with such beliefs themselves. The following examples illustrate such a stance.

> 'Even though I don't agree with this person [stopping young Asian people from joining a sports club] I believe she/he has the right to state her/his opinion and can share her/his opinion with others. We live in a free society and we have the right to say what we believe.' (Female, 17-18 years)

There were clear indications that appeal to freedom of speech as justification for holding prejudiced beliefs and speaking about them increased with age. No more than 10 per cent of the 11 to 12 year olds justified this behaviour by appeal to freedom of speech in any one story. In contrast, between 25 and 30 per cent of the 15 to 16 year olds and up to 49.4 per cent of the 18 to 22 year olds used such justifications. These findings are in contrast to findings about young children. Studies using the same methodology and similar stories with 6 to 7 year olds in Australia found a global affirmation of tolerance on the basis of fairness with no appeal to freedom of speech (Chung-Voon, 2001; Hogan, 2002). In other words, appeal to freedom of speech also increases with age. Freedom of speech appears to legitimise, at times, holding prejudiced beliefs and talking about them.

The major constraint to tolerance that emerged, was not prejudice towards others, but beliefs in freedom of speech as a democratic right. Many of the students in the two older age groups assumed that it was permissible to openly express prejudiced beliefs

'Because we have free speech in this country.' (Male, 14-

15 years)

'Everybody has the right to have their own opinion and

talk about them.' (Female, 11-12 years)

However, what is important to take into account is that the prioritising of

freedom of speech over racial tolerance does not necessarily imply a decline in racial

tolerance, but could instead point to a conflict of values. It is possible that tolerance

and freedom of speech are ordered by their relative importance to the individual

(Schwartz, 1992).

5 Bringing together Judgements and Justifications

This research has adopted a definition based on conscious reflective tolerance

using findings that showed that strong support for tolerance requires three sets of

beliefs: fairness, empathy and reasonableness. On the basis of their responses it was

clear that the majority of students in the current study used conscious justifications,

either singly or in combination, indicative of fairness, empathy and reasonableness,

which captured their ability to consider the intentions and interests of others, as well

the perspective and feelings of those who were the target of discrimination. One of the

challenges for future research is to continue exploring the quality and complexity of

the kinds of reasoning individuals use, so that we can better understand the

development of reflective racial tolerance (as age is only a correlate of development).

The appeal to freedom of speech may reflect recent, vigorous political debate in

Australia about 'political correctness' and civic education. The students in this study

assumed the right to express prejudiced beliefs, either for themselves or for others. However, they appear to have failed to understand that there are moral limits to democratic rights and freedom of speech. In addition, there was a strong tendency to view such rights in isolation from other behaviour. Rarely did they consider the possibility that the right to *express* a prejudiced belief may lead to *holding* such a belief and also *acting* on it. Civic education needs to consider such outcomes and teach about the moral limits of both freedom of speech and democratic rights.

CHAPTER THREE: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

There are implications for curriculum design and education programs that can be drawn from the findings of the data. Whilst there are consistent efforts to deal with prejudice in Australian schools in the elementary years, civic education programs traditionally begin in early adolescence. This is also true for other societies, such as Canada (Helwig, 1998). However, it is evident from the findings of the current study that pre-adolescents are able to understand about tolerance and intolerance, and that they reject intolerance vigorously. Harnessing pre-adolescents' strong rejection of intolerance and support for tolerance should not be underestimated in designing curriculum for elementary students. However, the fact contextual nature (information in the stories) influence tolerance judgements poses a particular set of challenges to curriculum developers and educators.

The finding that young people do not necessarily conceptualise tolerance as a global and inclusive concept, as shown by the current study and supported by the findings of previous work, is an important variable to consider from an educational perspective. In the current study, level of tolerance was contingent upon the specific behaviour discussed. The evidence that holding prejudiced beliefs, speaking about them and acting on them were treated differently cannot be ignored when we educate for the promotion and protection of tolerance.

Programs need to be developed that take the multifaceted nature of racial tolerance into consideration. Further, the finding that young adolescent males are the least tolerant group indicates that we need targeted, innovative educational programs to challenge this group into reflecting about their thinking towards others who are different from them.

Another consideration is educational outcomes. How we define tolerance has implications for how we educate for tolerance and promote it. Educating for and promoting forbearance or, 'putting up with it', is very different from educating for consciously rejecting intolerance and promoting acceptance of others. It could be argued that even community-based programs should educate for a conscious rejection of prejudiced attitudes, beliefs and responses. As a society we need to learn to recognise our negative stereotypes, judge them against experiential knowledge or value systems, and reject them. Ideally, we need to educate for reflective tolerance both in school and community based programs.

Finally, education aimed at promoting tolerance may need to focus more on:

1   developing socio-cognitive skills which enables people to consciously assess and reject their own and others prejudiced beliefs

2   highlighting the inequitable situation and deemphasising the racial characteristic of people

3   developing a strong sense of justice

4   developing the ability to empathise with the plights of others and to understand the harm that intolerance causes.

The topic of racial tolerance is one of considerable significance, both from a theoretical and a practical perspective. The value of the current study is its focus on the positive aspects of social perceptions and behaviours in contrast to the large body of research into the negative aspects of prejudice. While the fields of research of both prejudice and racial tolerance have the same ultimate goal, to assist in the elimination of discrimination, their paths of exploration are quite different. Although they may be

researched concurrently, the research will be more useful in the real world if the two

perspectives are pursued separately and the results combined.

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