



URA Forum 2008 Journal

18 different cultural backgrounds

On June 24, 2008 the Third URA Forum was held with 60 students from three high schools. MLC School kindly offered its function room as the venue. The participants represented 18 different cultural backgrounds.

The Preparation started a month ahead and the participating students at 3 high schools were asked to prepare their presentation material on the designated topic. The topics this year were "Whaling", "Tibet and China" and "Racial Discrimination". Every group came up with some great quality of their work. It was clear that the students prepared their work with pride and had done thorough research on the topic.

The students were divided into 8 discussion groups in accordance with their cultural backgrounds. Some quiz questions on "Youth Culture" were prepared as an ice-breaking activity to introduce themselves

and get to know each other at each table.

The presentation on "Racial Discrimination" was done by Blacktown Girls High School. MLC girls presented reasons to stop whaling. A group of Davidson High School students did a presentation on the reasons why the Japanese government was pushing whaling and the other group students showed their research on the Tibet's history and its current situation. A group of MLC students talked about why it was important for China to keep Tibet under its authority. Everyone was so keen to discuss over these topics that many people felt there was not enough time for discussion.



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The President's speech

I sincerely would like to pay my respects to the people affected by the Sichuan earthquake in China and a terrible cyclone in Myanmar.

Living in Australia is such an advantage because Australia is such a diverse and multicultural country. Through our everyday life, we always come across people who come from different cultural backgrounds. Being of a different nationality does not mean that you are completely different, but it gives you different perspectives on the way you think about things. What we've got to work on is to understand, respect and accept the people who have grown up in different cultures from you. Our forum is named after this idea. What we hope to see at the end of today is that

every one of us here learns and gains deeper understanding, respect and acceptance of others through discussions. So please make the most of this opportunity and have fun.

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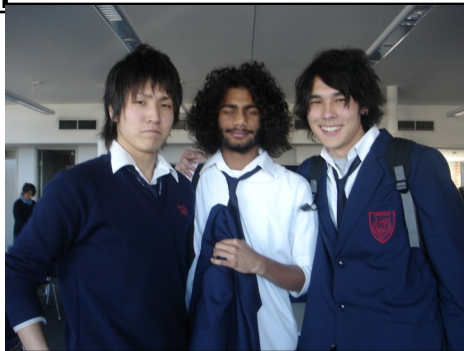
I hope that everyone has gained something out of this forum today. Let's remember that everyone on earth has different perspectives, which makes communication difficult. It is very important to see different points of view. In this way, healthy debate and discussion can take place. We surely can make the world a better place for everyone to live as long as we believe in the importance of understanding, respecting and accepting others. Finally, thank you very much for your participation in this forum.

Highlights

- Sixty students participated.
- They represented over 18 different cultural backgrounds.
- They all enjoyed meeting students from other schools.
- A great opportunity to listen to and discuss about different points of view and values.
- Many students have made new friends.
- All have learnt a lot of new things and are ready to make some changes in their daily life for a better world.



What we've got to work on is to understand, respect and accept the people who have grown up in different cultures from you. Our forum is named after this idea.



If you want the change the world, first start with yourself.



Quiz on Youth Culture, ice-breaking activity

The following questions were a part of the Ice-breaking activities. Would you try these ones on your friends?

- ◇ How much money do you spend a month and what for?
- ◇ How important for you is your PC and your mobile phone?
- ◇ What kind of person do you consider as 'cool'?
- ◇ What's your own definition of 'Youth Culture'?
- ◇ What responsibilities do young people have?
- ◇ When do we become 'adult' in your culture?
- ◇ How much do you think you rely on your parent(s)? And how?

Discrimination (1)

Australia enjoys a diversity of culture and people from all over the world. 'It gives us the freedom to celebrate cultural diversity' and at the same time 'takes a stand against racism and promotes community harmony'. It emphasizes that 'all of us are equal and important'.

The Blacktown Grils HS students have presented "The Golden Rules" in 13 different religions and beliefs in relation to the importance of respecting yourself as well as others.

It is quite interesting to see not only the concept but also the wordings itself is nearly the same in 'supposedly such different religions'. It shows, despite religion, race or culture, people basically want



to have the same respect shown to each other. The BGHS students

came up with some wisdom to eliminate Racism.

Whaling / Signatures sought for the Petition

A group of Davidson HS students did their presentation on "Whaling" from the points of view of the Japanese representatives at IWC-International Whaling Commission - and the Government. Several groups of MLC School students presented their views why the whaling should be stopped.

The presenters made it clear the Government views are not necessarily shared by normal citizens since the people in Japan are quite oblivious to the issues of whaling. The reason is very simple. The media do not touch on this issue at all in Japan.

Towards the end of discussion the entire

group agreed to send a petition to the Japanese embassy/government and the IWC. A few students from each participating school volunteered to collect signatures at their school for the petition.



Discrimination (2) What is Racism?

Racism is a belief in the moral or biological superiority of one race or ethnic group over another or others. The term racism is also sometimes used to refer to preference, views or preferences against interbreeding of the races, and nationalism.

When racism a belief, is applied in practice it takes the form of prejudice and segregation, verbal and even physical abuse and in extreme cases genocide.

The impact of racism can not be understated even though most young people

have been forced to come to terms with it.

Racism reinforces young people's feelings of insecurity and discomfort and emphasizes the differences between them and 'other Australians'. Racism can create a feeling of not being a part of the mainstream community and result in young people feeling isolated.

Racism can seriously impact on young people's mental health and development.



We can change the world to a better place for everyone to live.

Discrimination (3) What can we do?

STOP THE DISCRIMINATION! ... but how?

The BGHS students have suggested 3 actions we can take and we can start right now.

Action:

- ⇒ Stand up for what is fair and right.
- ⇒ Defend the rights of all by action not just words.
- ⇒ Show we care.

Our resolution on the day :

- ⇒ Create a support group that pro-

vides opportunities for those who are discriminated against to speak up/ a multicultural support group to guide you

- ⇒ Hold multicultural days where other people get an open mind on other cultures
- ⇒ Learn to be tolerant to others' cultures –listen and understand
- ⇒ Speak up when you see racism happening/ stand up for your rights
- ⇒ Select a group of students to be trained to stop any confrontations e.g. SRC



In Japan, I was not aware at all of the opinions that most Australian had on whaling. As an overseas student, I have been exposed to the strong criticism on my country of birth, and I actually came to learn a lot about whaling. The URA forum was such a great opportunity to exchange ideas from both Japanese and Australian sides based on factual information. Having learnt about the suffering of the whales, I am going to write a letter to the IWC, the Japanese government and Embassy to protest against the Japanese way of whaling and I would like to have your cooperation on this issue to collect signatures. I hope that this will make a difference in the future on Japanese whaling and I would also like to thank everyone who has and will support us all the way through our activity.
(Natsumi Kobayashi, Vice President)



Whales are mammals, the same as humans. They are so beautiful that their grandiose figures touch us with overwhelmingly powerful feelings. Therefore people become passionate and quite emotional about them being killed, particularly in cruel ways and for the purpose of meat consumption.

Protest against the Japanese whaling

Knowing the both sides, all the forum participants have come to conclusion to collect signatures and send a petition for not killing whales any more, even for the Scientific Research pur-

poses.

Apart from sending a petition letter, we can take following action.

- ⇒ Inform Japanese community more what's happening
- ⇒ Decrease the amount of whales captured
- ⇒ Change the method of killing
- ⇒ Make the Japanese government/the world more aware of the opposition to whaling

ICET-Intercultural Education Today

URA Forum is organized and sponsored by ICET for giving the opportunities for the ESL learners not only to mix, work and learn together with local Australian students but also to take up leadership roles in an English speaking environment.

ICET is a language school accredited by NEAS and its unique joint curriculum with Davidson High School, MacKillop College (VIC) and MLC School is highly regarded. The students getting benefit from its strong educational philosophy and well-thought personal development program. The graduates enjoy using their all round high quality skills in their further study and careers in a global environment.

Our homepage:
www.icet.edu.au

Thoughts and Impression of the Day

The best outcome of our presentation, "Whaling from Japanese government's stance" was that it led many Australian people to understand "what is really happening in Japan". In each country, the truth of Japanese whaling really depends on what information they are exposed to, therefore serious misunderstandings occur. Some students' feedback was that they had misunderstood but now they came to know the truth, and they changed their attitude towards Japanese whaling with a new insight. I believe that this forum was a great opportunity to get to know "the hidden truth", and was really a help to "Understand, Respect and Accept" each other. I really enjoyed it as a member of the forum, and also through the experience of organizing the forum as a host. Everyone cooperated with me by giving me their attention and by following "my pace," so it was easy to accomplish my job and I felt that I was really involved as a member of the group as well. It was a fantastic experience!! (Yoshiko Ono, MC)

It was my first time at organizing such a big event right from the beginning to the end, so through the whole progress of the preparation, I learnt a lot about what and how I could contribute to organizing the team and what I should do as a president. Consequently, I became much more comfortable with taking a leadership role within a group. I found the actual discussions really interesting, we all got to talk frankly about what we believe and to share our ideas. The best thing we got out of this forum was that we did not just understand others' opinions but also came up with some excellent ideas of actions we can actually take for the future to make the world a better place. The sense of accomplishment has blown away all the troubles I went through. (Eri Sakaguchi, President)

On Tuesday 24 June a group of girls from the Blacktown Girls Anti-Racism committee was invited to MLC School to attend a conference organized by exchange students from Japan. We all bonded very quickly and exchanged views and ideas on issues of Racism and Anti Discrimination, Whaling and Tibet. All the students were divided into teams: and we thoroughly enjoyed discussing these very important issues. It was a wonderful day, allowing us to represent Blacktown Girls and demonstrate how multicultural and diverse we really are. The students from the other schools really enjoyed the Blacktown Girls' presentation on Racism and Discrimination and seemed to get a lot out of it. (Didem Inan Blacktown Girls High School)

We were all a bit worried but excited about the events of the day. We heard debates on Whaling & Tibet from the other schools, both with valid points. There was time for discussion. Katea, Shardae and Dilan presented our presentation really well. Our handouts on racism and prejudice were very informative. It seems perfect as we were the most multicultural school there by far. We mingled with MLC & Davidson High students during the day which was good. Both schools had Japanese exchange students attending as well, adding to the cultural diversity in our room. The conference room overlooked the city and we could see the Harbour Bridge and Centrepont. It was a breath taking view.

At the end of the Conference we all had a picture taken. It was an eye-opening day with a lot of fun and the girls that went represented our school with pride. (Jaclyn Dominey, Blacktown Girls High School)





The conference at MLC was a great experience. As young adults and the leaders of the future we were able to talk about a range of important issues in our society. I found it really interesting to see the different cultural view points on the different topics. I really enjoyed the conference. It gave me personally a greater understanding of issues such as whaling. (Shardae Roe, Blacktown Girls High School)

On Tuesday, the 24th of June, 8 students from Year 11 traveled to MLC School, Burwood, to participate in the URA Forum. The topics of the day? Whaling, Discrimination and Tibet. Joining us were the ICET students, as well as students from MLC and Blacktown Girls High School.

We started the day getting to know each other with a few “ice-breaker” activities. Afterwards, the students from Blacktown Girls High gave a presentation on racial discrimination. After some discussion about why racism is wrong, and what can be done about it, all groups got to talk in a more casual way with some morning tea. We then got back to the nitty-gritty. MLC students gave a talk on whaling, and the ICET students gave Japan’s stance. Again, we discussed about whether whaling was right or wrong, and then had some lunch.

After lunch, some other MLC students gave a presentation on China. A very passionate Chinese student gave a speech about how separating Tibet from China would be like separating Queensland from Australia. Then, it was the Year 11 students turn to present and we gave a brief history on the relationship between Tibet and China. We then had a debate on what an appropriate solution to the Tibet-China problem could be, and we decided to let the Chinese government take care of its own affairs.

In short, a lot of fun was had meeting new people, from different cultures, despite living in the same city, and the topics and discussions were both interesting and educational. I leaned a lot from my time participating in the URA Forum, and would recommend it to any students for whom this opportunity arises. (Ryan Bridgett, Yr 11 Davidson HS)

