

# Children, Discrimination and Rights Education



 *Equal Opportunity Commission*



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## Acknowledgment of Country

The Equal Opportunity Commission Western Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## Introduction to the project

An essential part of how the Equal Opportunity Commission in Western Australia (the Commission) promotes the recognition, acceptance and equality of people within the community, as well as the elimination of discrimination, is informing and educating the WA community about the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (the Act) and its provisions. A core element of this task is the provision of information, education and training, which is largely performed by the Commission's Strategy and Engagement Team (SET).

The work of the SET, including its research projects, is shaped by the Commission's Strategic Plan (July 2022 – June 2024). This project responds to Objective Four of the Strategic Plan, which states the Commission will "Develop programs that raise awareness of discrimination and promote anti-discrimination for school-aged children by engaging with educational institutions." The SET's response to this objective commenced in mid-2022, with a pilot project in collaboration with Edith Cowan University intern Patience Makambwa, that examined children's knowledge and experience of discrimination and rights education. The project placed children at its centre and, by listening to children about their understanding of these concepts, found the children engaged in the project possessed a reasonable amount of foundational knowledge about the meaning of rights and discrimination and a keen interest in developing their knowledge in ways that were critical, reflective and respectful of people's lived experience.

Informed by the findings of the pilot project, this second research stage commenced at the beginning of the 2023 school year. The second stage includes two significant revisions: 1) a revised student questionnaire and 2) the inclusion of input from teachers'. The revised questionnaire examines students' knowledge and interests more deeply. In relation to teachers, it examines experiences, interests and needs regarding how discrimination and rights function in the curriculum and how teachers manage their teaching of these concepts.

This report presents, analyses and discusses the students' and teachers' ideas and offers key findings useful for informing how the Commission and, potentially, other interested bodies may support teaching and learning about discrimination and rights within the year six curriculum.

The report is divided into three major parts. It begins by outlining the method adopted by the project, including its research design and data collection elements. Next, it analyses and discusses the responses by students and their teachers to the two research questionnaires. Finally, by way of conclusion, it offers the key findings of the research and indicates the significance of these findings in relation to the how the Commission (and other anti-discrimination commissions) may support teaching and learning about discrimination and rights within the year six curriculum.

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## Method

### Research population

This research project focuses on children in year six, the year in which they are completing their primary school education and preparing to transition to secondary school. Fifty-eight students were included in the project from six schools. While considerable effort was expended on trying to shape the research population to represent the systemic participation of students in WA, this proved to be unachievable.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, the research population comprises five government schools, including fifty-two students and five teachers, and one Catholic school, including six students and one teacher. It was also possible to include schools that made sure WA's three education regions, Perth metropolitan region, WA inner regions and WA outer regions, were represented.

1. Balga Primary School (Government): 10 students
2. Dalyellup Primary School (Government Inner-regional): 14 students
3. East Manjimup Primary School (Government Outer-regional): 10 students
4. Kyilla Primary School (Government): 9 students
5. Mundijong Primary School (Government): 9 students
6. Newman College Primary School (Catholic): 6 students

The six teachers selected the participating students with their only instruction being to select six to ten students, using their own discretion.<sup>2</sup> The schools and teachers were provided with an information sheet that explained the project, an information and permission slip for parents or guardians, and questionnaires to be completed by the students and the teachers.

### Research question and objectives

The research project used one research question and two research objectives.

Research Question:

What does an examination of the experience and knowledge about discrimination and rights, held by children in year six in Western Australia, tell us about how to support their learning about these concepts?

Objectives:

1. To investigate children's
  - a. knowledge and understanding of discrimination and rights;
  - b. lived experience of discrimination and rights; and
  - c. ability to think critically about discrimination and rights, both in theory and in the way they function in day-to-day life.

<sup>1</sup> In WA 66.8% of students are enrolled in government schools, 17% are enrolled in Catholic schools and 16% are enrolled in independent schools. 51% of non-government schools are Catholic and 49% are other independent schools, with the largest proportion of them belonging to Protestant churches (27%), followed by Various Other (15%) and no religious affiliation 0.05% (see [Department of Education Annual Report](#)). The intention at the beginning of the project was to select participants to represent the student population in WA, at least regarding systemic participation and student populations according to regions. This would have meant the inclusion of 8 government schools, providing 40 students; 2 Catholic schools, providing 10 students; 1 Protestant school, providing 5 students; 1 Other school (either non-religious or a non-Christian religious school, or a mix), providing 5 students.

<sup>2</sup> Dalyellup had requested to include two entire classes in the project but only managed to get 14 students to complete the required permission forms. It was decided to allow the 14 students, from two classes, to participate.

2. To build an understanding of the needs associated with teaching and learning about discrimination and rights by examining
  - a. children's perceptions and ideas about learning about discrimination and rights; and
  - b. teachers' experiences, interests and needs regarding how they manage teaching and learning about discrimination and rights within the curriculum.

### Data collection method and questionnaires

Two questionnaires were developed, one for students and another for teachers. The teachers oversaw the completion of the student questionnaires which were able to be completed in whatever amount of time the students required, on a date and time selected by the teacher. The teachers were instructed to provide the students with practical instructions only and not to assist with comprehension. The students were told that they should respond to each question by writing as much or as little as they thought necessary. The student questionnaire comprised of three parts. Part One provided a table with seven prompts about students' interest in learning about topics associated with discrimination and rights. The students expressed their interest in each topic using a Likert Scale (see Table 1):

1. I am interested in learning about the correct meaning of human rights.
2. I am interested in learning about the correct meaning of discrimination.
3. I am interested in learning about how rights protect people from discrimination.
4. I am interested in learning about how to stop discrimination.
5. I am interested in learning about how not to discriminate against other people.
6. I am interested in learning about the effect that discrimination has on people.
7. I am interested in learning about how I can teach people to understand more about discrimination and rights.

Part two provided a table with eight grounds of discrimination (age, disability, gender identity, physical appearance, political conviction, race, religious conviction and sexual orientation) along with four prompts. The students were required to tick each of the grounds and prompts that matched them (see Table 2). These four prompts were provided for each of the grounds:

1. I have experienced this discrimination.
2. Someone I know has experienced this discrimination.
3. I think this is an important issue.
4. I want to learn more about this issue.

Part three required students to write paragraph answers to seven questions:

1. What do you think is the meaning of human rights? Provide one or two examples of human rights.
2. What do you think it means to say people have rights? Provide one or two examples with your explanation.
3. What do you think is the meaning of discrimination? Provide one or two examples of how discrimination happens. If you or anyone you know has experienced discrimination, you may choose to describe one of these experiences.
4. Think about what you already know about discrimination and rights. How did you learn about them? Provide one example of how that learning happened.
5. What do you think might be the most important things for you to learn about discrimination and rights? You might like to offer a description of what you would like to learn or provide a list of ideas.
6. What do you think would be the best way for you to learn about discrimination and rights? What would help you learn more about discrimination and rights? You may like to include some examples of your ideas.
7. What do you think would be a good resource to help you teach other people about discrimination and rights? You may like to explain or describe how and where you would use this resource.

The teachers were provided with a questionnaire with three questions:

1. The concepts of discrimination and rights are mentioned in the subjects Civics and Citizenship, History and Health and Physical Education. Based on your teaching experience, would you regard discrimination and rights as being more suitably aligned to one of these subjects more than the others and, if so, how would that be the case? You may like to include some examples to illustrate your answer.
2. This research aims to find relevant ways to support teaching and learning about the concepts of discrimination and rights within the year six curriculum. It wants to know how this could be done in ways that are most useful for teachers and their students and would be endorsed by teachers and schools. What requests or recommendations would you offer regarding how this project could best contribute to that outcome?
3. In your opinion, what would you find most useful and supportive for your teaching about discrimination and rights within the year six curriculum? What types of support (incursions, resources, materials and so on) would you welcome and be most likely to use?

Using this research method, it has been possible to find out what fifty-eight students and their six teachers, from regions across WA, think about issues related to teaching and learning about discrimination and rights and what might best support this endeavour. This becomes clearer when we analyse and discuss what the participants tell us.

## Analysis and discussion

The analysis and discussion is organised according to the structure of each questionnaire and uses tables to represent the responses to each question before considering their significance. The students' responses are discussed first and then the teachers' responses are discussed.

### Student Questionnaire

Questionnaire Part 1 and Part 2: Interest in learning and experiences of discrimination

This section analyses and discusses two tables. Table 1 presents how the students responded to prompts about their interest in learning about human rights and discrimination. Table 2 presents what students think about eight individual grounds of discrimination in relation to four prompts about experience, perceived importance and the desire to know more about the grounds.

### Interest in learning about human rights and discrimination

Part One of the questionnaire required students to consider seven prompts about learning about rights and discrimination and to respond by using a Likert scale. Table 1 presents the prompts in order of students' strongest to weakest agreement.

**Table 1: What do you think about these statements?<sup>3</sup>**

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am interested in learning about how rights protect people from discrimination.		2	7 (12%)	30 (52%)	19 (33%) <b>(85%)<sup>4</sup></b>
I am interested in learning about the effect that discrimination has on people.		1	9 (16%)	29 (50%)	19 (33%) <b>(83%)</b>
I am interested in learning about the correct meaning of human rights.		2	9 (16%)	35 (60%)	12 (21%) <b>(81%)</b>
I am interested in learning about how to stop discrimination.		1	10 (17%)	18 (31%)	28 (48%) <b>(79%)</b>
I am interested in learning about the correct meaning of discrimination.		2	10 (17%)	27 (47%)	16 (28%) <b>(75%)</b>
I am interested in learning about how not to discriminate against other people.		1	12 (21%)	20 (34%)	24 (41%) <b>(75%)</b>
I am interested in learning about how I can teach people to understand more about discrimination and rights.	3 (5%) (13%)	4 (7%)	14 (24%)	11 (19%)	25 (43%) <b>(62%)</b>

The table shows that a substantially high number of students (75% and higher) agree or strongly agree that they are interested in learning about rights and discrimination. The students are most interested in three topics. The greatest interest is in learning about how rights protect people from discrimination (85%), followed by learning about the effect that discrimination has on people (83%), and the third highest level of interest is in learning about the correct meaning of human rights (81%). An interesting point to be drawn from these responses is that the two highest responses concern matters that are closely related: how people experience discrimination and how rights protect them. This demonstrates the students are very interested in knowing how discrimination and rights function in practice, especially how discrimination impacts people and how rights protect them from discrimination.

The next three most common areas of interest are: how to stop discrimination (79%), the correct meaning of discrimination (75%), and how not to discriminate (75%). What stands out here is that, while a high percentage of students want to know the correct meaning of human rights (81%), a slightly lower percentage of students want to know the correct meaning of discrimination (75%). This is significant because, as will be seen in later analysis, the students demonstrate a strong ability to explain the meaning discrimination but struggle to explain the meaning human rights. The responses presented in this table indicate they have some appreciation about what they know, what they do not know, and what they need to learn when it comes to understanding the meaning of rights and discrimination.

<sup>3</sup> The shading colours of gold, silver and bronze indicate the order of the top three most chosen statements while pale red is used to highlight the least common choice.

<sup>4</sup> The higher bolded percentages indicate the sum of agree and strongly agree or disagree and strongly disagree.

A further point relates to the students' lowest level of interest in learning, which is learning about how to teach people to understand more about discrimination and rights; 62% of the students agree or strongly agree and 13% disagree or strongly disagree that they have an interest in learning this skill. This prompt is the only category with which any students strongly disagree (5%). The highest level of disagreement, apart from this prompt, is 3%. Comparing this response to the very high level of interest in each of the other learning categories, it would seem reasonable to suggest the students are not attracted to the idea of learning to teach rather than being specifically disinterested in learning to teach people to understand discrimination and rights. This assertion is supported by the fact students agree or strongly agree with the other statements that are associated with understanding discrimination and rights, such as their correct meaning and the effect discrimination has on people. The major difference is the inclusion of learning to teach rather than the concept of discrimination. It would be interesting to test this by revising the statement so students responded to a new statement that replaced "teach" with another verb, such as "help". This would test if students were willing to learn how to help people to understand more about discrimination and rights rather than learn how to teach them this.

### Students and grounds of discrimination

Part two of the questionnaire required students to consider eight grounds of discrimination via the four prompts listed across the top of Table 2. The students were instructed to tick every box they matched.

**Table 2: Students' personal experiences and perceptions regarding grounds of discrimination<sup>5</sup>**

Ground or Type of Discrimination	I have experienced this discrimination	Someone I know has experienced this discrimination	I think this is an important issue	I want to learn more about this issue
Age	10 (17%)	19 (33%)	22 (37%)	17 (29%)
Disability	3 (5%)	22 (37%)	38 (66%)	15 (26%)
Gender Identity <sup>6</sup>	8 (14%)	19 (33%)	32 (55%)	16 (28%)
Physical Appearance <sup>7</sup>	15 (26%)	28 (48%)	36 (62%)	12 (21%)
Political Conviction	1 (2%)	7 (12%)	18 (31%)	26 (45%)
Race	9 (16%)	27 (47%)	38 (66%)	17 (29%)
Religious Conviction	5 (6%)	10 (17%)	30 (52%)	19 (33%)
Sexual Orientation	7 (12%)	16 (28%)	30 (52%)	24 (42%)

It is useful to analyse this table by beginning with the prompt about what students think is an important issue (ground). This prompt attracts the highest level of matches in the entire table with four grounds attracting the highest level of interest. Disability and Race are chosen by 66% of students, Physical Appearance is chosen by 62% of students and Gender Identity is chosen by 55% of students. It is also worth noting that Religious Conviction and Sexual Orientation are regarded as important by 52% of students. Even the lowest matching grounds of Age and Political Conviction still attract one-third of the students' interest. It is useful to bear in mind what students regard as important issues when considering how students match grounds according to their personal experience and the experiences of someone they know. With this point noted, it is worthwhile to consider what we learn from the students' responses.

The table indicates some correlation between the grounds that the greatest number of students regard as important issues and the grounds that most commonly match students' experiences of discrimination, as well as that of someone known to the students. Correlation occurs most noticeably for the grounds of physical appearance and race.

<sup>5</sup> The shading colours of gold, silver and bronze indicate the top three chosen prompts.

<sup>6</sup> The students were not given definitions or explanations for any of the grounds. Teachers were instructed to assist the students to complete the questionnaire in practical terms but not to provide them with knowledge or information about the content or meaning of terms used in the questionnaire. This means that students have interpreted the meaning of Gender Identity using whatever knowledge or understanding they possess.

<sup>7</sup> At present, physical appearance is not covered by the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA) as a ground for unlawful discrimination. It is, however, recognised as a ground for unlawful discrimination in jurisdictions other than WA. The Law Reform Commission

Race is regarded by 66% of students as an important issue and 16% of students indicate they have personal experience of this and 47% state someone they know has experienced racial discrimination. Physical appearance is considered by 62% of students as an important issue and 26% of students indicate having experienced this form of discrimination, while 48% of students indicate that they know someone who has experienced discrimination due to physical appearance. The other correlation worth noting is that 66% of students regard disability as an important issue and 37% of them indicate that they know someone who has experienced discrimination due to disability, although only 5% disclose that they have experienced disability discrimination directed at them, personally. With these points of correlation in mind, it is interesting to consider how what the students tell us compares with the matters raised by people who contact the Equal Opportunity Commission WA (Commission). Table 3 presents the three most common grounds according to student responses as well as the data collected by the Commission regarding the types of enquiries and complaints made by the public about discrimination.

**Table 3: Most common grounds according to student responses and Commission enquiries and complaints<sup>8</sup>**

	Most Common	Second Most Common	Third Most Common
I have experienced this discrimination	Physical Appearance 15 (26%)	Age 10 (17%)	Race 9 (16%)
Someone I know has experienced this discrimination	Physical Appearance 28 (48%)	Race 27 (47%)	Disability 22 (37%)
I think this is an important issue	Disability Race 38 (66%)	Physical Appearance 36 (62%)	Gender Identity 32 (55%)
I want to learn more about this issue	Political Conviction 26 (45%)	Sexual Orientation 24 (42%)	Religious Conviction 19 (33%)
Commission Ground of Enquiry	Impairment (24.4%)	Race 13.9%	Age (4.5%)
Commission Ground of Complaint	Impairment (25.4%)	Race (16%)	Age (8.7%) <sup>9</sup>

This table shows an overlap between how students experience discrimination, how people they know experience discrimination and how members of the community, who make an enquiry or complaint to the EOC, experience discrimination according to grounds. The groups overlap regarding their most common experiences of discrimination according to grounds: Disability (Impairment), Race and Age.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to this correlation, it is worth considering how the students respond to the prompt regarding what they want to learn more about. Given what the students indicate regarding their personal experiences of discrimination, and what they deem to be important issues (see Tables 1 and 2), it is interesting to note which grounds they want to learn more about: political conviction, sexual orientation and religious conviction. The least common ground personally experienced by students is political conviction and it is the ground they most want to learn more about. This choice makes a lot of sense because it demonstrates a desire to learn about something which the students have limited experience and knowledge.

<sup>8</sup> The data refers to enquires and complaints received by the EOC in the Financial Year 22/23.

<sup>9</sup> Age is included as the third most common ground for complaints even though Sexual Harassment (9.4%) and Victimisation (10.7%) rank above Age in the Commission's data. The decision for this is to enable a comparison to be made with the students, who were not given the option of choosing Sexual Harassment and Victimisation.

<sup>10</sup> This overlap is illustrated using green highlighting.

The second and third most common choices regarding what students want to learn more about are religious conviction and sexual orientation, which more than half the students regard as important issues. The recognition of these two grounds as important issues, along with the fact that the students have limited experienced of them (6% and 12%, respectively), helps us appreciate why the students wish to learn more about them and demonstrates a desire by the students to inform themselves more thoroughly about the ways people experience discrimination and that are unfamiliar to the students. This desire to learn highlights the importance of understanding what students already know about discrimination and rights and how they learn about these concepts.

Questionnaire Part 3: Student knowledge and learning

Part 3 of the student questionnaire seeks to understand how students understand the meaning of rights and discrimination and how they have obtained their existing knowledge about these concepts. Each table presents the most common ideas provided by students and the number of students that shared the idea. A quotation is provided to illustrate the meaning of each key idea.

The meaning of human rights

Table 4: What do you think is the meaning of human rights? Provide one or two examples.

Key Idea	Quotation	Quantity
Everyone has human rights	“Human rights are rights that every human can expect to have simply because they are human.”	20 (34%)
Equal opportunity	“... if someone has a disability, they should get the same opportunities as someone who doesn't have a disability...”	16 (25%)
Freedom to express ideas	“Human rights is when a human has a right to speak, say the truth and tell their opinion, or what they think is right or wrong or what should happen or what shouldn't happen.”	13 (22%)

The students assert three ideas most often about the meaning of human rights. About one-third (34%) of the students explain human rights belong to every human, 25% of students describe human rights as providing people with equal opportunity and 22% of students associate human rights with the right to freely express ideas or opinions. A reasonable way of measuring the students' attempts to explain the meaning of human rights is to compare their explanations against how it is expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). While the UDHR is not the only way human rights may be explained, it is widely regarded as providing a widely respected and accepted understanding of “human rights”.

It is, therefore, significant when the students' ideas about the meaning of human rights include language that is similar to that used in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). For example, the 34% of students who assert that everyone has human rights are expressing the ideas that human rights apply to “all human beings” (Art. 1) and that “everyone is entitled” to human rights (Art. 2). In addition to this, when 25% of the students associate human rights with equal opportunity, they are unconsciously echoing Art. 2 of the UDHR, which states “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in [the UDHR], without distinction of any kind.” Finally, the 22% of students who assert human rights ensure the freedom to express ideas and opinions, are expressing an idea that resonates with Art. 19 of the UDHR, which states, “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.” In addition to demonstrating an understanding of human rights that resonance with the meaning expressed by the UDHR, some students demonstrate an appreciation for the way that the meaning of human rights is made more complex in practice.

An appreciation for the complex nature of human rights is demonstrated by students who critique the meaning of human rights by shining a light on the assertion human rights belong to everyone equally. These students exercise an ability to think critically about the way human rights are shaped by people's lived experience and that different people experience human

rights differently. In doing so, they highlight the importance of appreciating the full meaning of human rights as embodying theory and practise. One student exemplifies this by asserting that, “if someone has a disability, they should get the same opportunities as someone who doesn't have a disability.” Another student illustrates this by stating that “human rights are an important part of everyone's lives and, in some cases, people are denied those rights.” This ability to think critically about human rights as concepts shaped by everyday practices is demonstrated further when the students move beyond explaining the meaning of human rights and explain what it means to have human rights.

What it means to have human rights

Table 5: What do you think it means to say people have human rights? Provide one or two examples.

Key Idea	Quotation	Quantity
Everyone has equal access to their rights	“Rights are things that every person should have access to, and be given, no matter their race, disability or gender.”	16 (27%) <sup>11</sup>
To be protected from harmful treatment	“I think the meaning to say people have rights is that they can do anything that they want like have a good life and not be harassed or made fun of what you are.”	15 (26%)
Rights permit or allow	“To say that people have rights is saying that they are allowed legally to do or receive things.”	11 (19%)

Table 5 presents the three most common ideas that the students associate with what it means to have human rights. According to 27% of students, people have human rights when everyone has equal access to rights, which one student illustrates, stating that “It means that although no-one is the same, everyone has the same right and are equal, no matter where they come from or what they look like.” In the view of 26% of students, people have rights when they are protected from harmful treatment, thus making it possible for people to “have a good life and not be harassed or made fun of what you are.” Finally, 19% of students regard having rights as receiving permission to “do or receive things” ensuring that “nothing should be stopping people from having rights.” Taken together, these three points demonstrate that the greatest number of students judge whether a person has human rights according to how well people can access their rights and how well those rights provide people with protection and permission to live and act in accordance with their rights. It should be noted, however, that the percentages of students advancing the ideas presented in Tables 4 and 5 are rather low, which suggests that there are substantial gaps in the students' knowledge about the meaning of human rights. This deserves some consideration before moving to consider what students have to say about learning about discrimination and rights.

The low percentages reported in Tables 4 and 5 highlight gaps in the students' knowledge about the meaning of human rights. For example, it indicates 73% of the students do not know “everyone is entitled to all ... rights and freedoms” (Art. 2) which suggests that a significant percentage of students would not know about the “equal rights of men and women” (UDHR Preamble) to access their rights “without distinction of any kind” (Art. 2). In addition to these gaps in knowledge, many students incorporate flawed ideas in their explanations of the meaning of rights. Common flaws are exemplified by these four responses:

“... everyone gets to do everything.”

“... everyone has the right to do anything.”

“Everyone is treated the same.”

“...you can say what you want, do what you want and believe what you want. People don't have the right to say that you can't do what you want to do.”

11 It is interesting to note the percentage of students describing human rights as belonging to everyone, was much higher in the pilot project, with 56% of students describing it in this way.



These statements embody ideas that are either false or require greater precision. They are certainly not unique to children, and they commonly expressed by adults. Indeed, it would be safe to assert that the children learn these fallacies from adults, both known to them personally and through the media. These examples, together with the information provided in Tables 4 and 5, illuminate the gap in students' knowledge about rights and discrimination and they inform us about the need to help children learn to think more precisely and critically about rights and the complex ways in which rights function in theory and practice. When it comes to the meaning of discrimination, the students demonstrate a more solid understanding.

### The meaning of discrimination

**Table 6: What do you think is the meaning of discrimination?**

Meaning	Quotation	Quantity
Negative behaviour directed at difference: disrespect, abuse, bullying, hurt, put down, rude, unfair treatment, teasing	"Discrimination is when someone is treated differently because they are different. Discrimination happens when people decide that they are better than someone else because that person is different to them in some way. For example, someone could be unable to walk and people could bully them for that reason."	48 (83%)
Exclusion	"The meaning of discrimination is being excluded or treated differently because of their race, gender or because they have a disability. I have been bullied for what kind of gender I am attracted to, and it feels horrible, so I really want to make a difference, so others feel okay with who they are and do not get left out of games."	12 (21%)

When explaining the meaning of discrimination, 83% of students describe it as negative behaviour (abuse, bullying and hurtful or unfair treatment) directed at difference, with some students referring to specific attributes such as race, religion, gender, disability and physical appearance. The second most common meaning, provided by 21% of students, is that discrimination is about excluding people. In addition to the insightful statement provided in Table 6, a student provides this powerful example, taken from lived experience, that illustrates discrimination as unfair treatment that excludes people because they are different: "some Indigenous kids in the shops and the security guard asks them to empty their bags, but not other people." The clear outcome demonstrated by Table 6, is that the students possess a strong ability to define discrimination properly as well as a solid appreciation for the way that it impacts people. Acknowledging the knowledge the students possess, it's valuable to consider how they obtained their knowledge and how that knowledge might be extended.

### Learning about discrimination

Part 3 of the questionnaire includes three questions about the students' learning about discrimination and rights. The questions aim to understand how the students have learnt what they already know, what they consider to be most important to learn, and what they consider to be the best way to learn. In addition to these questions, the students were asked to indicate what they think would be a good resource to help them teach other people about discrimination and rights. Given the point made above about how the students responded to the idea of teaching other people about discrimination and rights, it isn't surprising they struggled to respond to this question, meaning there is little value in trying to analyse the responses to this question in any great depth. For this reason, the following discussion limits itself to the first three questions.

When asked how they have learnt what they already know about discrimination and rights, the students name three learning sources: school classes (50%), personal experience or witnessing discrimination (29%) and family and relatives (22%). When the students explain how they learn about discrimination through experiencing it or witnessing

it, they share that this learning happens through their involvement in wider society, their experiences at school and in their families. The students describe personal experiences of discrimination, which include: being searched at local shopping centres because of their race; being told about personal experiences of discrimination by classmates; and family members sharing personal experiences of discrimination.

Responding to the question about what they think are the most important things to learn about discrimination and rights, the students name points associated with knowledge and skills. Twenty six percent of students state understanding discrimination and rights better would be the most important thing to learn, with 21% of students indicating that it is important to learn about the grounds of discrimination. Twenty four percent of students state that developing skills to respond to discrimination would be the most important thing to learn, including how to stop or fix discrimination (24%) and how to deal with it personally and on behalf of other people (22%). The way the students respond to this question illustrates how some students recognise the important relationship between knowledge and skills when learning about discrimination and rights. One student demonstrates a particularly perceptive appreciation for this learning need, when they respond by saying, "I think that we as children should learn more about our rights and then when we get into the later years of high school, learn about your rights as an adult and how they are different. We should also learn about examples to do with how to spot discrimination and what to say when somebody is discriminating somebody." Comments like this demonstrate how some students are able to think critically about the gap that exists between rights in theory and in practice and they highlight the importance of teaching and learning that helps all students to develop this critical skill.

In responding about what they consider to be the best way for them to learn about discrimination and rights, the students offer four ideas that fit into two categories. Firstly, the greatest number of students (33%) make the point that school offers the best way for them to learn about discrimination and rights. The second point they make is that they regard learning from lived experience as a valuable way to learn about discrimination and rights. One student illustrates the value the group gives to learning from lived experience when they explain, "The best way for me to learn about it would be to understand people's experiences [...] It would help if I could see the impact of these actions on people." The students name three methods for engaging with lived experience: lived experience speakers (21%), examples and stories about discrimination (16%) and videos that include the use of lived experience (16%). The fact that the greatest number of students regard school, including their classes and teachers, as the source that offers them the best way to learn about discrimination and rights highlights the importance of considering what teachers have to say about teaching and learning about rights and discrimination within the year six curriculum.

### Teacher questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire consists of three questions which aim to understand what teachers think about two fundamental matters: 1) how they see the concepts of rights and discrimination fitting within the year six curriculum and 2) what they regard as the most practical means of support for their teaching about rights and discrimination. The following discussion considers these matters together by drawing on the teachers' responses to the three questions.

The concepts of discrimination and rights are included in the year six curriculum in three learning areas: Civics and Citizenship; History and Health; and Physical Education. The teachers were asked to draw on their experience of teaching and to explain how they understood how the concepts of discrimination and rights fitted in the three learning areas. All six teachers asserted it was important each of the concepts be included in each of the three learning areas. This view was based on the conviction that embedding education about discrimination and rights in each of the three learning areas helps students to develop a well-rounded knowledge and understanding of these concepts. The teachers also argued this cross-curriculum approach helps students appreciate how these concepts function in concrete terms and are not limited to the abstract. While sharing this view, one teacher highlighted some of the challenges this approach embodies, explaining, "Although I understand why it is across the curriculum, it is another concept added to the teaching load. Resources need to be designed to cover all three (subject areas) simultaneously instead of adding more." This point illuminates the importance teachers attach to the need for resources that do not add to their workload or complicate existing demands within the curriculum.

When discussing the cross-curriculum nature of the concepts of discrimination and rights, the teachers provided a consensus view on how the concepts are included in three learning areas. Civics and Citizenship informs students about rights they currently have. History deals with past discrimination and how rights have improved over time, thus providing students with perspective on the purpose of laws and the need to continue to learn from past mistakes. History does this because it requires students to examine how discrimination and rights are evident in key figures and significant events in Australia’s past, such as colonisation and Federation, as well as in the experiences and changing status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, migrants, women and children. Health provides opportunities for students to consider their personal experiences and makes them more likely to identify if their personal rights are being interfered with, including in the way it requires students to think critically about self-identity and making informed choices. As a consequence, Health often enables students to consider more subtle forms of discrimination by including familiar examples that children experience in their lives, including how to develop empathy and how to consider multiple perspectives of situations or ethical conundrums. For example, one teacher illustrates this by explaining the learning that occurs in Health enables students to “make human rights personal and create a natural link to why we need to know more.” This happens in Health when students learn about interacting with other people. When studying this, they consider how difference is part of being human and part of human relationships. This requires the students to think about what it means to make choices in the way they interact with people who are different and what it means to manage positive relationships, show respect, and act with empathy.

It is important to appreciate the value the teachers attach to teaching about discrimination and rights via a cross-curriculum approach because it shapes how they think about the type of support they would value for their teaching. This should be kept in mind when considering how the teachers responded to the third question put to them. This question asked the teachers to indicate what they would find most useful and supportive for teaching about discrimination and rights within the year six curriculum. Their responses are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7: Resources valued by teachers**

RESOURCE	EXPLANATORY NOTES & TEACHER SUPPORT
Lesson plan packages	This resource refers to “ready-to-teach” lesson plan packages, matched to the curriculum. The packages should include other resources listed in this table. Five teachers supported this resource with the most enthusiasm of all the requested resources.
Lived experience material	Authentic stories of discrimination and harassment included as part of the other resources in this table. Five teachers enthusiastically supported this.
Empathy exercises	The teachers described these exercises as teaching children how to build empathy and to deal with lived experience scenarios and ethical conundrums.  Five teachers stressed three points: 1) schools with empathy programs in place would be reticent to use this additional resource; 2) teachers in schools without empathy programs would value such a resource; and 3) teachers are time poor so the resource must match the curriculum in a meaningful way.
Videos	Videos should be used to provide: lived experience; explanations of concepts; and to demonstrate how language can result in discrimination. Five teachers agree that video content should be included in lesson packages, particularly for providing case studies.
Hypotheticals	Brief stories, scenarios or scripts about situations involving discrimination for students to read and discuss in pairs, groups and as a class. The hypotheticals should include dilemmas with accompanying discussion points.  Four teachers indicated that they would use this resource, especially if it were incorporated into lesson packages. One teacher was interested in incorporating the hypotheticals according to how they matched her needs.

The five resources presented in Table 7 provide a clear representation of the resources teachers regard as best answering their teaching needs and that they would use. In addition to these resources, the teachers expressed interest in one other resource but their interest was accompanied by some doubt. This concerned the idea of a resource to help parents and guardians support and enhance their children’s learning about discrimination and rights at home. Five teachers regarded such a resource as a good idea, but they believed it would have limited impact because parents’ and guardians’ input is so varied with parents and guardians often asserting they are too busy to engage in learning activities at home. One teacher also commented the parents at her school would struggle with such a resource, given many of them do not speak English.

## Conclusion: Key findings and moving forward

The analysis and discussion of the students' and teachers' responses makes it evident there is much to learn from them about supporting teaching and learning about discrimination and rights within the year six curriculum. This conclusion advances nine findings that provide knowledge useful for informing what it might be like to move this project forward in terms of the practical support it offers year six students and teachers in their efforts to learn about rights and discrimination. The nine findings are presented and followed by several comments that advance some suggestions about the possibilities that exist for moving this project forward.

1. Most students (83%) can define discrimination clearly and appropriately as negative behaviour, directed at difference, such as race, religion, gender, dis/ability and appearance.
2. Most students are interested in learning more about discrimination, including how to protect people from discrimination (85%), the effect that discrimination has on people (83%) and, even though their understanding of the meaning of discrimination is strong, they want to learn the correct meaning of discrimination (75%). Most students are also interested in learning about how to stop discrimination (79%) and how not to discriminate (75%).
3. Most students struggle to define human rights clearly and unambiguously. Only 34% of students explain that human rights belong to all humans simply because they are human. It is, therefore, encouraging that most students (81%) express an interest in learning about the correct meaning of human rights.
4. The students' struggle to define human rights is accompanied by an inability to bridge the gap between the abstract nature of rights and what it means for people to access their rights and the protections they offer in concrete terms. This includes the need for students to learn how to recognise and critique erroneous ideas that are commonly attached to how rights are popularly understood, including the idea everybody has the right to believe, say and do whatever they want, without being told they cannot act in that way.
5. There is an overlap regarding the types of discrimination that a) students regard as an important issue, b) students have experienced, c) people known by the students have experienced and d) are the reasons people make enquiries or complaints to the EOC. The overlap shared by each of these four sources is discrimination on the grounds of disability (impairment), race and age.
6. Inviting the students to select some grounds that are not currently included as provisions in the Act, and therefore are not captured as enquiries or complaints by members of the public, reveals the grounds of physical appearance and gender identity are significant for how students experience discrimination (physical appearance 26%) and how people they know experience discrimination (physical appearance 48%) and what the students regard as important issues (physical appearance 62%; gender identity 55%).
7. The students' existing learning about discrimination and rights has occurred during classes at school (50%), through personal experience or witnessing discrimination (29%) and via their families (22%). In addition to this, 33% of students regard school as offering them the best way to learn about discrimination and rights.
8. Every teacher in the project agreed the concepts of discrimination and rights should be taught in a cross-curriculum approach in the three learning areas of civics and citizenship, history, and health and physical education. They base this view on the conviction this approach enables students to develop a well-rounded knowledge of the concepts, including an appreciation for their abstract and concrete meanings.
9. The teachers are emphatic that what they would find most useful and supportive for their teaching about discrimination and rights are resources that match the curriculum and are ready-to-use. They name five resources (in this order) that would meet their needs: 1) ready-to-teach lesson plan packages; 2) materials that share authentic stories of lived experience; 3) exercises to build empathy in students; 4) videos that present lived experience and explain the meaning of the concepts, discrimination and rights; and 5) brief hypotheticals in the form of stories, scenarios and scripts, accompanied by discussion guides. It is useful to note the students also regard learning from lived experience (guest speakers, examples and stories, videos) as the best way for them to learn about discrimination and rights.

Each of these nine findings offers important knowledge about developing programs that raise awareness of discrimination and promote anti-discrimination for school-aged children by engaging with educational institutions (EOC Strategic Plan Objective 4). While each finding is useful on its own, taken together, they offer several ideas for moving this project forward in practical terms.

Firstly, the students' responses demonstrate developing "programs" that support their classroom learning about discrimination and rights is worthwhile. They do this by demonstrating that most children in their age group possess a solid understanding of the meaning of discrimination and most of them are clearly interested in learning more about the meaning of discrimination, how it occurs and what can be done to respond to it. They also demonstrate the worthwhile nature of developing "programs" when they demonstrate a clear gap in their knowledge and the need for learning support that addresses this gap. This gap relates to the students' inability to define human rights, as an abstract concept and a concrete experience, and to examine its meaning and function in a critical manner. This means that developing "programs" that support classroom learning about discrimination and rights would be worthwhile as long as such "programs" enhance students' existing knowledge and genuine interest in the concepts, and if they respond to the students' knowledge gaps and ability to think critically about human rights in theory and practice.

Secondly, the students in this project clearly experience discrimination and think about discrimination in ways that mirror adults' experiences of discrimination. This illustrates how children experience and think about discrimination daily and that it is far from a purely abstract concept for them. Children know that discrimination exists and that it is unjust. They experience it in the present and know they will continue to encounter discrimination as adults. Therefore, developing "programs" to support year six students to learn about discrimination recognises the need to support their learning and understanding now, and as a way of preparing them for the future.

Thirdly, developing "programs" that support students' learning about discrimination and rights in a way that fits within the school context and matches the year six curriculum, resonates with the students' existing experience of learning about these concepts and is valued by the teachers in the project. Half of the students explain their existing learning about these concepts has been taught to them by teachers in classes and the teachers agree that including teaching about discrimination and rights as part of a cross-curricula strategy would enable them to help students well-rounded knowledge. This demonstrates such "programs" would respond to and support the way that teaching and learning about discrimination and rights occurs.

Fourthly, the teachers shine a light on the idea of developing "programs" in a way that invites us to reframe this idea in terms that are more pedagogically relevant and practical. They clearly explain that their needs would be most practically and valuably addressed by the provision of resources, especially ready-to-teach lesson packages, rather than by adding new programs to an already full curriculum. In addition to this, together with their students, they emphasise the value of providing lived experience materials as an essential element of any resources developed to support teaching and learning about rights and discrimination.

Placing students and their teachers at the centre of this project has made it possible to listen to both cohorts about their experiences and knowledge of discrimination and rights. This listening has resulted in some substantial learning about what teachers and students really need to help them attain a greater understanding of discrimination and rights. This process of listening and learning has gifted us a robust body of knowledge that enables us to move forward in a well-informed manner. It enables us to respect the knowledge and keen interest in learning students possess about discrimination and rights and to support them and their teachers to continue learning in meaningful and relevant ways, to be critical, reflective and skillful architects of their inherent rights in the face of day-to-day discrimination.

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