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# REVOLVE

## CHRISTIAN WORK IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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### Why should we care about multiculturalism?

For some, multiculturalism is not an issue. Australia seems to be handling its cultural diversity fairly peaceably, and outside metropolitan centres the percentage of overseas-born young people is negligible. Why focus on this issue? By focussing on our differences, don't we simply encourage divisiveness? Does it have much to do with our mission to serve young people in the name of Christ?

While these questions are valid, it is also true that Australia's diverse mix of ethnicities is a constant challenge. We have not yet resolved the tensions between the diverse cultures that inhabit Australia. Furthermore, young people of CLD background (Culturally & Linguistically Diverse) face unique challenges. These include: a history of trauma or torture; expectations from family that conflict with dominant Australian values; learning a non-native language; racial discrimination and intergenerational conflict.

As to whether multiculturalism is relevant to Christian mission amongst young people, incarnational mission requires that we take seriously the history, culture and ethnicity of the young people we serve.

## A short introduction to multiculturalism

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Officially, multiculturalism is:

*"...a government policy that recognises and celebrates Australia's cultural diversity and seeks to address the challenges and opportunities arising from it."*

However, another perspective on multiculturalism is that it is simply our reality:

*"Multinational migration...is becoming more and more prevalent resulting in a world where monocultural societies are virtually extinct today."*

In fact, Australian young people see multiculturalism as *"...something which pervade(s) all of their everyday realities..."*.

That is certainly true of Australia. Although "multiculturalism" is only a recent addition to our vocabulary, it has always been an issue in Australia's history, dating back to white settlement. We are a nation of migrants. In fact, of western nations, Australia has the highest proportion of overseas-born persons (21.9%) .

From the early conflicts between indigenous peoples and white settlers, to the gold rushes of the 1850s, to disagreements over foreign labour in the late 19th century, to the White Australia policy, to the massive influx of post-WWII immigrants from Europe, to the refugee migrations from South-East Asia in 1960s and 1970s, to the rise of One Nation and accompanying racial debate, to the controversy over mandatory detention of asylum seekers from the late 1990s to the present - Australia has *always* been a nation shaped by a multitude of ethnicities.

## Section 1 - The ethnic makeup of Australia's youth

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### 1. Basic Facts

- 15% of Australia's young people were born overseas (390,300 people)
- 818,933 young people (35%) have non-English speaking ancestry
- 71% of overseas-born young people come from a country where English is not the main language
- 16% of young people speak a language other than English at home, with over 200 languages spoken nation-wide
- 25% of young people have both parents born overseas

### 2. Overseas-born young people

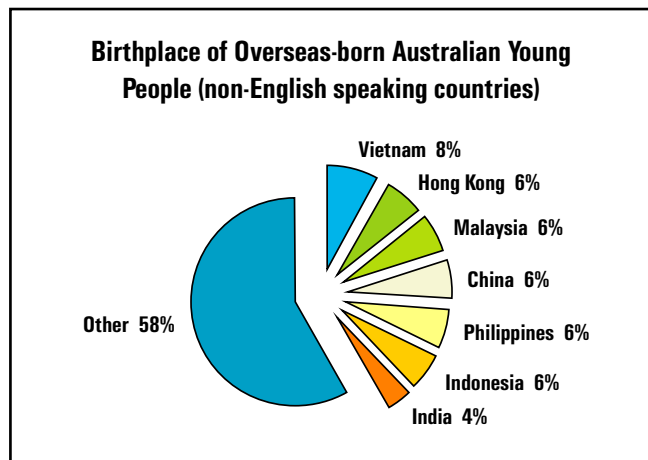


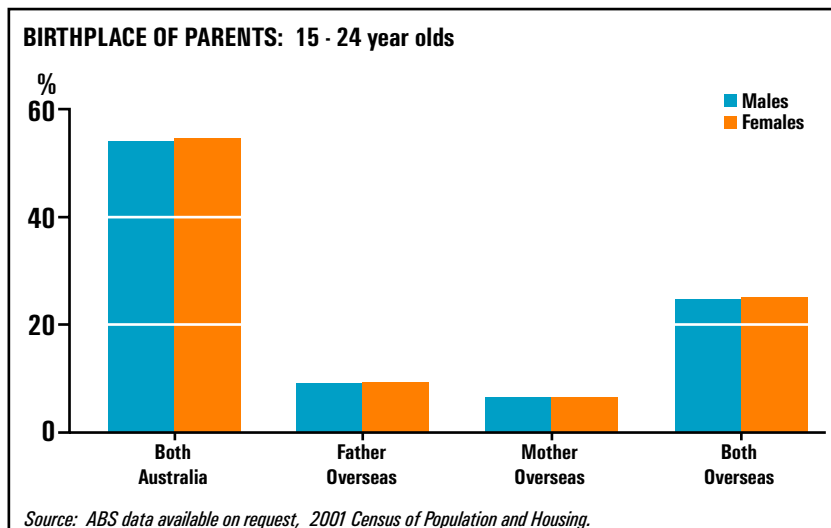
Figure 1

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, Australia's Youth, 2001

While approximately one third of young people born overseas come from countries where English *is* the main language, most originate from countries where English is not commonly used. Figure 1 shows that most of these young people come from Asian countries. Smaller numbers arrive from Eastern European nations.

### 3. Ancestry of Australian young people

As Figure 2 shows, 54% of young people's parents were both born in Australia, while 25% of young people had parents who were both born overseas.



Source: ABS data available on request, 2001 Census of Population and Housing.

However, a more accurate view of the diversity of Australian youth culture is to look at the ancestry statistics of the 2001 census. People chose the ancestries they most identified with, going back 3 generations. Most chose "Australian" (40%), which included over 20,000 responses for indigenous ancestry. Of other ancestries, *Table 1* shows the breakdown.

Table 1 - Australian youth ancestries - other than "Australian"

<b>Oceania</b> - eg. NZ, Maori	<b>3%</b>
<b>North-West European</b> - eg. English, German	<b>85%</b>
<b>Southern &amp; Eastern European</b> - eg. Italy, Serbia	<b>18%</b>
<b>North African &amp; Middle Eastern</b> - eg. Lebanese	<b>4%</b>
<b>South-East Asia</b> - eg. Vietnamese, Filipino	<b>5%</b>
<b>North-East Asia</b> - eg. China	<b>8%</b>
<b>Southern &amp; Central Asia</b> - eg. India	<b>3%</b>
<b>The Americas</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	<b>1%</b>

Source: *ABS Census of Population and Housing, Australia's Youth, 2001*

NB. Percentages do not add up because respondents could choose more than one ancestry.

#### 4. Indigenous Young People

There are approximately 116,698 Indigenous young people aged 12-24 years, representing 3% of the total Australian youth population. In terms of education, employment, health, life expectancy, suicide risk and likelihood of child protection intervention, indigenous young people fare worse than average Australian young people.

#### 5. Refugee Young People

- In the year 2000/01, 3853 young people came to Australia as refugees.
- Of these, 31% (or 1266) arrived in an "unauthorised" manner, and were placed in detention. However, 81% of these "unauthorised arrivals" were found to be genuine refugees.
- Up until the year 2000, most refugee young people arrived from Asian or from Eastern European countries. However, Department of Immigration figures from 2002/03 indicate that the major countries of origin are now Sudan and Iraq.
- Australia detains significant numbers of young people. In April 2002, 81 12-17 year olds remained in detention, along with an unknown number of 18-25 year olds.

## Section 2 - Challenges that CLD young people face

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Although Australia is a relatively diverse nation in terms of culture, western value systems still dominate education, politics, the economy and social norms such as dress and language. This fact creates a myriad of challenges for CLD young people. For the purposes of Revolve, however, we will focus on four: racism, identity and refugee experiences.

### A. Racism

From Federation (1901) until the late 1970s, Australia's immigration policy was blatantly discriminatory. The "White Australia" policy, contained in the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, aimed to filter out "undesirable" ethnicities through methods such as a dictation test in *any* European language.

How is racism currently expressed towards CLD young people?

#### 1. Interpersonal racism

- CLD young people are 40% more likely to be harassed than Anglo-Australian young people.
- drive-by abuse, physical harassment, cutting hair, being taught swear words by English-speaking peers and being provoked into conflict.

#### 2. Stereotyping

- CLD young people experience racial stereotyping via schools, the health profession, the police and the media.
- The most obvious expression of stereotyping is the police and media representation of 'ethnic gangs'. Following the stabbing murder of a student in 1998 in Sydney, police claimed it was the work of "ethnic-based gangs", and the media circulated this story sensationally.

#### 3. Structural racism

- Structural racism means that a nation's laws, institutions and "cultural atmosphere" are discriminatory towards people of certain ethnicities. For example, though a school may treat its CLD young people with respect, it may have no ESL program, thereby discriminating against them on the basis of language.

However, the good news is that most Australian young people support racial tolerance. A recent study found that the majority of young people were racially tolerant, although older young people were likely to be less tolerant than younger young people.

### B. Identity

The development of a stable and healthy identity, distinct from parents, may be the core task of adolescence, particularly in Western cultures. For Anglo-Australian young people "*identity development occurs in a context to which they have been progressively socialised.*" This means that their environment is relatively stable and familiar throughout their development, and so the task of constructing identity is relatively easy compared to CLD young people.

#### 1. Negotiating two cultures

If a stable and predictable cultural environment enables identity development, then CLD young people will struggle enormously. They develop their identity in a context of two or more cultures, with differing languages, values, norms and behaviour patterns. CLD young people still face pressures to "*assimilate*"; to completely alter their beliefs and behaviour to reflect Anglo-Australian values and culture. In some ways, this is a simpler way to deal with cultural conflict than "*integration*"; the "*mutual adjustment to each other's cultural lifeways*".

Charlene Delos Santos, a Scripture Union worker with CLD young people, says that:

*From my own experience...we've had issues with family, and trying to fit into the dominant culture. You don't quite fit into your parent's cultural background, but you don't quite fit into Anglo circles either. There's a tension in trying to balance the cultures. Some reject one of the cultures altogether.*

Western culture, as expressed in Australia, often values different things from the cultures that CLD young people have grown up in. The grid below maps out some of these value tensions:

Western Culture	Non-Western Culture
Individual	Group
Nuclear family	Extended family
Independence	Interdependence
Competition	Conformity
Youth	Age
Future-oriented	Past-oriented
Conquest of nature	Working with nature
Assertion & aggression	Patience & modesty

Table 2 - Tensions between Western & non-Western cultures

CLD young people must decide how to engage with their culture's traditions, rituals, family & community gatherings, language and spirituality. In addition, they must decide how to engage with Australian culture, parts of which will conflict with their original culture. CLD young people make these decisions with varying success, but it does seem that young people who were born in Australia or arrived at a young age, find it easier to integrate the two cultures satisfactorily.

## 2. Intergenerational conflict

In addition to developing their own identity, CLD young people must also deal with the responses of their parents and extended family to Australian culture.

Young people often assist their parents to navigate their way around Australian society. A common example of this is in interpreting for parents, or taking time off school to assist their parents during a medical appointment. The young person assumes more responsibility than they would in their original culture - this can lead to resentment and conflict.

In addition, parental expectations can clash with the perceived "Australian" way of parenting. These expectations concern the young person's social life, dress, academic performance, gaining financial independence through Austudy and gender equality. More generally, parents may feel that their child is adopting an Australian lifestyle too quickly, or in ways that conflict with the original culture's values.

## C. Refugee Experiences

*Refugees arriving in Australia face not only the stresses of migration related to sudden changes in language and culture, but they must also contend with a past that is often filled with extremely traumatic experiences.*

### 1. Pre-migration experiences - trauma

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture describes various methods by which refugee young people may suffer trauma in their home country, including:

- A state of terror and chronic alarm
- Disruption of core attachments to families, friends, religious and cultural systems.
- Creation of shame

The effects of such trauma are many, including:

- Dramatic role reversals within families, as parents may be too damaged to parent adequately.
- Pressure associated with dislocation from culture and tradition.
- Young people are often taught not to trust anyone.
- Guilt associated with leaving family or close friends behind.

## 2. Transition experiences - immigration detention centres & TPVs

- 2184 children and young people arrived in Australia by boat or air without a visa and applied for refugee protection visas between 1 July 1999 and 30 June 2003.
- On the 18th of March 2005, there were 57 people under the age of 18 in detention centres around Australia, including "off-shore" facilities such as Christmas Island.

According to the Department of Immigration, young people in detention have access to educational, health, welfare and psychological services.

However, a number of researchers have pointed out the negative effects of detention upon young people. In particular, the HREOC inquiry into children in detention concluded that:

- The detention of children contravened the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right of a child to not be in detention except as a last resort.
- Children in immigration detention for long periods of time are at high risk of serious mental harm.
- Children in detention were not able to enjoy rights such as: protection from violence; a high level of physical and mental health and the right to education.

Once young people, along with their families, are found to be in need of protection, they are released into the community on a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV). Australia has granted 8872 TPVs in the past 5 years. After 3 years, the visa-holder must again prove that they need protection in order to qualify for a Permanent Visa.

## Section 3 - Implications for Christian youth workers

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This is an area for further study. Because of the diversity of cultures in Australia, it is difficult to pin down strategies or frameworks that will "work" everywhere and with everyone. The following are some general implications for Christian youth work.

### 1. Communication

Christianity is primarily a communications movement - we communicate the good news through embodying the words, deeds and spirit of Jesus. A crucial element of effective communication is understanding the filters through which your message is being passed.

These filters consist of family background, socio-economic status, cultural heritage, religious experience, educational achievement and many other environmental factors. They combine to form our "worldview", a largely unconscious way of interpreting the world and acting in it. There are three ways in which worldview is pertinent to serving CLD young people:

1. **CLD young people's worldview:** when serving CLD young people, we need to be mindful of their worldview. This means that we need to listen carefully to them. Their worldview will not be identical to a Western worldview, although there may be overlap. The more we understand a person's worldview, the more effectively we can communicate with them.
2. **Our worldview:** in the study of mission, it is now widely recognised that the worldview of the missionary can easily obscure the message; too often we identify discipleship with a particular way of life eg. western individualism. We need to judge our own worldview against the worldview of Jesus. The more we understand our own worldview, the less we will obscure the message.
3. **The overlap between worldviews:** not everything in a CLD young person's worldview is opposed to the worldview of Jesus. This is particularly important when serving young people from religious backgrounds other than Christianity. The word missiologists use for this is "prevenience" - God is already at work *before* we meet someone. There will be elements of all worldviews that are consistent with the good news, and this provides ground for meaningful conversation.

## 2. Helping CLD young people integrate cultures

For CLD young people to flourish, they need to be able to find a way to live "in-between" cultures, in a way that is satisfactory to them. We have a role here, which could be practised in a number of ways:

- Being a safe and reliable support, eg. mentoring, language tutoring, sport, creative activities
- Bringing Anglo-Australia and CLD young people together to socialise
- Providing "third way" forums for CLD young people to discuss their struggles openly.
- Encouraging connection with family and cultural heritage. This has been shown to increase self-confidence and self-worth.

## 3. Being culturally appropriate

An incarnational approach to mission is sometimes described as "*contextualisation*" - changing the way we embody the good news to suit the situation we find ourselves in. This does not entail eliminating the challenges of the gospel, but removing all possible barriers to effective communication.

### Programs

When planning a program that will involve CLD young people, there may be cultural norms that will either allow or disallow them participating. These may be around issues of:

- Food - eg. most Muslims will only eat *halal* food - that is, food that is "clean" according to *halal* regulations. This involves certain ways of killing animals, and certain animals may not be eaten.
- Dress - eg. it may be culturally unacceptable for some CLD young people to wear western-style swimming clothes.
- Gender - eg. some cultures may prohibit girls and boys participating in some activities, such as sleepovers. Public affection between genders may also be frowned upon.
- Language - eg. using printed material may be a problem given some young people's difficulty with language.

### Church

Some expressions of church life may be inappropriate to the young people we are serving. Many Australian churches are either very Anglo in population, or following Anglo norms in terms of structure, music, location etc. We need to be aware of how language, music, location, rituals and sermon format can be shaped to be either welcoming or unwelcoming to CLD young people.

Our task is to allow CLD young people to shape how church will look for them. This will entail modifying and adapting elements of church life to become more culturally relevant to young people from non-Anglo backgrounds.

On the positive side, we may discover that there is much that we can learn from CLD young people's cultures, particularly in terms of ritual and community, which could enliven and deepen our expression of church.

## 4. Cross-cultural training

As Australia's society becomes more multicultural, missional practitioners will need the skills and knowledge to interpret the cultures they are serving, and respond appropriately.

Christian youth workers need to take every opportunity to develop their understanding of cross-cultural issues, their ability to be culturally aware and their skills in relating to people cross-culturally.



## Multiculturalism Links

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- [Coping in a New World](#) - report on the challenges CLD young people face
- [Face the Facts](#) - information about migration, refugees and indigeous people.
- [White Australia Policy](#) - an overview of this controversial legislation
- [Department of Immigration, Multiculturalism & Indigenous Affairs](#)
- [Temporary Protection Visas](#) - Refugee Council of Australia

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