

Learning about world views and religions

Learning about the key premises of world views and major religions is an important part of a contemporary school curriculum. It enables students to be more informed and engaged at both a local and global level, supporting an understanding of the perspectives of diverse local communities and the beliefs and practices of diverse traditions.

It assists students to recognise and appreciate both areas of commonality and difference between diverse faith groups and secular perspectives.

The approach to learning about world views and religions in the Victorian Curriculum F–10 is based on the following characteristics:

- learning about world views and religions should be contextualised in broader learning programs
- it should include a rationale and opportunities for critical thinking, and
- students should have the opportunity to study at least one non-religious world view and a range of religions.¹

The following is provided as a guide to teachers and schools as students engage with opportunities for learning about world views and religions across the curriculum, including the Civics and Citizenship and History curricula, and Ethical, Intercultural and Personal and Social Capabilities. It provides an outline of the key premises concerning belief in the nature of ultimate reality, the meaning and purpose of life and the relationship between people and ultimate reality posited by a world view broadly described as Secular humanism and rationalism, and the world's (and Australia's) five major religions. The key premises reflect what is common to different denominations of religious traditions and schools of thought, but do not detail the whole of each view nor the diversity within that view. This content enables students to gain a broad awareness of diversity across world views and religions.

¹ Jackson, R. (2014) 'Signposts': Policy and Practice for Teaching about Religions and Non-Religious Worldviews in Intercultural Education, Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

Key premises

Buddhism

Buddha was a human being who attained enlightenment after numerous lifetimes. The Ultimate Truth in Buddhism is that despite how things may appear, everything is changing, impermanent and interdependent. The Law of Cause and Effect, known as Karma, entails that actions shape current and future lives.

Buddha taught that life on earth is full of suffering, which can be overcome through right understanding. Suffering is caused by craving that which is impermanent. Realising that things are impermanent and abiding by the Law of Karma leads to the cessation of craving. Practising the teachings of the Buddha, doing good and refraining from causing harm to self and others leads to freedom from suffering. The purpose of human existence is to become enlightened and abide in Nirvana, the natural state of bliss, and to help others to also be happy and free from suffering.

There are several texts that form the basis of Buddhism. Buddhists overcome suffering through meditation on and practice of the Buddha's teachings and self-discipline.

Christianity

There is one God, consisting of the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. God is the creator and sustainer of the universe. God became human in the person of Jesus, the Son.

People have one life and its purpose is to live in a loving relationship with God, with others and with the world. The life and teachings of Jesus show how this is done and make possible the life-giving changes needed in individuals and society. Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit and are called to demonstrate God's love, compassion and justice in all their relationships and interactions. Most Christians believe in an afterlife; that after their physical death, they will live forever with God.

The Bible is the sacred text for Christians. The Bible has two parts, known as the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament contains Jewish books and teachings, before the time of Jesus. The New Testament records the teachings of Jesus as well as the history and teaching of the early Church which is based on the teaching and example of Jesus.

Hinduism

The ultimate reality is the indivisible, eternal and all-pervading Brahman, which is the spiritual essence of all that exists. Brahman manifests as Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer, in the cycle of the material universe. Brahman lives as the eternal soul (Atman) in all things and lives and minds.

The individual Self (Atman) is endlessly born and re-born under the influence of Karma, which is the cosmic law of consequences. Good deeds result in positive consequences; bad deeds produce negative consequences. In human life, each person has the freedom to make choices on the spiritual journey towards the ultimate purpose of life, which is to attain Moksha, that is, freedom from karma and liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

No single text is the basis of all Hinduism, but principal scriptures are the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. To progress in the life-journey, Hindus perform spiritual rituals and devotional actions to the various Gods, who are all manifestations of Brahman, the ultimate reality.

Islam

Allah (Arabic for the one God) is the Creator of the universe and is separate from creation. God has sent prophets and messengers throughout time with guidance for humanity; with Muhammad the final prophet and messenger.

The purpose of life is to worship God (Islam means 'peace through submission to God'). Any deed done to please God is considered worship. Muslims are called on to do good and to lead balanced lives in this world while striving to reach eternal paradise in the afterlife.

Muslims are expected to maintain good relations with peoples of all faiths (and no faith) based on the concepts of mutual respect, justice, and shared responsibilities to one another and the natural world.

The Qur'an is the sacred text of Islam which Muslims believe to be the literal word of God (revelation) and His final revelation to humanity. The life of Muhammad is considered the best example of how to live according to the Qur'an.

Muslims perform a number of rituals including five daily prayers, obligatory charity (zakat), fasting the month of Ramadan and performing the Hajj pilgrimage once in lifetime. Muslims are encouraged to develop a direct and personal relationship with God without any intermediaries.

Judaism

There is One God, who is the Creator of the world and continues to care for the world.

Jewish people are in a special Covenantal relationship with God, which obliges them to try to live according to God's laws. These laws can broadly be categorised into laws concerned with how a person conducts their interpersonal relationships and those laws concerned with how a person conducts their personal relationship with God. In return God promised the land of Israel. Jewish sacred texts teach that while there is an afterlife, the focus is on this life. Jewish people are called upon to make the world a better place through acts of social justice and charity.

The Written Torah and Oral Torah (Talmud) are the basis of all other Jewish sacred texts. The Torah gives the Jewish people rules for everyday life, and an entire philosophy of life. These rules are interpreted by experts in Jewish Law. One of many significant aspects of Judaism is the observance of the Sabbath (Saturday) which is a day of cessation of all creative activity. This is to remember the seventh day, after Creation was completed, on which God ceased all creative activity.

Secular humanism and rationalism

There is a natural universe independent of human experience, thought and language and this natural universe is the ultimate reality.

The universe and everything in it, including people, were not created by a god or gods. Every person has only one life, which ends in death. Purpose and meaning are generated by people, not received from god or any religious text. People are therefore responsible for how they live and treat others, including non-human species, and the environment.

Rationalists and Humanists draw on collective experience, empirical evidence and reason to establish ethical principles, based on a sense of common humanity and aimed at enhancing human wellbeing. These principles include affirming human dignity and individual freedom, compatible with the rights of others, and form the basis of practical moral decision-making.

Humanism and Rationalism have arisen out of philosophical inquiry dating back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. They gained modern form after the 18th century Age of Enlightenment which focused on the powers of human reason and science.