Talking about contentious issues – a quick guide

1. Prior to class discussions or activities take time to establish the ground rules:
   • show respect for others
   • no interrupting
   • avoid emotive or insulting language
   • attack the issue, not the person

2. Reinforce that all students are different, with their own cultures and beliefs. Anglo-Australians should not be represented as the norm from which difference can be identified.

3. Acknowledge the differences within groups. Encourage students to avoid generalisations about cultural or religious groups (e.g. Muslims think...)

4. Don’t ask students to speak on behalf of a group they identify with (e.g. Aboriginal Australians). Ask them to speak from a personal perspective.

5. Do not ask students to express their opinion early in a discussion or activity, which may back them into a corner and entrench simplistic and polarised positions. Give them time to consider complexities before expressing their views.

6. If students express a position, ask them to provide their reasons.

7. Stress that consensus is not the aim, and that feeling uncomfortable about what others say or do is part of living with diversity.