

The Source and the Solution: Preventing Violence through Schools and Youth Led Change

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Introduction

- o Experiences of racism and homophobia by young people.
- o Schools are key sites to improve the wellbeing of young people experiencing exclusion and violence prevention
- o Two frameworks for effective positive ‘whole of school’ change
 1. Creating cultures of diversity
 2. No Regrets
- o These initiatives highlight the important role of schools and youth-led initiatives to reduce young people's risk and increase their resilience.

Context: The young person

- o Young Australians embody and reflect a culturally and linguistically diverse society whose fabric is woven from a global movement of people that encompasses everything from tourism to migration and that dates back through convict settlement to the origins of the first Australians.
- o Indigenous young people account for 3.6 per cent of people aged 15 to 19 and just under three per cent of all people aged 20 to 24.
- o One in five Young Australians were born overseas and one in five speaks a language other than English at home (Muir et al., 2009)
- o 1 in 10 young Australians experience same sex attraction

Context: The young person

- o Victims of homophobic violence and emotional abuse may experience anxiety, depression and thoughts of self-harm and suicide
- o 44% of young non-heterosexual people experienced verbal abuse
- o 16 per cent report physical abuse

Context: The young person

o “Violence is the tip of the iceberg, we're looking at the rest of the iceberg.”

– Yin Paradies

Case-study: Young people's experience of racism

- o The research:
 - Impact of Racism upon the Health and Wellbeing of Young Australians
 - Youth Attitudes to Racism: A study of 18-24-year-olds in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia
 - Building Bridges: Creating Cultures of Diversity

Case-study: Young people's experience of racism

- o Over 70% experience racism, with most racist incidents experienced on occasional basis
- o Young migrants in Australia less than 5 years 6 times more likely to report racist incident
- o 2nd or 3rd generation migrants 4 times likely to report racist experience
- o Indigenous students report fewer isolated racist incidents, but pervasive daily experience of racism
- o Young women more likely to be affected
- o Racism experienced by over 50% of Anglo-Australian students
- o Racist name-calling prevalent

Case-study: Young people's experience of racism

- o Young people not born in Australia are almost twice as likely to experience discrimination as those born in Australia (Forrest, 2009)
- o Damaging effects on young people (VicHealth, 2009)
- o Direct impact upon young people's health and wellbeing
- o Tension, anxiety, anger, sadness, sense of exclusion; fear of being attacked
- o Loss of trust in the world as a whole
- o Headaches and post-traumatic stress
- o Loss of confidence, self-esteem, sense of belonging
- o Resilience

Case-study: Young people's experience of racism

- o 67% nominated classroom, school grounds, or sporting oval as site of racism
- o Most young people who experience racism take no action
- o Teachers or school administrative staff are sometimes perpetrators of racist behaviors
- o 16% describe frequent experiences of being overlooked or ignored in the classroom
- o Overtly racist towards students
- o Tolerate exhibitions of racism in the classroom

Case-study: Young people's experience of racism

- o Students reluctant to seek help from school staff
- o Over half reluctant to report racist incident to teacher while less than a third would approach school counselor
- o 12% students indicated willingness to report to police or health professional

“All I know is I don't trust no-one, even if you're my closest friend, I trust my dad and my mum and my two sisters, but I don't trust no-one. Cause everyone can do the dirty on you, so I don't trust no-one...”

- Robert, born in Montenegro

Strategies for schools

- o Right programs in schools can promote greater engagement with diversity
- o Schools ideally:
 - o Open about their cultural composition
 - o Prepared to critically engage all stakeholders in the educational process
- o Charters and mission statements recognising importance of diversity in school can make valuable contribution to the psychological and structural transformation of the school community

Strategies for schools

- o Diversity needs to be recognised in teaching practice, curriculum and pedagogy
- o Compulsory classroom programs to educate about racism, stereotyping and cultural issues work
- o Empower teachers to deal with issues more effectively
- o Ongoing and targeted PD enables teachers to identify issues and instances of racism in the school and class
- o School leadership crucial - Elcho island
- o Whole-school initiatives to combat racism

Strategies for schools

- o Students should be encouraged to maintain their heritage and culture
- o Foster critical analytical skills to engage diverse points of view
- o Tokenistic gestures limited

Strategies for parents

- o Can participate both formally and informally, through school councils, parent clubs, volunteering (DEECD)
- o Poor understanding of the Australian education system
- o Resources and mechanisms for dialogue for newly arrived parents
- o Support services, interpreting services and practical information to parents in LOTE about basic structures, curriculum and expectations of education system

Students in the lead

- o Students are not only the victims or perpetrators of racism: they can also help to challenge and overcome it

No Regrets

- o Pilot sought not only to prevent individual acts of violence but to generate lasting attitudinal change in communities: promoting respectful relationships, improving behaviour, tackling the root causes of violence and enhancing communication via youth-led initiatives.
- o It is based upon the premise that young people must be involved and empowered in order to create social change, and that community participation is essential if youth-led projects are to have maximum effect.

Recommendations

- o Whole of school approaches work
- o The earlier in life that approaches are embedded in schools the better
- o Need to move beyond knee-jerk / reactive responses to ongoing and long-term solution
- o Need to embed in school curriculum
- o Focus on student wellbeing is key

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