

Building Resilience Among Indigenous Students and Staff

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Bulletproofing

- **is it conceding to racism?**
- **is there an under-explored ‘flip-side’ to cross-cultural training?**
- **does it have the potential to add a new dimension to the fight against racism?**

Aims of the Bulletproofing Project



- describe the racist events experienced by Indigenous health students and staff
- explore how people respond to racism
- identify strategies used and whether they are perceived as being effective - or not
- examine whether effective strategies can be taught to others

Experiences of racism

Racist remarks were commonly

- overheard
- made directly to participants
 - frequently about others
 - directed straight at the participant

Remarks included, among others,

- name-calling (*boong, coon*)
- derogatory remarks (he's one of those parkies)
- joke telling
- verbal intimidation & threats

Experiences of racism

Racist behaviours included...

- ignoring
- avoiding
- staring
- insulting facial expressions
- back-turning
- pushing-in
- patronising
- undermining
- talking about *them* as if *they* were not there

Experiences of racism

Racism of ideas

- **promotion of a selective view of history**
(Australians believe in giving each other a fair go)
- **historical ignorance**
(All the things we've given them)
- **perpetration of myths**
(Problem is they all drink)
- **denial of identity**
(you're not like them)

Responses to racism

Common feelings

- **hurt**
- **anger**
- **powerlessness**
- **frustration**

Responses to racism

Stress associated with racism

- constantly making decisions about reacting
 - conditioned anticipation of racism
 - *sussing out* new people
 - evaluating an event as racist or not
 - deciding whether to respond
 - deciding how to respond
 - appraising how effective the response was
 - guilt that the response *was not good enough*
- enormous accumulated stress

Effective strategies

What the 'stayers' said ...

- having many strategies 'on the ready'
- being able to choose the right one for the job
- not *beating themselves up* if they thought the response could have gone better – mostly
- giving themselves permission *not* to respond

Effective strategies

Managing racism & building resilience is underpinned by ...

- the ability to appraise events as racist or not
- understanding the facts & myths of Australian history
- a pride in family, community and survival
- knowing fighting racism is not their responsibility alone
- supportive colleagues
- supportive institutions
- having *successes* dealing with racism

Teaching Effective Strategies

Interviewees reported that they learned a lot about responding to racism from

- **personal experience**
- **study**
- **observation of others**
- **reflection on these**

Racism is repetitive - and unimaginative

These represent learning opportunities

Teaching Effective Strategies

Fairly common teaching strategies might help

- common in routine cross-cultural training
- but rarely used with targets of racism
 - role playing “what to do in a racist event”
 - *Myths and Facts* that you may have to debunk
 - problem solving activities
 - self-reflection activities

Underpinning knowledge

- **Australian history & society**
- **shared international Indigenous experience**
- **the nature of racism**
- **successful Indigenous people and activities**
- **institutional rules and the law regarding racism and discrimination**

Supporting strategies

- **access to power structures via mentors**
- **engaging with families**
- **building networks & support groups**
 - **among diverse Indigenous people**
 - **alliances with anti-racist staff and fellow students**

Bulletproofing- another strategy for
lessening the impact of racism

Thankyou

One of the *stayers* said:-

Get your little foot soldiers that you can guide. Whether they be Indigenous or non-Indigenous, people that have some passion - heart and also want to make a difference by engaging and sharing those issues and working with them.