


Identifying racism

To be or not to be

 Suggested time: 40 minutes

Preparation

Some staff members in schools and colleges would prefer not to have to deal with difficult issues such as discrimination and racism.

The problem with avoiding such issues is that silence can be perceived as acceptance and support by prejudiced individuals. On the basis of such perceived support, biased individuals can become bold enough to bring their beliefs to the surface in demonstrations of racism against individuals or groups.

To be or not to be presents a school community in which the difficult issues have been avoided to such an extent that racist graffiti has appeared. The school is confronted with a serious situation that has provoked lodgement of a formal complaint about racism. The need for anti-racism education can no longer be ignored.

If necessary, view or review the *To be or not to be* video and read the notes.

Copy the handout for each participant.

Whole group activity

Introduction (2 minutes)

- Use the Purpose and Overview from *To be or not to be* reproduced on page 3 to explain the purpose of this session.

Before the video (15 minutes)

Ask participants to identify an occasion when a work colleague came to them for assistance in dealing with a difficult situation with other staff members or parents. Ask participants to list:

- the general category of the situation, (e.g. discrimination from staff, grievance against other staff, child protection concern, sex-based harassment, homophobia)
- if they felt they could assist their colleague.

Small group activity

Divide participants into small groups. Ask each of them to reveal the general category of their colleague's concern and to discuss common responses to difficult situations within organisations.

Invite representatives of each group to list the common responses to difficult situations that were identified in their group.

Preparation for watching the video (7 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of the discussion question handout for *To be or not to be* to each participant.
- Ask participants to collect information in response to Question 1 while viewing the video.

View *To be or not to be* (41/2 minutes)

After viewing the video (15 minutes)

- Ask participants in their groups to discuss the three questions.
- Invite each group to provide a response/comment to each of the discussion questions.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

To be or not to be highlights some of the issues that individuals and school communities may face when they are confronted by racism and the need for anti-racism education.

The Department's Anti-Discrimination Policy and supporting Anti-Racism Statement suggest that denying or avoiding such issues doesn't make them go away. Educational communities, like the one in *To be or not to be*, promote change more effectively by acknowledging the difficult issues, facing them and then taking timely action against them.

From *to be or not to be*

Purpose

The purpose of *To be or not to be* is to promote discussion about:

- the need to address complex and difficult issues such as racism among staff, students and communities of schools and colleges
- ways of dealing with racism and other difficult issues in schools and colleges
- ways of dealing with complaints about racism in schools and colleges
- reasons for perceived levels of difficulty in dealing with inappropriate behaviours among students compared to dealing with similar behaviours among staff.

Overview

To be or not to be shows a teacher, Mrs Chedda, grappling with increasing levels of discrimination and racism towards her from students.

Although advised to take her difficulties to her supervisor, she initially attempts to deal with the situation herself. However, finding racist graffiti about her on a wall at the school is the last straw that provokes Mrs Chedda into action. She lodges a formal complaint about racism.

Despite attempts to dissuade her from making the complaint, Mrs Chedda proceeds with her action in the hope that it will prompt the school to start to address racism, gender and discipline issues.

Before the video

Presenters should remind participants not to identify schools/colleges nor in any way reveal the identity of colleagues who came to them for help. The situation needs to be identified, not the individuals.

For example, 'My friend came to me about the sex-based harassment she was being subjected to every day by staff in her staffroom.'

The main point of identifying and discussing difficult situations among staff is to acknowledge that dealing with them in schools and colleges is often uncomfortable, unpleasant and disturbing. Even so, 'turning a blind eye' and hoping they will go away places excessive and unfair demands on individuals.

Trouble between staff can be isolated and limited to a few people and specific circumstances. On the other hand, difficulties and lodgement of a formal grievance or complaint may indicate an organisational climate that prefers to ignore, deny or avoid getting involved in resolving difficult situations.

Handout discussion

Question 1: Based on the behaviours you observed in the video, what issues do you consider need to be addressed in the school community?

Gender relations — evidence in the video:

- boys telling girls to be quiet when they 'stand up for' Mrs Chedda
- bullying and intimidation that support the inappropriate behaviours of boys
- discipline management in the school.

Anti-racism education — evidence in the video:

- racist jokes
- stereotyping of Mrs Chedda as ineffective because of her accent.

Complaints resolution strategies — evidence in the video:

- 'The boss isn't going to like this'
- the Deputy attempting to dissuade Mrs Chedda from lodging a complaint.

Question 2: Mrs Chedda believed that lodging a formal complaint about racism would be an effective way to get resolution of her personal concerns. She also believed that it would be a catalyst for change in her school community

Would you adopt a similar approach to dealing with a difficult situation in your school community? Why? Why not?

Potential responses — Yes

If informal discussions had not resulted in any action. Without a stimulus, change will not happen.

Potential responses — Not at first

More effort to get change through informal approaches. Lodge an informal complaint. Advise principal or responsible school executive member that a formal complaint is likely to arise if concerns are not addressed effectively. If giving a number of chances does not yield results, then lodge a formal complaint.

Potential responses — No

Making complaints only makes things worse. Life is often made miserable for 'whistleblower'. Better to reach resolutions without stirring up troubles that could linger long after complaint is resolved.

Question 3: What makes dealing with difficult and sensitive issues easier when they arise between students rather than when they concern staff or parents?

Being adjudicator of student behaviour is accepted and familiar territory to staff.

When dealing with students there are agreed and locally accepted procedures and sanctions for dealing with inappropriate behaviours such as school rules, discipline systems, counselling support, detention, suspension, exclusion, transfers and expulsions. The procedures for dealing with students are clear, however, sanctions against inappropriate behaviours among staff are not so finely graduated and locally agreed as they are for students.

The consequences of disciplinary action against students, as a result of the inappropriate behaviour, can be difficult for them to accept and handle. However, the ramifications of disciplinary action against staff are considered more serious. In worst case scenarios, an individual could lose their job with devastating impacts on them and their families. ssible responses to other issues and concerns.

To be or not to be discussion questions

Question 1: Based on the behaviours you observed in the video, what issues do you consider need to be addressed in the school community?

Question 2: Mrs Chedda believed that lodging a formal complaint about racism would be an effective way to get resolution of her personal concerns. She also believed that it would be a catalyst for change in her school community. Would you adopt a similar approach to dealing with a difficult situation in your school community?

Why?

Why not?

Question 3: What makes dealing with difficult and sensitive issues easier when they arise between students rather than when they concern staff or parents?