

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY 2

Inclusive language and practice



Victorian Equal Opportunity
& Human Rights Commission

About this activity

This activity develops knowledge and application of inclusive language and practice for school staff. It also engages staff to consider the importance of using inclusive language as a core part of their teaching practice.



INSTRUCTIONS

Activity leaders present short case studies to staff groups with a series of discussion points. Participants can work through the points with reference to an inclusive language guide. Examples of inclusive language guides are included below.

Scenarios

1. Robert is a year 7 student. He and his family informed the school that he transitioned his gender over the school holidays and would like the school to ensure his gender identity is affirmed and supported, including using his preferred pronouns, "he/him". A group of students continue to refer to Robert using incorrect pronouns and ask personal questions about medication and surgery. Some teachers are also making these enquiries about Robert's transitioning process.

2. Maureen and her family recently migrated to Australia from Guinea, Africa. It's Harmony Day and each child at Maureen's new school has been given the opportunity to introduce themselves and their cultural background. As Maureen is new and at times has difficulty with English, her teacher offers to introduce her to the class, even though she wanted to try to introduce herself. Maureen wrote a paragraph for her teacher to read out telling her story and her cultural background. Her teacher ignored her written speech and introduced her as a new migrant from Africa. She also shared images that had no connection to Maureen's culture. Maureen felt undermined.

3. Karen, a Wathaurong person, and her family recently moved to a new town and are happy to see the Aboriginal flag in the school yard and an Aboriginal flag sticker on the front door. When Karen comes into the classroom, she is introduced as an 'ATSI kid'. This makes her feel strange, misunderstood and put into a box. Her parents have taught her to say where she is from, and who her people are, so she corrects the teacher. The teacher is dismissive of her and refers to her as 'ATSI' with another staff member later the same day.

Discussion questions

- What does this story tell us about why inclusive language matters?
- What are the privacy, respect and dignity considerations?
- What was the impact on the student/s involved?
- What would you say or do or you saw this happen in your school?
- How well do you think our school understands how important inclusive language is and what to do?
- How can your school improve their practice?

Guidelines for inclusive language to support discussions

Victorian Government Inclusive Language Guide

How to use respectful language when talking to or about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Gender Diverse and Intersex communities.

<https://www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-language-guide>

Guidelines for Inclusive Language

From the Tasmanian Department of Education and Training.

<https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Guidelines-for-Inclusive-Language.pdf>

Our approach to inclusive language

From the National LGBTI Health Alliance

<https://lgbtihealth.org.au/inclusivelanguage/>

Notes to assist the activity leader facilitate this discussion

The language we use as educators and school staff can make a difference to:

- how students feel about themselves
- how other students practice inclusion through their language and actions
- the school's culture, and the extent to which everyone treats each other with dignity and respect.
- Non-inclusive language can be harmful when it inhibits or prevent students reaching their full potential and benefitting from their education. Full participation in the curriculum and school environment is difficult for students who experience exclusive language and can result in students being silenced.
- Teachers are critical role models for children and young people, including when they don't act or say anything. Where discriminatory language is left unaddressed, this compounds the feeling of marginalisation and sends a message that discrimination is ok. The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.
- Research informs us certain factors associated with a school's management, organisation or culture, such as teachers stepping in to correct and intervene in inappropriate comments or behaviour, can significantly reduce the likelihood of violence and inappropriate behaviour.
<http://behaviour.education.qld.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/preventing-bullying-violence/understanding-violence.pdf>

- Building teachers' confidence, through increased knowledge and practice to use inclusive language helps them intervene in situations where discriminatory language is used.
- We often do not realise how our words can exclude people. Some people take longer than others to learn how to use inclusive language. We can politely and consistently model inclusive language or clarify a person's preferred language with others. By speaking up or modelling inclusive practice, we can make sure that a standard is set for students, parents and carers and all staff at our school.
- If you unintentionally offend or disrespect someone, apologise briefly and start using respectful language. In that moment, prolonged discussion about the language is likely to make the person feel worse. After you leave the situation, you can reflect on how to be more inclusive in the future. The value of inclusive language is that it underpins respect for all people who belong to our diverse and wonderful human community. <https://lgbtihealth.org.au/inclusivelanguage/>
- In order to comply with our legal obligations under Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006, and the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 we need to take reasonable steps to prevent discrimination occurring for all our students. Informing ourselves about inclusive language and practice, and creating a school environment that ensures every student feels included, helps us to comply with our legal obligations.

Sources

<https://lgbtihealth.org.au/inclusivelanguage/>
<https://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Guidelines-for-Inclusive-Language.pdf>
https://www.nswtf.org.au/files/priest_2014jya.pdf
<http://behaviour.education.qld.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/preventing-bullying-violence/understanding-violence.pdf>
<http://behaviour.education.qld.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/preventing-bullying-violence/understanding-violence.pdf>