

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ACTIVITY 4

# Tips for turning professional learning into action – staff reflection



Victorian Equal Opportunity  
& Human Rights Commission

## About this activity

This activity engages staff to consider how they can build on their professional learning and provides ideas about day to day inclusive practice.



## INSTRUCTIONS

Activity leaders provide the tips sheet below to staff via email or at the beginning of a staff meeting.

As part of a staff meeting, engage staff groups to discuss the information provided, reflect on current practice and identify improvements all staff can make to ensure an inclusive environment for all students.

Note: ideas generated from staff can be incorporated into school's action plans, or be aligned to programs schools are currently undertaking, ie: respectful relationships, or safe schools.

# Top tips for turning professional learning about the Charter and the Equal Opportunity Act into action

## OVERVIEW

Promote a positive climate for learning in which:

- difference is accepted and welcome
- all students and their families are listened to, taken seriously and treated with respect and dignity
- all students are supported as individuals and as members of a learning community
- all students feel safe to speak up.

## LANGUAGE

- **Use inclusive language** in all school communications and at school
- **Take action, call it out, speak up** consistently when students are using homophobic, racist, sexist or other discriminatory language. If discriminatory language is left unaddressed, it implies to the whole school community that discrimination is tolerated or accepted. This can amplify the experience for students who are on the receiving end of these comments and can lead to students feeling unsafe, unsupported and isolated. Link the expectation of positive and inclusive language back into your school's values. Support students to understand that their behaviour is breaching the values and having a negative impact on the students around them.
- Phrases like 'that's so gay' to describe something that is 'not good' is one of the most common things that you may hear. Using the word 'gay' in a negative sense can be offensive to people who identify as LGBTI, their friends and family. Other examples of derogatory language and behaviours that can have a negative impact include:
  - teasing someone because they are not masculine or feminine enough – eg 'you throw like a girl'

- use of homophobic language like 'faggot', 'poofter', 'dyke', or 'lezzo'
- using of racist language like 'abos', 'coons', 'curries', 'towel head', 'nigger', 'chink', 'wog', 'lebbo'
- derogatory language relating to disability like 'retard', 'spaz', 'spastic', 'downie'
- sexist language like 'ho', 'dog', 'slut', 'bitch'
- calling a transgender or gender diverse person 'it' instead of their preferred pronouns.

## Examples of ways to address instances of discriminatory language

### *'This work is gay'*

- Say that you don't understand how the work would have same sex attracted feelings towards other work. Ask for another adjective so you can understand the point they are trying to make. Explain to the student that 'gay' is not an acceptable word to use in this context.
- Hand out a worksheet to the student to get them to write down five other words that better describe the message they were trying to convey.

### *A student makes a joke that is racist, sexist or homophobic or otherwise discriminatory*

- Ask the student for clarification. 'What do you mean by that, I don't really get it?'
- Encourage them to consider their use of words and help them unpack their comment.
- Advise the student that a joke like that is inappropriate and harmful as it is based on negative attitudes towards a group of people.
- Suggest that next time they think more clearly about the words they choose to use.

## School events and awards

- Make your school events are safe and inclusive for all students so that everyone has the opportunity to meaningfully participate. Put together a planning committee that includes student representatives.
- Consider all **venues** for events (e.g. concerts, sports days, formal, camps, excursions etc) and consider whether these are accessible and appropriate for people with disabilities or other special needs, not only the students but also school community members who may attend.
- **Promote** the fact that the venue is accessible for people with disability and that it is a safe/inclusive event for all of your community (eg LGBTI students and families, students of all backgrounds regardless of race, culture, language etc). For example, formals – make it clear that students are welcome to bring a same sex partner to the formal in advance of having any requests from students. The more you can show the community that you are inclusive, the better!
- For individual **students with disabilities**, start planning early with the Student Support Group for any special events to enable reasonable adjustments to be made e.g. camps, excursions, sports days, concerts.
- Consider whether there are **dates to avoid** (because of religious festivals or feast days that might affect your school community like Eid or Jewish religious days of significance).
- Consider whether any food shared at your events should cater for religious requirements in your school community (eg halal or kosher).
- Ceremonies and celebrations often include awards or prizes. If having awards is an important part of your event, think about how you can help make the awards celebrate all people and support diversity. For example, awards like 'cutest couple' instead of 'formal queen' and 'formal king' are more inclusive and awards like 'most fabulously dressed' encourage people to dress a bit differently, which makes the dress styles more inclusive.
- Awards for **sporting achievements** should be open to all students, including gender diverse students, e.g. an award for best sports person or people, rather than best sportsman or sportswoman.

## CELEBRATION DAYS

- Pre-plan in advance for the special/celebration days that you will mark as a school community to ensure a broad range eg: International Women's Day, Harmony Day, NAIDOC week, IDAHOBIT Day, Wear it Purple Day, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, International Human Rights Day etc.
- If you hold a Mothers' Day or Fathers' Day stalls, breakfasts or other similar events consider how your events can be inclusive of all parents and types of families.
- Performances (eg plays and musicals)
- Be mindful of the messages that may be portrayed to students and the wider school community through school performances. One way to make performances inclusive is to allow students to audition for any character they wish, regardless of gender or other attributes. Positive representations of all diversities helps to demonstrate that your school is accepting of all people, regardless of their sexuality, or gender identity.



## OTHER

- For students who require specific medical or personal hygiene assistance at school, consider processes that support them in a manner that affords them dignity, respect and privacy
- Consider how your sex education classes are inclusive of students who have diverse gender identities and sexual orientations
- Think about whether your curriculum materials/readers/library books/posters around the school are representative of a broad range of people in the community
- Are your policies, rules and requirements sufficiently flexible to accommodate difference when it arises and is reasonable (e.g. does your uniform policy have an exemption process? Do you take into account a student's disability that manifests in challenging behaviours when implementing the code of conduct)?
- Are written and other communications to your school community accessible (including to members of CALD communities and people with disabilities)?
- Can any limitations on human rights be justified?