DEEP HARMONY

AN ARTS-BASED ANTI-RACISM PROGRAM FOR SCHOOLS

Interventions in Schools and Youth Programmes

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Quality practice in anti-racism and multicultural education



- Ongoing
- Strategically planned
- Unified approach
- Modelled by those in power
- Addresses structural issues and historical power imbalances
- Confronts power and privilege (Arenback & Jamte, 2022; Taylor et. Al, 2022)
- Leans into difficult conversations, shades of grey, ambiguity, contentions issues (Taylor et. Al, 2022; Zembylas, 2010), uses uncomfortable terms (doesn't whitewash with generic terms) (Kohli, 2018)
- Making space for lived experience of minorities (Arneback, 2020)
- Addresses intersectionality (Evans-Winters, 2021; Gillnorn, 2015)
- Make it interactive, but avoid placing anyone in overly negative or combatative positions (Jacobs, 2024)
- Allow students distance to learn through games or stories (Jacobs, 2022; Bell, 2009; Morettini et al, 2022)
- Uses positive behaviour frameworks (McIntosh, 2023; Taylor et. Al, 2022)
- Includes joy, wonder and shared moments (Jacobs, 2024)

Quality practice in anti-racism education



Why programs for schools and youth?

“I experience racism every day. It doesn’t stop me from coming to school or nothing. But it’s always there and I wish it weren't.” (Year 9)

“I want a school without racism. And I want my teachers to do something about it.” (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2023)

“These are students most formative years. This is the time we can take action.” (Jacobs, 2021)

Case study 1

DEEP HARMONY

AN ARTS-BASED ANTI-RACISM PROGRAM FOR SCHOOLS

- 2021-2026 in Australia (NSW)
- Primary school (Year 3-6) and High School (Year 7-11)
- One school day or 5 weekly lessons
- Facilitated by: Teaching artists with a culturally located artform trained in anti-racism education
- Participants
  - Students n=2698
  - Staff n=442
  - Schools n=23
- Research methods
  - Student pre and post program surveys
  - Staff surveys
  - Staff interviews
  - Student focus groups
  - Observation and ethnographic journalling

Co-constructed curriculum (Jacobs 2022-2026)

Teachers' Top 5 concerns:

1) Use of the 'N' word

2) Students claiming racism when it's not (racial literacy)

3) Insults and slurs (overt racism)

4) Exclusion

5) Groups not integrating

Student's Top 5 concerns

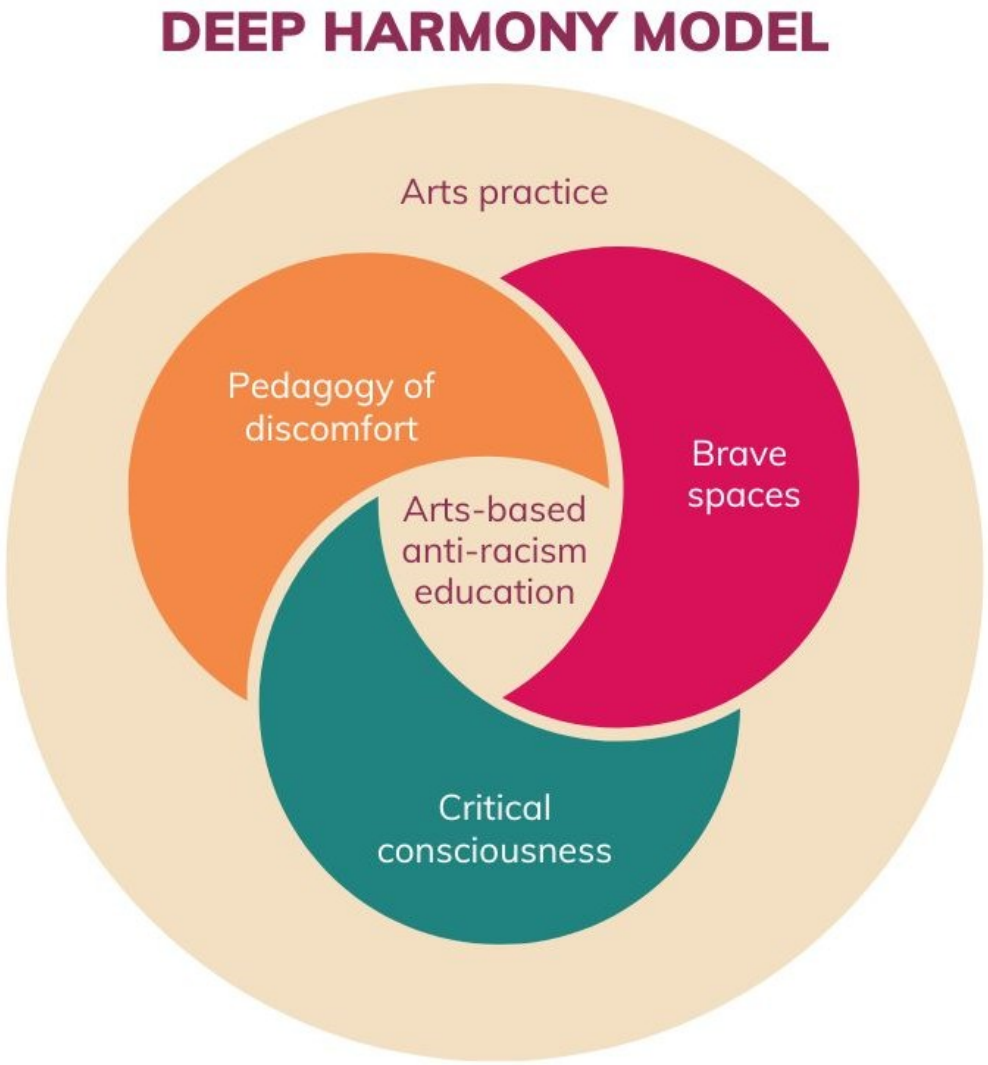
1) Exclusion *and* 1) Groups not integrating

2) Microaggressions from teachers and students

3) Lack of belonging

4) Insults and slurs (overt racism)

5) Cannot 'see themselves' in the school or curriculum (structural racism)



Jacobs, R. (2026). Deep Harmony: A model for an arts-based anti-racism program in Australian schools. In L. Naidoo, S. Gannon, C. Woodrow, C. Díaz Larenas, V. López, & J. Salazar (Eds.), *Sur-Sur Southern knowledges: Education, sustainability and social transformation*. Western Open Books. https://doi.org/10.61588/HGMT4758



Topics covered in Deep Harmony

- First Nations history and experiences
- Migrant and refugee experiences
- Assimilation vs integration
- Power, privilege and disadvantage
- Media influence and leadership
- Ways to live as an anti-racist and an ally
- From bystander to upstander
- What to do if we make a mistake
- Working together to combat racism
- Culture, heritage, cultural appropriation and appreciation



Deep Harmony

- https://youtu.be/KQhQfzpoCgg

Findings

1. Discomfort is inherent to anti-racism and intercultural education, but can't be applied in a confrontational or destabilising ways (trauma informed practice)
    - Emotional work regulated, not escalated
    - Scaffolded engagement using indirect entry points (stories, case studies, arts-based methods) to create "distance" and reduce emotional overload
2. Tight enabling constrains and effective modelling by those in positions of power funnel participants into proactive pro-social behaviours (Rule-Eg)
3. Deep noticing, listening, asking questions and 'speaking in draft' is central to anti-racism learning and can be effectively facilitated through arts pedagogies
4. Invitations to deep engagement with cultural artforms scaffold positive experiences of difference, diversity and truth telling

Case Study 2: Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR)



Bystander intervention, teacher professional learning and whole-school change

- A school-based anti-racism initiative piloted in six primary schools across New South Wales and Victoria.
- Targeted students in Years 5 and 6, approximately 10–12 years old.
- Combined several components:
  - Teacher professional development and coaching
  - An eight-week classroom curriculum
  - Student-led anti-racism initiatives through Team SOAR.
  - Parent and community engagement.
  - School audits of policies and practices relating to racism.
  - Monitoring and reporting of racial discrimination.

SOAR: Findings

- **Improved bystander skills:**
Students developed greater knowledge of how to respond proactively when witnessing racism.

- **Greater confidence:**
Students reported increased confidence and self-efficacy in addressing racial discrimination.
- **Positive peer relationships:**
Findings indicated improvements in prosocial skills and peer norms supporting anti-racism.

- **Teacher development:**
Qualitative findings suggested changes in teachers' attitudes and behaviours regarding racism.

- **Improved school climate:**
Students in intervention schools reported improvements in their perceptions of teachers' support for positive intergroup relationships.

- **Student agency:**
Team SOAR enabled students to take leadership roles and promote anti-racism among peers, families and the wider community.

Priest, N., Alam, O., Nelson, J., Dunn, K., Sharples, R., Cronin, D., Truong, M., Francis, K., Paradies, Y., Curry, P., & Kavanagh, A. (2021). Promoting proactive bystander responses to racism and racial discrimination in primary schools: A mixed methods evaluation of the 'Speak Out Against Racism' program pilot. *BMC Public Health, 21*, Article 1434

Case Study 3: Interfaith Encounters



Interfaith dialogue, challenging stereotypes, arts-based learning and practical anti-racist action

- Secondary students, generally aged 15–18, from different religious and cultural backgrounds
- Schools work with Catholic Mission and its partners to develop activities suited to participating students and communities. Student focus groups help inform program design.
- Key learning themes:
  - Identity, belonging and human dignity.
  - Cultural and religious diversity.
  - Stereotypes, prejudice and unconscious bias.
  - Interfaith understanding and respectful dialogue.
  - Racism, discrimination and practical strategies for taking action.

Case Study 3: Interfaith Encounters

• **Improved attitudes towards cultural diversity:** Agreement that a multicultural society is beneficial increased from 91.3% before the program to 96.5% afterwards.

• **Reduced prejudice:** Negative feelings towards Jewish Australians decreased in the pre- and post-program surveys.

• **Greater confidence in recognising prejudice:** 93.2% of post-program respondents agreed that the program helped build their confidence in recognising bias and stereotypes.

• **Increased confidence in future interfaith interactions:** 91.5% agreed that the program helped them feel more confident speaking with someone from a different religious group.

• **Stronger capacity for dialogue:** 90.1% agreed that the program helped them identify the negative effects of bias and stereotypes on relationships.

• **Greater willingness to connect across difference:** Students valued the opportunity to meet peers from other backgrounds, learn about their beliefs and experiences, and develop friendships.

• **Emerging student leadership:** The evaluation identified opportunities for students to become advocates for anti-racism and interfaith understanding in their schools and communities.

Catholic Mission. (n.d.). *Interfaith Encounters*. Catholic Mission — Interfaith Encounters

Questions and contact

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