

**Why respond?**

Feedback from past and current students tells us that racist comments are made, and racist jokes told, on campus and in schools. There are formal structures to address racism that is directed towards a specific individual. For example:

- In the Graduate School of Education The Race Equality Resource Officer is available to meet with students for support, advice and signposting to appropriate agencies for further assistance.
- the University has a Policy for the Protection of Dignity at Work and Study (<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/equality/dignity/>) with a network of Dignity and Respect Advisors (<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/equality/dignity/advisorsgallery/>), and a reporting system for discrimination (<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/speakout/>).
- schools are required by law to have a system for reporting and recording racist incidents.

Racist comments or jokes that are not obviously against a particular individual, and are often made in the absence of anyone with a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background, may require a different sort of response. There are a number of professional **reasons** for responding, which include:

- To remain silent risks collusion with underlying racist assumptions, stereotypes or intentions
- The *Teachers' Standards* for QTS. In particular Part 2 refers to 'treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect'. Other pertinent standards are S1, S5, S7 and S8
- Under the Equality Act (2010) schools have 'a positive legal duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity'. The Act outlaws discrimination on the grounds of certain protected characteristics: religion or belief, race, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, sex, pregnancy and maternity. This specifically includes education in schools.
- Historically from September 2007, all maintained schools have had a duty to promote community cohesion – '*Every school – whatever its intake and wherever it is located – is responsible for educating children and young people who will live and work in a country which is diverse in terms of cultures, religions or beliefs, ethnicities and social backgrounds*'. (see DCSF (2007), *Guidance on*

*the duty to promote community cohesion*). This is no longer inspected by Ofsted which has weakened schools' focus on this.

## **Respond how?**

We cannot offer you 'the answer'; indeed, we welcome feedback on this guidance.

No guidance can overcome the need for each educator to exercise judgment in the face of a racist comment or joke. Instead, this seeks to offer a framework to underpin such judgments.

1. It is useful to think of long term as well as short term goals.

For example, a short term goal may simply be:

- to lay down a marker, indicating that we have heard the joke or comment and noticed its racial overtones
- to challenge inaccuracies underlying the joke or comment (e.g. myths, stereotypes)
- to make it clear that we find such jokes / comments inappropriate, particularly in school / University.

while your longer term goal may be:

- to educate about race equality, the costs of racial discrimination and harassment, and the benefits of racial equality and ethnic diversity.

2. The terms in which you respond will depend on your authority relationship with the source of the comment or joke: this depends on whether you are dealing with a pupil, a peer, or a colleague within whose authority you work / study.

3. When pupils make racist jokes or comments, there are often behaviour management implications. Much of the guidance about behaviour management is directly relevant, e.g.

- Familiarize yourself with the school policies and procedures relating to racist comments, incidents and harassment; don't wait until you need them!
- If in doubt, seek advice
- Do use the reporting procedures that are in place, when appropriate
- A measured short term response often leaves a door open to pursue a longer term goal. An initial response based on scorn, vilification or heavy-handed sanctions often closes that door. This is not to say that a pupil who *persists* with racist jokes or comments should not face sanctions.
- Challenge / problematise the behaviour, not the person
- Follow through: don't make threats you can't fulfil, and do carry through any warnings or sanctions that you impart
- Seek opportunities to pre-empt unwanted behaviour
- If it seems appropriate, say that the comment has been noted, is unacceptable, and that there will be follow up at a later date / time (this can create a window of opportunity for a

more considered response and the chance to talk through the best response with others as appropriate)

4. There are many ways of inviting pupils or colleagues to reconsider a racist joke or comment that they have made or heard. You will not always convince someone on the spot, but you may cause them to think about what you have said. If you persevere in naming discriminatory behaviour people will come to anticipate your comments and may in time choose to express themselves differently.

Not all of the example below are without risk- some may elicit anger; in the bigger picture, ignoring racist comments isn't risk free either.

- **'This is how I feel about that'**

One way of responding to discrimination is to say how it makes you feel. You may want to say, for example, 'When you speak like that, I feel angry' or 'hearing that makes me feel uncomfortable; I'd prefer it if you didn't use that sort of language'. While people may not see why you have these feelings, they cannot deny that you have them. And once they discover how you feel, this may give them some insight into how their behaviour affects others.

- **'That's a racist remark.'**

This is a straightforward response. It is clearer and more direct than the cautious 'Sounds a bit racist to me' or the sarcastic 'Some people round here have never heard of equal opportunities' or the angry 'Don't be so racist!'

If you decide to name discrimination when you encounter it, be prepared to explain yourself: the other person may not see it as such. A clear and direct explanation may avoid you and/or the other person from being driven into aggressive or defensive positions. **'What do you mean?'**

A lot of discriminatory behaviour is presented in the form of jokes, innuendoes, hints or suggestive gestures. Sometimes these are malicious but more often they arise from thoughtlessness or habit. Simply asking for an explanation may encourage someone to review their behaviour. For example, you might ask: 'Can you explain that to me?' or, 'What do you mean?' or 'Can you explain to me what the joke is?' or 'Why is that funny?' These questions can be confronting. If the joke is stripped away, people are faced with the real implications of what they are saying. You need to be prepared for strong reactions if you use this method of responding.

- **'Would you say that to a white person?' 'What difference does their colour make?'**

Many people are genuinely unaware of ways in which their behaviour is discriminatory; they may generalise about Black and minority ethnic people without thinking about what they

are doing. Asking them if they would behave in the same way towards someone from a different group can show people their hidden assumptions.

5) Looking after the individual.

It's important that anyone negatively affected by a racist 'joke', comment or incident should be taken care of' after the incident. As a student teacher you have a 'duty of care' to your pupils. This includes making sure that the victim of racism has someone to talk to and knows what is going to happen next.

6) Weave anti-racist practice and thinking into your own teaching.

The best way to challenge racism is long term, by creating opportunities to expose it for what it is – based on anger, misinformation, prejudice, habit and inaccuracies – and to build a different way of thinking and viewing the world. Teachers are in an enviable position of being able to challenge racism through their teaching and their pupils learning

### **Some useful resources**

<https://www.stophateuk.org/tag/racism/>

<http://www.kickitout.org/>

<https://www.acas.org.uk/racehate> a guide to race hate crime in the workplace.

<http://www.irr.org.uk/resources/materials-on-racism-for-teachers/> resources for teachers on Racism

<http://archive.teachfind.com/ttv/www.teachers.tv/racism.html> video clips discussing racism and football.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007) '*Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion*'. Nottingham: DCSF. Available at:

<https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8108/>

Department for Education (2012) *Teachers' standards. Guidance for school leaders, school staff and governing bodies*. London: DfE. Available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards>

Updated 2019 Ruth Flanagan.

N.Givens@ex.ac.uk r.flanagan@exeter.ac.uk