

Identifying racism

Just listen

 Suggested time: 40 minutes

Preparation

The first impressions that students and community members get of their school or college are often from the staff members who help them with enrolment.

These first impressions are developed as much by how things are done as they are by what is done.

Just listen helps individuals and groups of staff to consider both what they do when dealing with inquiries as well as the impact of their behaviours on students, parents and community members.

If necessary, view or review the *Just listen* video and read the notes.

Copy the handout for each participant.

Whole group activity

Introduction (2 minutes)

- Use the Purpose and Overview from *Just listen* reproduced on page 2 to explain the purpose of this session.

Before the video (10 minutes)

- Ask participants to recall an occasion when they visited a government department, bank or community organisation to make an inquiry or seek information, but were not satisfied with the assistance they received from staff. With the unsatisfactory visit in mind, ask participants to identify:
 - the behaviours of staff that were unhelpful or inappropriate
 - how they felt after the visit
 - whether they think the staff realised the impact they had on visitors.

Small group activity

- Divide participants into small groups and ask them to list behaviours, qualities or characteristics they expect from reception and inquiry staff when they seek information from organisations.
- Ask a representative from each group to identify the behaviours, qualities or characteristics that were most frequently identified in their group.

Preparation for watching the video (7 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of the discussion question handout for Just listen to each participant.
- Participants will need to collect information while viewing the video, so give them a few moments to read through the questions before showing it.

View Just listen (5 minutes)

After viewing the video (17 minutes)

- Divide participants into small groups and ask them to discuss the three questions.
- Invite each group to provide a response/comment to each of the discussion questions.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

One of the ongoing challenges for colleges and schools is maintaining effective communication with students, parents and community members.

Just listen demonstrates that quality communication, particularly between individuals who do not share the same cultural or linguistic backgrounds, can be promoted when:

- generalisations or stereotypes are avoided
- needs of students, parents and community members are responded to effectively.

From *Just listen*

Purpose

The purpose of *Just listen* is to promote discussion about maintaining quality communication with students and community members who are not fluent speakers of English.

Overview

Just listen shows staff in a busy enrolment office of a college responding to inquiries from students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

One staff member, John, makes a number of errors of judgment which results in him giving confusing and inappropriate information to student inquirers.

With the support and guidance of his supervisor, John comes to recognise that:

- to give students the answers they need, he must allow them to finish asking their questions before responding
- responding to individuals on the basis of generalisations and stereotypes leads to errors in judgement and inappropriate responses
- communication is more effective when individuals listen first, then respond to the actual question asked, rather than what they expect the question to be.

Before the video

The reasons participants might suggest for not being satisfied with the assistance they received from inquiry staff could include:

- reluctance of staff to deal with their inquiry
- discussions behind the 'counter' that appeared of more importance
- not listening to the question
- not enough staff
- staff not knowing enough

- receiving misleading, wrong or inappropriate advice
- feeling that the staff told them anything just to get rid of them
- getting advice that sent them in the wrong direction and wasting time
- referral/counter-referral backwards and forwards between offices
- getting different information from different officers in response to the same question
- patronising, disinterested or rude manner.

Not getting satisfactory responses from staff can leave inquirers feeling:

- confused
- frustrated
- helpless
- annoyed
- angry
- resentful
- vengeful

Busy staff members rarely mean to appear rude, patronising or disinterested in their dealings with visitors and inquiries.

All staff in face-to-face roles need to remind themselves that every inquiry is important to the person asking the questions, even if they as staff members have been asked the same questions many times before.

Handout discussion

Question 1: Until his last interaction with the Electronics student, John, the Enrolment Officer, was unhelpful and confusing. Do you think he was aware of how his behaviours were perceived by the student and his colleague?

Given his approach, John is unlikely to have considered the impact of his responses on students.

He was focused on his knowledge of courses and on getting through each inquiry as quickly as possible so he could get on to the next one during the 'rush' of enrolment inquiries.

A number of behaviours indicate that he was not aware of the impact of his behaviours:

- repeatedly sending a student to the wrong room
- giving the wrong advice about courses because he was not listening
- lack of individual response to students and their needs

Question 2: What assumptions do you think could have been behind John's misinterpretations and behaviours towards students?

The possible assumptions that could be behind John's misinterpretations and behaviours include:

- all students with Asian features require English language instruction
- having a good understanding of the courses available and enrolment procedures means he is able to predict what students want
- when students have limited understanding of English, speaking loudly and slowly gets the message through
- experiences of diversity in one context, (e.g. interpreting and translating within the family), prepares an individual for understanding and effectively responding to diversity in all contexts.

Question 2: Identify mistakes in John's initial approach to enrolment inquiries and compare them to the approach adopted by Jean.

John's approach	Jean's approach
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• didn't listen or allow student to complete his request• assumed English, rather than Electronics• seemed more intent on responding/ getting rid of student, than helping (electronics and diploma)• unnecessarily spoke slowly to fluent English speaker• treated all students with Asian features as English language learners• didn't apologise for sending the student to the wrong room.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• allowed inquirer to complete their request before responding• gave the course information requested• focussed on providing information being requested, not on getting rid of student as quickly as possible• responded to the needs of students, whether they were native speakers of English, beginners or people who needed an interpreter• responded to each inquiry as individual• listened first, then responded.

Just listen discussion questions

Question 1: Until his last interaction with the Electronics student, John, the Enrolment Officer, was unhelpful and confusing. Do you think he was aware of how his behaviours were perceived by the student and his colleague?

Question 2: What assumptions do you think could have been behind John's misinterpretations and behaviours towards students?

Question 3: Identify mistakes in John's initial approach to enrolment inquiries and compare them to the approach adopted by Jean.