

Anti-Racism Training

EPTO Style

The European Peer Training Organisation (EPTO) is an anti-racist youth network that uses the method of peer training as a way to take social action against racism and all forms of discrimination. What is effective anti-racist training, what does it include and what objectives does it follow? In her article, Robin Sclafani shares some training strategies to facilitate anti-racist awareness and action, in order to start a dialogue in Coyote about different approaches to training in this field.

Intercultural youth programs are generally considered to be anti-racist because of the positive value which they give to: 1) intercultural relationships; 2) intercultural skills; and 3) self-awareness. Often the task of bringing different cultural groups together is complicated by factors that are the result of serious social issues, and racism and xenophobia can certainly play a role in some people's participation. It could be that stereotypes and prejudices are holding participants back, or that because of economic or political disadvantages it is difficult to get a diverse participation, or that misunderstandings can escalate deep-rooted tensions.

This article seeks to start a dialogue about different approaches to anti-racism training..... but let's first talk about what is anti-racism training. Here are my impressions.

Racism and Anti-racism

Anti-racism is an active approach that counteracts the production and reproduction of racism, breaking the cycle of racism and transforming society into a new model of social relations. Logic holds that anti-racism can be defined in direct relation to the definition of racism. It is that which is "anti" or against the many aspects of racism. However, people hold many different perceptions and definitions of racism, thus determining their action or lack of action to combat it. For this reason, anti-racism training should provide participants the opportunity to come to a common understanding of racism, ultimately shaping any anti-racism initiatives that are born out of the training.

According to the *Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology*, racism is "a set of beliefs, ideologies, and social processes that discriminate against others on the basis of their supposed membership in a so-called racial group. The term has been used in a variety of ways to describe both systems of thought and doctrines that justify the supposed superiority of one social group over another, through to descriptions of practice and attitudes that produce racial discrimination and advantage."

Through my work as a trainer, and recently in my research for a study called "Anti-Racism and Youth for Europe," I found that effective anti-racism education programs include:

- ✓ Developing self-awareness and understanding of an individual's own cultural identity.
- ✓ Engaging in an on-going self-examination of one's role in either perpetuating or confronting racism.
- ✓ Developing the ability to work effectively in diverse settings.
- ✓ Recognizing the spheres of influence in our daily lives.

- ✓ Identifying personal and group actions for change.

In *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*:

A *Sourcebook*, authors Adams, Bell and Griffin describe experience-based personal awareness and social action strategies combined as the most common and preferred techniques for anti-racism workshops. However, they also say that the ultimate goal of an anti-racism program is to "identify ways of taking action against racism in the personal, institutional, and community lives of the participants." But this can only happen after the participants have come to understand how racism manifests itself in society generally, at the local level, and within themselves. It is one thing to know about racism and it is another thing to choose to act against it.

In *Teaching/Learning Anti-Racism*, authors Derman-Sparks and Phillips describe the goal of anti-racism education as generating "development of individual consciousness and skills that enable people to be active initiators of change rather than conforming perpetrators or passive victims."

Beginning with individual consciousness, anti-racism training asks us to look within at our own cultural assumptions and prejudices, while at the same time learning about how others see and experience the world. Self-Identity or cultural identity activities are often used in anti-racism training as a way to raise personal awareness. Explorations into identity can be done through drawing, collages, guided small group discussions, among other training methods, and ultimately should honor the complexity of identity, respecting each unique individual as well as their sense of cultural belonging.

Sharing personal experiences of prejudice, in a workshop where a safe and respectful environment has already been established, is helpful for developing empathy and understanding. It also begins to provide information on how racism manifests itself in society, starting from the individual.

Continued awareness-raising about racism happens through the on-going discussion of different perceptions on the issues presented, but further information can also be brought into the training through videos, simulations, speakers and new experiences. Once participants understand how racism exists, they can begin to see ways of acting against it. Manifestations at local or societal levels can include: racist humor; stereotypical images; social segregation; intergroup tensions; economic disparities; and unemployment, among many other examples.

by Robin Sclafani



Looking at the enormity of racism in our societies can be overwhelming and it can seem difficult at first to imagine what one person or small group of people could do about it. An action plan could include something as simple as challenging racist language, being open to a more diverse network of friends, gathering further information on a particular topic, tutoring or mentoring younger kids, participating in a public demonstration or political action, creating an artistic project to be shared in the community, or participating in other local development activities. Following-up an anti-racism training with an action project will help participants to integrate their learning into their daily lives and contribute in some way towards transforming society.

EPTO Workshops

The European Peer Training Organisation (EPTO) is an anti-racist youth network that uses the method of peer training as a way to take social action against racism and discrimination. A diverse network of youth representing 10 European countries make-up the membership of EPTO. They are youth facilitators of anti-prejudice diversity awareness workshops for their peers, based upon the methods and materials of the Anti-Defamation League A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute. One aspect of the program's philosophy is that breaking down prejudices and institutional change go hand in hand on the road to respectful diversity. Also, fighting racism is not independent of the fight against other forms of discrimination.

For this reason, EPTO's workshops also deal with other issues related to racism and diversity, such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, and disabilities. EPTO facilitates activities to raise personal awareness and encourage social action with youth from a variety of social contexts (schools; youth associations; universities; etc.). Peer trainers deliver either one or two-day awareness workshops, or longer-term series of shorter workshops over the course of a month or several months.

Using interactive activities, discussion groups, simulations, visualisations, role plays, and other forms of intercultural learning techniques, EPTO workshops help participants to:

1. Create an inclusive environment;
2. Be aware of their personal and cultural identity;
3. Recognise their own prejudices, stereotypes, and discriminatory behavior;
4. Recognise and confront prejudice and discrimination in all forms; and
5. Develop an action plan.

Using the methodologies described earlier in this article, to meet the objectives mentioned above, EPTO agendas might include the following kinds of activities, coming from the curriculum of the ADL A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute.

1. Peer trainers use icebreakers and a ground rules activity to begin to create an inclusive environment, establishing trust and a desire to participate fully in the program. Ice breaking activities can also begin to raise issues related to racism in a fun way, alleviating uneasiness with the subject. One example would be the *Greetings Activity* in which each participant receives a slip of paper with a description of a particular greeting from a different part of the world. Over the course of 5-10 minutes, participants move around the room greeting each other, with much laughter and head collisions. The discussion in the large group can identify codes of behavior and challenge cultural interpretations of differences.

2. The *Identity Molecule*, or other self-identity activity, is an impor-

tant part of an agenda, in which participants have the opportunity to describe themselves culturally and share what is positive and what can be difficult about their cultural affiliations.

3. Recognizing one's own prejudices and discriminatory behavior takes time within an agenda, and it is actually a work that is never finished. Through simulations such as the *Lemons Activity* and *Here I Stand*, participants are provoked to reflect on issues of racism in new ways. In the *Lemons Activity*, participants move from generalizations to individualization, using lemons (or potatoes or peppers) as metaphors for people. After developing an attachment to their lemons, participants decide if they will allow a new fruit into lemonland. In the end, participants identify behaviors that include or exclude newcomers. *Here I Stand* is an opportunity for participants to share their opinion on current issues, such as if positive discrimination is still important and necessary, or if interracial dating is a good idea.

4. Recognizing prejudice and discrimination is achieved through a variety of activities, such as *Developing a Common Language*, or using videos and vignettes showing discriminatory situations, like the brown eyes/blue eyes experiment that was conducted by Jane Elliot 30 years ago.

5. Action planning activities can reflect either personal and/or small group actions for change. At the personal level, participants can identify things that they will stop doing, start doing or do differently. However, small group actions are useful because they incorporate follow-up to the youth exchange and give the benefits of the training back to the community. Having positive experiences of contributing to others is important to motivate further social action by the participants.

With creativity and dedication, anti-racism work with youth and by youth can take on a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Networking amongst anti-racist organizations, discussing different philosophies, sharing resources, developing collaborative projects, and acting in solidarity are also important anti-racist actions. This article shared some training strategies to facilitate anti-racist awareness and action, and hopefully opens up the possibilities for further exchange.

The European Peer Training Organisation (EPTO) is a network of youth who lead workshops on issues of diversity and discrimination. EPTO's mission is: "to promote personal responsibility against prejudice and discrimination by increasing consciousness and understanding using educational interactive methods that create respectful environment for everybody."

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