Addressing anti-Asian racism in the workplace
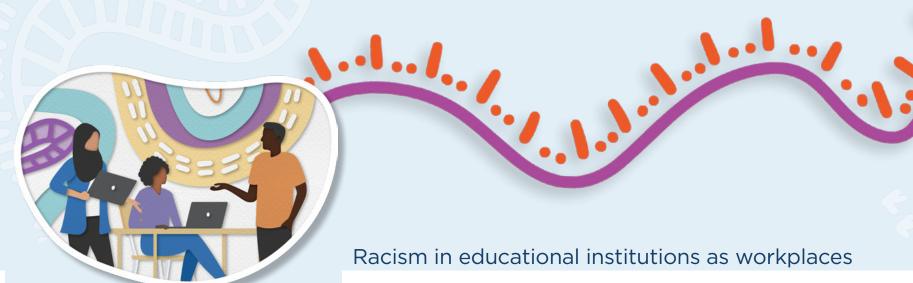
The Commission consistently heard from communities about the urgency to address institutional racism in the workplace, including name discrimination and biases in hiring, institutional norms that centre whiteness, and ineffectiveness in handling racism complaints.[i] The need to embed cultural safety and anti-racism in workplace policies and governance was highlighted as a best practice solution to racism, and as a work health and safety priority.

Strengthening cultural safety and anti-racism in the workplace is an organisational responsibility and a systems-focused solution that requires centring First Nations communities, embedding anti-racism practices at the institutional level, taking strengths-based approaches to diversity and representation, and centring the wellbeing of all negatively racialised employees throughout the process.

This resource presents several examples of Asian and Asian Australian communities' experiences of systemic racism in the workplace and solutions to tackle it.

Racism in educational institutions as workplaces

This resource contains descriptions of experiences of racism that could be distressing and traumatic for some people, particularly people with lived experience of racism. If needed, you may want to seek support from formal support services **here**. Please note that we have occasionally reproduced language from research sources that describe people in derogatory and offensive ways that are recognised as unacceptable today. We included such terms to demonstrate and dissect the language and thinking of the time, and we apologise for any offence or distress that reading such language might cause.[i]

This resource was developed based on the commissioned advisory work of the Griffith University research team consisting of Dr Ubayasiri, Dr Willing, Dr Teo, Dr Anacin, and Ms Chew.[ii] Designs by Bree Buttenshaw for Saltwater People (2024). Layout by Bree Buttenshaw for Saltwater People and Miranda Douglas.

Australia's teaching workforce used to be predominantly white, with teachers coming from mainly Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. In spite of ongoing racism in the education sector, more and more teachers with lived experience of racism establish themselves in this workforce. Despite this growing diversity, teachers with Asian heritage still face significant racism in school settings.[iii]

Beyond overt and interpersonal racism perpetrated by colleagues and students, such as name-calling and accent-related ridicule, Asian teachers also experience institutional racism that pervades the school's policies, processes, and organisational culture.[iv] Institutional racism manifests in different forms, such as racial barriers to employment and promotion, as well as racist assumptions about the lack of ability to communicate productively with parents, cater for classroom difference,[v] or effectively manage classroom behaviour.[vi]

For instance, research on the experiences of Taiwanese teachers found that race-based gatekeeping mechanisms are common within the Australian teaching community.[vii] These mechanisms are used to exclude and marginalise overseas-born teachers. They include non-recognition and delegitimisation of overseas past professional knowledge or teaching experiences, marginalisation of teachers based on perceived levels of white Australian cultural literacy, disengagement with Asian teachers in professional development spaces like Communities of Practice, and the general lack of preventative processes and awareness against racism at the institutional level.[viii]

These structural barriers and mechanisms operate to label and marginalise Asian teachers as inferior outsiders based on their ethnicity, culture, and language.[ix] Asian teachers are increasingly interrogating and challenging the racist status quo by pushing back against these barriers and mechanisms.[x]

Racism in performance venues as workplaces

Performance and entertainment spaces, such as stages, venues, rehearsal spaces, pubs, RSLs, and restaurants, are workplaces for many people, including performers and musicians.

Migrant musicians and performers experience racism in these spaces, both in interpersonal forms – such as language or appearance-based microaggressions and everyday racism by audiences, fellow performers, or venue staff – and in structural forms, such as ethnicity and visa status-based barriers to accessing performance and grant opportunities.[xi] For instance, research on the experiences of Filipino migrant musicians show that they face racial microaggressions on and off stage and are questioned about their proficiency to sing in English because of their accents, which negatively affects audience perceptions of their skills and their prospects of securing future performance opportunities.[xii]

Structural racism in the performance industry also manifests in the marginalisation of migrant performers. Despite their ongoing and significant contributions to Australia's creative, cultural, and economic development, migrant performers face a lack of recognition in the industry, barriers to accessing grants or festival opportunities, economic exploitation including unfair pay and working conditions, and constant and harmful exposure to racism in performance venues.[xiii]

Strengthening anti-racism within performance venues and spaces is the responsibility of venues, as workplaces, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of performers. As Mo'Ju, a Filipino/Wiradjuri third gender artist, highlighted in a keynote speech, it is not the responsibility of negatively racialised performers to educate others about 'deep-seated racism'.[xiv] Rather, it is the industry's responsibility to create a safe space against racism, so that musicians and artists can feel welcome and supported.[xv]

Pathways forward – committing to a National Anti-Racism Framework

The Commission heard calls to address racism in the workplace by embedding cultural safety and anti-racism in organisational policies, structures, and processes. Cultivating First Nations cultural safety and anti-racism within the workplace will help reform structures and norms that privilege whiteness, and create a work environment that more effectively addresses both the unique racism experienced by First Nations people and the racism experienced by other negatively racialised communities.

Achieving this requires efforts that centre First Nations communities, embed anti-racism practices at the institutional level, take strengths-based approaches to diversity and representation, and centre employee wellbeing throughout the process. This entails, among other things:

> Having recruitment and hiring practices, mentoring and retention practices, and cultural accommodations that can support staff with lived experience of racism;

> Having safe and transparent discrimination, harassment, and vilification reporting mechanisms;

> Embedding anti-racism education in mandatory trainings for organisation leadership and staff; and

> Having the long term commitment from organisations to continuously monitor and evaluate their practices, programs, and policies, such as through external cultural safety audits and assessments.

The need to embed First Nations cultural safety and anti-racism in workplaces also applies in the political realm, such as in parliaments and government departments and agencies, and in holding political leaders accountable for speech and action that encourage or enable racism.

For the performance and entertainment sector, venues and organisers need to acknowledge structural racism and its impacts on negatively racialised performers; enhance access to performance and industry networking opportunities by Asian Australian and other migrant performers; diversify broadcasting practices and normalise the inclusion of Southeast Asian, South Asian, and other Asian songs on the radio and other channels; and be supported to strengthen First Nations cultural safety and anti-racism in venues as workplaces. Governments need to enhance temporary migrants' access to grant opportunities, as well as redress for the racism experienced, while also proactively protecting performers of various temporary statuses against economic exploitation through policies and stronger legislation. Unions also have an important role to play in advocating for enhanced workplace protections against racism and strengthening access to rights.

| Read more about what's next for the National Anti-Racism Framework **here**.

References

i   Ethan French and Zathia Bazeer, 'Experts say name discrimination and hiring biases are bad news for applicants and employers', *ABC News* (online, 1 September 2023) <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-09-01/name-discrimination-job-hiring-bias-for-non-english-people/102795452>. See also, Alison L Booth, Andrew Leigh and Elena Varganova, 'Does Ethnic Discrimination Vary Across Minority Groups? Evidence from a Field Experiment' (2011) 74(4) *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics* 547.

ii   For the purpose of this project, the scope of 'Asia' discussed is limited to the regions of East, Southeast, and South Asia, and did not substantively cover other regions of Asia that are conventionally studied in fields including Middle Eastern Studies and Central Asian Studies.

iii   Jinghe Han and Michael Singh, 'Getting World English Speaking Student Teachers to the *Top of the Class*: Making hope for ethno-cultural diversity in teacher education robust' (2007) 35(3) *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education* 291. See also, Carol Reid, Jock Collins and Michael Singh, *Global Teachers, Australian Perspectives* (Springer Science+Business Media Singapore, 2014). Elaine Sharplin, 'Bringing them in: The experiences of imported and overseas-qualified teachers' (2009) 53(2) *Australian Journal of Education* 192.

iv   Jock Collins and Carol Reid, 'Immigrant Teachers in Australia' (2012) 4(2) *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 38.

v   Li Xu, 'The Role of Teachers' Beliefs in the Language Teaching-learning Process' (2012) 2(7) *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*.

vi   Wenying Zhou and Guofang Li, 'Pedagogical challenges in cross-cultural Chinese language teaching: Perceptions and experiences of Chinese immersion teachers in the U.S.' in Patriann Smith and Alex Kumi-Yeboah (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Cross-Cultural Approaches to Language and Literacy Development* (IGI Global, 2015) 159.

vii   Alex Kostogriz and Eleanor Peeler, 'Professional Identity and Pedagogical Space: Negotiating difference in teacher workplaces' (2007) 18(2) *Teaching Education* 107, 110-111, 120.

viii   Ibid.

ix   Ibid.

x   Aaron Teo, 'Autoethnographically Interrogating School-Based Anti-"Asian" Racism in Post(?)-Pandemic Times: An AsianCrit-Informed Composite Palimpsest' (2023) 23(5) *Cultural Studies <-> Critical Methodologies* 451. See also, Aaron Teo, 'AsianCrit and Autoethnography: A Future-Focussed Fugue of Critical Collaborative Inquiry' (2022) 29(5) *Qualitative Inquiry* 582.

xi   Kristine Aquino, 'Anti-racism "From Below": Exploring Repertoires of Everyday Anti-Racism' (2016) 39(1) *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 105. See also, Silvia Domínguez and David G. Embrick, 'Racial microaggressions: Bridging psychology and sociology and future research considerations' (2020) 14(8) *Sociology Compass*.

xii   Carljohnson G. Anacin, 'Negotiating Identity, Music(ality), and Translocality of Filipino Musicians in Australia' (PhD Dissertation, Griffith University, 2023).

xiii   Ibid. See also, Alexandra Blok, 'Songs of migration: The role of music in realising benefits and barriers of regional migrant resettlement and development in Queensland and New South Wales, Australia' (PhD Dissertation, Griffith University, 2022).

xiv   Poppy Reid, '6 things we learned about Mojo Juju from her excellent BIGSOUND keynote', *The Music Network* (online, 4 September 2019) <https://themusicnetwork.com/mojo-juju-bigsound-keynote/>.

xv   Ibid.