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Building Bridges for social inclusion in multi-cultural societies

A/Prof Margaret Kelaher, Ms Angeline Ferdinand, Dr Yin Paradies, Dr Deb Warr
What is the ‘Building Bridges’ Initiative?

• **Aim:** to reduce racism (racial stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination)

• **Theoretical influence:** ‘Intercultural Contact Theory (developed by Allport in 1954)
  – Providing opportunities for contact between people from different racial groups
  – Requires 4 conditions:
    • Equal status of the groups involved
    • Common goals
    • Requires co-operative interaction
    • Organisational, law or customary support

• **Approach:**
  – Phase One (2006-07) – 40 small projects funded across the state
  – Phase Two (2008-11) - 5 large projects funded for 3 years
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.R.A.B. (Victorian Arabic Social Services)</td>
<td>Performing arts project, involving students from 8 secondary schools across the Northern suburbs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beaut Buddies (Foundation House)</td>
<td>School-based peer support program to ease transitions from English Language Schools into secondary schooling for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Games (Local councils and primary schools in the inner western suburbs)</td>
<td>Led by the City of Maribyrnong in partnership with primary schools, engaging students from diverse cultural backgrounds sharing and playing children’s games with facilitated support from parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kar Kulture (South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre)</td>
<td>Involving newly arrived young people and based on doing up a car; emphasis on building positive relations with the police and learning to drive safety.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kitchen Culture (Melbourne Citymission/WYPIN)</td>
<td>7 week or week-long intensive cooking program involving young people from a diversity of cultural backgrounds; participants also receive certificates in food handling</td>
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Evaluating the initiative:

- Anti-racism strategies targeting:
  - Individual-level attitudes and behaviour
  - Organisation environments and practices
  - Social and community norms
- Evaluation needed to capture change at these levels
- Quantitative approaches:
  - Longitudinal surveys of participants (pre and post)
  - Control groups (but has been difficult to achieve)
  - Surveys of community members
- Qualitative approaches:
  - Focus groups with participants
  - Personnel in auspice and partner organisations; community members
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Pre surveys</th>
<th>Post surveys</th>
<th>Community surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.R.A.B</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaut Buddies</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Games</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kar Kulture</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen Culture</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>A.R.A.B.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beaut Buddies</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Games</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kar Kulture</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen Culture</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Anticipated outcomes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual-level: improved self-esteem, sense of identity and membership within a diverse community, reduced experiences of racism/discrimination, increased community participation, increased awareness of common humanity, improved cross-cultural relationships</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisational-level: increased and more effective partnership between community-based organisations, organisations becoming more inclusive and supportive of cross-cultural diversity, increased capacity to plan, implement strategies and practices that support positive intercultural contact/to address discrimination and promote social inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community: environments that are more inclusive and supportive of cultural diversity/promote opportunities for intercultural contact, increased capacity/willingness to address discrimination, promote social inclusion and awareness of the mental health benefits for the community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Common goals:

**Getting people involved:**

…the first thing we say is, ‘Do you like food?’ and usually that’s the bait. Everyone says, ‘Yes, we love it.’ I said, ‘Well do you like to cook it?’ and they said, ‘Yeah!’ That sparks that interest there automatically, so we use that quite a lot as an incentive for young people (Kitchen Culture project worker)

I think I find it easier to talk to people when we were cooking, if we were cooking the same thing. It was easy to talk with them and keep talking and cooking, keep talking and cooking. … Something in common we can [do] – not sitting there like listening to someone like a teacher or talking or it’s boring. (Kitchen Culture participant)

The attraction was the activity, but the content was a positive message…[the school] still need[s] to build an overall identity, and the project helps with that. (Teacher working with A.R.A.B.)
Children usually only see other schools in the context of competition – at the beginning, children were asking if they would ‘verse’ the other school. *(Cultural Games teacher)*

Stories were really valuable because they give some insight into what migrants have gone through – they got to hear stories from other children’s parents. It would have raised their awareness. They related the stories at the Immigration Museum to their own parents’ experiences. *(Cultural Games facilitator)*
I don’t think the department understands all that A.R.A.B. does for the school. They say they want to work with the community—well, here it is. There’s no financial contribution…teachers have to negotiate time to be involved, rather than being encouraged to be involved. If students are participating, how can they get credit for what they’re doing? ... It needs to be formalised—why doesn’t the department give the schools teacher release days for rehearsals, so there’s no disadvantage to the schools for being involved? (Teacher working with A.R.A.B.)

If you asked them [other teachers], they’d say it [ARAB] is great. But the truth is, they use it as a tool – if you don’t do your homework, you can’t go to ARAB but they’ve not prepared – they get shitty if they miss class for rehearsal or performance. But a lot of the kids wouldn’t be at school if it wasn’t for ARAB. Some only come to school on rehearsal day … (ARAB teacher from a different school)
Equal Status:

• Largely being achieved, although there are some challenges

• Ensuring equal status among multiple project partners and project participants (teachers, project workers, facilitators, participants)

• Local cultural barriers (perceptions of difference between ethnic groups)
Other issues:

• Class/ economic disadvantage/ experiences of marginalisation

• Difficulties in young people's families

• Social isolation
  ‘It’s broadened some students’ circle of personal support, when they know there’s someone they can ring up for advice and supports’ (A.R.A.B. school staff)

• Need positive role models
Contexts of place, class, gender:

- **Place:** ‘There’s definitely need [for ARAB]. It’s always been multicultural, and first it was mainly Arabic, but that’s changed as the population has changed, and now it’s mostly Islander students. It has to do with racial variance, harmony within different groups, and the desire to have a ‘Boxy’ identity outside of their own smaller groups.

- ‘Our kids are very conservative, they have very narrow experiences and are unused to change’
• **Class:** ‘There’s a small Tongan minority group, and they seem to withdraw a bit, or mix with themselves. No real tension, but just withdrawal… Probably the parents are in groups, and maybe some are excluded, if I’m looking for that, and not even cultural groups, maybe even socioeconomic groups. I think there could be some of that covert division between parents. (Cultural Games school teacher)

• Lack of neighbourhood networks attributed to many reasons: ‘you just don’t have time if mum and dad both work’
- **Interethnic divisions and tensions**: ‘It was pretty obvious in the schools that those things were going on. The Vietnamese, the Islanders, Afghans and Sudanese. And it’s still a big issue.’ (Kar Kulture staff)

- **Gender**: ‘I had a group of girls – they were so open and welcoming – some girls were showing some leadership stuff, there were some who were shy – I could see they found it challenging. And then some of the older girls, it was about being ‘cool’. And I want to provide a challenge to how they could expand. Because that ‘cool’ stuff can be so damaging to them and damaging to others. Part of the facilitator stuff is supporting them and working with them.’ (Cultural Games facilitator)
The importance of process

- Limited English language skills as a barrier to wider forms of social participation and engagement—participants reported being treated unfairly due to “what language they speak or for the way they speak English” far more often than for coming or looking like they come from another country.

- Difficulties attracting Anglo-Australians to become involved in programs in programs not based in institutional settings

- Attraction of gaining work-related skills (Kar Kulture, A.R.A.B.)

- Reflexive learning as insights are incorporated into project cycles (what works, what doesn’t)

- Aiming for incremental changes:
  ‘I’m not going to say a 100% but at least there’s maybe 30, 40% - their attitudes drop a little bit, you know. That’s for me, its quite an achievement, rather than a 100% racist, you know. Maybe now it’s a 50%’
Challenges and Limitations:

• Complex settings- many other factors at play – which ones are causing the positive or negative effects?
• If things are difficult, suggests the high need for programs but difficult to achieve deep change in short periods of time – initiated some shifts?
• Ensuring attendance/tendencies to attract participants already ‘open’ to cross-cultural situations
• Challenges of working cross settings/sectors
• Recruiting white Australian-born participants to programs
• For evaluation, difficulty in interacting with ‘community’ level