

TEACHING COUNCIL PARTNERS WITH HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION FOR UNTEACH RACISM TRANSCRIPT

With Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand Chief Executive Lesley Hoskin and Race Relations Commissioner Meng Foon

Meng Foon: The reason why the Human Rights Commission took up the Give Nothing to Racism mantle is because we know that racism is everywhere in New Zealand and also there is a lot of ignorance about it and lack of understanding. So it's important in my role as the Race Relations Commissioner to actually inform our communities, educate our communities and also to create debate. We acknowledge that the Teaching Council is a leader in our community, they influence our young people and eliminating racism is very important at a very young age.

Lesley Hoskin: Our opportunity, and the reason that we're working in this space, is because we get to work with individual teachers, we set the Standards for the Teaching Profession and we set the Code of Professional Responsibility for teachers. Those two things together, the Standards and the Code, describe what a teacher does and how they're to do it. And it includes ensuring our kids are safe, that they are well, and that their learning is done in a culturally competent context so that every student that is being educated in our system in Aotearoa New Zealand has that done in a way that meets their individual needs.

Meng Foon: Look I think the Teaching Council is showing great leadership, being very brave to actually bring this conversation of eliminating racism, unteaching racism in schools. It is a subject that used to be taboo and used to be swept under the carpet. But now many of our community newspapers have actually come out and said, "Look, we are sorry".

Lesley Hoskin: I saw the launch of Give Nothing to Racism video with Taika Waititi and I was very affected by it. I was impressed, it was a New Zealand-appropriate approach to having a hard conversation, a conversation that we really hadn't had very often. And so teachers are uniquely placed to lead a societal change around unteaching racism. What do we think we know about it? Dismantling it and then recreating a different response to what we know about racism.

Meng Foon: I think for some teachers it will be confronting and uncomfortable. But I'm also hopeful that the family of teachers and also the school Board of Trustees will actually give great support. I would see there will be a bit of training for the teachers to actually unteach racism. But I think it's a brave journey and I do encourage every teacher to actually give it a go.

Lesley Hoskin: The important point for me here is that this is not a criticism. This is not saying a teacher has done something incorrectly, or some have done it correctly. This is about really owning up to and acknowledging where we are as a country in this subject of racism. And calling out teachers, having these amazing opportunities in front of our young people every day, with a unique set of skills. If we support them and support them to lead, I think we will see this change absolutely take place in a more systematic and coherent way.

Meng Foon: We need to actually be truthful to ourselves. And we hope that being truthful to ourselves is not gonna be hurtful and demeaning to anyone. We just want to say, “This is the problem and we need to address it together”.

Lesley Hoskin: I think of the Ministry of Education’s work they’re doing around racism and discrimination. They’ve recently launched Te Hurihanganui, which is a community-based programme to work with whānau and communities and to support teachers and schools and centres to be able to learn and change.

Meng Foon: Co-design is the key to success. Because so many times the decisions have already been made. But this is a real co-design project. It is important that we actually support each other because we’re all in the same kaupapa of eliminating racism, unteaching racism, we have the National Action Plan Against Racism which is going to be the structural license for all of New Zealand businesses and organisations and public entities to actually implement an action plan to eliminate racism.

Lesley Hoskin: From my perspective, we couldn’t do what we are doing, to talk about race, without the backing of the Human Rights Commission. And to your point – you have Give Nothing to Racism and we literally wanted to just hook our trailer onto that truck to support it but also to be pulled along by it. There is just no question, we are able to create Unteach Racism as a subset of Give Nothing to Racism because of the work you do, the mandate you have, the mana you have in this space. And so it’s an absolute necessity that the partnership continues strongly, that we share the learnings backwards and forwards as we move forward. It’s untrodden ground and so the more I think we stay closely together the better it will be.

Meng Foon: It’s a basic human right, right-

Lesley Hoskin: Yeah!

Meng Foon: To be safe, excelling in education, excelling in our communities. But also I like your notion that we’re not here to blame anybody. Everybody here is in a safe environment. We’re trying to encourage and change people’s habits. Not only the children but also the parents, the teachers, the trustees, everybody needs to be on board. It’s a community project and the team of five million is very important, Lesley.

Lesley Hoskin: It is. And I like that, Meng. I often think of teachers as human rights advocates.

Meng Foon: Mmm.

Lesley Hoskin: They advocate for the rights of those children in many different ways throughout a day. And so yeah I think this partnership is well-aligned. I’m pretty excited about the opportunities that teachers will have to be supported to have really hard conversations.

Meng Foon: I think there’s actually quite a tidal movement in terms of unteaching racism, eliminating racism, Give Nothing to Racism. So that notion of respect is very important. And so teachers, you’re brave, you’re dynamic, and you’re adaptive for today’s environment going forward. [To Lesley] Thank you so much for your contribution, your staff’s contribution, acknowledge your Board for supporting it because the leadership from your Board is important. The Human Rights Commission is right behind you but you are a true leader in our community. I think this bodes well for the future. It’s awesome.

UNTEACH RACISM

Credits (UNTEACH RACISM, Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, Give Nothing to Racism, New Zealand Human Rights)

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