

BRINGING DIVERSITY TO THE CURRICULUM

Where are we now?

Diversity, inclusion and belonging matter. In its current guise, our school curricula are not representative of the society in which we live, and they do not reflect the reality that we are all global citizens.

What do teachers need to recognise?

The time for real change is here, now.

There are opportunities to diversify the curriculum, enabling it to reflect our society, but teachers must identify these opportunities and exploit them.

Uncomfortable conversations need to happen, and people must take time to reflect upon their own understanding if impactful change is to happen.

Teachers need to reflect upon their knowledge and understanding of the history of the United Kingdom, which will not only include new learning but include unlearning in order to re-learn.



HOW CAN TEACHERS DIVERSIFY THE CURRICULUM TO ENSURE IT REFLECTS ALL OF OUR CHILDREN?

Aleishia Lewis is Deputy Head Teacher in a primary school in Essex. Aleishia is an NPQ Programme Lead, Specialist Leader in Education and a BAMEed Rep. As a national and international English teaching consultant and Local Authority Lead Moderator, Aleishia supports English subject leaders and head teachers to improve reading and writing at a whole-school level. Aleishia is an EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion) curriculum consultant.

- WHERE ARE WE NOW?
- WHAT DO TEACHERS NEED TO RECOGNISE?
- HOW CAN WE DIVERSIFY THE CURRICULUM?

- WHAT ARE WE READING IN THE CLASSROOM?
- WHAT DOES ENGAGING IN THIS WORK MEAN FOR TEACHERS?

KEY WORDS

- Belonging
- Celebrate difference
- Diversity
- Empowerment
- Identity
- Representation
- Significant figures
- Value

21 How can teachers diversify the curriculum to ensure it reflects all of our children?

INTRODUCTION

Before we start to explore the question posed in the title, I would like you to set a timer for 30 seconds. In that time, write down everything that comes to mind first when you think about what you learned at school. In history, music, English, in assembly, primary or secondary school ... anything.

Now I would like you to look at your list and reflect upon why you think these things came to mind so quickly. What do you remember – the facts or the experiences? Or do the two go hand in hand?

At the bottom of your list, write down your ethnic background. Consider your experiences and what you learned at school against your ethnic background. Was your cultural history reflected in what you learned at school? If you are not from a global majority background, I would like you to imagine that you are and look again at your list from another perspective. Where is your sense of representation now?

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Diversity, inclusion and belonging matter. In their current guise, our school curricula are not representative of the society in which we live, and they do not reflect the reality that we are all global citizens.

The Pearson Report, *Diversity and Inclusion in Schools*, identified that one in three teaching staff think that the diversity of pupils and the world around them is not reflected in the education provided in UK schools today despite the DfE's five-year strategy goals for education stating that the purpose of education is to ensure 'young people are prepared for adulthood, and the world of work and to be a fulfilled and active participant in society' (DfE, 2016: 9).

CRITICAL QUESTION

How can we expect children to be a 'fulfilled and active participant in society' if they are only ever exposed to a single narrative?

The murder of George Floyd in May 2020 led to a significant shift in people's perceptions of racism. People who had never before encountered racism beyond photos of segregated America or the story of Rosa Parks now had the reality of systemic racism right before their eyes. Communities and individuals stepped out and marched across the world in the middle of a global pandemic to stand up for change.

The conversation about racism and equality is not new. Papers have been written, recommendations have been made, laws have been changed. But now this conversation has shifted into what can be done in the everyday. Organisations, including schools, are working to make real change so that communities are no longer marginalised or stereotyped. The conversation has shifted beyond how we tackle racism in schools to what schools can do to become actively anti-racist.

CRITICAL QUESTION

What is your understanding of what it means to be anti-racist?>

WHAT DO TEACHERS NEED TO RECOGNISE?

- The time for real change is here, now.
- There are opportunities to diversify the curriculum, enabling it to reflect our society, but teachers must identify these opportunities and exploit them.
- Uncomfortable conversations need to happen, and people must take time to reflect upon their own understanding if impactful change is to happen.
- Teachers need to reflect upon their knowledge and understanding of the history of the United Kingdom, which will not only include new learning but include unlearning in order to relearn.

KEY READING

Here is a summary of the Swann Report (1985) which focused on the experiences and achievement of West Indian pupils in schools. The report concluded that the main problems were low teacher expectations and racial prejudice among white teachers and society as a whole.

<http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/swann/>

HOW CAN WE DIVERSIFY THE CURRICULUM, STARTING IN EYFS?

Awareness of cultural diversity at every educational stage must be positive and meaningful. Teachers must recognise that the attitudes of young children towards diversity are profoundly affected by the behaviour of the adults around them. Therefore, as stated above, teachers must examine their own thoughts, attitudes and assumptions towards difference and diversity.

Educators need to be aware of their own barriers and their own bias, unconscious or otherwise. It is important for teachers and support staff to examine their feelings and their attitudes, sensitively, openly and honestly to avoid further generations of children experiencing bias and inequality which can lead to underachievement.

In schools, a lot of time can be spent talking about how everyone is the same, but the reality is everyone is different, and difference should be celebrated. Schools have a responsibility to ensure they teach and model positive attitudes to diversity and difference. This is not only so that every child is included, and therefore not

21 How can teachers diversify the curriculum to ensure it reflects all of our children?



Fig 21.1 Awareness of cultural diversity

disadvantaged, but also to encourage children of all ages to value diversity in others. It is important that children learn to not only respect, but also to celebrate each other's differences which in turn will enable them to develop an understanding of diversity beyond their immediate family experience.

Children need to be taught about people in the wider world and this needs careful thought and preparation. EYFS practitioners should provide a range of resources and activities that reflect and value the diversity of the children's own experiences as well as those they will never have experienced before.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Do your resources reflect cultural and ethnic diversity? For example, do you ensure dolls and puppets have realistic skin tones? Do you provide colouring pencils that reflect different skin tones? What about the images presented on your classroom walls?

Schools must actively challenge gender, cultural and racial stereotyping and help children to gain an understanding of people, families and communities beyond their immediate experience.

WHAT ARE WE READING IN THE CLASSROOM?

The CLPE report, *Reflecting Realities* (2020: 4) clearly states that ‘Books have a role to play both in supporting children to become literate individuals and in shaping their sense of self, their outlook and their understanding of the world around them.’

INFO 21.1

Only 7 per cent of the children’s books published in the UK between 2017 and 2019 feature characters from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background.

Recent figures show 4 per cent in 2017, 7 per cent in 2018 and 10 per cent in 2019. The numbers are slowly increasing but they are still quite a way from being truly representational.

Stories are a great way to introduce diversity to your classroom. Stories open minds ... they are a chance to open minds to different opinions, experiences and perspectives. It is very easy through following the curriculum to tell a single story – to see something from just one side. Children, and indeed adults, need to see through more than one lens.

It is important for children to see themselves and others portrayed positively in books and on displays throughout the school. Teachers of all ages and stages must consider how diverse their books are within their classrooms and school libraries and those that they choose to use in their teaching. Teachers should ensure that images and illustrations include different cultures, races and religious backgrounds so that all children feel represented and included. Multilingual books should also be considered where appropriate. Rudine Sims Bishop said that literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, ‘we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience’ (Sims Bishop, 1990: 11).

Using high-quality texts is not only a valuable tool for engaging and immersing children in topics, for developing reading for pleasure and for improving writing, but also ‘a book can also serve as a stimulus for exploring points of difference, providing recognition and affirmation for readers who can identify and invaluable insight for those who may not’ (CLPE, 2020: 17). Books can also provide teachers with a safe space to explore more challenging issues that they may find uncomfortable talking about with children.

CLASSROOM LINK

Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes follows the story of Jerome, a teenage black boy, who is shot by the police when he is, wrongly, suspected of carrying a gun. As a ghost, he meets the ghost of Emmett Till and begins to explore how historical racism may have led to the events that ended his life. This powerful story grapples with grief, history, bias (both conscious and unconscious) and the fight for justice. It is poignant

(Continued)

21 How can teachers diversify the curriculum to ensure it reflects all of our children?

and it is challenging and Year 5 or 6 teachers could gain so much from reading it with the children and the children would gain so much from hearing it and being involved in the questions and the discussions that stem from it. *The Proudest Blue* (I. Muhammad, with S.K. Ali) is a perfect story to read in EYFS and KS1. It not only celebrates the choice to wear a hijab but it is also about being proud of yourself and your beliefs. Stories such as these enable teachers to actively seek out ways to counter the learning of negative attitudes towards difference.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Does your classroom and your school book stock provide books and stories free from stereotypes that promote positive role models from a wide diversity of backgrounds? Do you have any multilingual books within your school?

KEY READING

CLPE (2020) *Reflecting Realities: Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children's Literature*.

<https://clpe.org.uk/system/files/CLPE%20Reflecting%20Realities%202020.pdf>

HOW CAN DIVERSITY BECOME EMBEDDED WITHIN THE FOUNDATION SUBJECTS?

The report written by the Black Curriculum (2020: 4) says that 'teaching black history not only benefits black students, but it is also beneficial to British society as a whole'.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

What do you think of when you first consider 'black history'? Is it, as said at the start of this chapter, thoughts of segregation? Slavery? Key figures in civil rights history?

It is important that we move beyond a knowledge that focuses predominately upon slavery when we talk about, teach and learn about black history. It is vital that the contribution of black people should move beyond the slave narrative. We need to move beyond focusing on oppression. We must focus on the value and the skills that black people have brought, and continue to bring, to the UK.

'British citizens [need] to understand the full variety and diversity of British life and history' (Black Curriculum Report, 2020: 9); teachers need to be aware that there were black people in Britain during Roman times, in Tudor England and that they were fighting in the British Army during the First and Second World Wars.

21 How can teachers diversify the curriculum to ensure it reflects all of our children?

Across the curriculum, opportunities should be created for children to learn about artists and musicians from global majority backgrounds. Children should be introduced to the Peters Projection Map and the Mercator maps and question why they are so different. They should learn about environmentalists beyond David Attenborough and they should learn that there are people from global majority backgrounds, as well as women, who have made significant contributions to science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). Neil Armstrong is named as an example of a significant figure that could be studied at Key Stage 1, but this is just an example. Children may be aware of who Neil Armstrong is from conversations with their parents, from books about space or from things they have watched on the television. Of course, another example that could be used within the curriculum is that of Mae Jemison, the first black woman to travel into space when she served as a mission specialist aboard the Space Shuttle *Endeavour*. It is important as a teacher to critically engage with the curriculum and consider how diverse, or otherwise, it is.

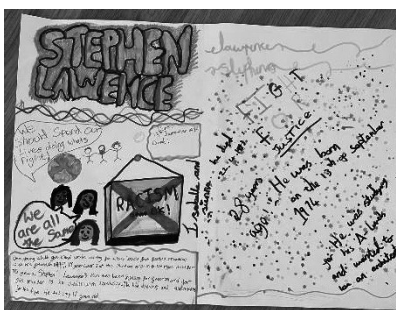


Fig 21.2 Marking important awareness events

Marking important celebrations, national awareness days, weeks or months such as Black History Month and Stephen Lawrence Day provides opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively on a whole-school learning focus which enables them to build and develop their knowledge and confidence, as well as educating the children about important world issues. Awareness events provide a platform, often with supporting resources, to enable effective cross-curriculum learning to take place on key social issues.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

How does your school curriculum challenge misconceptions and prejudices?

- What are the children seeing day by day?
- Who are the children learning about?
- What images are on the walls?
- What music do the children hear?
- What artists do the children study?

WHAT DOES ENGAGING IN THIS WORK MEAN FOR TEACHERS?

There are pedagogical implications that come with diversifying the curriculum. Teachers and school leaders need to take responsibility for their own professional development and learning and must be on-board with developing subject-specific, global knowledge. Teachers need time to find and understand meaningful and culturally diverse resources to support the curriculum. The curriculum in a school should be planned to ensure that it is flexible to meet the needs of all pupils and different approaches.

Teachers need to take time to consider how they connect with pupils to create a sense of belonging and identity within the curriculum for all children. Schools who have a monoculture community need to engage with this work even more than schools who have children and/or staff of a global majority background as they do not have the natural diversity within their teams that children benefit from seeing every day.

By developing their own understanding and knowledge, teachers can quickly make a demonstrable difference to those around them. It is essential that the support, the resources, the experiences that are offered in schools reflect the rich diversity of multicultural Britain and provide all children with the opportunity to develop a positive sense of self-identity, positive self-esteem and respect for others.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Diversity and inclusion matter. The current National Curriculum is not reflective of society in England today. Research shows that one in three teachers working in primary schools today feel that the world around them is not reflected in the education provided in schools.
- Conversations about race and racism are not new. The murder of George Floyd in May 2020 led to a shift in people's perceptions of racism. This conversation has shifted into what can be done in the everyday. Some schools and teachers are now working to make real change.
- In order to move forward, teachers must be willing to reflect on their own understanding and perceptions and may need to 'unlearn' to 'relearn'. Uncomfortable conversations need to happen. Educators need to be aware of their own barriers and their own bias, unconscious or otherwise.
- Awareness of cultural diversity at every educational stage must be positive and meaningful. Teachers must recognise that the attitudes of young children towards diversity are profoundly affected by the behaviour of the adults around them.
- Stories and literature are a chance to open minds to different opinions, experiences and perspectives. It is important for children to see themselves and others portrayed positively in books. Teachers of all ages and stages must consider how diverse their books are within their classrooms.
- When teaching and learning about black history it is vital that discussion of the contribution of black people should move beyond the slave narrative. We must focus on the value and the skills that black people have brought, and continue to bring, to the UK.

21 How can teachers diversify the curriculum to ensure it reflects all of our children?

- National awareness days, weeks or months such as Black History Month and Stephen Lawrence Day provide opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively on a whole-school learning focus.
- There are pedagogical implications that come with diversifying the curriculum. Teachers and school leaders need to take responsibility for their own professional development and learning and must be on-board with developing subject-specific, global knowledge.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

CLPE (2020) *Reflecting Realities: Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children's Literature*. Available at: <https://clpe.org.uk/research/clpe-reflecting-realities-survey-ethnic-representation-within-uk-childrens-literature> (accessed 28/1/22).

Devarakonda, C. (2019) *Promoting Inclusion and Diversity in Early Years Settings*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Department for Education (DfE) (2016) *DfE Strategy 2015–2020*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfe-strategy-2015-to-2020-world-class-education-and-care> (accessed 28/1/22).

Harris, C., Stiell, B. and Leather, D. (2019) *Time for Change: Black and Minority Ethnic Representation in the Children's Literature Sector: A Report for Arts Council England*. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/diversity-children%E2%80%99s-literature-report-2019> (accessed 28/1/22).

Jewell, T. and Durand, A. (2020) *This Book is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action and Do the Work*. London: Frances Lincoln Children's.

Kara, B. (2020) *A Little Guide for Teachers: Diversity in Schools*. London: Sage.

Olusoga, D. (2021) *Black and British: A Forgotten History*. London: Picador.

Pearson (2020) *Diversity and Inclusion in Schools*. Available at: <https://www.pearson.com/uk/educators/schools/issues/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-and-inclusion-in-schools-report.html> (accessed 28/1/22).

Sims Bishop, R. (1990) *Windows and mirrors: children's books and parallel cultures*. California State University Reading Conference: 14th Annual Conference Proceedings. March, pp. 3–12.

The Black Curriculum (2020) *Black British History in the National Curriculum: Report 2021*. Available at: <https://diversityuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Black-Curriculum-Report-2020.pdf> (accessed 28/1/22).