

Teaching about race and prejudice: key issues

- ❑ **Teacher skill**

Expertise and appropriate teaching approaches can be built up within a team over time. Teaching about race and prejudice takes courage and practice!
- ❑ **Monitoring and responding to pupils' feelings**

It is always good practice to monitor and evaluate the impact of teaching. Possible strategies include pupils' personal learning logs / pupil self evaluation / responses through art, drama, film planning (e.g. outlines, scripts, storyboards)
- ❑ **Using pupils' feelings**

Use of simulations, responses to films and people's stories – these are powerful techniques for giving a flavour of what discrimination feels like for its targets.
- ❑ **Stereotypes**

It is important to develop approaches which go beyond simplistic views of passive victims of prejudice and develop more subtle understandings of individuals within 'categories'.
- ❑ **Presence of black and Asian pupils**

Teachers need to know these pupils and have their trust before exposing them to a classroom focus on prejudice. Reactions will vary – some pupils may be more comfortable than others. It remains important not to ignore the issues – individual discussions with pupils before and/or support during/after may be appropriate.
- ❑ **Terminology**

It is crucial to discuss the issue of words and names – to develop common understandings of key concepts and agreement on what is offensive / acceptable.
- ❑ **Challenging simplistic views with information and facts**

Racism is not caused by ignorance but it feeds on it. Teaching about racism needs to make use of factual information and evidence to 'clear up' myths, half-truths and misinformation. Also, concepts need to be explored: e.g. stereotypes and generalisations about 'culture' and religion (Islamophobia?)
- ❑ **Politics and bias**

Racism cannot be examined without being 'political' to some extent – as such, it can contribute to the study of Citizenship in the National Curriculum. Challenging racism and prejudice is about making a difference for ALL pupils. A stance of neutrality is inappropriate when dealing with racism and prejudice and pupils need to know where the school and the teacher stands.
- ❑ **Teaching methodology**

Pupils need a chance to learn for themselves and learn from one another. A range of strategies need to be employed – including pair and small group work, practical tasks and investigations – to promote genuine learning and develop positive working relationships between pupils.
- ❑ **Treatment of racism and prejudice needs to be sustained**

Opportunities to explore issues and reinforce key messages need to be developed within the whole school framework wherever appropriate and from Year 7 up.

Checklist: How Confident Am I?

Racism is not an easy subject and you may find that you shy away from it in the classroom because you aren't confident that you can handle what it brings up in you or in the young people you are working with. Using the following checklist to help you prepare.

- How confident am I to broach this topic and the messages I want to get across? Do I need to read up on or discuss anything with someone first?
- Is racism/cultural identity something most of this group will feel comfortable discussing? If not, what reactions do I anticipate?
- Are there likely to be some individuals who resist or strongly identify with particular messages? Do I know why?
- How much preparatory work will I need to do with this group – for example, agreeing boundaries or defining key terms?
- How can I ensure that the discussion feels 'safe'? What ground-rules could I suggest – for example, about coping with angry feelings or being ready to learn from conflicting viewpoints?
- Have I thought through the discussion prompts and how I will deal with the responses they could provoke?
- How will I deal with any conflict or resistance? If certain students 'act up' or express offensive views, can I 'keep the equality' by challenging the ideas rather than the individual concerned?
- Am I clear what I'm aiming for and how I will achieve it? Have I defined the particular skills or competencies and the changes in awareness, attitude or behaviour that I am hoping for?
- Do I have everything I need? Are there any handouts to prepare, videos to order or back-up resources to be located in advance?
- Which classroom activities are most suited to the needs of this group? How will I evaluate the extent to which individual attitudes have been challenged, expanded or changed?

If any of your responses suggest you are not yet fully prepared, make a list of what else you will need to do and try to set yourself some achievable deadlines.

**'Toolkit for Tackling Racism'
by S. Dadzie (Trentham)**

Guidance on the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues

Teachers will need to:

- Ensure pupils establish ground rules about how they will behave towards each other and how the issue will be dealt with
- Judge when to allow pupils to discuss issues confidentially in small groups and when to support by listening in to these group discussions
- Ensure that pupils have access to balanced information and differing views on which they can then clarify their own opinions and views, including contributions made by visitors to the classroom
- Decide how far they are prepared to express their own views, bearing in mind that they are in an influential position and that they have to work within the framework of the school's values
- Ensure they take due care for the needs of individuals in the class when tackling issues of social, cultural or personal identity.

Handling sensitive and controversial issues

Learning from real-life experience is central to citizenship, and sensitive and controversial issues are certain to arise. Pupils should not be sheltered from them; through them pupils can develop an important range of skills, including listening, accepting another point of view, arguing a case, dealing with conflict, and distinguishing between fact and opinion.

The need for balance should not be regarded as inhibiting a clear stand against racism and other forms of discrimination. Our common values require that there are behaviours we should not tolerate. For example, racism, bullying and cruelty in all its forms are never acceptable.

QCA: Citizenship – a scheme of work for key stage 3
Teachers guide

Ground Rules

- Listen to each other
- Make sure everyone has a chance to speak
- Don't use 'put downs' or make fun of what others say or do
- Be helpful and constructive when challenging another's viewpoint
- Offer help and support when it is needed
- You have a right to 'pass' if you do not want to speak on an issue
- Show appreciation when someone explains or does something well, or is helpful in some way to you
- Treat each other with equal respect

Self Evaluation – Starting points for an Inclusive Curriculum

- How is the curriculum used to explore social and political issues, for example, racism and anti-racism?
- Where in the curriculum do pupils have the opportunity to explore and express their own sense of personal and cultural identity?
- How are pupils encouraged to think critically so that they can identify bias, distinguish fact from opinion and challenge stereotypes, including racial, ethnic and cultural stereotypes
- How do schemes of work reflect the multi-ethnic nature of British society?
- How does the curriculum draw upon different cultural traditions and make explicit that excellence is not confined to 'Western' culture?

Adapted from 'Promoting Race Equality and Cultural Diversity' by Bethan Rees

TEACHING ABOUT RACISM: SOME GUIDELINES

CREATING SAFETY

However consistent your messages, they will be competing with the attitudes of friends and family members as well as the powerful views and stereotypes your students hear expressed in the media every day. Young people's views about racism, culture and personal identity are still developing. Like girls or young people with physical disabilities, black young people are constantly exposed to negative messages about what they can be and do. If you are to work with these views and stereotypes, they first have to be aired. You will need to think hard about how to **create a learning environment that is 'safe' and encourage students to share their thoughts, feelings and concerns.**

KEEPING IT REAL

Racism is a dynamic issue, meaning that the cultural, social and political context and the language we use to discuss it are constantly evolving. Your student's interests and learning needs will reflect the realities, priorities and controversies of the day. Whether you overhear them talking about last night's episode of *Eastenders*, the murder of a rap artist or the latest ethnic cleansing atrocity, **use whatever is happening in the world to raise awareness and encourage on-going discussion, debate and self-reflection.** There will always be local incidents, human interest stories, interesting statistics, information on the Internet, news event or national debates in which racism, 'race' relations and other related issues are a prominent feature. Exploit them!

HANDLING FEELINGS

People's feelings about racism, difference and personal identity are rarely easy to explore, particularly in a classroom setting. You may have to break through a wall of embarrassment, feigned boredom or defensiveness before you can get the class to engage. Once you do, it is important to **avoid making stereotypical assumptions about what it means to be 'white' or 'black'.** You may well unearth some crude racist views, especially in predominantly 'white' schools, but you are equally likely to uncover sensitive and positive attitudes towards difference. It is not uncommon for white young people to have black friends, step-parents or married relatives. Some may prove to be of dual or mixed heritage themselves or to have parents or grandparents who originally came to Britain as immigrants. Others may have strong feelings about racism because of personal experiences of being bullied, taunted or excluded because of their appearance or special needs. Even if such differences are not immediately apparent to you, there will be others arising from their social class, gender or home circumstances that you can draw on. These and other differences will probably prove to be your most valuable teaching resource.

RESPECTING DIFFERENCE

In multi-ethnic classrooms, where young people are often grappling with conflicting experiences of school, home, and youth culture, there are likely to be some strong and sometimes contradictory feelings about religious, linguistic, cultural or personal identity. By giving students the space to define who they are and how they see themselves, you convey an important message that you value their experience. This also helps to break down barriers by revealing what they have in common. Your ability to demonstrate that you **respect and take account of students' individual identities, their differences and similarities, their social attitudes and religious affiliations** will ultimately determine the credibility of your key messages.

You will want to feel confident and sufficiently prepared to handle the questions and differing viewpoints that may emerge. You are most likely to achieve this if you **use books and resources to assist you own learning** and seize every opportunity to take part in relevant items and make a case for papers like the *Voice* or *Asian Times* to be ordered for the staff room. If teaching about racism is new or unfamiliar territory, this will help you to develop suitable language and some confidence. It will also expose you to a wide range of different views that you can draw from.

CREATING OWNERSHIP

Once in the classroom, you can encourage 'ownership' of the ideas and activities by involving students in planning and preparation and demonstrating that, within reason, you will try to respond to whatever they raise. Having clear ground-rules will help you to manage discussions by helping to **create an ethos of relative safety and a readiness to listen and empathise with the views and experiences of others**, however unfamiliar they may be. Having explicit teaching outcomes will help you to judge what is immediately relevant. If questions arise that you are unprepared for, be ready to admit that you don't have all the answers. This is a valid response whether you are black (and therefore 'expected' to know them) or white (and possibly expected not to). If necessary, give yourself time to think things through – or invite the group to seek out the answers by doing their own research or talking to friends and family members. This will give you some space as well as encouraging group ownership of the issues.

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE CONTEXT

Your work in the classroom will be most effective if it is part of a whole-school strategy to convey a consistent message that antiracism, with its attendant values of respect for diversity and fair treatment for all, is 'part of everything we do'. This message will have credibility only if young people are able to see the evidence with their own eyes, reflected in the life and work of the school. clear policies, explicit codes of conduct, effective grievance procedures and consistent staff responses will create the right context for this work by reinforcing the message that racism is undesirable and will be actively opposed. Good quality staff training and effective communication will also be central to your efforts, and will help to develop your confidence.

For some, this scenario may seem like a far-off utopia. You may lack the support of your Headteacher or Head of Department or find yourself working on these issues in relative isolation. You may have to seek out ways to create a supportive context for doing this work. It helps to identify someone to talk to who understands your context and supports what you are trying to do, preferably a fellow teacher. If you can't find an appropriate ally among your colleagues, try to access networks of like-minded teachers in neighbouring schools. Remember that once you've done the necessary groundwork, when you close your classroom door you can move mountains...