

1:3 Advice on Addressing Race Equality Issues in the Classroom

Racism can be a difficult subject to approach, and you may find yourself avoiding 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. It may also be the case that you are not experienced in working in a multicultural setting and worry that the young people will have questions you cannot answer easily.

There are often not clear cut answers to issues of racism, but young people will always be aware of, and talk about, the injustices they see, so ignoring it can give a message that you do not take it seriously. Opportunities should be found in all curriculum areas to explore concepts of race equality, difference and social justice.

Work in the classroom on race equality will be most effective if it is part of a whole school strategy which can be seen in:

- Clear policies and plans e.g. Race Equality Policy and Action Plan.
- All pupils and staff understanding the reporting procedures for racial incidents.
- Having an explicit code of conduct e.g. behaviour policy that addresses racial harassment.
- Effective grievance procedures e.g. racial harassment.
- Consistent staff responses to racism.
- A curriculum that is regularly reviewed to ensure it is culturally sensitive and relevant.

Use the following questions and suggested actions to help you address any concerns:-

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?

You may need to:

- Re-visit school policies and procedures in relation to racism.
- Be familiar with correct terminology to describe ethnicity. See Glossary.
- Be clear about how to deal with racist issues and language that might emerge.
- Research issues/views such as Black History, Migration, African Empire.
- Talk to parents/carers about concerns they may have.

Is racism/cultural identity something most of this particular class/group will feel comfortable discussing? If not, what reactions do I anticipate?

You may need to consider that:

- Issues around racism can be difficult to explore in a classroom setting if this is not the norm within the school.
- You may have to break through a wall of embarrassment, feigned boredom or defensiveness before you can get the class to engage.
- Some young people may have strong feelings about racism because of personal experiences of being bullied or taunted.
- Some Black and minority ethnic pupils in the class may experience strong reactions such as anger, upset etc.
- Some white pupils may express ignorant or negative views about Black people.
- There may be particularly complex issues for multiple heritage pupils and their situation needs to be considered.
- Some areas of the UK have a greater mix of cultures and religions than others, and this can have an influence on racial perceptions and attitudes.

Are there likely to be some individuals who resist or strongly identify with particular messages?
Do I know why?

You may need to think about how to:

- Listen to and involve pupils as much as possible in planning and preparations and also in evaluating sessions.
- Create an ethos of relative safety and a readiness to listen and empathise with the views and experiences of others.
- Encourage students to find answers by doing their own research or talking to friends and family members.
- Ensure that pupils are informed of the range of Black history issues such as immigration and why people migrate.
- Challenge myths and stereotypes about ethnicity.

How much preparatory work will I need to do with this group – for example, agreeing boundaries or defining key terms?

You may need to:

- Agree rules for discussion.
- Ensure that pupils are familiar with the school's racial harassment policy.
- To be familiar with key terms and definition e.g.
 - Asylum Seeker
 - Black
 - Ethnic
 - Ethnic Minority
 - Immigrant
 - Multiple heritage
 - Prejudice
 - Race
 - Racial discrimination
 - Racism
 - Refugee

(See Glossary for definitions.)

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?

You may need to:

- Work towards creating a learning environment that is 'safe' and encourages students to share their thoughts, feelings and concerns.
- Bear in mind that Black and minority ethnic young people are constantly exposed to negative messages about their ethnicity.
- Create an ethos in the classroom which is about respecting differences and valuing others.
- Try to involve Black and minority ethnic adults in the discussion.
- Role play coping with feelings in advance.
- Arrange for support to be available for Black and minority ethnic pupils after the session if required.

Have I thought through discussion prompts and how I will deal with the responses they could provoke?

You may need to:-

- Use current events where possible – discussing the news allows you to use resources such as newspapers etc and can develop young people's critical skills.
- Be aware that young people may be hearing comments at home and may not have the space to explore them.
- Try to ensure where possible that the Black and minority ethnic young pupils have people who understand their perspective, that they can speak to if issues come up for them, and that they are not left unresolved.

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?

All schools should have a 'bottom line' that racist attitudes will always be challenged. However, our role is also to observe and to offer support when issues such as racism are displayed and then plan provision which can be put in place to challenge misconceptions and promote change.

You may need to:

- Refer to 'Reporting and Dealing with Harassment in Bristol Schools' folder.
- Give students space to define who they are and how they see themselves.
- Ensure that all students feel valued.
- Respect and take account of students' individual identities, their differences and similarities, their social attitudes.
- Help pupils to develop suitable language to express their views in a way that does not offend others.
- Ensure that all views are listened to.
- Ensure that all issues are responded to.
- Refer to National Curriculum online – General Teaching Requirements – Inclusion.

Am I clear what I'm aiming for and how I will achieve it? Have I defined the particular skills or competences and the changes in awareness, attitude or behaviour that I am hoping for?

You may need to:

- Ensure that when planning the lesson you consider the impact of the topic on all groups of pupils.
- Ensure clear learning outcomes around new skills and increased awareness are explicit to the pupils.
- Think specifically about needs of Black students as well as white students.
- Ensure that sufficient time is given to the plenary session and that there is a positive end to the lesson.

Do I have everything I need? Are there any handouts to prepare, videos to order or back-up resources to be located in advanced?

You may need to:

- Ensure visual images reflect diversity.
- Ensure that resources are global as opposed to being Eurocentric.
- See Resource list for each Black Bristolian.

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, or expanded or changed?

You may consider the following:

- Begin with raising general awareness.
- Link to main curriculum areas.
- Ensure clear learning objectives, common ground-rules and a shared understanding of key words.
- Be clear about equality issues to be evaluated.
- 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.

Adapted from *Toolkit for Tackling Racism in Schools*, Stella Dadzie, Trentham Books.

ISBN 978 1858561882

www.trentham-books.co.uk