



8 WAYS TO celebrate diversity with children

Explore difference, equality and compassion with pupils through a joyful and inclusive learning experience, says **Shaun Dellenty**

1 | IT STARTS WITH US

To reduce prejudice, we must first be honest with *ourselves* about our potential for prejudice. Mindfulness programmes can reduce stress and enable us to develop authentic, less reactive relationships with our own feelings towards human diversity. Underpin with Philosophy for Children (P4C) and school guidance on respectful discourse.

2 | START FROM DAY ONE

Celebrate authentic identities with culture bags. Pupils take home a bag to fill with items that reflect their family group, lifestyle, interests, culture, heritage or religion. Children share it with the class and describe what it means to them. Same-sex families are valued equally, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. Children progress knowing it's OK that diverse families exist.

3 | EXPLORE EXISTING ATTITUDES

Make it compassionate and joyful; many young people get excited by animal and geographical diversity, yet human diversity often provokes anxiety, fear, bullying and prejudice. Robustly explore the diversity of the natural world, making ongoing links to human diversity and diversity of modern family life. Model bringing compassionate, non-judgmental curiosity to the natural rainbow of life.

4 | BOOKS AND IMAGES

Families in the 21st century are diverse. But do our books, posters and examples we deploy in lessons reflect it? Do school or class libraries contain books about differently abled children? Or children living with grandparents? Do children with same-sex parents ever see their family group validated in books and posters around school? Do lessons include examples from BAME or LGBT+ histories and lives? If not, why not?



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5 | USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Don't get too hung up on 'difference' but explore 'diversity'. Bring awareness to what *binds* us as human beings, compassionately exploring the experiences of a range of diverse identities, including those of same sex families and children with LGBT+ siblings or friends. Acknowledge that LGBT+ children and adults exist and should be celebrated.

6 | OPEN UP DIALOGUE

Use pupil surveys, assemblies and P4C lessons. All stakeholders should be familiar with the Equality Act 2010 and its requirements to eliminate discrimination, foster good relations and further equality. Explore the act with children, along with the UNICEF Convention of Rights for the Child, relating them to school ethos and rules and, in KS2, cover hate crime laws.

7 | INSPIRATIONAL SPEAKERS

Source a range of inspirational speakers from a diverse range of business and cultural backgrounds, including LGBT+. Diverse school speakers can be accessed in person, but if not explore online Ted Talks. Good school leaders empower staff (including those who identify as LGBT+) to be authentic at work; staff can be invited to tell their story.

8 | A WHOLE-SCHOOL CELEBRATION

Plan a whole-school topic exploring identity and reference it throughout the year. Make it a joyful celebration of diverse individuals; explore autobiographies, interviews, heritage, ancestry, and interests and beliefs. Follow up with P4C in which children's reactions and responses to diversity are explored in a respectful space. End with a 'carnival of us', during which children dance to music and sing songs about their authentic identities.



THERE MUST BE NO OUTSIDERS IN OUR SCHOOLS

It's vital that schools ensure all pupils have access to adults who create tolerant, safe environments for children to thrive and grow

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In 2008 I found myself sitting in the headteacher's office in my middle son's school, graded 'outstanding' by Ofsted, discussing the fact that my Y5 child was regularly being called "gay boy" by other children in class and in the playground. It was making him feel like he didn't want to go to school any more.

"It's just playground talk," the head said, "it's not malicious... he doesn't join in with the football games and he spends all his time with the girls. Perhaps if he tried to be more sporty, things would be better for him. It's going to get worse at secondary school if he doesn't."

I was less assertive then than I am now. I'd stayed quiet back in reception class when he was told he couldn't be an angel like he wanted to be in the nativity play because "angels are girls". And I stayed quiet in that head's office. I went home in a fog of despair with no idea what to do. I wish Andrew Moffat's 'No Outsiders' programme had been around then.

"I'm not gay, Mum, I'm not!" he cried. He bought a girl in class a red rose and some chocolates with his spending money to prove it. He was gay, but he couldn't bring himself to admit it for another eight years.

There were no books in his school about little boys who wanted to be

mermaids or about baby penguins being raised by two daddies. There was nothing in his lessons to make him feel like there might be other people like him. And the adults in his school dismally failed to help him.

The head was right about one thing – it got worse at secondary school. It was only after he left, came out and was thriving in an inclusive, vibrant and warm sixth form college that we heard the half of it – medicine balls thrown at his head in PE, being tripped up and pushed against walls, daubed in Tippex, name calling and worse.

He is now a young man, flamboyant and proud – a campaigner for equality and gay rights and a brilliant role model for his youngest brother, who has just come out at the age of 12.

In Y5 (in a different school) he too was called "gay boy", was teased about having a gay older brother and about his own preferences and interests, as if not being sporty or enjoying the company of girls was somehow weird. But this time he had a teacher who would not tolerate intolerance. She spoke to the class, made sure they understood that all people were equal in her eyes and that she would truck no bullying in her school. She told the children about her gay brother and how

much she loved him. My child stood a little taller and his classmates became kinder.

He's in Y7 now at the same secondary that his brother attended and he's aware of some bigoted attitudes from people who he dismisses simply as "idiots", but he's also in a class where others will stand up for him because they are, on the whole, better informed. That knowledge came with them wrapped in compassion and started in primary school with great adult role models.

It's no walk in the park. He has few male friends, but is excluded from a lot of the girl's activities because their parents don't understand that he might enjoy them – no nail painting parties for him (though he loves painting his nails). Times have moved on, but not far enough. And it worries me that some people would have them move backwards.

Whether we like it or not, children are aware of differences in gender identities and sexuality from a very early age. It's not about sex – it's about being able to feel like you belong, that you are a part of the community you care about and that all your similarities and differences are things to be valued and celebrated. That's what the No Outsiders project is – it's about belonging. It's about making sense of a confusing world by teaching children that the answer is kindness.

There is no place in our schools and in our society for attitudes that make children feel excluded for their race, their gender or their sexuality. It's time we stood up as a profession for the values we hold dear and we should demand that our politicians and media do the same. **TP**

Debra Kidd has worked in education for over 20 years and has delivered CPD nationally and internationally.

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Don't be afraid of THE DARK

For children to develop understanding and compassion, they need to read about the imperfect, self-centred decisions adults sometimes take – and their repercussions

ANNET SCHAAP

I remember I wanted the dark. I wanted to know about it, to read about it. I also remember it wasn't easy to find. At home, at school and in church things were made mostly non-dangerous, happy and kid-sized. With raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens and Jesus loved children and well, yes, he died, that was sad, but he was resurrected again almost immediately so let's think about that, children.

I remember visiting a catholic church on a holiday in Italy. There I saw a wooden saint with lots of bloody arrows sticking out of his body. And a bleeding chalk Jesus who didn't look like he would be resurrected any time soon. I couldn't stop looking at them.

That's the real story, I thought. The story I wasn't told about.

I looked for the dark in books, because there were only books back then. They were mostly full of stories about funny talking animals and smart children catching burglars, but sometimes I could find them: darker tales, about things I knew were there underneath the happy stories. Very dark fairy tales in which parents abandoned their children in the woods, or wanted to kill them with a poisonous apple.

I remember they didn't make me scared; they made me happy. Children in the books I loved experienced dreadful things: they were beaten, abandoned, sold or made to climb filthy chimneys, like in *Black Brothers* by Lisa Tetzner. I lived and suffered with them: I coughed in the soot. I cried when the little monkey Joli Coeur died in *Nobody's Boy* by Hector Malot. I jumped out of the window of a

burning house on my brother's back, and survived where he was killed, as I read *The Brothers Lionheart* by Astrid Lindgren.

The tears I cried comforted my own grief somehow and being with those characters throughout their hard lives made my own life seem bigger, and made me understand it better.

As I grew up I never wanted to be anything but a writer or an illustrator and tell stories like that. However, as an author, I lost my courage, when I couldn't really express what I meant, and people who were experts told me that children don't like that dark stuff. There may be a few literary-prize-winning books like that, but normal children hate them and, more importantly, they don't sell well.

So, listening to them, as an illustrator I ended up at the other, brighter side of children's literature, and drew many plucky children catching burglars, wacky adults doing crazy stuff and lots of talking animals.

When I finally gathered the courage to become an author and write my first children's novel, I wanted it to be

for children like I had been. I wanted to talk about grief and sadness and some of the hard things in life. And I didn't want to make the story too one-dimensional either. I thought it was important to write about the imperfect, self-centred decisions adults sometimes take, and about the dark repercussions they may have on children's lives. I tried to create more realistic adult

“Most people mean well in their own minds and are the heroes of their own stories – even when things go horribly wrong”

characters than an evil man who hates children or a wicked woman wanting world domination.

There is a Dutch children's book about Snow White, called *Black as Ink* by Wim Hofman, that starts with the thoughts of her mother, the wicked stepmother in the story. How lonely she is. How the girl reminds her of what she has lost and how she hates her and wants her dead. Pretty

horrible stuff, and you may not come to like the woman, but you feel some compassion for her when you read her thoughts.

Or there is nasty Professor Snape, in the Harry Potter books, who seems to be a horrible villain, until we find out about his reasons for acting as he did. Again, we still may not like him, but we can understand him better.

Is it important to create baddies who have emotional depth? I think it is. Because it's true.

One of the things I wanted to do while writing *Lampie and the Children of the Sea* was to tell the story from different points of view. To take the reader inside the heads of several characters, children and adults. To make it clear why they choose to do what they did. To get close to not only the girl who is hit, but also to the father who smacks her, or to the son who thinks he needs to be different than he is, and also to the father who refuses to accept him.

We may not come to like some of them, but we may understand better why they act like they do. I think most people mean well in their own minds, and are the heroes of their own stories – even when things go horribly wrong. And I think children can handle that – the truth that parts of life are quite difficult and dark, and that people come in many colours, and their motives are not always black and white. For them to grow into understanding and compassionate adults, I think it is helpful to learn about life through stories, to experience the perspective of both ends of a relationship: the small one, the big one, the one who hits, the one who is hit, the one who leaves, the one who stays. The parent, the child.

I now have a ten-year-old son who likes the dark as much as his mother did. He doesn't find it in books so much, but he can't get enough of watching and drawing graveyards, zombies, skeletons and blood. As his mother, I don't always feel comfortable with that and catch myself sometimes trying to push him towards the non-dangerous, happy kid-sized stories: “Here Jonas look: raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens...”

It doesn't work any more than it worked when my parents did it to me. **TP**



*Annet Schaap's debut novel, **Lampie and the Children of the Sea** (£12.99, Pushkin Press) is released on 30th May.*