

## Paper 14: Case studies and reports

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### **Avoiding the easy option**

At a village school in the West Midlands with 120 pupils, of whom five are of minority ethnic background, governors and staff were shaken recently when one of the minority ethnic pupils complained about racism in the playground. The behaviour was subtle (exclusion from a friendship group rather than explicit and vicious name-calling) and the school could almost certainly have taken the easy option, if it had wanted to, of ignoring the complaint or making light of it. If it had done so, it would probably have had the tacit support of most of the white parents.

The head and governors decided, however, to take the complaint entirely seriously. There was much discussion with parents, staff and pupils. Procedures were agreed for ensuring that staff were more aware of pupils' experiences and feelings, and for ensuring that complaints about prejudice and racism were rigorously and sensitively investigated and dealt with. The school extended the work it was already doing on cultural diversity, for example to do with festivals and world faiths; and there was increased attention to preparing all pupils for life in a multi-ethnic society.

### **Statues and stories**

UNICEF education department has devised six stories about racism for use with children aged from Year 2 to Year 6. Sessions using three or more of the stories usually last a day.

A session starts with the children making statues representing a moment in their school lives when they felt good about themselves. They are then asked to suggest words which best describe these positive feelings and the words are recorded on a chart. Next, they make statues representing moments at school that were negative and again their words to describe their feelings are written on the chart. The lists of words then become points of reference for the rest of the day and provide a vocabulary for reflections and discussions.

There is then a dramatised story, using hand puppets, about a cat and a fox. The cat and his father run the only shop in the forest. They refuse to serve the fox, on the grounds that foxes are 'Pointies' and they refer to foxes with a stream of negative stereotypes.

The son eventually change his views, however, whereas his father remains bigoted to the end. The story sets an agenda of issues and questions that are then picked up in later stories.

Later stories vary according to the children's age. *Zaynab's Story* by Lenford Anthony White is frequently used to explore racist bullying in schools and the story of Rosa Parkes and the Montgomery Bus Boycott shows the importance of collective action against racism. The session closes with poems by Langston Hughes and Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream*.

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### **Here, there and everywhere**

A secondary school in Derbyshire has 13 partner primary schools. Recently finance became available from the LEA for a continuing professional training day involving all teachers in the cluster. The headteachers resolved that the whole day should be on cultural diversity and arranged for the centrepiece of the event to be a piece of forum theatre presented by a professional company from London. The story was about street racism and playground racism in a mainly white town in Derbyshire, and about teacher attitudes and staffroom cultures in the schools in such towns.

The day had a great impact on staff in all 14 schools and gave impetus and context to a range of projects and activities, including: the development of policy statements on cultural diversity for all schools in the area; reviews of displays and visual environments – diversity, it was said, should be ‘part of the air children breathe’; and the incorporation of cultural diversity themes in projects such as the Healthy Schools Programme.

Also, the day gave added impetus to a partnership with inner-city schools in Derby, some 20 miles away, funded by Barclays New Futures: activities include drama, dance and music days for participating primary schools; a website entitled *Here, There and Everywhere* run jointly by Year 11 students; and a commemorative magazine as a record for all taking part.

### **Cool to be antiracist**

An 11-16 secondary school in the North Midlands was troubled by mutual hostility between white and South Asian students. Most of the latter were of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage. Every day at break times there was a stand-off in the playground and generally there were bad relationships involving large numbers of students. The hostility spilled into classrooms: here too white and Asian students stayed separate from each other and refused to cooperate.

Some Year 11 students, both white and Asian, felt strongly that they should do something about the situation before the time came for them to move on to college. They talked to a sympathetic member of the senior management team and were unobtrusively supported in the efforts they made to set up an Equal Opportunities Council (the name they chose) with student representatives from all year groups.

Amongst other things, the Council organised a range of music, movement and dance performances, making much use of fusion and crossover forms, and presented these in community venues as well as within the school. It is cool, the message was, to be antiracist.

Both in the playground and in classrooms the atmosphere and behaviour improved.

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Sources: (1) *Aiming High: understanding the needs of minority ethnic pupils in mainly white schools*, DfES, 2004; (2) Peter Barton and Norman Schamroth in *Race Equality Teaching*, vol 23 no 1, autumn 2004; (3) *Here, There and Everywhere* by Robin Richardson, Trentham Books, 2004; (4) Presentation made by students and staff from a school in Stoke on Trent at a seminar in February 2004 organised by the Institute of Global Ethics.