

Countering Racist Bullying

Paper 4: I never had a chance to explain

...I was picked on at school for being different. My command of the English language did not help me here. In fact it might have been better if I had not understood some of the comments thrown my way. I was desperate for people to understand about me and where I came from.

The stereotypes and ignorant comments were never challenged. Not by me – I was too scared. And definitely not by the school. The bullying carried on in the corridors and classrooms and I think the teachers too were under attack.

Every time I was bullied I wanted to explain myself, to tell people about my life and why I was in this country. I carried with me stories and feelings and a great sense of pride about my country and my people. I was proud of my struggles and being brave every single day in this new country. But I never had the chance to explain.

Mostly children, but adults too, seemed to think I did not exist before coming to England, and made me feel ashamed of the past. They made me think that I only became a whole human being, civilised, when I stepped onto these shores.

In the end I stopped wanting to express myself. I thought people would never understand and would only laugh at the differences in me. I wanted to blend into the background: I wanted the bliss that I thought would come if I was no longer different.

It never came.

Source: Prologue by Giang Vo in *Equal Measures: bilingual and ethnic minority pupils in secondary schools* edited by Penny Travers and Gillian Klein, Trentham Books, 2005