**Diversity, Equality and Achievement in Education**

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**Introduction**

There is a well known poem written by Pastor Martin Niemoller in the 1930s. Many of you will know it as “First They Came”, it begins *First they came for the Jews/ And I did not speak out - because I was not a Jew.* (Niemoller) The poem is powerful and often cited because its seeming simplicity voices complex and challenging ideas about diversity and equality. The poem is about who individuals identify with and who they see as different to them. It is also about their response to that perceived difference. The poem explores how individuals form alliances with others who seem to share similar values, attitudes and beliefs to themselves and how they can alienate those they perceive as being different. The poem also explores how we may form these alliances or reject others deliberately or, unwittingly. That is, we are not always aware of how our actions, or lack of actions, impact on others. The poem serves to remind us that we are, in the end, all part of the same community. Therefore, if we are looking out for others, we are also looking out for ourselves. Similarly, where we fail to support others, at some point, we may find we lack support we need too.

These may seem challenging ideas to open this book with. The power of the poem is that while was written at a time of significant historical events in Europe, the poem is still remains relevant today. The poem serves to remind us that , in diverse societies such as Britain, unless we remain aware of issues such as diversity and equality, deliberate and unwitting acts of discrimination can still happen. With particular reference to this book, the poem reminds us that as adults working in schools with children with diverse needs and from diverse backgrounds t is part of our role in schools to ensure all children are provided with and equal opportunity to achieve. That is, it is part of our role to recognize and understand the diversity in our society and, as those who work with children, to respond to it in a way that enables children’s achievement. We have a professional, moral and legal duty not to be culpable in allowing the diversity in our schools to lead to inequalities in educational experiences and underachievement for child.

Indeed, these ideas are not new. Since 1997 schools have been successfully addressing many aspects of diversity and equality in relation to educational achievement, through developing their inclusive practice. In particular, schools have worked hard to ensure that children with specific learning needs, that might act as barriers to their achievement, are being taught in such a way that they are enabled to access learning effectively. Many schools are now expert at providing an inclusive education that can meet a wide range of learning needs, be that needs such as dyslexia and other cognitive learning needs, or the needs of children who are, for example, on the autistic spectrum. Schools are providing equal opportunities for children that enable them to engage in all aspects of school life and to achieve in their learning. However, as understanding about inclusion has developed, so too has the realization of the diversity and breadth of need children may bring to the classroom. For example, increasingly since the inception of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda, it has been understood that if equality of achievement for all is really to be realized, schools must ensure the content and delivery of the curriculum they provide for children is designed and planned with a wider understanding of the wider social context that children are part of. That is, to provide equal opportunities for children to achieve schools need an approach to learning that also encompasses understanding about the backgrounds that children come from. Be that background in terms of culture, socio-economic status, whether the child is living with their birth family or is a Child in Care. That is to say, it is necessary to have knowledge and understanding of how the life experiences children have had, their sense of self, or identity and their current home life impact on how they access learning. Providing equal opportunities that enable all children to achieve is about understanding the diverse families – or home lives and childhood’s children have, and why these need to be taken in to consideration when planning learning activities.

All those who work in the education sector are bound by legislation relating to the aspects of equality and diversity briefly outlined above, and the relevant legislation will be explored, as appropriate throughout the book. However, depending on the role an adult holds in a school there are also professional skills knowledge and understanding relating to equality, diversity and achievement that they may need to demonstrate they have achieved. For example, teachers are required to *understand* how *developmental, social, religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic (Training and Development Agency 2008)* aspects of children’s lives will impact on their engagement with their learning in schools.Teachers should also be able to take these considerations in to account and *make effective personalised provision for those they teach (ibid*). Professional development available for teaching assistants, including the achievement of Higher Level Teaching Assistant status also requires a similar understanding of these concepts. In the same way, all schools – and those working in them, are bound to consider aspects of diversity, equality and achievement as outlined in the Department for Children, Schools and Families document (2007) *Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion*. This document states: *the curriculum for all maintained schools should promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society (DCSF 2007a p.1).* It goes on to say: *schools have a duty to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different groups (ibid).* Community Cohesion is also one of the central principles of the National Curriculum 2010 and, therefore, an important part of all teaching and learning activities undertaken with children (QCDA 2010d).

This introduction began by discussing how discrimination can occur because of diversity and difference. And many societies at different times in history have been guilty of discrimination against sectors of their society, both through deliberate and unwitting discrimination. We have also seen how Britain and British schools have already made great strides in seeking to include children with diverse learning needs in their learning provision. However, the research on children’s achievement shows that while there has been progress in terms of equality of opportunity for some children with regard to their learning needs, there are still some children, who come from particular backgrounds, who continue to fail to achieve.

In seeking to explore the challenge of working with and understanding diversity, equality and achievement in education with the reader this book begins, in **chapter 1,** by discussing, in particular how our own understanding about ourselves, our own identities, values, attitudes and beliefs can impact on how we approach notions of diversity and how those understanding then translate in to our professional practice. Chapter 1alsoasks the question **what are diversity and equality to do with educational achievement?** In seeking to begin to answer the question it raises many ideas which will explored in greater depth throughout the rest of the book. In particular, the chaptersexamines how diversity relates to the well establish inclusion agenda in schools. It introduces the link between diversity educational achievement and underachievement and how the notion of identity is important for exploring diversity, equality and achievement. It also briefly explores how addressing diversity, equality and achievement issues are central principles of the 2010 National Curriculum and therefore, how knowledge and understanding about the concepts explored in the book will be fundamental for those working with children to engage with.

**Chapter 2** picks up the discussion about identity and diversity begun in chapter 1 and explores the concept further. This chapter broadens the exploration in to why it is important to consider identity when thinking about diversity and explores what is meant by identity. The chapter also discusses how identity can be said to be formed and may change or develop over time, depending on a person’s experiences and the influences around them. The link between identity, values, attitudes and beliefs is also examined.

In Chapter 3 **diverse families, diverse childhoods** how children need to form secure attachments when young to enable them to thrive is discussed. The chapter also explores that while for many children these secure attachments are with their immediate birth family, there is still considerable diversity in what might constitute a child’s ‘family’ and who might ‘parent’ a child. In the same way, the chapter considers, if there is diversity in terms of what we mean by family children will have diverse experiences of childhood. The chapter also discusses the notion that, while of considerable significance in the raising and welfare of children, a child’s immediate family is only part of the structures and systems a child interacts with to enable them to thrive. That is to say, schools too contribute to what happens to a child in their childhood and, therefore, need to consider how they respond to this aspect of their role, particularly where they work with children from a diverse range of backgrounds.

In chapter 4, **ethnicity and whiteness** the authors explore with the reader how, over the past 50 years Britain has become an increasingly culturally diverse society. However, the term cultural diversity itself is one that can be misinterpreted and not always fully understood. Often the term is used as if it relates only to race or ethnicity. Race and ethnicity are part of what is mean by cultural diversity, but it essentially it refers to the wide range of differing values attitudes and beliefs that many groups in British society hold. Therefore, the chapter seeks to clarify the meaning and importance of the term ethnicity. it discusses how, in terms of education, ethnicity and achievement are linked. It introduces the notion of ‘whiteness’ which is emerging as a concept in the literature on race and education in England and explores how the concepts discussed in the chapter enables those who work with children to reflect on and evaluate their own position with regard to the ideas raised.

Chapter 5 discusses **Class** as the first of the chapters of this book that begins to explore diversity and equality by looking at how the factors discussed above can impact on the achievement of particular, identifiable, groups of children and their families. In particular the chapter discusses why class is part of the diversity, equality and achievement in education debate and what is meant by class. It explores the link between class and poverty and discusses the term ‘social capital’ and how it is linked to class, diversity, equality and achievement.

Chapter 6 explores the debate surrounding **boys, girls, gender issues and achievement** and as with class, it acknowledges gender is a factor that impacts on equality and achievement but also cuts across ethnicity and class. Exploration of gender issues and their impact on children’s achievement at school have swung back and forth across the ‘gender divide’ over the past 30 years, therefore the chapter begins by exploring the salient contemporary issues related to gender and education in Britain. It sets these issues within the wider historical ‘gender’ framework and discusses prevailing myths about gender, seeking to provide counterarguments from recent research.

Chapter 7 **Coming from a Traveller background - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children – living on the margins** explores the history and origins of Gypsy and Roma people and discusses the stereotypical assumptions about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. The chapter examines the educational debate related to children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritages, discussing the difference between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups. The discussion also invites the reader to consider their positionality with regard to this most marginalized group of children.

In chapter 8, **refugee and asylum seeker children** explores what refugee and asylum seeking means in terms of the law and personal experience in Britain and discusses why people, children and families seek refuge or asylum. It explores the distinction between the terms refugee and asylum seeker and examines how the experience of refugee and asylum seeking children may impact on their learning and achievement in school, while also discussing how schools and can support the well being of refugee and asylum seeker children through understanding the wider needs of their families.

Chapter 9 explores what it means to be **a looked-after child or a Child in Care** and discusses what is meant by ‘looked-after’ and how children come to be looked after children, including the role of multi-agency teams and the family courts in the process and where children go when they are looked after. The chapter discusses why looked-after children are particularly vulnerable to underachievement; why being looked-after seems to have long term negative impacts on a child’s life chances, for example, looked-after children go on to form a disproportionate sector of the prison population. The chapter will give examples of good practice in terms of helping looked-after children to thrive and achieve.

The final chapter of the book, chapter 10 concludes the book’s exploration of diversity, equality and achievement by discussing **enabling equality and achievement for children with disability.** The chapter outlines what is meant by disability and the law in Britain schools need to be aware of that relates to disability and working with disabled children. The chapter also explores what the barriers to learning for disabled children can be and what constitutes good practice in providing for disabled children and their families, to enable the schools to supporting equality of opportunity and achievement in learning for their disabled children.

**Chapter 1**

**What are diversity and equality to do with achievement and education?**

**This chapter explores:**

* How diversity is part of the inclusion agenda;
* The link between diversity educational achievement and underachievement;
* How government research shows that children from diverse groups, such as minority ethnic families, deprived communities, Gypsy Roma traveller families or who are Children in Care are among those children most likely to underachieve;
* How the notion of identity is important for exploring diversity, equality and achievement;
* Diversity, equality, achievement and the National Curriculum.

**Introduction**

Those of us who working with children, or who intend to work with children, know that when we are in the classroom we need to be aware of the needs of the children we are working with. However, what this chapter begins to discuss is that sometimes, unless we have had the opportunity to reflect on our backgrounds, values, attitudes and beliefs, we can unwittingly take into the classroom values, attitude and beliefs that can act as barriers to achievement for the children we work with and actually prevent achievement occurring. This is particularly so if the children we are working with come from a diversity of backgrounds outside our experience.

For over a decade schools have understood that children bring to them a range of learning needs. Schools have been working hard with the concept of inclusion to meet these needs and provide equal opportunities for children to achieve at school. The concept of inclusion, and the notion of inclusion in schools as it began to develop from 1997 (Knowles 2010), is now a well embedded aspect of educational practice. All those who work in schools to enable children to enjoy and achieve, whether in their academic learning or in realising individual potential across a range of skills and attributes, have seen the enormous benefits the inclusion agenda has brought with it (OfSTED 2006). Schools, their staffs and the children and families that attend them are all much more aware of the ways in which children can be engaged in enjoying and achieving at school, whatever learning needs they bring to the classroom.

**Activity**

Think about the range of learning needs you are aware of. These may be learning needs you have direct experience of working with in the classroom, or they may be needs you know about from your reading, talking to colleagues and through your general life experience.

Much of the initial work around the inclusion agenda focused on enabling children with learning needs, both those related to cognitive learning needs, social and physical needs, to be included in mainstream schools. Almost all schools are far more competent now, than they were ten years ago, in providing an environment that meets the needs of all children. Including children with particular needs such as dyslexia, autism or a physical or sensory disability of some sort. Indeed, OfSTED in their 2006 report *Inclusion: Does it Matter Where Children are Taught?* (OfSTED 2006) found that: *the most important factor in determining the best outcomes for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) is not the type but the quality of the provision (OfSTED 2007 p.4).* They went on to state*: there was more good and outstanding provision in resourced mainstream schools than elsewhere (ibid),* where elsewhere included special schools dedicated to catering for children with learning difficulties and disabilities. One of the central aims of the inclusion agenda was to remove the barriers to achievement in their learning that some children had been identified as experiencing prior to 1997.

How children are achieving in their learning is tracked and monitored by OfSTED. To help schools improve in terms of their educational provision for children every year OfSTED provides information to each school about how their children are achieving against national trends and averages. The information is also broken down to show how different groups of children within the school are achieving. That is, the information records the number of children in the school who have free school meals and special educational needs or are ‘looked-after’ or are Children in Care (CiC). The information also shows how children are achieving by gender and ethnicity (OfSTED RAISEonline 2010). The idea being that, through having their children’s achievement reported to them in this way, schools can analyse the data and use it to further improve their educational provision. The current system for reporting this information is called: *Reporting and Analysis for Improvement through School Self-Evaluation or RAISE (RAISEonline 2010).* The collecting and reporting of this achievement information has been taking place for over ten years and has provided invaluable information for individual schools about how they are enabling their children to achieve and improve that achievement over time.

The data has also allowed OfSTED and the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF), the government department concerned with children’s learning, to look at national trends with regard to achievement. The data also allows comparisons to be made between how different groups of children are achieving compared to one another. What the data has shown consistently is that some groups of children always achieve more in their learning than others. That is, the data shows there is not equal achievement between diverse groups of children. The way the children are grouped for purposes of reporting achievement notes for each school the number of children who have a special educational need (SEN), the range of ethnicities in the school, the number of children who have free school meals, how boys and girls are achieving compared to one another and the number of children in the school who are children in care (CiC).

**Activity**

Go back to your list of learning needs that you compiled earlier. Highlight those needs you have itemised that relate to a cognitive learning need, like dyslexia or a motor learning disability (formally known as dyspraxia), or are related to a need such as autism or a sensory or physical disability.

Now, in a different colour highlight those needs that relate to the wider social circumstances of the children. For example, children from economically deprived homes (often measured by the number of children who are eligible for free school meals - FSM), CiC, children who have a disabled parent or children who are a black or minority ethnic child.

Did your list cover all the needs listed above?

Depending on your training, professional development and experience, you may find that you are more aware of the needs of some children rather than others. This book focuses on the barriers to learning for children from diverse backgrounds and will help you explore the challenges of providing equality in terms of educational opportunity for these children.

**Diversity, achievement and underachievement**

Having already discussed the findings that show schools have made a positive difference in terms of achievement for children with certain learning needs, the most recent comprehensive exploration of achievement as it relates to diversity in terms of ethnicity, shows a far less positive picture. The most recent information published by the Department for Education and Skills, now the department for Children Schools and Families, in 2006 (DfES 2006) is a document entitled: *Ethnicity and Education: The Evidence on Minority Ethnic Pupils aged 5–16.* In 2006 the DfES recorded that 21% of the children in state funded or *maintained* primary schools could be classified as belonging to a minority ethnic group (DfES 2006 p.6). In this instance they defined the minority ethnic groups they were discussing as being:

*White Other, Black Caribbean, Black African, Black Other, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Mixed White & Black Caribbean and Mixed White & Black African and Chinese heritage* and *Where appropriate children and young people of White Irish, Gypsy/Roma and Traveller of Irish Heritage origin (DfES 2006 p.5*).

The document also states that children from these groups *are more likely to experience deprivation than White British pupils* (DfES 2006 p.6). Further to this:

*Indian, Chinese, Irish and White & Asian pupils consistently have higher levels of attainment than other ethnic groups across all the Key Stages. In contrast, Gypsy/Roma, Traveller of Irish Heritage, Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi pupils consistently have lower levels of attainment than other ethnic groups across all the Key Stages (ibid).*

The report also explores how a range of factors impact on the achievement of the ethnic minority children detailed above. For example, not only is deprivation a barrier to achievement but the report shows that children from certain ethnic groups are more likely to be excluded than others, particularly *Gypsy/Roma, Traveller of Irish Heritage , Black Caribbean, White & Black Caribbean and Other Black pupils* (DfES 2006 p.7). It was also found that, taking other factors into consideration, B*lack Caribbean and White & Black Caribbean pupils are around 11⁄2 times as likely to be identified as having Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties as White British pupils (ibid).*

Similarly, if we explore the national statistics that report the achievement of children in care (CiC) or looked-after children it can be seen that these children are not achieving as well at school as their peers. *In 2008 only 46% of CiC achieved level 4 in English and 44% achieved level 4 in maths (DCSF 2009 p.3)* whereas the national average showed that *81% of all children obtained this level in English and 79% obtained this level in maths (ibid).*

We have seen above how the DCSF reports that children from some backgrounds are achieving less well at school than others. On the face of it, in Britain, state education is provided free for all children. All children are taught the skills, knowledge and understanding required by the National Curriculum and, therefore this would seem to suggest that education provides an equal opportunity for all children and that each child, therefore, has an equal chance of achieving equally well as another child. That not all groups of children are achieving equally suggests that there are barriers to learning occurring for some children. Some of these barriers may come from the children themselves, but we also need to consider what barriers we, as the professionals, may also be placing in the children’s way and which may be blocking children’s chance to achieve.

At the beginning of this chapter we introduced the idea that we all have personal values attitudes and beliefs. For most of us our values, attitudes and beliefs are shaped by our own ethnicities, up-bringing and experiences. Some of us may have grown-up in an area which is culturally homogeneous (Tierney 2007 p.1). That is, in an area where most people seem to share the same cultural practices and beliefs.

However *cultural diversity is an expanding social phenomenon (ibid)* and as professionals who will work in increasingly culturally diverse schools we may find that the values, attitudes and beliefs we have been used to operating with are not the same as the children we work with. Therefore, our expectations, about the experiences, knowledge and understanding they bring to the classroom may not accord with those of the children and their families and this can act as barriers to children’s learning.

**Case study**

Aadila and Sally work in parallel Reception classes in a primary school in the south of England. Across their two classes are children from a diversity of backgrounds, including different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including Poland.

Given that the children are in Reception many of the literacy activities Aadila and Sally do with the children are based on the use of familiar stories and nursery rhymes. Using stories and rhymes for beginning reading and writing activities is recognised as good practice for reception aged children as the a children already know orally what it is they are now seeing in print. Therefore, children can more easily make the connection between the spoken word and what it looks like written down. If they know orally the story they are now reading they can make informed decisions about unfamiliar words and use the pictures as clues as to what the text might be about.

Aadila describes herself as a British Muslim and Sally describes herself as White British with an Irish heritage. When Aadila and sally began to work together in Reception, and discussed their planning for these activities, they very quickly realised that they shared some rhymes and stories, but that they also knew many which their colleague did not know. Talking about this they began to realise that, given the diverse nature of the classes they were working with that they could not assume all the children would share the same pool of stories and rhymes too. They felt that between them they would be able to share their own stories and rhymes with each other and with the children from similar backgrounds to themselves; however they both knew they had no knowledge of Polish stories and nursery rhymes.

Aadila and sally realised that if they were to provide all children with equal access to the learning activities they had planned, they needed to developed their knowledge and understanding of Polish nursery rhymes and traditional stories, otherwise the children they were working with, who had a different cultural identity to themselves may be marginalised by their belief that all the children would know the stories and rhymes they had chosen to use.

**Identity, diversity, equality and achievement**

One of the challenging things about exploring the diversity of values, attitudes and beliefs is that they are elements of ourselves closely linked to what we can consider our whole identity to be about, and identity is personal and essential to our very being. Indeed the way we act and respond to what is happening in our lives we often refer to as being our ‘personality’. Our understanding of our identity, who we believe ourselves to be affects how we feel about ourselves, how we wish others to respond to us and, therefore how we present ourselves to others. Therefore, to be told that the values, attitudes and beliefs we hold may be preventing children from learning can be challenging to deal with. For example, in the case study above, Aadila and Sally knew that the stories and nursery rhymes from their backgrounds would be different to those known by some of the children they were working with. However, they also knew that using stories and nursery rhymes is one of the most successful ways of helping children begin to read. In this instance Aadila and Sally understood that to ensure that this activity could be provided equally for all children, they would need to do some research into the Polish stories and rhymes the children would know. Had they used only stories and rhymes from their own backgrounds, the children from backgrounds different to that of Aadila, would have been disadvantaged.

Identity is also about belonging – we identify with others and our shared values, attitudes and beliefs are what keep us together as a family, group or community In her writing on belonging Thompson (Kehily 2007) explores how: *Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others (Kehily 2007 p.148).* She goes on to explore how we are a complex range of possibly innate personal tendencies we are born with and ways in which the society in which we are brought up in and live in leads us to develop, demonstrate and manage those tendencies – that is, develop an identity. However, she maintains that what who we are, or present ourselves as being, at anyone time and how we possibly choose to present that person – or identity to others, can vary depending on the situations we are experiencing and the society we find ourselves in.

It is becoming increasingly understood that the concept of identity is fundamental to all discussions about diversity and diversity and achievement. Again, we can see how this is manifest in the case study above. Part of Aadila’s and Sally’s identities are the stories and nursery rhymes they grew-up with and enjoy sharing with all the children they works with. In the same they understood that the children in their classes also have stories that are part of their identity that they too enjoy. Stories and rhymes that are not only ones that can be used as good learning activities, but those which the children and their families may wish to share with others as part of who they are. Had this not been understood by Aadila and Sally’s then the message that would have been being given to the children and their parents is that only some stories and rhymes are part of this school and therefore, are valued by the school. This is what is meant by institutional or unwitting racism. That is, it occurs where individuals or organisations transmit messages that suggest only particular aspects of certain cultures are acknowledged and others are ignored or marginalised. Often, particularly in the field of education, this occurs because of lack of knowledge and understanding both about others’ values, attitudes and beliefs, rather than through acts of deliberate alienation. However, where individuals and schools fail to understand and deal with institutional or unwitting racism, particularly in the attitudes, values and beliefs of the adults that work in them and in the curriculum provided for the children it can marginalise children and erode their sense of self, or who they identify themselves as being.

While we have explored only one instance of how assumptions about what is shared between diverse cultures can lead to inequalities in learning opportunities, for some children this example may be only one of many that happen to them throughout the school day or their life at school. In this way, the many small instances of, usually unwitting, discrimination can accumulate into a situation where children and their identities are constantly undermined. For children to whom this happens they may experience school as an alien place, leading to lack of self-esteem and disaffection. Similarly when children are unable to connect with the learning activities being provided, or are unable to access them, for whatever reasons, they are more likely to underachieve.

Let us consider another example that illustrates how we sometimes have to think beyond our immediate professional knowledge and understanding to meet the needs of the children we may be working with. PE, or physical education lessons are often ones that involve children running around, climbing and, as the name suggest, engaged in a variety of physical activities. In some PE lessons particular skills and activities are developed and taught, gymnastic movements, dance, how to play rounders, etc. If we have a child in our PE group who is in a wheel chair, we do not expect the child to run around. Although it may initially be challenging for us to think of ways of planning our PE session to enable the child to be included, we would not think twice about ensuring we include the child. In the same way, we need to think how the way we are presenting our lesson activities may act as barriers to learning – or unequal learning opportunities for the children we are working with.

Activity

Sometimes we are unaware of how the beliefs we carry into a classroom, the things we say and the assumptions we make about the backgrounds and experiences of the children we are working with actually impact on the children. For example, a phrase often heard in KS1 classrooms is: ‘take your reading book home and read it to mum’. However, for a child who is a Child in Care or is a refugee or asylum seeker child, they may not be with their mother or have any immediate contact with her.

You will be able to think of other phrases you have heard used in schools, or which were said to you as a child, that although not meant unkindly by the person saying them, show that the speaker was making assumptions about the diversity of backgrounds the children they were working with.

Our outlook on life, our values attitudes and beliefs, of our identities are formed by the people we live with and those around us, including by those we work with. Our friends have an influence on us, as does what we study and the media. However, perhaps one of the biggest influences on shaping our values, attitudes, beliefs and identity is the family that brought us up. As Parekh (2008) writes, many of us are brought up within families – however they are constituted. We try to make sense of our roles within our family units and the wider social units we operate in. We have roles in those units too as daughters, sons, siblings, parents, friends, students, employees etc.. We take on these roles and make sense of them, in some ways we can be said to ‘perform’ these roles, in way that are expected by those around us. We have been taught to do by those around us. We do this in ways that are worthwhile not only for ourselves, but also in the wider social context we find ourselves in.

As adults we may feel fairly sure of our own identities, although we may not have given much thought to why we believe what we do, wear what we wear, eat what we eat, etc.. However, if we have not reflected on the choices we have made about what we believe and the influences that have led us to these beliefs, we can fall into the trap of being blind to significant factors that impact on the achievement of the children we work with. That is to say, if we always fall back on the values, attitudes and beliefs we personally hold at any one time and assume they are held universally by others – or that our own values, attitudes and beliefs carry more weight than others, we can, however unwittingly, be discriminating against others.

**Case study**

Louise is in her early 20s and has cerebral palsy. She is in a wheel chair; her sister is two years younger, has the same condition and is in a wheelchair too. Louise says that generally growing-up has been challenging and there are times when she has been very depressed. For her being a teenager was very hard. She wanted to go to discos and parties and the pub, she wanted to wear fashionable clothes and desperately wanted to have a boyfriend.

Louise says ‘because of my condition I can’t stand and need support in sitting up – which is why I have to have this really cumbersome wheelchair. Even if I get fashionable clothes they don’t look sexy on me as I’m all hunched-up. Again, because of the cerebral palsy (CP) I have involuntary facial movements so what boy was going to look at me? And at the time I didn’t really have able-bodied friends since I couldn’t go to a mainstream school so I never got to do ‘normal teenage things’; things have changed a bit for girls now with CP. But it was really tough; I just wanted someone to ask me out and go on a date and be kissed! My sister and I used to play being in Eastenders and we’d take the different parts of whoever was the main teenage love story of the moment – I don’t think even our parents realised how unhappy we were. It sounds funny talking about it now, but at the time it certainly wasn’t.’

The notion of identity is explored in more detail in the next chapter, but the point to note here is that we can take very personally any suggestions that our values, attitudes and beliefs may need reflecting on, because our values, attitudes and beliefs are part of who we are. If someone challenges what we believe, they challenge us as a person. Reflecting on values, attitudes and beliefs and exploring them is not necessarily something that can happen quickly. Often such reflection takes time to think things through and sometimes research into new ideas. Change, of this nature, is a process or a journey rather than something that happens overnight. In terms of our own professional development in the area of diversity, equality and achievement we are all on different journeys and at different stages in that journey. The diagram that follows is adapted from Adams, Bell and Griffin (2007) notion of an action continuum. *It describes the journey we take to better understanding of new and sometimes challenging ideas (Knowles 2010).*

start finish

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| actions that are barriers to equality and achievement | | |  | actions that promote equality and achievement | | |
| actively participating failing to promote equality of achievement | | |  | taking action to ensure equality of achievement | | |
| personal behaviours, values and attitudes that act as barriers | denying personal behaviours that act as barriers | recognising personal behaviour acts as barriers, but not doing anything to change |  | researching the issues to become better informed | sharing research and working with others change behaviours | having the personal confidence, skills, knowledge and understanding to challenge others who still raise barriers to children’s achievement |

(Adapted from Adams, Bell and Griffin 2007)

**What we mean by equality and equal opportunities**

As those who work with children we are well aware of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda and our role in enabling children and their families to achieve the five outcomes for well-being (Knowles 2010). One of the important aspects of the ECM agenda is that the outcomes are about both the short and the long-term. For example, if we take the first outcome, that of ‘being healthy’ (Knowles 2010) we know that we can enable children to be healthy while they are at school which is a relatively controlled environment. However, the real challenge is to provide children with the knowledge and understanding that will enable them to always make healthy choices about what they eat, ensure they take physical exercise and are able to look after their mental health too, so being healthy becomes part of their long-term identities, not just something they do at school. The ECM outcomes are quite broad in terms of what they cover and the principle that underpins them is that if these outcomes are achieved a child will enjoy well-being as they are growing-up and as an adult. That is why the ECM agenda also has long-term outcomes such as requiring that children should achieve economic well-being. In this way, in working with children, we have a long-term responsibility to children to impact on the sense of self - their identities even, in terms of what they know, understand and can do to, particularly to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being. By shaping children’s attitude to the ECM outcomes we are shaping the children themselves.

One of the other principles of the ECM agenda is that the outcomes for well-being are about all children have equal entitlement to the outcomes, just as they do the skills, knowledge an understanding in the National Curriculum. However, there is sometimes confusion about what this means. It is one thing to say that everyone has an equal opportunity to achieve something, it is quite another to enable those opportunities to be accessed and realised. If we consider Louise above, there are many laws and people with good intentions that support the notion that she is entitled to opportunities to achieve well-being equal to those opportunities of able-bodied young people. However, because assumptions were made on Louise’s behalf about what she needed or wanted and what was best for her, because issues of her difference – how her needs were diverse in comparison to other young people around her, were not considered – and she was not consulted, she did not have an equal opportunity to achieve those things she wanted; her well-being was compromised. She went to discos, but the opportunity to go to the discos and parties she wanted to go to and to do the things she saw other teenagers do – indeed the teenage lifestyle which she saw portrayed in the media, was not an opportunity offered to her in ways that could be said to be equal to other young people that were her peers. Equality of opportunity is not just about ensuring the opportunities are there for everyone, it is about ensuring everyone is able to access those opportunities. And sometimes, even though we have the best intentions towards the children and families we work with, because of our own beliefs we prejudice their chances in achieving the opportunities available to them. This is not to say we do this deliberately or wittingly, usually we try to help children to the best of our abilities, but sometimes because of the values, attitudes and beliefs that are so central to our own sense of self we unwittingly discriminate against others.

**Case study**

Sukhdev came to Britain from the Punjab when she was thirteen. While she could not speak English very well when she started at the local comprehensive school, she had been to school in the Punjab and she was very good at mathematics. However, because she was a child for whom English is an additional language the school placed her in the low ability sets for all her lessons. She was also ‘withdrawn’ from sessions to work with the English as an additional Language specialist teachers for 3 hours per week and she received some ‘in class’ support from a bilingual assistant who didn’t speak Punjabi but spoke Hindi which Sukhdev knew well.

In one maths lesson where she was supported by the bilingual assistant Sukhdev, who had finished her work, sat watching other children in the class, some of whom were not engaged with their work and were being disruptive. She turned to the bilingual assistant and said in Hindi, ‘Why I am in this class with these people? I did this mathematics work when I was in primary school’. The bilingual assistant reported this back to the Head of Department who found it difficult to grasp that while for Sukhdev English might be an additional language; she was still good at maths. However, after some persistence by the support assistant Sukhdev was moved to a higher set for maths where she was provided with the opportunity to work at an appropriate level for her ability.

In this case study assumptions had been made about Sukhdev’s level of mathematics based on her competence in the English language. This assumption would have affected Sukhdev’s educational outcomes since in the lower set she herself was aware that she had been judged based not on her maths ability but her language ability. She was aware that she wasn’t expected to achieve a lot and her placement in the lower set was affecting her well being and self confidence.

**Diversity and the curriculum**

One of the reasons that the National Curriculum undergoes periodic review is because it is recognised that our knowledge and understanding about what children need to learn in school, in terms of what will benefit them and society, changes as the world around us changes.

The National Curriculum was introduced by the Education Act 1988. The National Curriculum that schools will be working with from September 2011 will be the fourth version of the National Curriculum. We can see how the proposed 2011 documents reflect changes in society, in terms of technological and other social changes that have occurred since its last review in the late 1990s by the way some subjects have been renamed or grouped with other subjects and new subjects have become compulsory in the primary phase. As the government state: *education both influences and reflects the values of our society, and the kind of society we want to be (QCDA 2010b).*

**Diversity the aims, values and subject content of the National Curriculum**

It is the aim of the National Curriculum (2010) that children should be enabled to be: *responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society (QCDA 2010b p.4).* Further to this, being a responsible citizen is seen as the staring point for the teaching of each area of learning within the national Curriculum makes its own contribution to enabling this to happen. For example, the subject area previously named English is now called: *English, communication and languages (QCDA 2010b p26).* The content of this aspect of the curriculum recognizes that *English is a major world language and its secure and confident use opens up many possibilities (ibid).* That is, the document underlines the importance of children developing a confident, fluent and secure grasp of speaking, reading and writing English. However, is also acknowledges that, equally important in terms of overall language development *learning and using languages enables children to engage with different cultures and societies and further develops their understanding of how languages work (ibid*). Indeed, there is considerable research that shows that having experience of more than one language, from the earliest age, enables children cognition and language development generally (Baker 2001).

**Understanding the arts**, children will show how they are responsible citizens*: in responding to the work of others, they gain insights into different viewpoints, identities, traditions and cultures (QCDA 2010d p.19).* And, in the same way, through**Historical, geographical and social understanding:** *Children learn about diversity and interdependence, fairness, justice and democracy (ibid p.36).*

A range of complex and possibly challenging concepts and ideas that relate to diversity, equality and achievement in education have been raised in this chapter. It is also recognises by the authors that it is one thing to understand what is meant by diversity and difference but it is sometimes harder to know how to put this knowledge and understanding in to practice in the work place. Therefore, it is intended that the subsequent chapters of this book is will provide you with the opportunity to explore some of the ideas introduced here, more fully and begin to help you reflect on developing your classroom practice to ensure you are enabling all children to enjoy and achieve at school.

**Further reading**

Adams, M., Bell, L. A., Griffin, P., (Ed.) (2007) *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* 2nd. Edition Routledge Taylor and Francis Group New York and London

DCSF (2007a) Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion DCSF

Department for Education and Skills (2006) *Ethnicity and Education: The Evidence on Minority Ethnic Pupils aged 5–16* Department for Education and Skills

Knowles, G., (2009) *Ensuring Every Child Matters* Sage, London, GB

Office for Standards in Education (2006) *Inclusion: Does it Matter Where Children are Taught?* Her Majesty’s Inspectors 2535

Parekh, B., (2008) *A New Politics of Identity* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK

**Identity**

**This chapter explores:**

* Why it’s important to consider identity when discussing diversity;
* What is meant by the term identity;
* How an identity can be said to be formed and may change or develop over time;
* Identity, values, attitudes, beliefs.

**Introduction**

*Who taught you to hate the colour of your skin? Who taught you to hate the texture of your hair? Who taught you to hate the shape of your nose and the shape of your lips? Who taught you to hate yourself from the top of your head to the soles of your feet? Who taught you to hate your own kind? Who taught you to hate the race that you belong to, so much so that you don’t want to be around each other? You know . . . You should ask yourself who taught you to hate being what God made you.* (Malcolm X cited in Charlesworth, S., J., 2000 p.1).

**Identity and diversity**

From September 2011 schools will be planning their learning activities from the 2010 National Curriculum. We have already seen in chapter 1 how exploring and discussing with children aspects of diversity are embedded throughout the 2010 National Curriculum. In terms of the concept of identity, this too features as an aspect of the 2010 National Curriculum. The area of learning called **historical, geographical and social understanding** states that one of the aspects of knowledge and understanding that we need to explore with children is: *how identities develop, what we have in common, what makes us different and how we organise ourselves and make decisions within communities (QCDA 2010d p.36).* The central theme of this chapter is: *how identities develop* and why it is necessary to have some insight into the concept of identity to better understand the notion and challenges of exploring diversity.

Diversity is about similarities and differences (Roosevelt 2005). Britain is a society comprised of many cultures, values, attitudes and beliefs. It is also a society that acknowledges that such diversity can engender discrimination, that is, where one group, sharing a particular set of values, attitudes and beliefs may deliberately, or unwittingly, marginalise or actively show prejudice towards a group different to themselves; a group who may hold different attitudes, values and beliefs.

Until recently there has been a notion different ideas and approaches to life need to be some how reconciled into one set of beliefs and understandings for marginalising and discrimination to stop. As part of the journey towards eradicating discrimination, be that racist discrimination or discrimination against people because of their gender or ability/disability, it has been increasingly understood that, stopping discrimination does not mean ‘everyone has to be the same’. Indeed Britain is probably a much richer and more vibrant country for acknowledging the differences that exist between people. Accepting there are differences or that diversity exists between peoples in society is not, however, the end of the story. Difference does give rise to complexity (Roosevelt 2005) and acknowledging there is diversity means we have to acknowledge that complexity too and, as those working with children, begin to find ways of working with that complexity in our classrooms.

One of the first ways of beginning to explore diversity is, as the 2010 National Curriculum requires, through having some insight into how identities develop. For those working, or intending to work in education, this is helpful in two ways. Firstly, if we have some knowledge of how identities develop we can then understand why we hold the values, attitudes and beliefs we do and while other values, attitudes and beliefs that are different to ours are just as strongly held and often just as valid as we believe ours to be. In terms of working in the classroom, we can then begin to understand how our identities impact on our approach to planning learning activities. We can also understand how, unless we are aware of the diversity, both in terms of cognitive needs and cultural attitudes, values and beliefs, the children we teach may hold, how our assumption that we are all starting with similar backgrounds, values, attitudes and beliefs can lead to underachievement. Secondly, we can appreciate how values, attitudes and beliefs are fundamental to our identity – our very sense of self. This, in turn, can mean that as professionals we may find it hard to ‘change our minds’ about things, even when we know the evidence before us suggests we should. Or we may feel challenged by research and ideas that seem to be telling us ‘we are doing it wrong’. For example, as Thompson (Knowles 2006) discusses, prior to the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 the values, attitudes and beliefs about education for girls that were widely held by teachers and others were ones that celebrated the importance of preparing girls for being wives and mothers. And, for these reasons the Norwood Report (Knowles 2006 p.95) argued that: *the grounds for including domestic subjects in the curricular are……..firstly that knowledge of such subjects is necessary equipment for all girls as potential makers of homes (Knowles 2006 p.95).* Changing values, attitudes and beliefs towards how and what girls should be enabled to achieve at school happened over decades. Many, teachers, parents and girls themselves saw that offering girls a curriculum with opportunities equal to those being enjoyed by boys was a denial of girls true identities and flew in the face of what a society should be providing for its girls.

**What do we mean by identity?**

In thinking about personal or individual identity we can be said to be thinking about two interrelated aspects. One is the physical dimension of the object – or person in question and the other is bound up with the psychological aspects of being that person (Garrett 1998 p.41). It is also possible to argue that both physical and psychological aspects can change and vary over time. Most obviously certain physical characteristics can change considerably over time; we change physically in many ways throughout our lives, from the moment we are born, through childhood, adolescence, into middle and old age. Some of these changes are beyond our control abut increasingly we can have a direct impact on our physical appearance. We can modify our weight and change aspects of our appearance though surgery and the way we dress. We may suffer accidents that will alter our appearance. But in terms of our psychological characteristics to what extent are we determined by our biological make-up and to what extent is our identity – who we and others believe us to be under our conscious control? Is it possible that we could change our physical and presenting psychological selves to such an extent that someone who had not seen us for a number of years would be unable to recognise us? But would we have really changed internally or are we just choosing to show different parts of ourselves?

In many ways it is our psychological selves or identities that we often regard as being our true identities, since human beings will often claim to have a core self that continues, unchanged throughout our lives. Indeed, when we work with children we very often talk about helping them ‘realise’ this ‘self’. This is not to say we may change our approach to and opinions about things, but our sense of who we fundamentally are continues and survives by making sense of the experiences we engage with and the memories we hold, storing information in response to those inputs, sometimes revising that information and acting on how that information and those memories add to our knowledge of ourselves and our values, attitudes and cultural understandings (Garrett 1998 p.42).

This interest in trying to explain the psychological aspect of human identity has been one that has interested people throughout time, however in Europe one of the most recent and influential thinkers in this are was Sigmund Freud. At the end of the nineteenth century Freud began to develop a theory that sought to explain how our psychological identity develops in response to how our subconscious, impacted on by the wider social context around us, reconciles tensions within our growing psychological selves. For Freud we begin as infants driven by physiological needs that are necessary for our survival as helpless, vulnerable infants.

*The ‘pleasure principle’ is what governs us at birth and this principle pushes us towards the instant gratification of all our wishes. As we grow up and discover that we have to live with, and adapt to, the natural world and other people, the ‘reality principle’ comes into operation (Rennison 2001 p.31).*

If we grow-up in a supportive environment with significant others around us who are concerned about our welfare – in the broadest sense –then we learn to manage this basic desire in socially acceptable ways, depending on the cultural norms we are being brought up with. That is, at this period in our lives and arguably throughout our lives, we need appropriate significant others around us who help us reconcile our wants with the demands of our wider social context. This notion of significant others will be further explored in Chapter 3.

Freud called the part of us that can be wholly selfish and wanting instant gratification the id. The id is a necessary part of a baby’s survival mechanism since it drives the baby to cry for food, warmth and comfort. However, for humans to live in a social context they need to learn to manage the gratification of these immediate basic needs with the needs and desires of others. Freud called the rational part of the mind, the part that reacts to the outside world and allows the individual to adapt to reality, to acknowledge the ‘reality principle’ *(Rennison 2001 p.39)* the ego. For Freud there was also the superego that is: *the internalised voice of parents, carers and society which provide the individual with the rules and regulations that guide it when it moves beyond primary narcissism* *(Rennison 2001 p.39).* This basic premise of Freud’s has had a profound impact on the way Europe and the west regards the notion of psychological identity, particularly when it comes to exploring how values, attitudes and cultural notions that have become part of our identity develop and can change.

Lawler (2009) however also considers to what extent identity is influenced by our genetic heritage and to what extent it is a product of the wider influences of our environment. If who we are, our dispositions to behave in certain ways and present ourselves to others in certain ways is determined by our DNA, so that we might seem to be ‘at the mercy’ of our genes and have little or no control over who we are. Or, as Freud suggest, who we are may to a greater extent be determined by our upbringing and environment. It may be that both genes – nature and our social context – nurture have an impact on our identity. However, if we can be said, at whatever level, to be shaped by external experiences, then we can also choose to allow some of those influences to have more impact on us than others. That is, we may have some control in what Lawler (2009) terms achieving our identity. That os to say, identity seems to be something that, although it may have an essential basis stemming from our genes, it could be argued that these provide us with the raw materials from which an identity can be constructed.

We do, however, often behave as if we have some determination over our identity as we say things like ‘I wouldn’t normally choose to wear these clothes, but I have to for work, they aren’t really me’. In our leisure time, we seek out places, pursuits and friends that allow us to relax and ‘be ourselves’. That we know we are ‘different’ depending on the place we are in and the people we are with raises two ideas about identity that need to be pursued further.

If we do believe we are ‘different’ depending on circumstances, then this would suggest that we have some notion of being in control of our identity and to may also have, to varying extents control over the impact others make on us. In this way the term identity is linked to the other, that is part of having an identity is about identifying with, or refusing to identify with others. The term *identify* suggests an action, we identify ourselves with something outside ourselves, including with others. And, by reciprocation, those things and others we identify with will determine aspects of our identity. Therefore, we might, as part of our identity, say we are male, or female or transgender, we might then go on to further identify ourselves as identifying with particular groups within that broader category, so as a woman we may also want to identify ourselves as being ‘single’ or ‘a mother’. In the same way as we may identify with sub-groups within the wider category, we may also be ‘*dis-identifying from certain features of being*’ in that category that we find ‘*unattractive or unpalatable’* (Lawler 2009 p.2). In this way we can identify ourselves as being part of wider socially recognised and defined categories but we can also show how we are different to others within these categories. There may be groups in society that we do not want to identify with and will seek to ensure that, possibly by our outward appearance and certainly through the values, attitudes and beliefs we hold, that we cannot be identified with those groups.

**Activity**

Think about how you describe yourself in terms of gender. That is, do you think of yourself as being male, female or transgender?

Thinking about the portrayal of male, female and transgender people in the media, who do you identify with and who do you seek to be different from?

What is it you do to show you similarity to them – for example, is it in the way you dress, the values attitudes and beliefs you hold, your aspirations and the way you live your life?

What is it that you do that shows you do not identify with other people and personalities portrayed in the media?

By making these distinctions, what is it that you want people to know you have in common with these others – what aspects of them do you want to be seen as sharing? And where you believe you are different from others what aspects – of them, do you want to be seen as rejecting?

**Producing an identity**

Sometimes the formation of an identity can be seen as being a product of the narrative, or story, of our lives. In our personal reflections about ‘ourselves’ or ‘who we are’ and when involved in ‘explaining ourselves’ to others we will often set our current ‘selves’ in a wider narrative of ‘our lives’.

**Activity**

On a large piece of paper and with some coloured pens, draw a road-map through your life. Chart those people and events that have you feel have had a significant impact on your identity.

As with all narratives there are main characters, minor characters, main plots and sub-plots. There are also those incidental events or chance meetings with others which, later in the narrative, turn out to be significant. Or there are characters that return to the narrative and completely change the direction that things seemed to be going in. There are also random and unforeseen events that impact on our narratives, some very exciting – and some very tragic.

One of the aspects of our narratives to consider is that however personal we believe our narrative to be, they are constructed in relation to the narratives of others. That is, those who feature in our stories have their own stories too and these may also have had an impact on our narratives and, just as our narratives are shaped by other people will we shape theirs. Wider social events will also significantly impact on personal narratives, war, recession and dominant discourses.

**Activity**

Go back to your map of your life and draw in someone else’s narrative. Also mark in where external events impacted on you – or ideas that were, or are, prevalent in wider society at any one time.

**Case study**

Janice and Paul were at school together, at one point Paul asked Janice if she would like to go and see a film with him. Janice said no and in discussing this time in her relationship with Paul she says ‘we were quite good friends, but ‘here was *something* about him which made going out together a non-starter’.

Immediately after school they moved away from the area and lost touch. Then, one evening a few years later, quite by accident, Janice walked into a pub she had never been in before, having bought a drink, sat down and looked around she realised that most of the people in the pub were gay. And, there was Paul. After the surprise and delight of seeing each other after so long, and Janice explaining she way there ‘by accident’ and Paul explaining he definitely meant to be there they spent some time ‘catching-up’ on each others news. Paul said he was doing chemistry at university and hating it and that once he had come out he set about changing many things in his life. He was going to finish his course and get his degree, but that he had also taken up dance and was training to be a dancer. Janice and Paul remained in touch for a few years and were much closer friends than they had been at school, in part because Paul was much happier and had a much stronger sense of ‘self’ and they were able to have a relationship that was not confused by feeling that the only relationship that they could have was one of girlfriend and boyfriend.

We may believe we have choices in forming our personal identity, but often we may be compromising more than we think because of dominant discourses that exist in wider society. Indeed significant parts of what we see as aspects of ourselves that we have deliberately cultivated may indeed have been scripted for us. Most notably over the last century we can see this in relation to how we are expected to behave in relation to our gender. For example at the beginning of the twentieth century the role society expected women and men to fulfil has changed considerably to its expectations at the beginning of the 21st century. As Parekh (2008) states:

*Every society has a more or less well-articulated system of identities, each subject to certain norms, carrying certain privileges or privations, and enforced by formal or informal sanctions that form part of its disciplinary regime (Parekh 2008 p.16).*

Further to this, as Parekh also explores dominant aspects of society, the media, community leaders and often central government will seeks *to ensure that its members not only conform but internalize their social identities, that is; identify themselves with an internalize the norms of these identities (ibid).* That is to say, those in power believe they have more to loose by challenging these notions that impact on identity than by examining to see if as concepts they actually confine the possible way in which someone’s identity might develop, given more freedom and choice. Recognised and accepted societal identities seemingly provide order and stability for a society. Indeed, there can be freedom in certainty. However: *they can also take us over and become prisons* (Parekh 2008 p.16). There can also be dominant identities which marginalize others, since social identities represent a particular way of seeing the world and behaving in the wider social context. *Identities do not co-exist passively* (Parekh 2008 p.24), they impact on one another. Children quickly ‘pick-up’ those identities which are expected of them and learn how to ‘perform’ that identity.

**Case study**

Amy (5) says, ‘when I am at school I’m allowed to play outside on the scooters, I like to splosh my feet in the puddle to make it go fast. When I’m at home my mum says - ‘you can’t go out in this rain’, I think she doesn’t want me to get dirty’.

Aanand (10) says, ‘when I was at nursery I remember pretending to be my sister Sai. I used to dress-up in a red sari they had and pretend I was making chapattis for everyone. I used to think making chapattis always looked like a great thing to do, but my dad said it was women’s work. Sai put nail varnish on me once and my dad went mad.

**How we deal with the identity of others**

Having thought about our own identities let us now look at how we seek to live alongside others and their identities. By exploring what our own identities may be comprised of and looking at the complexity of our own selves we must also know that others have the same complex structures that they too are working with – or are the product of. However, often, when we are thinking about others this does not seem to be part of our reasoning. Pennington (2000) in writing about our social selves – us dealing with others, rather than us dealing with ourselves, suggests that while we work very closely with our own narratives in seeking to realise who we are and explain ourselves to others, we can be very dismissive of the same process in others. Therefore, in working with children, it is important to understand that they do not come to school as entities separate from their home background and community. Children, as young human beings who are still in the early stages of forming, performing and understanding themselves they will part of an almost a seamless whole with their background. For these reasons, to ensure schools are providing learning opportunities that meet children’s needs they need to understand and work with the child’s family and community, if the learning presented is to be meaningful to the child. that we are part of a wider whole and that this ‘whole’ impacts consciously, or subconsciously on us is a concept that is also explored by Parekh (2008). For Parekh: e*very social identity links us to a particular group of people, makes us part of a historical narrative, and gives our lives a meaning and depth (Parekh 2008 p.24).* However, he also acknowledges that the notion we have of ourselves is complex and, often multi-layered since we will have *multiple belongings, loyalties and sources of meaning (ibid)* that *enables us to construct several overlapping narratives of our lives (ibid).*

The idea of *multiple belongings* is, in a diverse society, an important aspect of identity to consider. In a mono-cultural society it may be arguable that, in terms od identity we have fewer *loyalties or sources* of mean we need to consider in terms of defining ourselves. For most of us, however, we have multiple belongings, we are sons or daughters, we may be parents, we are friends, students, employees, etc.. At anyone time we may need to prioritise one narrative of our lives above others depending on the situation we are in. For example, when we are in the classroom we may be focusing on an aspect of our identity and narrative of our lives that requires different things from us to when we are out with friends. How often will people who know us, on seeing us in situations where we do not usually meet them say ‘I did not recognise you at first’, or ‘I did not know you could do that’.

**Case study**

I am a British Muslim I was born in Britain and my parents are from Iran. I say I am a British Muslim since I love living in Britain and enjoy all the things about Britain my non-Muslim friends do, but being a Muslim is also very important to me. It is part of my identity. With all the talk about terrorism particularly since the July bombings in London in 2007 I sometimes get scared. Some people think because I am a Muslim I am automatically a terrorist, or agree with the terrorists. At the time there were fights at school about it too and lots of racist name calling. But I am just as scared by the thought of terror attacks as anyone.

I don’t wear a hijab – a scarf over my hair and neck, probably because my mother doesn’t. She says when she lived in Iran in the 1960s women didn’t wear them; it was enough that they dressed modestly, which she does. My older sister has decided to wear one and some of my fiends do. When we are out in London, no one seems to care or notice, but when we have been on visits to friends outside London I have been quite shocked by how people have stared at my sister, sometimes they giggle and you can see them nudging their friends. Sometimes you can see in shops that they are actually backing away. I want to tell them this is part of who my sister is, it does not make her an alien or a terrorist, she pays her taxes and contributes to Britain. Anyway, wearing a hijab is better than walking down the street half-naked like some people do. Which when you think about it is also a response to a cultural notion, one that says you’re only attractive if you’re wearing brief clothing. This makes me laugh, when I think about the battle women in the west fought to make it acceptable for them to wear trousers.

Unless we are aware of this notion of multiplicity and layering that is part of people’s identities Pennington (2000) suggests that we can tend to use aspects of our own identity and transfer them onto others. This means we are making judgements based on examples of our dispositions to behave in one way or another, as opposed to verifiable situational factors. Pennington (2000) calls this false consensus and this notion can be used to explain why the behaviour of others can surprise or shock us, that is, we expect everyone’s reaction to particular events to be the same as our reaction. Pennington (2000) suggests that there are three possible explanations for the *false consensus effect (Pennington 2000 p.47).* Firstly because many of our social interactions with friends, family and partners are likely to be with people who do have views similar to us we can often assume that these values, attitudes and beliefs are more widespread than they actually are. Secondly, because what we believe and our thoughts are all consuming for us, we can have a tendency to believe that our concerns are also the concerns of others. The third part of the false consensus concept is that *motivation and our own self-esteem may have a role to play in that our own self-esteem may be enhanced by believing that other people hold the same opinions as ourselves (Pennington 2000 p 47).*

A further interesting point to note about the false-consensus effect is that it can lead to what Pennington (2000) *defensive attributional bias (ibid p.55).* That is, not only do we attribute our own values, attitudes and beliefs to others but that we can also ‘take sides’ with those who do hold the same values, attitudes and beliefs as to defend our beliefs or deny that any aspect of what we believe might be open to question. For example, in the previous case study Paul may have know he was gay when he was at school, but the prevailing values, attitudes and beliefs at that school in the late 1970s were ones that were hostile to homosexuality. Those around Paul assumed everyone was straight and not only that, but that it was a bad and *unnatural* thing to be gay. Those around Paul worked together, whether consciously or unconsciously, as a group to defend their own and others’ biased attitudes to protect their own identities, values and beliefs even if meant denying Paul his identity. Such defensive behaviours from groups of people who share similar values, attitudes and beliefs and are confronted by other ways to live life and other identities can be seen all around. Pennington (2000) cites the example of *conservatives in the United States* who *thought that poor people were more personally responsible for their plight and could do more to avoid poverty than liberal (Pennington 2000 p.54).*

Not only do we have the capacity to identify and work with like minded people to defend our values, attitudes and beliefs but we will also be prepared to be more tolerant and understanding of the behaviour of those we identify with. Of course, there is no problem with this laissez-faire approach unless the behaviour of others could be called into question and this may happen in our professional lives in terms of promoting equality for the diverse children we work with. I may feel fairly secure with the part of my identity linked to being tolerant and treating people equally; I may feel I have no particular prejudices or unwitting aspects to my personality and beliefs that get in the way of enabling all children to achieve at school, however, if I am surrounded by people who think the same as me – how would I know? I may find out more about my own attitudinal biases by reflecting on situations which make me react defensively and negatively towards those who say and do things I disagree with. Often we do not reflect on values, attitudes and beliefs or other aspects of our identity unless there is something external to us that prompts us to do so (Pennington 2000). Considerations about our health might motivate us to change our views on how much exercise we take. Similarly in our working lives we sometimes come upon situations that require us to reflect on the values, attitudes and beliefs we hold.

As we explored in chapter 1, reflecting on our own values, deciding which to keep and which to modify in the light of new ideas and new information is both part of our professional development and part of living in a diverse society. Elias (2001) states: *social patterns of self-regulation which the individual has to develop within himself or herself in growing up into a unique individual, is generation-specific and thus, in the broader sense, society-specific. (Elias 2001 p.viii). E*ssentially, what Elias is suggesting is that each generation has to invent itself and reinterpret its values, attitudes and beliefs so they work for that generation. Society is forever changing, both in terms of who and what comprises that society, the impact of technological change and wider global events, such as war and natural disasters, on that society. The cultural Diversity of Britain has changed considerably since 1945 and we can see by how people identify themselves in terms of their ethnicity and cultural background that, as a society, we are beginning to identify what we have in common, as well as those things that are different between the diverse groups in Britain.

The subsequent chapters of this book will develop further some of the ideas introduced here. The main aim of this chapter has been to raise with you the notion that our identity – where we have come from and where we see ourselves as going, both psychologically and socially, will impact on how we respond to issues relating to diversity and equality.

**Further reading**

1. Bird, C., (1999) *Myth of Liberal Individualism* Cambridge University Press, Port Chester, NY, USA
2. Daiute, C., (Editor) (2006) *International Perspectives on Youth Conflict and Development* Oxford University Press, Incorporated
3. Du Gay, P., (Ed.) (1997) *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production* The Open University with sage London
4. Elias, N., (2001) *Society of Individuals* Continuum International Publishing
5. Parekh, B., (2008) *A New Politics of Identity* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK

**Chapter 3**

**Diverse families, diverse childhoods**

**This chapter explores:**

* How children need to form secure attachments when young to enable them to thrive;
* That for many children these secure attachments are with their immediate birth family, however, there is considerable diversity in what might constitute a child’s ‘family’;
* The notion that a child’s immediate family is only part of the structures and systems a child interacts with to enable them to thrive;
* What we mean by parenting.

**Introduction**

In the previous chapter we explored how understanding the concept of identity is an important part of working with children from diverse backgrounds. The exploration of identity also considered how important families in how identities develop and are maintained. This chapter picks-up and further discusses the notion of families, family diversity and family and identity. The chapter is also concerned to explore the notion of family and that of childhood since much of the work primary schools are engaged in is closely linked with children’s families. Therefore, if we are to understand how to provide equality of opportunity for the diverse needs of the children we work with we need also to understand how our understanding of family, family diversity and diversity in experiences of childhoods impacts on our work.

**Activity**

In previous activities you have been asked to think about friends, family and others who have helped shape your identity and the person you feel you are. Similarly, you have considered how you have impacted on their story too.

The terms family and childhood can be terms that conjure up very definite ideas about what a ‘family’ should be, who a person’s family is and how a family should operate. Similarly, when we think of ‘childhood’, we can have strong views on what ‘being a child’ is about. The things children can, or cannot do. Or the things they should, or should not do.

Either by your self or with friends reflect on who you regard as your family. How many of the people you have thought of are you related to? Have the people you regard as family changed as you have grown-up, you have met a partner’s family or you have lost some of your family members. Are the people you rely on most related to you, or are the friends? Does your experience of family reflect that of your friends?

The likelihood is that no two people will have the same experience of ‘family’. Keep this thought in mind as you read this chapter, since although we know families are diverse and therefore, so are childhoods, schools can sometimes behave as if all children have the same experience of families and of being a child.

**Attachment**

The most important things children need to thrive and flourish are capable, loving and caring persons around them with whom they can form mutual supportive attachments (Mayseless 2002, prior 2006). The notion of attachment and caregiving as expressed in this way comes from the work of John Bowlby in the 1960s and 70s. In the way Bowlby uses the term attachment he is referring to tie or bond a child forms with those who are its primary caregivers. Attachment bonds are initially formed because of the survival needs infant human beings have, the need for food, shelter and security. Most such bonds also develop into one of considerable mutual love, care and affection. However, in Bowlby’s use of the term attachment, he is referring to an instinctive attachment that develops because of the infant human’s need to attach to a caregiver who will ensure its survival, in the most basic sense (Prior 2006 p.15). In the same way, Bowlby refers to the person with whom the infant forms these primary attachments to as the caregiver (ibid, Mayseless 2002). From the infant’s point of view, they will instinctively manifest their need for food or security, or release from whatever sense of discomfort they are experiencing, from whoever seems to provide it (Prior 2006 p.17 Oppenheim 2007). Over time, as the attachment bond develops the infant will come to know what behaviours are most likely to produce the relief from discomfort wanted from the caregiver. As the infant grows and develops they will be able to discriminating between caregivers around them and behaviour likely to produce desired responses from them (Prior 2008 p.16, Oppenheim 2007). Then, between the ages of two or three the infant – now a young child can begin to see their primary caregiver as a person separate from themselves and the relationship will develop into a more complex relationship or *partnership* (ibid).

While Bowlby acknowledges that we continue to from attachments and be attached to others throughout our lives, after he age of two or three, when we can see others as people other to ourselves with their own desire and motivations, we continue to have attachments, but not in the same way as we do as infants. As children become young people their attachment to those who were of primary importance in childhood begin to be overtaken by friends and, as they become young adults, by more intimate partnerships.

In his early work Bowlby centred much of his theory on the attachment/caregiver bond between mother and child. The implication seemed to be that for children to form appropriate early attachments that would enable them to thrive as infants and later as young children moving out into the wider world and needing to form attachments with others, that it was the child’s moth who had to be the primary figure the child attached too. However, Bowlby’s later work states that infants are able to form attachments to more than one caregiver and that successful attachment figures do not have to be the child’s mother. Indeed an infant *can have more than one attachment figure and often has several (Prior 2006. p 56)*. What is of paramount importance to the child’s likelihood of thriving is that the caregivers are there not only to meet the basic survival needs the infant has, but that they are also sensitive to wider needs the child has, because of the nature of them as individuals, but also in terms of providing the wider aspects of care and nurturing we know children need to thrive. While Prior (2006) also suggests that of primary importance for children is: *safety, protection and sense of security (Prior 2006. p 58).* Prior acknowledges that love and care usually develop from these bonds, however, for Prior (2006) *the child’s first need is for safety. A loved child who is unsafe is in physical and psychological peril. Love alone is insufficient (Prior 2006. p 58).* In the same way, while love alone is not enough to ensure a child thrives, so too caregiving which lacks affection and is purely instrumental in terms of providing for physical needs and fails to provide for emotional needs may cause a child to grow-up feeling unwanted and with low self-esteem.

**The child in the wider social context**

The work of Bowlby was, and remains central to our understanding of how important it is for children to be able to form secure attachments from birth, with those who will be able to provide the infant and young child the care they need. While Bowlby claims the initial bond between the baby and its caregivers is based on the infant’s innate biological drive to ensure it has it’s basic needs met, for most children and their caregivers this is usually a relationship which includes much mutual affection. Chapter 8 explores the emotional and physical impact on children who do not establish a secure and flourishing bond with a caregiver or caregivers. These may be children whose caregivers can not, for whatever reasons, provide the necessary care and affection for the infant. Or, because of bereavement or parental separation the child suffers the loss of one or more of their caregivers. In such cases children may become looked after children, or Children in Care (CiC).

Where a child is a CiC, society, usually through agents such as social workers, have needed to ‘step-in’ and try and provide a more secure environment for a child to grow-up in than the one they have been living in. In chapter 2 we explored how an individual’s identity is formed in the early years of life. The chapter discusses how we may have innate characteristics that drive how our identity develops while immediate external influences from those around us and our environment will also impact of a developing identity. In the late the psychologist 1970s Urie Bronfenbrenner began to explore the how human beings are essential social beings who, from an early age, live in a social environment which will impact on their developing selves. For Bronfenbrenner aspects of the way we learn to behave as children, and traits which can be said to form our identity, are rooted in and reflect the social context in which they developed (Dunlop 2006. p 159).

**Bronfenbrenner’s ecological environment model**

If we imagine a set of concentric circles, circles within circles, in the middle Bronfenbrenner places the child in what he terms the microsystem. The microsystem also includes those primary caregivers who are the first people the infant will bond with. The microsytem will, therefore, include parents, siblings and others close to the infant from birth and in the first few months and years of the child’s life.

Moving out from this central circle into the next circle Bronfenbrenner describes the child as moving out into wider society and into the mesosytem. The mesosytem is the bridge between the home, or microsystem, and environments the growing child will move into such as school and the circle of friends the child will develop.

If we continue to move out through our concentric circles we move from the mesosytem to the macrosystem. The macrosystem explores those influences on a child which occur: *indirectly through the parents, siblings, or friends. Stress in the parent’s workplace and its effects on parenting are an example* (Deater-Deckard 2004. p 116). The next circle in our conceptual model is the exosystem. The exosystem contains the wider aspects of the society which the child grows up in that will have an influence on the developing child, but the immediate links between the individual and the influences may sometimes seem very intangible or indirect. For example, the aspects of the exosystem that will impact on the child, positively or negatively, will be whether the society the child is growing up in is experiencing an economic boom, or a recession. It will also contain the policies of the government of the time, fashions and prevailing dominant discourses.

The final circle in our imaginary diagram is the chronosystem. *The chronosystem represents the idea that these contextual influences and all of the complex connections between them are changing over time* (ibid, Empson 2004 p.30).

Having explored the impact of those around us on the formation of our identities, particularly the influence of those around us when we were children. What is helpful about the work of Bronfenbrenner is that his work explores the impact of wider societal influences on the development of individuals and identity. It’s sometimes tempting to think of children as growing up in a bubble, where they are protected from the wider complexities of the adult world. However, if Bronfenbrenner is correct in what he suggests his model shows how children are directly and indirectly affected by wider issues and events happening around them. Robb (Foley *et al* 2001) also state that childhood is a time dominated by adults who, to a greater extent, control most of what happens for a child. From choosing the clothes a child wears, the food they eat, what they watch on television to the friends they should play with and the school they should go to. There can also be a tendency on the part of adults to behave as if the current generation of children are ungrateful for not realising how much better things are for them, particularly in material terms than they were for their parent’s generation. Robb (Foley *et al* 2001) writes that the picture of childhood in Britain is experienced as *a stereotyped picture of modern children as spoilt and over-materialistic* (op cit p.19). However, as he also points out, children learn their behaviour from those around them and if the adults too are using material objects to define themselves and establish their sense of identity and status, children will learn to do this too. Further to this Robb (Foley *et al* 2001) also reminds us that there is considerable money to be made from children and ‘childhood’. There are a number of industries whose livelihood is dependent on children. The toy industry, the section of the media that caters for children, advertising, fashion, entertainment – films, leisure pursuits, including the ‘traditional’ dancing lessons, horse riding, swimming and football. it is only adults who believe children are unaffected by the wider workings of the world.

**Activity**

In his ecological environment model Bronfenbrenner explore the impact of wider social events of the development of the child. Think back through your life, can you find any examples of how events in wider society directly – or indirectly impacted on your childhood and possibly your developing sense of self? These may be events that had a positive or negative impact, they may be huge societal events such as wars or lighter trends such as a particular music fashion. The impact may have been fleeting in terms of the effect it has had on you, or you may be living with lasting consequences of these events. If you are still unsure what Bronfenbrenner is exploring through his notion of the ecosystem and chronosystem, read the case studies below to help your thinking.

**Case studies**

Innocence was born in Jamaica and, at the age of 12 came to Britain with her parents in 1951. Carl says: ‘my father had been in the RAF in the war and was stationed in Britain, he said we would like it here and he’d fought for ‘the mother country’ so people would welcome us. When we got here we arrived in a country still recovering from the war. London was like a bomb site and there was still rationing. While the white British were happy for black Jamaican’s to fight in the war for them, they weren’t quite so welcoming now everyone was scrabbling to make a living.

Finding somewhere to live was hard too. It was just like that sign they show sometimes on TV documentaries about the time, you know the one: no blacks, no Irish, no dogs.

I’m now in my late 40s, but I was in my 20s in the 1980s and had just started work. Britain really seemed to have found itself and was booming. Work was so easy to find and it was a great time and a great time for young women. My friend and I bought ourselves suits – with the shoulder pads and everything. We really thought we could do anything and go anywhere. I still look back on those days as being some of the happiest times of my life. Things seem so much harder for my own daughter, you have to have qualifications to do everything now, I don’t know how she’s going to afford to buy a house and get a mortgage. You think things are always going to get better, but it’s not always like that. Mind you, she is going to university which is something that wasn’t there for me.’

Atorena says ‘I am 12 and living in Britain with my grandparents and my sister. I come from Baghdad in Iraq. When the British and American bombing started in 2003 my mother took us to Saudi Arabia to stay with my aunt. My mother went back to Baghdad to be with my father and they are still there. My aunt brought us to Britain so we could be safe and looked after by our grandparents. Our flat is quite small and I share a bed with my sister. I was very homesick when I first came and really missed my parents – I haven’t seen them since 2003. When it is better in Baghdad I want to go back and see them, but I might come back to Britain again as this is what I know now.’

‘My name is Sam, I’m 9 and in year 4 at school. I really like school, I have lots of friends and we play football at lunchtime. I’m good at football and play in a team at the weekend. I’m quite good at maths too and like using the computers at school. I like it when the teacher does stuff on the interactive whiteboard and we get to use it. We’re doing about the environment at the moment. Sometimes it does worry me about what’s going to happen, I worry about the [polar] bears whose ice sheets are melting. Sometimes I think, I’ll be an adult soon and have to sort all these problems out. I also get worried sometimes about the tests I have to do in Y6. My sister did them and she got really stressy.’

Bronfenbrenner’s model is also helpful in that it enables us explore how aspects of inequality work at a societal level. While those who work with children in schools – which in Bronfenbrenner model is part of the mesosytem, seek to provide equality of opportunity for children because of the other factors operating in the mesosytem, exosystem and chronosystem the success school can achieve for children, in terms of equality and achievement, may be diluted by wider societal influences. For example, schools can ensure all children have equality of opportunity when it comes to accessing the school’s resources. However, the facilities and resources children have access to outside school will vary considerably, depending on the income of the child’s parents and the area in which they live. Similarly, if the child goes home to a safe, warm house where those that look after them are not unusually stressed by other life events, they are going to have very different experience to those children who may not have such security at home or whose carers are concerned about money, jobs, unemployment and repossession. Such differences in background will also impact on the child’s sense of self, sense of identity and expectations (Dunlop 2006).

Children who have a range of microsystems to move between grow-up understanding, whether consciously or unconsciously, how to manage themselves in a range of social and cultural situations. They build up a repertoire of behaviours and a bank of knowledge and understanding that can build confidence and self-esteem. They learn that the world is full of different situations but they have a range of experiences they can draw on to help them deal with a new and unfamiliar situation they may find themselves in. The broader the mircosystems available to the child, the greater the child’s access to a range of social and cultural experiences and understanding, the higher a child’s store of social capital (Dunlop 2006. p 3). For example, a child who is used to travelling out of their immediate home environment, to stay with relatives, for example; or the child who goes to playgroup, friends houses, travels abroad on holiday, does activities outside the home and is encouraged to engage with a range of ideas, will have more social skills at their disposal and will have learnt that new situations can bring exciting possibilities compared to a child who has, for whatever reasons, a more restricted microsystem.

**The notion of family**

Both the work of Bowlby and Bronfenbrenner highlights the fundamental impact a child’s immediate family have on all aspects of growth and development. This next section explores what is meant by the term family, since it is a term that can mean many things, depending on who is using it. This is illustrated by Featherstone (2004) who states: *humans have been imagining and re-imagining families throughout recorded history (Featherstone 2004 p.20).* That is to say, many of us have an image of what we think a family is – or should be, having often ‘picked-up’ this image of the family from the popular discourse about families. However, we also know that the reality is that there is no one model for determining what a family is. Families too come in diverse configurations, shapes and sizes.

However, while our experience teaches us that no one family is like another, one of the most enduring notions of what constitutes a family is the discourse surrounding the notion of the ‘nuclear family’ encouraged in the 1950s. This concept of family portrays a family as being one constituted of a *male employed head of household, homemaker wife and dependent children in a nuclear arrangement* (Featherstone2004. p 20, Knowles 2009, Chamber 2001). Indeed Chambers (2001) would go further and claim that this portrayal of the family *reinforces a white, middle-class, patriarchal model…..shaped by British imperial power and activated in the colonial context (*Chambers 2001 p.33). However, even the most cursory research will expose this model as not reflecting the family experience of the majority of children and adults. Indeed, research by the Family Policy centre (2000) shows that *that one in four children will experience the divorce of their parents by the time they are 16 (Foley et al 2001 p.239),* and a similar number of households are supported by a ‘lone parent’. Many divorced parents will remarry, forming stepfamilies, however, e*stimates also suggest that least 50 percent of remarriages that forma stepfamily also end in divorce, and that a quarter of step families break down in the first year (ibid).*

Families are of central importance to society since they are the means by which societies reproduce themselves. At a very fundamental level a society needs children since it needs them to grow-up and become the adults that run the society. Children become the adults that govern society, fill the jobs, generate a country’s wealth and continue to ensure economic growth. In 2006 the BBC published an article stating that women in Europe are having fewer children than in previous generations. The significance of a falling birth rate is that if a countries population becomes top-heavy with people over retirement age, there are fewer adults of working age available to meet the demand not only of the work that needs to be done, but the taxes and national insurance that needs to be paid to support health and pension bills. Let alone care for an elderly population. The article suggests that across Europe 2.1 child per woman is what is required to ensure a sound population balance. In Britain n 2004 the average was 1.74 children per woman. This means that *the dependency ratio of those aged 65 and over to those of working age looks set to double from one-to-four to one-to-two in 2050* (BBC 2006). At a very pragmatic level, a society needs families in part because they are one of the mechanisms by which children can be generated. Not only this, but most children are born into families that want them and are prepared to selflessly seek to provide for the needs of the child. Most families also seek to educate and socialise their children to grow-up to be the next generation to grow-up and take on the responsibility of managing society. While this discussion of what families are about may seem to reduce the notion of family to a structure that is there to serve society, it is still worth considering families in this way since society needs families and needs them in all their diversity, and harms both itself and children by pursuing a dominant discourse that suggests the only good family is the family that meets the nuclear family model.

From our exploration of the work of Bowlby and Bronfenbrenner we know that what young children need to thrive are caregivers with whom they can form secure, mutually affectionate bonds. Although in his early work Bowlby saw the child’s birthmother as being the most ideal person to fulfil this role the most positive impact of Bowlby’s work is in recognising that what a child needs is not necessarily their birthmother, however desirable a situation that may seem, but a caregiver or caregivers who can provide security and affection. Similarly, we can see from the work of Bronfenbrenner that a child who is growing up in an environment with a range of stimuli and socialising experiences and with caregivers who can mitigate the worst of the negative events that may be happening in society, as well as enjoying the positive aspects of life society has to offer, will be a thriving child. Therefore, as adults who work with children, we need to have a broad understanding of what family might mean to any one child and to society as a whole.

**Activity**

How outstanding schools can celebrate family diversity.

Overall, does the school generate a sense of all families being valued and respected?

When the school sends out letters and information to a child’s home, is there an assumption it is the child’s mother who is the audience for the letter or information?

Is the information sent home in a language that can be understood at home?

How are children’s families encouraged to work in partnership with school to support particular needs a child might have?

Do home corners in KS1 allow children to act out their home lives *helping them to learn more about how families are different* (OfSTED 2007 p.31).

Is the personal, social and health education aspect of the curriculum used to best effect to enable children to *share news about themselves and their families, helping them develop a strong sense of belonging and being valued (OfSTED 2007 p.24).*

Do displays, books and other information and resources around the school reflect the diversity of family life both in terms of different cultures and the different ways a family made be constituted?

Does the school actively engage with all aspects of the school’s community? Doe children have the opportunity to go out into the community? Are community members prominent members of school life?

Are children and their families for whom English is an additional language supported, both to learn English and through information being available in a variety of languages?

Do adults in the school work closely with children’s families, listening to what they have to say about individual children and their interests?

In reception do key workers liaise with the children’s families? Are the children’s family members *encouraged to spend time in the setting with their children when they start attending, to build the child’s confidence in their new carer (OfSTED 2007 p.25).*

OfSTED states: o*utstanding providers recognise the fact* that parents know their children best…….*They work hard to draw parents into their child’s learning (OfSTED 2007 p.27).*

**Parental responsibility**

The law understands the term parental responsibility *as the bundle of rights and duties relating to a child (www.family-lawfirm.co.uk/),* which derive from a range of family laws that have been passed over a period of time. In this way the law sees parental responsibility as including proving for the material needs of a child, a home, food, clothing and education. In British law a child’s mother automatically has Parental Responsibility. An unmarried father of a child does not automatically have Parental Responsibility, even where the father may be registered on the child’s birth certificate. Therefore, in a family where the child’s parents may be living together, but unmarried, it may only be the mother who has Parental Responsibility. *Father’s without Parental Responsibility are able to acquire it through a formal agreement registered with the authorities or through a Court Order. (www.family-lawfirm.co.uk/).* Grand-parents may have Parental Responsibility as may other members of a child’s family, depending on the family circumstances and, f*ollowing the Civil Partnership Act 2004 coming into force on the 5th December 2005 same sex partners in a registered Civil Partnership are also able to acquire Parental Responsibility by formal agreement or Court Order (ibid).* Schools do need to be aware of who has Parental Responsibility for a child as they too are bound by legislation in terms of who they must contact as the ‘parents’ of a child. However, while we have briefly explored what the law says about who has parental responsibility for a child, from the a child’s point of view they may regard their family, that is, the unit of people they go home to differently. Similarly, the group of people a child regards as their family may vary greatly from child to child and be comprised of a range of those they are related to by birth or law or through other social relationships.

Children will have families where one adult, who may or may not be a birth parent, may be looking after them. Older siblings may be responsible for the family unit. Families will be comprised of step-parents and possibly step-brothers and sisters, or half- brothers and sisters. Aunts, uncles and grand-parents may be integral family members having parental responsibility, morally and financially, if not legally for children. Children will have parents who are a same sex couple or they may be living in foster families, be a Child in Care or be with an adopted family.

**Step-parents**

When an adult becomes a step parent they do not automatically gain Parental Responsibility. However, where appropriate, since 2005 it can be applied for. For a step-parent to gain Parental Responsibility each person with Parental Responsibility for a child is required to sign the agreement (ibid). However, while it is important to be clear where legal responsibility for a child lies, the relationships children will have with those they regard as family will be complex and fluid and *vice versa*. Step-parenting and being a step-child is by far from being a new family concept. However, before the 1960s and the changes to the divorce laws step-families usually occurred because of a bereavement, where one parent had died and the surviving parent re-married. The rise in the number of children with step-parents and adults who find themselves in the role of step-parent has lead to far greater discussion and understanding of how the step-child-parent relationship might develop.

From the step-parents point of view, it is usually the person they are marrying who is their primary reason for forming the relationship in the first instance. They may already have children of their own or be childless. They will have a range of feelings about becoming a step-parent. However, what research in this area has found is that while there are well embedded role models about being a father or mother to fall back on, this is not so with a step-relationship and it may be necessary to enter the relationship with a much more open mind about how the relationship will develop and what rules it will be governed by.

The ‘big concern’ for both the child and the adult entering into a step-relationship can be, is the relationship supposed to mirror a birthparent/child relationship – or is it something different? For a child who has a relationship with their birthparents, although they may spend a majority of their time with one of their parents, often the last thing they want is for a step-parent to become a ‘new’ mother or father. Indeed, many step-parents do not want that for the relationship either. *Step-parents often put immense pressure on themselves to love and get on well with their new partner's children. But in reality, it may be impossible to ever love a stepchild as if it were your own* (BBC 2010 www.bbc.co.uk). Children too will feel a range of emotions for the step-parent, from resentment to affection or torn between loyalty to their birthparent and actually quite liking this new person. *Research suggests that stepmothers tend to have a more difficult time in their role than stepfathers (ibid).* While *many stepfathers take on a lot of responsibility - emotionally, practically and financially - but may feel they have no power and aren't appreciated (ibid).*

**Case studies**

Charlotte says: ‘my parents divorced when I was 2 and both remarried quite quickly, so, growing-up I had a step-mother and a step-father. Then I had half-brothers and sisters. As a very young child I hated both step-parents and wanted my birthparents to get back together again. I was particularly horrible to my step-mother who I think I took all my anger out on. We talk about it now (and laugh) and she say’s she thinks she wasn’t very nice to me either– but the funny thing is, I can’t remember that at all. I tell my children how awful I was to her and they know her as ‘nana’ and are appalled that is did those things to their nana.

As I got older I began to realise that there were things about these two ‘step’ people that they were actually better at than my birthparents and I began to develop a different sort of relationship with them. It’s hard to explain, it’s not like they are your parents, but you would still go to the ends of the earth for them. My step-father died a few years ago after a long illness. It was really difficult know how to handle it, there was no guidance for what to do. When he died no one said how sorry they were to me – like they would if he had been my father, it’s very hard to explain that sort of relationship to others. I have a friend whose parents divorced and her mum remarried. She got on really well with her step-father, but that marriage broke up too. She missed him dreadfully, but it was really hard for her having a birth dad and then a step-dad, who was, technically no-longer her step-dad. She tries to stay in contact with her ‘ex’ step-father but he’s in another relationship now which makes it even harder.’

Charlotte’s experience of being step-parented is echoed by Waterman (2003) who writes:

*It helps children to have a mother and a stepmother (or birthmother and adoptive mother, foster and biological mother, grandmother and mother) whom they can idealize for different attributes over time (if the loyalty conflict can be outgrown), as in the case of my husband, who reveres his mother for her passion and intensity of feeling and his late stepmother for her integrity and artistic sensibilities; and each of them for their Nicaraguan and Norwegian cooking, respectively (Waterman 2003 P.99).*

Sometimes step-parents can be huge relief to children. Depending on what their family situation had been before the arrival of a step-parent. Sometimes birthparents who have been through a difficult break-up or divorce have relied on the child to ‘parent’ them. This can force the child to have to take on responsibilities they are too young for or mean the child is missing out on the parenting they need. A step-parenting joining the family can re-dress this balance and allow the child to hand-over some of their responsibilities. *Thus by maintaining boundaries between the generations, stepparents can provide their stepchildren with a sense that at least one parent (Waterman 2003 p.99).* While not all step-parenting works out, not all birth-parenting is without its problems too and this is picked up again in chapter 8. However, what schools do need to be aware of is how the child in the relationship views the relationship. What does the child call their step-parent(s), when they make mother’s day cards what do they make for their step-mother?

**Lesbian and gay parenting**

A further change in families which it is important to recognise is how, over the past 20 years a the greater awareness of the role of lesbian and gay families in the lives of children has developed. As we have just discussed: *the past 50 years have seen us remodel the family as step-families and single parenthood have become commonplace* (Hannon 2009). Similarly:

*this has been accompanied by profound shifts in our views on what good parenting looks like. The rise of gay families is a part of the next chapter of this change, and it should not be provocative to suggest that there might be things to learn from alternative approaches to parenting and kinship (ibid).*

Further to this, although discussing parenting by gay or same-sex couples Tasker (2005) could be discussing family life in all its diversity when she states: *children of lesbian or gay parents have similar experiences of family life compared with children in heterosexual families* (Tasker 2005 pp 224-240). Where ‘issues’ about family and family life arise is when others seem to be challenged by others having diverse families that conflict with their notion of what families ‘should’ be like (Tasker 2005 pp 224-240).

Throughout our discussion about family diversity, and diverse childhoods the central theme has been, that for a child to thrive and therefore achieve at school, they need a home where they feel valued and are cared for, both physically and emotionally. It is likely that each child’s home will be unique and that this uniquness will be reflected in the child’s identity. Our role, as those seeking to enable children to achieve in their education, is to recognise the strength in the diversity of family life and to work with the child’s family, and the child’s sense of identity, to allow the child to draw on the support they drive from home to enable them achieve in their learning.

**Further reading**

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**Chapter 3**

**Ethnicity, whiteness and identity**

**This chapter explores:**

* the meaning and importance of the term ethnicity;
* how ethnicity and achievement are linked;
* and introduces the notion of whiteness which is emerging as a concept in the literature on race and education in England;
* how the concepts discussed in the chapter enable practitioners to reflect on and evaluate their own position with regard to these discussions and identify how their practice can be changed to accommodate their new understanding for the greater benefit of children, young people, their families and communities.

**Introduction**

Issues related to race, ethnicity and identity and how these aspects affect our own postionality are complex and cannot always be understood immediately. They will require revisiting. As professionals working to help all children enjoy and achieve it is our duty to be informed about issues related to race and ethnicity and to know how to construct arguments to oppose negative attitudes or positions which we may come across socially and in schools. Being critical and questioning is part of developing as a professional across all aspects of the work we do in schools and for, for the reasons we have already explored, for our work in the field of equality, diversity and achievement it is important that we become conversant with the debates about ‘race’, ethnicity’ and multiculturalism. In fact it is important that we develop a multicultural literacy, regardless of the area we live in within our diverse society. Understanding these debates not only enables us to define our own position but also enables us to better understand how to promote equality of opportunity for all children. This, in turn, enables them to succeed within the education system, to be healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, to make a positive contribution and to achieve economic well-being (DfES 2004).

**What is ethnicity? Why is it important?**

It is important to acknowledge that we all have ethnicity. The term ‘ethnicity’ or ‘ethnic’ can seem only to relate to images of Asian, African or African-Caribbean people. The term seems inextricably associated with people of colour. Yet on the ‘ethnic monitoring forms’ we fill out for applications for jobs or a university place many ethnicities are listed, not only those associated with skin colour. Ethnicity is an interesting and contested concept because it encompasses a number of dimensions which serve to contribute to the whole notion of what is meant by ethnicity. These components are aspects such as history, nationality, language and religion. So English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Muslim, Sikh and Cypriot are ethnicities which people could define themselves by. In essence ethnicity encompasses common elements by which people use to differentiate themselves into a group. Smith (2009 www.infed.org/lifelonglearning) notes that the origin of the word ethnic comes from the Latin *ethnicus* he goes on to highlight that ‘in ecclesiastical Latin it means 'heathen' and in Greek means ‘race’. This is very interesting because the term was used to identify people who were not Christian or Jewish and therefore the ‘other’. Other carried with it implications of being an ‘outsider’, being the ‘lesser’, the ‘lower’ and conversely the ‘higher’ and the suggestion that there are those that are ‘better’. In the use of the term there is an inherent assumption of a hierarchy which still permeate thinking and attitudes to ethnicity today. The ethnicities delineated on the ethnic monitoring forms below are the categories on one form found on the internet. The ethnicities that the form includes and fails to list, plus the order in which the ethnicities are listed, can be said to convey many messages, however unwittingly, about how ethnicities are ranked and valued. If you are Chinese, or from an Arab background how do you feel about this form? Which category would you choose to say you belong to? What might the term ‘other’ on the form convey?

|  |
| --- |
| Ethnic monitoring categories   1. White    1. British    2. Irish    3. Other 2. Mixed    1. White and Black Caribbean    2. White and Black African    3. White and Asian 3. Asian or Asian British    1. Indian    2. Pakistani    3. Bangladeshi 4. Black or Black British    1. Caribbean    2. African 5. Other ethnic group |

**Case study**

Saleema is a student teacher in Year 1 of an undergraduate degree. She does not know which box to tick because her parents came to this country when they were young, she was born in Britain and feels she is British, but with a Pakistani Muslim cultural heritage. She feels she has more affinity with Britain than Pakistan, although she does have relatives she visits there. She feels she is a Muslim in terms of her identity but there isn’t a box that defines her identity which she feels is British-Muslim. She feels more comfortable with this identity rather than ‘Asian British’ or ‘Pakistani’.

Just as Saleema is unsure how the form reflects her identity and ethnicity, if you are white British you may feel that you want to identify yourself as White English, or Welsh as that conveys a more accurate picture of who you are. In this way, we can begin to understand the contested nature of ethnicity as a defining concept. However, these are important discussions to continue to have since as a diverse society we need a way in which we can monitor our progress in promoting equality of opportunity and children’s achievement in education as well as our success in meeting our legal obligations with respect to the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000.

**Race, racism and institutional racism – what does it matter?**

There is no doubt that ‘race’ is a contested term, a term whose meaning has no agreed definition, this is why it is shown in inverted commas in most texts. Many would argue that there is no such thing as different races but just one race the human race. It is true that our genetic make-up is the same and only a small proportion is different, some scientists would contest this too. Indeed we are more the same than different. However, if we are more same than different then why do we make a big issue of ‘race’ or ethnicity? The answer partly lies in the fact that ‘race’ is a social construct (Garner 2010). That is a construction designed by humans. The notion of ‘race’ is not just limited to a signifier of physical differences it has in the past been extended to attribute characteristics, qualities and attributes to different peoples. This was the case during the slave trade when the Black slaves were not even considered to be humans but property (Harris 1993). In this way many myths were perpetuated which remain in the social psyche today. Ryde (2009:35) notes, ‘Today’s racism is hard-wired into our consciousness from the prejudices of the past’. These are the results of the powerful exerting control and domination over the less powerful and creating stories and myths to retain their power and maintain their oppression.

Indeed there are still many myths that prevail which are perpetuated by some parts of the popular press such as headlines which herald that we are being *overrun* by immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees. When people are asked to estimate the percentage of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people their responses vary from 30% to 10%. The last census in 2001 showed that the BME population was 7.9% with 45% of the total BME population living in London (Office of National Statistics). However, the actual situation with regard to the statistics can be over shadowed by the impression created by some of the media, an impression which can often generate ill feeling, suspicion, prejudice or racism against certain groups.

Those working in education and the wider schools’ workforce can feel uncomfortable with discussions about ‘race’, ethnicity or racism, particularly the last word. This discomfort can arise depending on people’s experience, or lack of experience. For example, those who have lived in culturally homogenous areas may have no experience of having witnessed acts of overt racism, acts which can range from low level name calling to acts of violence. They may have not yet had the opportunity to think through some of the issues around racism, they may have never met people from minority ethnic backgrounds, or had the opportunity yet to work with children from minority ethnic backgrounds or for whom English is an additional language (EAL) and, therefore may not yet have the language or concepts to talk about the issues.

**Kulwant’s story**

Kulwant Singh Bhambra is 13 years old now and this is his account about his primary schooling. He was born in England. Since starting school he made some friends but not a best friend. At playtimes he would wander about the playground to see if someone would play with him. Sometimes the other children would let him play but most times they didn’t. There were not very many BME children in the school. He felt that maybe it was because he was different that they didn’t play with him. There were about four people who were from BME backgrounds. There was Michael, he was Black and his mum and dad came from Nigeria; then there was Rashida, she was Muslim and she was in Year 6 and the other child who was Chinese was called Roy. They all spoke English very well. Kulwant always thought that they didn’t want to play with him because I was a Sikh boy, he has long hair which is coiled into a top-knot under his patka (a cloth which covers the head and hair). Some children called him ‘bobble-head’. He would get really angry and hurt by this. He told his mum and she told him to tell his teacher first. So he did. Mrs Clarke said ‘Don’t worry about it my dear. Sticks and stones… you know’ (but Kulwant wasn’t sure what she meant); ‘you are so much better than they are anyway. Take no notice’. Well that was useful. He just thought she was unhelpful and he thought she was there to help him. She didn’t understand and she didn’t seem to care. He knew what they were saying was racist. But he knew he couldn’t do anything about it. If he told his mum again she would come to the school and make a fuss and he felt then the teachers and the children wouldn’t like him and so he really would have no friends then.

They suddenly the teachers realised what it was all about but it was too late. By then Kulwant was in the last few weeks of Year 6. He felt the children who were being hurtful had got away with it and that teachers did nothing. One boy who had always bothered Kulwant and called him names like ‘smelly Paki’, ‘Taliban’ and he pushed him about as well. Kulwant didn’t do anything to him for fear of getting into trouble. One day as he played football in the playground this lad came up behind Kulwant and gave him such a big push and thump that Kulwant fell over and was knocked out by the fall. The next thing Kulwant is aware of is that he is in an ambulance going to hospital and his Year 6 teacher is with him. Following this event his mum went to see the headteacher, who actually apologised for what had happened and said, ‘We appear to have failed Kulwant’. Kulwant felt too right they did! It seems appears that the school didn’t want the hassle of dealing with the smaller events and the racist child could just do things to Kulwant. He is left asking why didn’t the teachers do anything, he was under the impression that teachers were supposed to be good.

Your response to Kulwant’s story will depend on a number of factors, including: your experience of dealing with such situations; training you have had to deal with issues like this; whether you have had racism directed at you – or whether you were the person who said something like Kulwant’s teacher did, perhaps because you did not know what else to do. Schools, like other public institutions are compelled to meet the duty set out in the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 and the duty to promote community cohesion (DCSF 2007).

Racism defined by the Macpherson (1999) is ‘*conduct or words which advantage or disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin’* (www.multiverse.ac.uk).

|  |
| --- |
| **Activity**  Try reflecting on these thoughts. In what ways can racism:   * Advantage a person * Disadvantage a person   When you hear the word racism what picture springs into your mind? |

Racism is no longer an issue confined to Black-White issues. It is more accurate to refer to ‘racisms’ because there are a range of exclusionary responses to difference which result in disadvantage or detrimental outcomes. The term includes racism, as defined above, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. The term racisms acknowledges that factors other than skin colour or culture can engender hatred, discrimination, exclusion and disadvantage (Parekh 2000). This has been the case after 9/11 where there has been hatred generated against Muslims which is referred to as islamophobia (Garner 2010, Gillborn 2009). Acts of racism or racist attitudes are premised on the superiority of one culture, or religion, or way of life. This creates a hierarchy of acceptability or tolerance and leads to the devaluing of the ‘other’ and the privileging of a mainstream culture which is cast as more acceptable or the norm and is used to judge other cultures by. The more the culture deviates from the norm, which in Britain is thought to be White middle class and Christian the more likely you are to be excluded from society. (See chapter on Gypsy, Roma and Travellers).

**Institutional racism**

Whilst you are shocked by Kulwant’s story because it outlines acts of overt racism, such racism still occurs across all sectors and institutions in British society. However, Richardson (2004:19) distinguishes between overt and institutional racism; the former as the racism that kills and the latter as racism that discriminates respectively. Previously, ~~In days gone by~~ the latter form of racism was mistakenly described as ‘passive’ racism. However, there is nothing passive about institutional racism. Institutional racism exists as a result of people deciding to do nothing about the inequity which they see or are aware of around them. It does not affect them so they do nothing. They are then as complicit in racism just as any violent racist act. In reading Kulwant’s story many readers would be left questioning the inaction of the teachers in his school and the school’s position particularly in the light of national legislation. But the inactions of the school can be classified as institutional racism. It is hard to recognise and acknowledge institutional racism. It is a pervasive form of racism which as a society we still seem to have failed to address. This may be for a number of reasons. Institutional racism is embedded in every day practices of institutions and the people that implement the processes and practices of that institution. This does not mean that the individuals are themselves racists.

Look at the extracts below taken from The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson 1999)

Note that the abbreviation MPS is for the Metropolitan Police Service.

1.11 Stephen Lawrence's murder was simply and solely and unequivocally motivated by racism. It was the deepest tragedy for his family. It was an affront to society, and especially to the local black community in Greenwich.

2.5The Inquest jury returned a unanimous verdict after a full hearing in 1997, that ***"****Stephen Lawrence was unlawfully killed in a completely unprovoked racist attack by five white youths"*.

2.10 There is no doubt whatsoever but that the first MPS investigation was palpably flawed and deserves severe criticism. Nobody listening to the evidence could reach any other conclusion. This is now plainly accepted by the MPS. Otherwise the abject apologies offered to Mr & Mrs Lawrence would be meaningless.

2.11 The underlying causes of that failure are more troublesome and potentially more sinister. The impact of incompetence and racism, and the aura of corruption or collusion have been the subject of much evidence and debate.

5.31 Yet at the end of the day we are satisfied that the lack of respect and sensitivity in handling him must reflect unwitting and collective racism particularly in those who dealt with him both at the scene of the murder and at the hospital....was the victim of racist stereotyping.

Why was Stephen killed?

What assumptions did the Police operate with?

How and why did those assumptions exist?

The term institutional racism came to public attention through the Macpherson Inquiry in 1999 which was set up to examine the circumstances which led to the inability of the Metropolitan Police to apprehend the murderers of a Black teenager Stephen Lawrence. The Macpherson Report (1999) defined institutional racism as

*The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. It persists because of the failure of the organisation openly and adequately to recognise and address its existence and causes by policy, example and leadership. Without recognition and action to eliminate such racism it can prevail as part of the ethos or culture of the organisation. It is a corrosive disease.* (Macpherson 1999 Paragraph 6.34)

Where people dispute the idea of institutional racism, this can demonstrate a limited understanding about how the forces of power and oppression operate. It can also betray the power or superior position that is conveyed by the speaker. However, institutional racism is difficult to identify. Firstly institutional racism is not apparent in overtly racist language or actions; the evidence of its operation is evident in statistics such as in recruitment, retention, progression and achievement of BME people or employees within an institution. Secondly, because it is ‘hidden’ or rather unapparent to some people it can be easily denied and therefore nothing is done to advance an institution beyond its discriminatory practises and unequal outcomes. It must be noted that any form of racism is premised on the notion of superiority, a position of power which allows the individual or institution to exercise this power through action or inaction which is discriminatory. The continued presence of institutional, hidden, or passive racism is described beautifully through the metaphor of a moving walkway by Beverly Tatum (1999:11-12)

I sometimes visualize the ongoing cycle of racism as a moving walkway

at the airport. Active racist behavior is equivalent to walking fast on the conveyor belt. The person engaged in active racist behaviour has identified with the ideology of White supremacy and is moving with it. Passive racist behaviour is equivalent to standing still on the walkway. No overt effort is being made, but the conveyor belt moves the bystanders along to the same destination as those whoa are actively walking. Some of the bystanders may feel the motion of the conveyor belt, see the active racists ahead of them, and choose to turn around, unwilling to go to the same destination as the White supremacists. But unless they are walking actively in the opposite direction at a speed faster than the conveyor belt- unless they are actively antiracist- they’ll find themselves carried along with the others.

Can you think of times or events when you or others may have just got carried along the walkway? How can you start to walk the other way?

**Whiteness – what is it? How can *that* be important?**

One of the most common responses in discussions about ‘race’, ethnicity, racism and diversity is usually in the following vain ‘Everyone is the same. I don’t see colour. You are an individual to me’. In my experience these phrases are usually uttered by someone White as a way of diverting or rendering the debate null and void. This could be considered a laudable liberal position. But is it is also an expression from a position of power and privilege because in not seeing my colour which is a strong part of my identity, after all people have drawn attention to it. Yet here they deny my identity, worse still, they try to render me invisible or is it that they try to make me ‘White by proxy’ as termed by Jones (1999). They have the power to negate my identity and provide me with a cloak of whiteness. When related in these terms one recognises the ridiculousness of the statement. This l~~ibera~~l neutral ‘colour blind’ position not only denies BME people their identity but it denies them their experience of racism through a privileged, possibly myopic, perspective which seeks to, but fails to address issues of race and racism as realities in my world and that of other BME people.

**Activity**

Joyti is a newly qualified teacher in her first job in a school in a ~~leafy~~ suburban school in a southern county in England. She hears a conversation in the staffroom between two colleagues about immigration and they use the term ‘paki’, they go onto to discuss that they saw nothing wrong with the term nigger because in the 1950s there were brown stockings called ‘nigger brown’ and someone’s granny at the time owned a dog called Nigger because he was all black. Joyti becomes quite uncomfortable and clears her throat so say something but one of her colleagues interjects, ‘Oh we didn’t mean you dear. You’re different!’

Joyti is left feeling hurt, confused and flabbergasted. She asks herself ‘How am I different? Why am I different?’

What would you do if you were Joyti? Would you complain? Would you want to ‘rock the boat’ in your first job?

This incident exemplifies the notion of whiteness and white privilege. King (2004:73) refers to a form of racism which is she calls ‘dysconscious’ racism described as an

‘uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions and beliefs) that justifies inequity by accepting the existing order of things as given’.

By assigning this way of being as a ‘dysconscious’ King is does not imply that the person is unconscious of what is happening around them but that they demonstrate impaired consciousness, accept the status quo in which racial inequity is unchallenged as are the stereotypes, myths and beliefs that perpetuate it. Alongside this there is an implicit acceptance of the advantages which privilege white people and disadvantage others. It could be argued that there are similarities between institutional racism and so called passive racism. But this notion of dysconscious racism does not allow the majority of the population who are inactive with respect to issues of racial inequality ‘off the hook’. They cannot claim not to know or to be conscious of it. The next section describes how this dysconscious racism is embedded in the notion of whiteness.

**Whiteness**

Marx (2006:45) has described defining whiteness as an exercise in ‘illuminating the invisible’. She notes that whiteness is not applicable to White people *per se* but it is a notion which is embedded in the ‘normal’ everyday fabric of society and in this way whiteness has become normalised. It is a function of ‘White culture, interests language etc’ (ibid). Zeus Leonardo (2002:31) presents the distinction concisely as

‘Whiteness’ is a racial discourse, whereas the category ‘white people’ represents a socially constructed identity, usually based on skin colour’.

Whiteness is a discourse which has become established through the process of oppression and domination. It is a negative discourse of white talk (McIntyre 1997:45), neutrality, colour-blindness and racism. Whiteness pervades institutions to replicate the power and privilege associated with it. It is considered as the ‘norm’, the status quo and seen as a ‘raceless’ state. As argued earlier race and ethnicity are attributes possessed by the ‘other’. Many White people do not think of themselves as racialised beings but as the ‘norm’, the standard by which the other is marked and judged. Being White is considered neutral, normal and invisible. In Marx’s (2006) research the White student teachers became upset when she tried to explore their ethnicity. Yet for BME people this marker is an everyday present fact of their lives which affects the course of their journey through the day and through their lives (Marx 2006).

McIntosh (1990) enumerates 46 taken for granted privileges she enjoys as a White person merely as a result of her being White. Ryde (2009) notes that white people do think race is a problem that BME people have. She asserts that as a ‘helping professional’ she needs to understand her own position as a white person as part of helping others as a counsellor. In her journey to understand whiteness she acknowledges how the discussion about whiteness, its neutrality, the associated privilege and its inherent racism made her feel shame and guilt. Gaine (2001) chronicled the reactions of White student teachers to race equality training. Their protestations that it made them feel guilty etc were acknowledged and the students continued to work with the training and in their careers as teachers admitted that it hurt. Gaine claims that ‘if it’s not hurting it’s not working’. Solomon et al (2005) describes how discussions about McIntosh’s paper on white privilege elicited different negative responses from student teachers who proceeded to deny the existence of such privilege. This discourse of denial is evident whenever whiteness and its associated concepts are discussed.

**Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

This is a theory which has been devised by Black African-Americans in the USA in response to the persistence of racism in society and its institutions (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). The theory originates within USA legal studies and states that society is inherently racist and that liberal, neutral and colour-blind approaches are ineffective and that most often they form the foundations of white responses to issues of race. The approach places racism and Black people’s experiences at the centre and seeks to examine how racism systematically operates to disadvantage people of colour. It is a response to the ineffectiveness of other approaches such as multiculturalism and race legislation in the USA. In England it is an emerging theory which researchers and scholars are just beginning to explore in terms of its applicability to the UK context.

Gillborn (2008) in applying CRT to the British context asserts that the systematic disadvantaging of Black pupils within education is not a mere accident or coincidence. He points out that education is an arena in which racism operates through policies designed by policy-makers which are oblivious to the effect their policies will have on BME pupils, particularly Black pupils, because the policy makers operate within a liberal White milieu and exercising privilege associated with whiteness totally oblivious to the racialised outcomes that their policies may have on Black children in school. Gillborn (2009) asserts that whilst this neglect cannot be deemed to be a political conspiracy it can however be cast as a conspiracy in legal terms. A conspiracy in law is defined as concerted actions which advantage particular groups and within British education this is largely White middle class children. But the conspiracy of policy makers systematically disadvantages Black children (Gillborn 2009). He cites many examples of this which are discussed later.

The Department for Education (DfES), as it was known then, conducted a Priority Review in 2005-6 to explore the reasons why a high number of Black pupils that got excluded from school.

**Percentage of the maintained school population with a FIXED PERIOD exclusion in 2003/2004**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Ethnicity | Percentage exclusion |
| White British | 4.95 |
| White and Black Caribbean | 9.65 |
| White and Black African | 5.63 |
| Black Caribbean | 9.61 |
| Any other Black background | 9.79 |

The report noted that Black Caribbean pupils were three times more likely to be excluded that White pupils (DfES 2006). It highlighted in-school factors such as institutional racism and the perceptions teachers held of Black pupils and out of school factors such as the demands on Black males to perform their masculinity in certain stereotypical ways may contribute to the high exclusion of Black pupils mostly males from school. It indicated that the stereotypes of Black males which prevailed amongst teachers and institutional racism were key factors in the high exclusion statistics. The report (DfES 2006:16) concluded that in a climate of the Every Child Matters agenda

Left to its own devices, the system will conclude that Every Child Matters,

but that Black children’s failure and social exclusion is to be expected –

that they matter a little bit less. Personalisation could empower Black pupils

to fulfil their true potential, but not whilst teachers’ view of the person is

conditioned by subconscious prejudice.

**Education, ethnicity and achievement**

In England, every year schools have to send data on the achievement of pupils to the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF). This data forms the basis of discussions related to various factors and the achievement of different groups of pupils. In 2003, the DfES published a report entitled ‘*Aiming High: Raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils*’, it noted that 30% of Black Caribbean pupils gained five or more GCSEs graded A\*-C compared to 40% for Pakistani pupils; 45% for Bangladeshi pupils; 50% for White pupils; 65% for Indian pupils and 73% for Chinese pupils. This persistent underachievement of Black pupils has been documented for the last thirty years. Why is it that Black students are the least successful group? What factors contribute to their underachievement?

Gillborn (2008) notes that the underachievement starts well before Black students undertake their GCSE exams. He charts the low percentage (10.5%) of Black boys and girls (14.5%) in top sets for English and mathematics; how the baseline assessment at age five has resulted from Black pupils outperforming their counterparts at age five but as they proceed through schooling this achievement falls away. It may be appropriate to ask why some groups perform better than Black pupils. This may be due to other factors such as gender and social class. Gillborn (ibid) refers to them as the model minorities, Chinese and Indian groups which are held up as achieving well within the education system and therefore ‘proof’ that racism is not the causal factor for the underachievement of Black groups. But the converse is true because we witness the operation of power and whiteness in this situation whereby the stereotypical ideas of Indian and Chinese pupils and their families as hard workers operates to affect how mainly White teachers treat these groups of pupils (Gillborn 2009) so assisting the operation of the old-fashioned self-fulfilling prophecy.

In addition Gillborn (2008) notes that the change from the baseline assessment to the assessment of pupils using the Foundation Stage Profile has shown that now at age five Black pupils have become the lowest rated group. There are many complex factors which affect pupil achievement, such as gender and social class. If we discount any spurious pseudoscientific racist arguments about race and intelligence the persistent underachievement of Black boys over a number of years should cause all educationalists alarm. Gillborn (2008) asserts that this is due to the lack of awareness on the part of policy makers regarding the effects policies will have on BME groups. He notes that they are not race conscious or maybe as King (2004) would put it they suffer from persistent dysconcious racism. This could be deemed a form of neglect in terms of the education of some children and one would question how these groups are enabled by policy makers, school leaders and teachers to enjoy and achieve when there is systematic institutional racism which adversely affects their life chances and the opportunity to gain economic well-being.

**Further Reading**

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**Useful Websites**

[www.britkid.org](http://www.britkid.org)

[www.multiverse.ac.uk](http://www.multiverse.ac.uk)

[www.runnymedetrust.org](http://www.runnymedetrust.org)

[www.tda.gov.uk](http://www.tda.gov.uk)

**Chapter 5**

**Class, equality and achievement**

**This chapter explores:**

* How the concept of class is part of the diversity, equality and achievement in education debate,
* What is meant by class,
* The link between class and poverty,
* An exploration of what is meant by the term ‘social capital’ and how it is linked to class, diversity, equality and achievement.

**Introduction**

Class and its impact on achievement is as complex an area of diversity as any we have discussed so far. One of the fundamental determiners of what is meant by class and to what class someone can be describes as belonging to is inextricably, although not exclusively, linked to money. In particular the occupation and earnings of an individual do, in strictly economic terms, determined the class to which they belong. Why this is so is discussed below. Not only does how much a person earns determined their class, but the earnings of a child’s family and the class which the family can be described as belonging to, do still have a direct impact on the likely educational achievement of their children.

**Class, diversity, equality and achievement**

In 2010 the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion published its report entitled *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK – Summary Report of the National Equality Panel.* It states:

*The evidence we examine confirms that social background really matters. There are significant differences in ‘school readiness’ before and when children reach school by parental income and mother’s education….. every extra £100 per month in income when children were small was associated with a difference equivalent to a month’s development. Rather than being fixed at birth, these differences widen through childhood (Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion 2010 p.22).*

One of the other factors about class that make it important to consider when discussing diversity, equality and achievement is that, while individuals can be deemed as belonging to specific groups because of their gender or ethnicity and we can explore what that might mean for them in terms of need, class is something that applies across gender and ethnicity. Whatever our gender or ethnicity we will be linked to others of different genders and ethnicities by our class. This cross-sectionality can act for some as an enabler in terms of achievement and for others compounds the barriers that can impact on their lack of achievement.

**Case study**

Sam is white British and is 7, his friend Ali is of Bangladeshi heritage and his other friend Carl is of Afro-Caribbean heritage. Sam and Carl both have free school meals as their parents do work, in local supermarkets and take-away restaurants, but they work-part time and to achieve a basic standard of living have their income supplemented by benefits. Ali’s dad is a maths teacher at a local secondary school. Their teacher says both Sam and Carl are underachieving at the moment, they started school with achievement levels below the national average for 5 year olds and have not yet ‘caught-up’. Ali however, is described as ‘a star’ especially in mathematics and is likely to do really well by the end of key stage 1.

The achievement – or lack of achievement of the children in this case study is compounded by class and in Carl’s case, possibly his ethnicity too. This is a picture of achievement reflected nationally and one also reported by the report: *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK (ibid):*

*In the main data available on performance at school, the best available indicator of socio-economic background is whether children receive Free School Meals. By age 16, half of boys receiving Free School Meals have results in the bottom quarter in England (and in the bottom fifth in Wales). However, it is boys on Free School Meals from certain ethnic backgrounds that slip back through secondary school…By 16 White British, Black Caribbean and mixed White and Black Caribbean boys receiving Free School Meals have the lowest average assessment of any group identified by gender, ethnicity and Free School Meals status, apart from Gypsy and Traveller children (Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion 2010 p.23).*

The *Economic Inequality* (ibid) report is only the most recent in a number of research projects that have also found that there is a gap in attainment between classes and class and ethnicity, in 2000 Gillborn and Mirza (2000) reported very similar findings to that of the *Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion.* However, before we pursue our exploration of the link between class and achievement and discuss the part those who work in education and their values, attitudes and beliefs may play in this issue, let us first be clear about what we mean by class.

**What do we mean by class?**

Our current use of the term class and the sub-groups within that, for example notion of the working-class and the middle-class, derive from the work of social and political writers and philosophers from the eighteenth century onwards. One of the most influential figures, in terms of our understanding of class, from this time is the historical and political philosopher Karl Marx (1818 – 1883). At the time Marx was concerned to explain the sociological and political effects on the population occasioned by Britain’s seemingly rapid change from a largely agricultural county to an industrialised one. Britain’s rapid industrialisation saw the movements of huge numbers of people from living by farming for their food to working in factories and other manufacturing processes. The change also brought with it what are now the infamous slum conditions that many of these economic migrants from the country found themselves living in. Not only this, but the appalling working conditions and wages many endured and the widespread use of child labour. Marx explored this divide between those who were reaping considerable economic benefit from industrialisation and those who were living in poverty. In very general terms he described people as being in one of two groups, or what we might now call the classes. Those who were, in his terms, the owners of the ‘means of production’, who actually owned the factories that produced the goods and therefore pocketed the profits he saw as being in the higher class. The workers who were far removed from being owners of ‘the means of production’ and were at the mercy of the factory owners to hire and fire as benefited them he described in terms that we would now understand as being working-class (Wheen, 2000).

In strict terms, those we would now see as being middle-class are not necessarily Marx’s factory owners, but they are those who are closer to the means of production than the workers. The middle-class are the professionals who might hold executive positions in the factories, they may be shareholders in businesses and they will serve as the allied professionals – the lawyers, accountants and bank managers that the owners of the means of production would need.

In modern terms the notion of working-class and middle-class is still linked to the employment people are engaged in, although rather than class the term ‘socio-economic classification’ is sometimes used. This is the term used by the *Office for National Statistics* who in ascribing a socio-economic classification to someone use the *Standard Occupational Classification 2000* (Office for National Statistics 2009). The classification makes a judgement about an occupation based on two criteria the type of work someone undertakes - the ‘job’, and the personal levels of ability and understanding need to do that job, known as skills (Office for National Statistics 2009). The more demanding, particularly in intellectual terms the knowledge, understanding and skills needed for the job, the higher the classification of the job. Not only this, but the more demanding the job is in terms of these intellectual skills, the greater the economic benefits to those in those jobs. Simply put, the greater your skills, particularly intellectual skills, the higher your salary. There are nine major categories in the classification, each of which have sub-groups. (Office for National Statistics 2009). The classification of occupations used by the government and drawn up by the Office for >national Statistics is the baseline for ‘ranking’ individuals by occupation. The board ranking of the classifications, from the Office for National Statistics (2009) is shown in the table below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Classification of occupation in rank order | Occupation | Example |
| 1 | Mangers and senior officials | Heads and executive managers of private and public companies, banks, local government, businesses, NHS, rail companies, airlines, Police officers (inspectors and above) |
| 2 | Professional occupations | doctors, lawyers, teachers, science and engineering professionals |
| 3 | Associate professional and technical occupations | Laboratory technicians, nurses, midwives, paramedics, speech and language therapists, youth workers, Police officers (sergeant and below) |
| 4 | Administrative and secretarial occupations | Filing and other records assistants/clerks, Library assistants/clerks, School secretaries |
| 5 | Skilled trades occupations | Plumbers, electricians, brick layers |
| 6 | Personal service occupations | Hairdressers, nursery nurses, childminders, educational assistants |
| 7 | Sales and customer service occupations | Shop workers, call centre operatives |
| 8 | Process, plant and machine operatives | Factory workers |
| 9 | Elementary occupation | bar workers, waiters, farm workers, postal workers, labouring work |

With regards to this classification, what is usually seen as the defining feature between which of the occupations listed above are working class and which are middle class is the level to which someone has to be educated to be employed in that post. That is, those jobs for which you are required to have a degree are deemed to be middle class and those for which you may need no qualifications, or perhaps training, but not to degree level, are working class (Benson 2003 p.12).

**Activity**

You may not have given much thought to which class you might belong to before now. However, reflecting on what you have read so far and thinking about what we have discussed about class in strictly socio-economic terms, what class do you think you belong to?

You may find answering the first question quite difficult because the socio-economic definition of your class may seem to tell only part of your story. You may feel other aspects of your life, besides your earnings and your occupation or qualifications a bearing on which class you see yourself as belonging to.

For example, you may feel that the occupations of other members of you family, particularly if you go back one or two generations impacts on which class you identify yourself as belonging to. You may also feel where you live has an impact on your class. From this activity we can see that class is not just about money, it is about identity too and from earlier chapters in the book we know that our identity is about sharing values, attitudes and beliefs with those around us.

Similarly, over the generations your family may have been **socially mobile**. That is, your parents may, though education or employment have, in social-economic terms moved into a different class to that of their parents. Similarly, you may be a different socio-economic terms be in a different class to your parents. Social mobility can mean moving from being working-class to middle-class and *vice versa* and although we may move class we may still retain our original class identity. That is the values, attitudes and beliefs we were brought up with.

Read the following two case studies and decide in socio-economic terms and in terms of attitudes, values and beliefs which class those in the case studies belong to.

**Case Study**

Grace and Chamakomo have two children, Charity 3 and Imakando 6. The family come form Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe Chamakando was a teacher he has a Zimbabwean teaching diploma, but it is not recognised in England so at the moment he works in a factory making plastic window frames.

Chamakando is retraining to teach here, by ‘topping-up’ his diploma to a BA degree through studying part-time with the Open University. He then intends to do the one year’s post-graduate qualification to get qualified teaching status. Grace works overnight shifts in a local care home. She would like to take up some training to get some qualifications as it is the only way she will be able to earn more, perhaps as a manager of a care home. At the moment getting Chamakomo qualified is the priority since he will be able to earn more and Grace still has the children to think about.

They are pleased to be in England because of the situation in Zimbabwe and Grace worries about her mother who is still there. The family have moved three times in five years. At first they were in local authority bed and breakfast accommodation, Grace says ‘Those first two places were awful. In the first one we had one room for the family and we shared a kitchen and bathroom with other families, it was so dirty I’m sure I spent half my time cleaning up after others. Some of the people we shared with……well, I used to think “and this is England?” We were lucky, Komo found work, although he was getting very depressed because he wasn’t allowed to teach and we were all crammed into one room, which was so damp Kando kept getting chest infections and with all the other families around it was never quiet. Luckily we had moved by the time Komo started studying.

Grace says: ‘ now we have much better accommodation (a two bed roomed flat with separate kitchen and living room), but I worry about the area. There are bad boys around here, and I don’t want Kando to fall in with them and I worry that the school won’t push him hard enough. We help him at home, but I think the work the school gives him is too easy. We don’t let him talk in Shona at home anymore; he needs to make sure his English is perfect and get all the practice he can. I think it will be different when Komo gets qualified, we can move to a better area, with better schools and get a car! We had a car in Zimbabwe, but things are so expensive here we can’t afford one at the moment. I miss our car.’

**Case study**

**Charlie says**: my dad passed the 11+ and went to grammar school. He came from Yorkshire and all his family, his parents, his aunts and uncles etc., ran pubs for the local breweries, so accommodation came with the job. He grew-up in pubs and was helping clean-up and get ready for opening time from a very early age. After grammar school he went to University and then trained to be a teacher, obviously this meant he could buy a house and had an occupational pension. Throughout his life he travelled widely and he sent all of us to university. However, he was a betting man all his life, always went down the pub on a Friday night, read The Mirror newspaper and watched football on Saturdays. He was very musical but thought the theatre and opera were overrated and for middle-class snobs.

**Low-income, poverty, class and underachievement**

One of the most complex issues to explore with regard to class, diversity, equality and achievement is the link between class and poverty. In Britain there has long been a concern for how best to provide for those who have no income or who are living in poverty. Indeed laws that state how the poor are to be provided for – or ‘Poor Laws’, first appeared in 1598 (Social Policy 2008). The current approach to trying to deal with poverty, particularly through what we now think of as ‘the welfare state’ began to emerge in the 1940s *(Lund 2002 p.1),* beginning with the Beveridge Report in 1942 (Lund 2002 p107). Today we can expect the state to provide welfare for those who need it in the form of: social security (money for those who are currently unemployed or unable to work); free healthcare at the point of need; housing for all; free education; and other free welfare services for children.(Social Policy 2008, Lund 2002 p107). However, despite welfare support available and free state education we still live in a society that has families living in poverty. While there is evidence that shows that *the proportion of people in ‘middle-class’ jobs has increased* (Thomson 2003 p.167), and therefore arguably the number of families on high-incomes, other research indicates that the number of those living in poverty or on low-incomes has risen over the past five years (The Poverty Site, 2009). Poverty can be measured in a number of ways. One way is through the notional ‘basket of goods’ that contain the items necessary for basic survival, food, shelter, clothing etc. (Hills, 2004 p.56), where those living in poverty are unable to purchase these basic minimum goods.

Poverty can also be measured by income and those living in poverty are individuals who earn below the average national income or 60% below the median income. In the year 2006/07 the average income for those in work was approximately £24,000 a year and the median income was measured as being £19,600 (Blastand, 2008). Therefore, if we consider the median income, in particular, the statistics tell us that while 50% of incomes in 2006/07 were above £19, 600, 50% of incomes were *below* £19, 600 – remembering to also take into account that £19, 600 is below the mean income of £24,000.

In the most extreme cases of poverty children and families are not only financially poor but homeless too. Shelter’s 2004 report about homeless children found that: *at the end of December 2003, there were 95,060 homeless households (Baker and Credland 2004 p.7).* The report alsosays of these homeless households*: around half …. were pregnant women or families with children* and claims*: people from different black and minority ethnic groups are over-represented among homeless households (Ibid*). It is likely, therefore likely that schools, particularly those in deprived areas and areas of high diversity will have children who are homeless or may have experience of being homeless. Poverty and homelessness have considerable knock-on effects in terms of children’s capacity to engage with their education. As Baker and Credland state it can have: *a damaging effect on the health and well-being of children and their families (ibid).*

**Activity**

In school the usual and only measure of children who come from low income families is achieved by counting the number of children who take Free School Meals (FSM). It is also worth bearing in mind that not all children who are entitled to free school meals take up their entitlement to them.

Think about children you have worked with who you know have FSM. While having FSM is a very public sign of low income, there may be other, less obvious aspects of their low-income you might need to think about.

Children from low-income families and those who are homeless may also be dealing with a home life characterised by: p*oor amenities, overcrowding, lack of privacy, no safe place to play……….[and] sharing a room with parents as well as older or younger siblings (Baker and Credland 2004 p.9).* Lack of privacy being a particular worry for children as they reach puberty and adolescence.

Children may also have nowhere to do homework and this may be even more difficult if space is limited and they are distracted by noisy brothers and sisters. The Shelter report also writes of children who: *had been forced to get rid of pets when they became homeless, increasing their feelings of instability and insecurity (ibid).*

**Case studies**

Daniel, who is 5 and lives on the outskirts of a large town in the north of England says: …my mum doesn’t make my packed lunches, they come in a special box, they’re brought by a van everyday – I know ‘cause I can see through the window when the van arrives and the man bringing the boxes in. Sometimes the sandwiches are Ok, but you can’t choose, you just have to have what they are in that box. Sometimes I swap with Tom and sometimes the fruit is really yukky. There’re OK [the lunches], but what I would like different is I have to sit on a special table with others who have these boxes too. I want to sit with my friends, but the dinner ladies say ‘no, you have to sit here’. Daniel, 5.

Education has always been seen as offering a way out of poverty and as we have already seen, logic would dictate that if education is free and available to all then everyone has an equal chance to make their lives better, through education. However, we also know that the link between simply attending school and achieving is not straight forward. We have already touched on the notion of social mobility, and for those who do achieve at school it is likely that they will have a better chance of enjoying well-being as adults, and throughout the rest of their life. However, the research also shows that at the moment the biggest factor impacting on well-being in adulthood is background, a factor of which is class: p*eople’s occupational and economic destinations in early adulthood depend to an important degree on their origins (Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion 2010 p.25).* The evidence the *Centre for Analysis* drew on to compile its report shows: *the long arm of people’s origins in shaping their life chances, stretching through life stages, literally from cradle to grave (op. cit p.32).* This is because the level of income a family has impacts from a child’s earliest years and can determine:

*….opportunities such as the ability to buy houses in the catchment areas of the best schools, or to afford private education, with advantages for children that continue through and beyond education. At the other end of life, wealth levels are associated with stark differences in life expectancy after 50 (ibid).*

**Class, values, attitudes and beliefs**

When discussing poverty and low-income, and its relationship to class and equality of opportunity in education, one of the attitudes that always surfaces is the notion popularised by some aspects of the media that runs: there are those who want to live on benefit and are too lazy to get a job.

In real terms, particularly at primary level, when children first start school it is a very unusual child who cannot be engaged and motivated in some way to achieve in and enjoy their learning. As a child passes through its primary school experience it may become more challenging to motivate and interest. In part this will be because, as children grow-up, very quickly there will be many influences on their life besides school. In chapter 2 we saw how the notion of having an identity and identifying with those around us is important in helping us to develop a sense of self. When children begin to disengage with school, particularly at the primary level, it suggests that whatever is happening outside school is more interesting and motivating to them than what is being provided for them in school. They are finding it more rewarding to identify with these other influences than with school.

One of the reasons children begin to disengage with school is because the experience they have at school do not connect with the way they live their lives or their experience of the world. We know *people and their parents are influenced by the people and places where they live……*and *the local environment, crime rates and the quality of services, are also likely to influence their attitudes* (Cabinet Office 2008 p.15). In theory many seemingly disengaged children and parents accept that education does have an ‘*instrumental value’* (O’Donnell and Sharpe 2008 p.4), but this does not necessarily translate into being able to engage with it. If the cultural background a child comes from, their family, friends and significant sectors of their local community believe that the *‘real world’* (ibid) lies somewhere else other than school – which doesn’t teach real skills and provides a curriculum remote from their daily experience, then it may seem increasingly pointless to engage with school.

As Adams, Bell and Griffin (2007) discuss, and we have discussed in previous chapters, some groups in society hold more economic and cultural power than other members of society and the dominance of those values, attitudes and beliefs can prevent others from thriving.

Earlier in the chapter we explored how some occupations, such as being a teacher, can be defined as a professional middle-class occupation. It may also be argued that these occupations are not only dominated by those who are economically middle-class, but also culturally middle-class. This in turn sets up barriers that prevent some children, particularly if they hold different class values, attitudes and beliefs different to the class values, attitudes and beliefs prevalent in the school in enjoying and achieving at school. There is, quite simply, a clash of values, attitudes, beliefs and experiences between some adults in schools and the children and families they are working with.

Generally the dominant class in terms of controlling what happens in schools is the middle-class, those who have the professional qualifications to be teachers, head teachers and work in an advisory capacity in the Local Authority. Where the tension occurs is where those in control of the school have not reflected on their values and attitudes and can be certain that the community they work with shares the same values, attitudes and beliefs as they do. Lack of equality of opportunity for achievement happens where there is diversity in terms of class and the controlling class ignores the needs of the other, believing its way of ‘doing things’ is the more correct, ‘better’ way to enable children to achieve.

However, to believe that there is only one set of values which are the correct ones for achieving well-being is to be prejudiced and to fail to acknowledge the complex issues most people deal with in their lives. It is also to assume that everyone has the same background and resources to draw on, lives in stable, safe communities with sustainable housing and has the financial capacity to plan for the future and survive unexpected events, like unemployment or redundancy.

*The ways in which social class affects educational opportunities are multiple and complex: some factors lie outside the school, others operate through institutional process that disadvantage particular groups of pupils (Gillborn and Mirza 2000 p.19).*

Let us take as an example the process of reading and learning to read. Schools invest a lot of their resources, time, effort and money in encouraging children and families to become involved in reading. It is a core element of the national Curriculum and general education policy that children become fluent readers and that they read for pleasure as well as for practical reasons.

The current and proposed National Curriculum requires children to engage with an extensive range of texts including literature (QCDA 2010b). Research shows that teachers can have a tendency to interpret this as being a fairly traditional diet of British ‘classic’ fiction texts and poems, and contemporary authors that reflect the teachers’ background and *interests with teachers relying on the same texts over a lengthy period* (OfSTED 2005a).

The research also shows that teachers’ interpretation of the literature aspect of the National Curriculum does not reflect children’s interests and actually encourage children to read for pleasure outside school (OfSTED 2005a, 2005b). Indeed there is a *dissonance between school reading and home reading choices and experiences* (OfSTED 2005a p.9 ). When children are given the opportunity to talk about what does influence what they read most children cited friends as influences on their reading choices *fewer pupils mentioned that their reading had been influenced greatly by teachers* (OfSTED 2005a p.24).

The research also finds that those children who most experience this dissonance are boys and particularly boys from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and ethnic minorities (OfSTED 2005a, 2005b). This Research (OfSTED 2005a, 2005b) into children’s reading habits showed that both boys and girls enjoyed reading comics and multi-modal texts for pleasure, neither of were routinely used by schools to engage children in reading; indeed the children themselves said they thought teachers didn’t approve of comics (OfSTED 2005a p.9). This is an example of the dominant group – the teachers, deciding what it is best to use to encourage children to read without reflecting on whether they were correct or not.

Comics are not inherently bad, and as a way of motivating children to read might be shown to be good. The school’s notion of what it is correct to is at odds with what the children actually read and undermines the self-esteem of the child and family who will learn to *accept and incorporate negative images of themselves fostered by the dominant society (Adams, Bell and Griffin 2007 p.11).* This is not to say that the only thing children should read is comics, but to illustrate how children who may seem reluctant or not interested in the literature they are being given at school must first be engaged in the reading process texts they are familiar with and do have interest for them. Once the children are engaged and can see that their interests are valued they can be introduced to a whole range of interesting and exciting texts (Knowles 2009 p.17).

We have already seen how it can be argued that British society provides equal access to all in terms of the benefits and advantages available in society, welfare support, health care and education. So, all have the opportunity, should they wish it, to achieve well-being. However, as we have also repeated seen despite this seeming level playing field there are other factors at work that mitigate against some individuals being able to access these opportunities and flourish.

In this chapter we have explored that within British society, the class a child is born into will determine the long-term life chances of that child and how they are likely to enjoy and achieve in school. This is not necessarily because the child will be offered a poorer schooling than is available to all children, but because the values, attitudes and beliefs of those presenting the learning may be acting as a barrier to enabling the child to achieve.

Throughout this book we have seen how if we hold values, attitudes and belief different to those the children we work with it can affect the way we behave towards them, and however inadvertently, have an impact, positively or negatively, on their achievement. In most instances we want to have a positive impact on children’s achievement. That we can be complicit in allowing some children to fail to achieve can be because :

..*a dominant group can so successfully project its particular way of seeing social reality that its view is accepted as common sense, as part of the natural order, even by those who are disempowered by it* *(Adams, Bell and Griffin 2007 p.10).*

**Activity**

In terms of enabling children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to achieve try thinking through some of the suggestion below and reflecting on how they might enhance your own practice.

What do you know about the socio-economic backgrounds of the children you work with, or have worked with?

When you are in school, or have been in school, is it obviously which children at school have Free School Meals? Are the FSM children treated differently at lunchtime or when the dinner register is taken than the other children?

What do you really know about the area the children come from? Try not to take on face value things that might be said in the staffroom, do your own research – you can find out a lot about a place on line through the *Fischer Family Trust* and the *Index of Economic* *Deprivation* (see list of web-sites at the end of this chapter).

Do you know where the parents of your children work? Who are the big local employers?

Talk to the children you work with, and where possible talk to their families. Find out what interests and motivates the children. Is it possible to personalise the children’s learning to their interests?

As with your work with children from different cultures to the one you were brought up in, you may find that what the children want to explore is new to you, try researching the subjects for yourself. Read the books and other material they bring to school, find out what they watch on television. This does not mean you need to compromise the quality of the learning you are providing, it will simply give you some insight into how they view their own lives and may help you to better motivate some children to achieve in their learning.

**Useful websites:**

http://www.fischertrust.org/

www.shelter.org.**uk**

*www.****poverty****.org.****uk***

**Further reading**

1. Barker, R., (1997) *Political Ideas in Modern Britain : In and after the 20th Century* London, GBR: Routledge
2. Benson, J., (2003) *Working Class in Britain, 1850-1939* London, , GBR: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited
3. Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Task Force (2008) *Aspiration and attainment amongst young people in deprived Communities, Analysis and Discussion Paper.* London: Social Exclusion Task Force
4. Cannadine, D., (2000) *Class in Britain* Penguin, St Ives, England
5. Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (2010) An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK – Summary Report of the National Equality Panel Government Equalities Office
6. DfES (2004) Removing Barriers to Achievement DfES
7. Gillborn, D., & Mirza, H., (2000) *Educational Inequality: mapping race, class and gender* OfSTED http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Inclusion/Minority-ethnic-children/Educational-inequality-mapping-race-class-and-gender [accessed 05.08.09]

**Chapter 6**

**Boys, girls, gender issues and achievement**

This chapter aims explores:

* Explore the salient contemporary issues related to gender and education in Britain;
* To set these issues within a historical framework;
* Explore the prevailing myths about gender and provide counterarguments from recent research ;
* Explore the inter-sectionality of gender with other factors such as class and ethnicity.

**Introduction**

This chapter may seem to be unnecessary in terms of the debate about achievement and gender because there is a popular assumption that the ‘issue’ of girls’ achievement has now been resolved and that the issue now is boys’ underachievement. However, as we will explore issues of inequality still exist in the classroom for both boys and girls. In order to better understand the debate it is helpful to move away from the polarised nature the debate can take. That is, of girls’ achievement *versus* boys’ achievement and, rather to examine the complex factors which nuance the debate and the issues. It is important that those who work with children try not to be drawn into the polarised regions of the debate and to appreciate the factors which influence achievement for some boys and for some girls. Please note we refer in the last sentence to achievement rather than underachievement. This is an important aspect of this chapter.

Defining the key issues and debates with respect to gender is not necessarily straight forward, since over the course of time the debate has changed from one which focussed historically on whether girls should be educated or not; the nature of their education; the subjects they should study and their achievement within education; to the present time with the concern, almost panic, about boys’ underachievement in comparison to girls’ achievement. Yet, in the workplace women still do not enjoy gender equality or equal pay despite equal opportunities and sex discrimination legislation. In all our discussions about diversity and equality, one of the aspects of the debate we have sought to explore is how there can often be a gap between the policy intended to address the issues raised and, what seems to actually happen in practice. This is no less true in terms of the gender and equality debate.

The area of gender and education illustrates how the gender debate has shifted over time. The recent heritage of the debate in Britain has enabled a considerable shift from the way gender roles, particularly for girls and women, were considered at the beginning of the 20th century, to where we are now. Prior to the rise of the Suffragette Movement in the 19th century, and the raising of public awareness of the issues surrounding the unequal treatment, in all sectors of society, between girls and boys, or men and women it was considered that girls were the ‘fairer sex’ or lesser sex. In part, in the west, this view of girls and women was supported by the Christian Church who propounded the notion of Eve as being the human more easily ‘tempted’ and the cause of Adam’s failure to obey God. Their eating of the ‘apple of knowledge’ in Genesis, the first chapter of the Bible tells the story of how Eve, through her succumbing to temptation and, in turn tempting Adam caused humanity to be dismissed from the Garden of Eden. In traditional Christian teaching the theme of women being temptresses is one that frequently reoccurs. Set against this propensity to be wanton and lead men astray are the teaching, particularly in the Letters of St. Paul, who explores how through being dutiful wives who obey their husbands women can, to a certain degree, redeem themselves. Interestingly, in other faiths, such as the Sikh religion, women are mentioned in the scriptures as equals and the first Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak, opposed the prevailing view of women at the time being inferior to men, he wrote that,

It is through woman, the despised one, that we are conceived and from her that we are born. It is to woman that we get engaged and then married. She is our life-long friend and the survival of our race depends on her. On her death a man seeks another wife. Through woman we establish our social ties. Why denounce her, the one from whom even kings are born? (The Adi Granth 473 as quoted in Cole and Sambhi 1978:142)

This quote encapsulates the dilemma of womanhood. The roles that women fulfil and the standing they have within society, whether it is a society from 500 years ago in India to modern times where the dilemmas are in some way the same and in others very different.

The following sections of this chapter outline the history of the debate about gender and education and how it plays out in the classroom; in the myths that prevail about gender and education; the nature of the teaching profession and how approaches to teaching and learning can begin to change thinking in classrooms with respect to gender and education. The section also examines the intersecting dimensions of gender, class and ethnicity. It concludes by raising some questions about gender and sexuality in the classroom and why this is still a relatively unexplored and little talked about area.

**Gender and achievement – a historical perspective**

The historical debate about women and education is rooted in the debate about their place in society in Britain. The perspective that we are presented about the role of women in society, through films and literature, is clearly classed, we gain the image of the Victorian lady dressed in a fine gown having tea, playing the piano and ‘as decorative, docile, delicate and dependent’ (Browne 1987:8) but this was an image of an upper class privileged woman. The working class woman would have to work and keep home in rather different conditions to her middle or upper class counterpart. But whichever class she belonged to the place of women in society has been cast as inferior, since the tasks of home maker, cook and child-carer were seen to be subservient to the role of the man as the major bread winner (Browne and France 1987). In fact, as Browne and France (1987:10) note in 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft, who could be considered a feminist in her time noted that, ‘The care of children in their infancy is one of the grand duties annexed to the female character by nature’. This perception can probably be traced back to cultural, geographical or religious origins and Kumria (1987) notes that in almost every culture women are treated differently.

**Activity**

The views you have about what the roles and responsibilities are for boys and girls and men and women will depend on your cultural heritage and the generation you come from. For example, your parents’ and grandparents’ views on the subject may be different from yours. We also know from our exploration of identity in chapter 2 that how we view the way we wish to portray ourselves as men or women is very closely tied to our sense of self.

The areas with regard to gender that are ones often contested, both by the media and in education usually relate to the areas listed below. As you read through the list, consider your thoughts about each area of contention. Talk to your parents and grandparents about the issues. Talk to friends and colleagues who have a different cultural background to you to seek their views about the subject.

Are boys and girls ‘born different’, or does society expect different things from boys and girls, thereby seeming to create an artificial divide between the genders?

All boys and girls should have the same opportunities in education, in terms of being able to go to school and study the same subjects in the same way. They should also have an equal entitlement to progress through the education system to higher education, if that is what the individual wants.

Men and women should have the same entitlement in terms of wearing what they like and going out of the home to work if they wish.

Bringing-up children is the responsibility of both men and women. Both should share in caring for and nurturing children in terms of meeting all aspects of children’s needs.

The education of girls and women has always been inferior when compared to the education of boys and men. It was Mary Wollstonecraft, who was not only an early feminist, but an activist for social justice for the poor and women, and who was brave enough, at the time to write against the slave trade. In 1787 she wrote a book entitled *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* in which she criticised the teaching of girls and the inadequacy of the curriculum at the time. In 1792, she wrote a now well known book called *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. It was a significant text at the time because it argued that women were not inferior to men and that it was their education and treatment in society which kept them in a state of ignorance and enslavement (Tomalin 1992). Indeed Wollstonecraft set up schools herself to provide education for poor girls.

Hargreaves (2004) notes that prior to the 1870 Education Act education for girls was through free schools, such as the one set up by Wollstonecraft, which taught girls reading, needlework and knitting. It was after the Act that schooling was then available for girls at infant level within a co-educational setting and thereafter in single sex provision. However the curriculum involved subjects related to housework such as cookery and laundry. So the education provided for girls was a preparation for their lives as housewives or for some as servants in the big houses of the upper classes. It should be noted that education for girls was not made compulsory until the age of fourteen until after 1918. This increased the number of girls in secondary education but the curriculum remained unchanged with perhaps the addition of infant care. It should be noted that the education of girls was an issue raised by women in order to change the situation at the time, but the education of upper-middle class boys was seen of greater importance by the men in positions of power who could follow through their own classed and gendered beliefs at the time. The debate about the education of girls is inextricably linked to the perceived place of women in society which in turn was influenced, in some societies, by religion.

In the post War years the schooling of girls was compulsory up to age fourteen and then sixteen but the curriculum for each gender was influenced by the perceptions of their future roles in society which really had not changed a lot since the 1800s. In secondary school boys did woodwork, technical drawing and metal work, they could choose the sciences; whilst girls did domestic science, or cookery, needlework and child care (Weiner 1985). This distinction was even more marked with the between grammar schools and secondary modern schools. The girls in grammar schools probably had greater choice of subjects but even they could not escape the clutches of domestic science. For whilst they may be preparing for entry to universities, even in the 1960s and 1970s the grammar school curriculum still offered domestic science as a compulsory subject up until age fourteen as attested to by the authors’ schooling.

Gaine and George (1999:63) highlight that although British law is enshrined in the right s of the individual ‘it has never guaranteed basic human rights’, and that it was a European Economic Community (EEC) directive about equal treatment of men and women which led to the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975. The Act outlaws discrimination on the basis of gender in the areas of employment, training and education (ibid). As Weiner (1985) comments that even the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 which dealt with equal pay for men and women did not include education within its scope of enforcement. Whilst there was a section related to education which outlined access to the curriculum on equal terms and that girls could not be discriminated against with reference to admissions to schools there was little that related to discrimination on the basis of gender within schooling. So whilst boys and girls had equal opportunities and access to the curriculum, in fact there was little change with respect to boys and girls opting to take subjects and subsequently heading for careers based on gender related socialisation.

This Act set up the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) which has now been subsumed into the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Weiner (1985:2) notes that within the first ten years of its existence there was not one case of educational discrimination upheld by the EOC and she argues that: *this is not to say that there is no sex discrimination in education, but rather, that the existing legislation has proved ineffective in providing a basis for change in our schools.*

She cites incidences of schools ‘operating outside the law’, noting that in the mid-1980s there was a different pass marks for boys and girls in local education authorities which still used the 11plus exam for secondary school selection to ensure that there were equal numbers of boys and girls entering grammar schools. The 11plus exam and the selective education system that it related to has largely diminished through the establishment of comprehensive schools, although there are still local authorities, such as Kent and Slough, that continue with a selective system based on examination results. However, the comprehensive system and the secondary curriculum whilst allowing all children the choice of all subjects regardless of gender has still been embroiled within a debate about gender and achievement.

**Activity**

In talking to your family and friends ask them about any significant historical events which may have affected the perception of women in society in the twentieth century?

Can you see how these events have impacted, or not, on girls’ education?

Are they reflected in the stories of education that your friends, mother or grandmother have told you?

What were the career aspirations of your parents’ and grandparents’ generation, particularly those of your mother and grandmother? How do your own aspirations match theirs? If you have a daughter, or have considered the possibility of having one, what are your aspirations for her?

So far the text has focused on the way society and the organising structures of society have constrained the role and function of women in society and the home. But it should be noted that just as society assigned roles for women it conversely had certain expectations of men as the main wage earner, protector of his family, but not as the home maker, the child carer or the cook in the family. But much has changed in this respect over the last ten years since it is not unusual to hear of men staying at home to care for young children whilst their wife or partner works. However, it is still interesting that there are few men who choose to work with young children in a preschool or school context. It could be argued that this is the case because of a combination of reasons such as fear of being cast as effeminate and not ‘butch’; fear of their interest in the care of young children being miscast or misconstrued and the still prevalent reason that they ‘didn’t think that it was a man’s job’, which encapsulates the ever present expectations of society that men are not expected to ‘care’ for young children. Yet we all know that as fathers that is exactly the role men take within their families. In the social sciences the term socialisation is used to describe how an individual acquires the norms, habits and expectations of a society. The main conduits of socialisation are the family, schools, religion, peer group and the media.

**Activity**

Think back to your own childhood and schooling. Can you identify key events, people or groups, books or media that influenced your socialisation process?

Did such processes or events affect how you behaved as a girl or as a boy?

**Gender theory and Gender Relational Theory**

It is important that we move away from the dual or binary thinking that surrounds the discussions about girls and boys in schools. The way in which boys and girls behave is not entirely borne from their biology but from the way they are socialised in their family, school and society. Paechter (2001:47) distinguishes between *sex* which is biologically determined, *gender assignment,* which usually occurs at birth and is based on the biologically expressed physical characteristics of a person and *gender identity* which is defined as how a person feels about their own gender and it may be different to the gender assigned to them. *Gender role* or identity is more complex. It is the performance of our gender which is constructed by the dominant discourses prevalent within society about what it means to be masculine or feminine. Such discourses are rooted in power and knowledge which has prevailed through time and we know that such power and knowledge is usually controlled by men. How we perform our gender role is dependent on the power and knowledge which prevails within the macro structures of society and the micro structures of family, school and peer groups. Our performance of gender roles is also dependent on our ethnicity and class.

**How do the issues of gender and achievement play out in classrooms?**

**Gender and schooling**

There are a number of issues and myths related to the education of boys and girls that are prevalent in the current education climate within England. The issues and myths will be discussed in the sections below in the light of the above theories. The first issue concerns the early years of education and how they can shape girls’ and boys’ socialisation and performance of gender in school and beyond. There are widely held assumptions that the curriculum within the nursery environment is ‘gender neutral’. Browne and France (1985:146) assert that ‘*sexism* does occur in most nursery classrooms’ since they are a reflection of ‘society’s perceived norms’ (ibid). They consider three important mediums thought which implicit messages are conveyed with respect to gender conformity: through the language used; teacher actions (or in actions) and visual images.

Epstein (1993:10) examines how language is used for conveying our competing understandings of the world and suggests that the structure of the discourse and ‘discursive practices’ reveal the way in which constructed knowledge influences the way we are in the world. She argues that schooling not only identifies the nature of knowledge to be learnt but also the nature of what it is to be a child and a teacher and ‘what it means to...be gendered’ (ibid). Gaine and George (1999:36) strengthen the link between language and knowledge construction within society by noting that language ‘acts as a vehicle for society’s culture and social structure’, adding how language can implicitly convey relationships of superiority or inferiority within a society. Browne and France (1985) observed how language was used in a nursery classroom to reinforce gender stereotypes of girls and boys. For example, language was used to describe how pretty girls looked, to compliment her for her dress and how the ribbon matched her dress, but conversely for boys if clothing was referred to it would be in terms of how comfortable it looked or in some other such reference to functionality. The use of word ‘little’ was more frequently deployed to refer to girls than boys, apart from when parents and grandparents referred to boys as ‘little man’ however we rarely hear the term little woman’ being used for girls. When comforting girls and boys different language was used for each gender; for girls the language was nurturing, warm and affectionate but for boys it conveyed a need to toughen up of the sort that ‘big boys don’t cry’. In a similar way it has been noted that the fact that the language used by parents, teachers and other adults to talk to children can reinforce societal gender expectations. So girls are expected to be ‘lady-like’, but not ‘woman-like’; other girls are referred to as tomboys and boys that may want to play with dolls or the kitchen in the home corner as cissies thus conveying that it is inappropriate for a girl to behave like a boy and be loud or assertive and it is inappropriate for boys to want to play at cooking, yet some of the world’s greatest cooks are men who we call chefs. The weak girl who needs to be nurtured and cared for versus the strong tough boy these are still prevalent stereotypes in many people’s thinking and actions. Many children are conditioned into performing their gender long before they arrive at nursery school.

**Activity**

Try this exercise. Ask a colleague within your school or setting to observe you for 10-15 minutes working with a group of children on four occasions across the day and on two randomly selected days in the week.

Ask them to note the occasions on which you use language to reinforce gender stereotypes and to note the phrases you use.

It is only through such self awareness and monitoring that we will become aware of how our own raced, classed and gendered socialisation impacts within our own settings in our interaction with the children we work with.

The other way in which we are conditioned to perform our gender roles is through visual images and stories. Try to think of gender roles within stories, particularly stories of gentle princesses and brave princes. Can the children be encouraged to re-write it so that the prince is rescued by the brave and courageous princess? Browne and France (1985) encourage teachers in nursery settings not to assign Spot the dog a male gender they ask why Spot can’t be a female? For older children are they presented with images of women as doctors, men as nurses and midwives, women as engineers, bus drivers and men as early years/ nursery teachers or indeed at home caring for their children? If such images do not exist it is possible to create them yourselves by raising this question as a topic for debate with pupils.

The early years of life are where the socialisation into gender roles occurs and it occurs not only through the way language is used but also the toys we buy for our children or give as presents at Christmas or for birthdays. How many times have you brought construction toys or cars for a young girl or a play set of kitchen utensils or a pram for a boy? Despite the positive images of young boys playing in the kitchen with such toys in colourful catalogues aimed at parents and early years practitioners, in the later years of primary schooling the work achieved to redress gender imbalance through play seems to reverse itself as games such as football or war/fighting games become more popular with boys. In fact observe boys and girls in the playground at any primary school and you will find that the boys occupy the majority of the playground with their game of football, or are running around using the available space for their war game whilst the girls occupy a comparatively small proportion of the space with skipping games, talking or playing another game which does not take up all the available space. When such behaviours are observed it is easy but incorrect to assume that this is how boys and girls are, that this is what is to be expected.

**Case study**

Nina a teacher in her late 40s in the north of England says: ‘when I was about three or four I was very interested in the ‘cowboy’ films that were being shown on the television at the time. My parents went a long with this interest and I remember having a cowboy suit and a rifle. I also remember wanting to play outside in the fields near where we lived and really did enjoy climbing trees. And yes, I was called a Tom Boy. As a teacher I have seen many young children exploring their gender roles, particularly in the early years, where boys and girls will use the home corner and role play areas to dress-up and try out different aspects of their identity. Many times I have seen boys wanting to dress-up as ‘princesses’ and girls wanting to drive off to work. And then I see as the children get older they begin to be more gender ‘conforming’ about the roles they take in imaginary games. When my son was little I painted his toenails for him, as he wanted them done like mine and sent him off to nursery. My husband was mortified.

Teachers have a strong role to play in challenging their own thinking, the thinking of other professionals and of the children themselves to counteract the performance of expected gender roles in schools. If such counter-activity and thinking does not occur then gender stereotypical expectations will, and do, continue into the secondary phase.

**Whose achieving and whose not?**

In the past issues related to gender manifest themselves at secondary level with respect to the subjects that pupils chose at age fourteen. But since English and mathematics have been compulsory subjects for public examinations for many years and science after the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1989 the debate with respect to the core subjects and pupils’ relative performance within them has stemmed a little except in the area of boys’ reading and the rather panicked debate about the rise in the achievement of girls within a feminised curriculum. So what are the facts? The Department for Children, Schools and Families or DCSF (2010) notes that when boys’ results at age sixteen are compared to that of girls of the same age that boys are found to be underachieving, that is they are not the same number of boys and girls achieving at the same level. However, it should be noted that not all boys are underachieving and that it is only in some subjects. Skelton et al (2007) stress that it is important to note that the picture with respect to what is called the ‘gender achievement gap’ has become clouded with the focus on boys’ underachievement. They advocate a nuanced picture which recognises that there are some groups of boys who are achieving and that some groups of girls are underachieving. The latter seemed to get overlooked when the debate about boys’ underachievement raged at the start of the Millennium.

Skelton et al (2007: iii) note that girls do outperform boys in English and literacy by ‘10 percentage points in English at KS2 in 2006. However, there is almost no gender gap in achievement in mathematics and science at KS2’. They quell the panic by noting that such a gender gap in language is evident in other countries. The DCSF (2009) contends that although the achievement of boys and girls is broadly matched in mathematics and science at Key Stage 2 (KS2 age eleven) the gap in English and literacy has been a longstanding phenomenon known since the 1950s and 1960s which was explained by the ‘late development of boys’ which did not in the long run affect educational outcomes.

**Teacher attitudes, teaching, learning and the curriculum**

The DCSF (2010) notes that there is evidence to suggest that teachers’ gendered attitudes and expectations do affect ‘pupils’ perceptions of and reactions to school’. Also there is no evidence to suggest that male teachers are better for boys and furthermore that there is no evidence to substantiate a link between boys’ achievement and the gender of their teacher (DCSF 2009). Indeed, some have stipulated that single-sex education benefits boys’ achievement, but Ivinson and Murphy (2007) showed that where there was single-sex education it tended to benefit girls’ performance and that this is a result of stereotypical teacher assumptions which in turn have affected their expectations and achievements.

Another myth which seems prevalent amongst the public and teachers alike is that the curriculum has become more feminised through the diminution of exams and the increase in course work. The DCSF (2009) outlines that the girls’ results were improving prior to the change in course work requirements and then a reduction in the requirements had little effect on girls’ results. The Ofsted report (2003) on the achievement of boys in secondary schools noted that in schools where boys performed well there is a strong ethos of high expectations, clear boundaries for behaviour and more structured teaching and learning approach which benefitted all pupils.

**Gender, subject choice and careers**

Whilst girls are achieving higher than boys in some subjects, in terms of subject choices post-16 there is the persistence of a familiar pattern, namely that there are still fewer girls choosing to continue studying science subjects than boys. This in turn affects career choices and paths since there are still more boys who study the sciences at Advanced level and go on to study the subject or related subjects in higher education. The DCSF (2010) highlights that ‘60 per cent of working women are clustered in only 10 per cent of occupations; and men are also under-represented in a number of occupations’. There is an interesting debate about how boys and girls perceive different subjects. For example, some boys think that reading, writing and poetry are feminine modes of expression and that subjects such as science, maths, technology PE and ICT are ‘masculine’ subjects whereas girls favour English, the humanities and other arts subjects are favoured by girls. Whilst some girls are prepared to ‘tackle’ more masculine subjects the converse is not the case for boys (DCSF 2010).

These perceptions of subjects being feminine or masculine are carried through to the career choices that youngsters make. For example the DCSF (2010) acknowledges that girls still tend to choose careers in ‘business and commerce, hairdressing, and beauty and caring services, while young men are still choosing engineering, construction and mainstream science subjects’. Skelton et al (2007) argue that boys and girls tend to choose these different subjects because this is what is expected of them in terms of their gender performance so girls choose English and the humanities but boys do not because this would run counter to their construction of being a boy. Therefore the myth of gender biased subjects is perpetuated through gender performance and teachers sometimes inadvertent or perhaps not so inadvertent reinforcement of such expectations. So here again, in the twenty-first century we have a pattern of subject and career choice which was prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s despite the introduction of the National Curriculum which established equal access to all subjects up until the age of sixteen. This has not affected the subject choices or career paths of girls or boys in the last thirty years.

**Activity**

Talk to a group of primary school children and find out which subjects they like and the reasons for their choice. Ask them what they would like to do after they leave school.

Is there a pattern of gendered subject and career choices? If so point this out to the group. How do they explain the pattern?

**Intersectionality - ethnicity, class, gender and achievement**

The pattern of achievement for boys and girls clearly differs but it would be a simple and essentialist stance to consider that gender is the only dimension of difference which affects the educational success of pupils in schools. The picture, as would be expected, is far more complex than the headlines reveal. It is not sufficient merely to consider the gender of each child when examining educational achievement statistics. This has been noted by Gillborn and Gipps (1996); Gillborn and Mirza (2000) and more recently by Skelton et al (2007). The various studies cited suggest that:

1. When factors such as ethnicity are considered within the achievement debate it is clear that some groups of pupils achieve better than others and when this is combined with gender then girls from all ethnic groups achieve better than the boys from those ethnic groups. Skelton et al (2007) note that the average attainment for girls in English at Key Stage 2 was higher but there was a very small gender gap with respect to mathematics and science at this level;
2. When social class, in the case of Skelton et al (2007:iv) study, as measured by entitlement to Free School Meals (FSM), was a ‘major impacting factor on educational achievement levels in the UK’ for both girls and boys but the gap was greater for boys on FSM and those not receiving FSM.
3. Skelton et al (2007:iv) note that the underachievement of pupils in lower socio-economic groups is a feature of the UK education system which is not reflected in the educational outcomes of children in Canada, Finland, Iceland, Japan, Korea and Sweden.
4. The nuanced picture (Mirza 2009, Skelton et al 2007) which takes account of gender, ethnicity and social class shows that social class has a greater affect on achievement than gender or ethnicity.

There are a number of possible explanations for these observed gender differences in attainment as discussed earlier. But it is important to draw on the theoretical framework of gender relational theory (Skelton and Francis 2003) which has been strengthened through empirical evidence which supports the theory that pupils’ construction and performance of gender result in different behaviour for girls and boys which can impact on their achievement. The way in which girls and boys perform gender is dependent on the display of, and engagement in, behaviours which are ‘different and opposite’ (Skelton et al 2007;vi); in other words girls are expected to behave in ways which are different and the opposite of behaviours which define being a boy. These behaviours are rooted deeply in boys and girls and can vary according to age, social class and ethnicity. But it is clear that peer groups ‘police’ the ‘gendered behaviours of their peers’ (Skelton et al 2007:vi) thereby reinforcing gender norms and expectations. These norms and expectations are defined by parameters which constitute masculinity and femininity. For example, it is not considered cool for boys to work hard at school which is considered feminine so some boys, both working class and middle class are noted as demonstrating this behaviour (Skelton and Francis 2003).

**Achievement, gender and family**

Mensah and Kiernan (2010:252)published a recent research project working with the Millennium Cohort Study data found that boys’ early educational attainment in communication, language and literacy was affected by their family environment. Their study did not take factors such as social class as signified by class categories or by FSM but used other factors to examine gender differences in educational attainment in the early years. They found that boys’: *in families of mothers lacking qualifications, living in poor quality areas or who had begun to having children at a young age were increasingly disadvantaged compared to girls in similar circumstances.*

They conclude that these gender differences are clearly affected by ‘socio-cultural aspects of the family environment...rather than by the family economic resources per se’ extrapolating that boys in some way are more sensitive to disadvantages in their family environment noting that other research has indicated that boys require ‘greater external facilitation than girls’ and this affects their learning. So any strategies to improve boys’ educational achievement need to be out in place in the early years of education to counter the disadvantages evident within their family environment (Mensah and Kiernan 2010:253).

It is clear that there are a complex set of factors which affect the educational attainment of boys and girls. These factors such as ethnicity, social class, peer group, family environment and teacher attitudes intersect to act on an individual to influence their educational trajectory and future career and earning potential. Teachers need to be aware of these factors and actively work to counter them within their classrooms and set high expectations regardless of the gender of all their pupils.

**Further Reading**

Safia Mirza H. (2009) Race, Gender and Educational Desire Why Black women succeed and fail Abingdon: Routledge

Tomalin, C. (1992) The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft London: Penguin Books.

[www.historytoherstory.org](http://www.historytoherstory.org)

**Chapter 7**

**Coming from a Traveller background - Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children – living on the margins**

This chapter explores

* The history and origins of Gypsy and Roma people;
* The stereotypical assumptions about Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people;
* The educational debate related to children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller heritages;
* The difference between Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups;
* And challenges the reader to reappraise their positionality.

**Introduction**

This may be quite a challenging chapter because if there is one area of ethnic diversity which challenges some people in education it is the subject of the education of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller peoples. Often they are seen as one homogeneous group which society labels as ‘trouble-makers’, ‘crooks’, ‘dirty’ and ‘uncontrollable’. What is it about this group of people that evokes such strong negative reactions in an age in which we think that we are all equal? Why is it that people think it is alright to use the word ‘pikey’ but definitely not alright to use the n-word to refer to Black people?

This chapter will be thought-provoking. It will take you on a journey that will explain the history of the people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) heritages. The history of these groups is an ancient and proud one perhaps not appreciated by ‘ordinary’ society. The chapter will outline how legislation covers each group and limits their way of life. In setting this background we will examine issues related to schooling and the achievement of GRT pupils and how teachers and schools can support children from these cultures. Finally the chapter will conclude with a discussion about our own perspectives and how they can influence our engagement with issues related to GRT pupils in school.

**Mind your language**

Just as Black and minority ethnic groups have helped to shape the terms used to refer to them so we must be mindful of the terms used to refer to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people. The term Gypsy, Roma and Travellers is used extensively throughout this chapter usually in full but occasionally abbreviated to GRT. No disrespect is intended in such use. It is recognised that the term Gypsy, Roma and Traveller is merely an umbrella term and it should not be assumed that this is a homogeneous group. Previously in official documents the term Traveller was used simply because it described a group of people that had a nomadic lifestyle, but it did not affirm their separate ethnic identities. It is important that the language we use is inclusive and recognises not only the ethnicity of each group but also notes the legal status afforded to the two main groups of ‘Gypsy/Roma’ and ‘Travellers of Irish heritage’ (DCSF 2009). In doing so we show respect for each group whilst also recognising that the term may include other sub-groups. The term Gypsy encompasses many groups with tribal and geographical associations, for example, ‘Vlach Rom’, ‘Rom’, Kalderash, ‘Siniti’, ‘Luri’ and many other groups. It should also be noted that it is not acceptable to use lower case letters for the terms Gypsy, Roma or Traveller and that the word ‘Gypsy’ should be spelt with the letter ‘y’ rather than ‘i’ (DCSF 2009).

**Who are Gypsy Roma and Traveller people?**

The term GRT covers three main groups of people. It is interesting to note that it is a group of people that have been put together based on their way of life, one that has traditionally involved travelling from one place to another to earn money. If we examine this for a moment at one time we were all travelling people in the way that many nomadic people live today, or try to live today. If we look at this in terms of the biological imperative that drives this movement from place to place it is clearly premised on survival, on using the natural resources in an area and moving on to give time for the renewal of these resources. In this way it was a sustainable way of life.

It is movement and migration that links the current Gypsy people with their ancestors in India. This link is not meant to imply that Gypsies are originally a nomadic people. It is estimated that there are twelve million Roma worldwide ([www.reocities.com/~patrin/history.htm](http://www.reocities.com/~patrin/history.htm)). There are no accurate records since this group does not feature on official census forms. It is thought that there are 300,000 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people who have been in Britain for over 500 years. The Romany Gypsy people constitute the largest group of Travellers in Britain ([www.multiverse.ac.uk](http://www.multiverse.ac.uk)). But the term Gypsy is a misnomer. The word Roma or ‘Rom’ means man or people. It is thought that the Roma people who are referred to by variety of other terms such as Gypsies, Tsigani, or, Zigeunerv, are descendants of warrior peoples from north India, possibly Rajasthan or the Punjab. It is unknown why the original descendants migrated west across from India to Europe between the ninth and fourteenth century. There is one theory that surmises they migrated due to the warring factions of Arab and Mongolian armies or that some such conflict dispossessed them of their homelands. Roma peoples travelled to Britain in the sixteenth century. Most Roma live in Central and Eastern Europe nowadays ([www.multiverse.ac.uk](http://www.multiverse.ac.uk)). It is mistakenly assumed that the Roma are referred to as such because they live in and come from Romania, but this is incorrect. The term Gypsy is thought to have been used by people in Britain who saw these dark skinned strangers who they thought were pilgrims from Egypt and Gypsy is a corruption of the word Egyptian.

The theory about the origins of the Roma people and their migration is strengthened by examining the Romani language known as Romanes. The language has roots in ancient Sanskrit and is probably linked to Hindi and Punjabi. Many English Gypsies speak a version of Anglo-Romany or as it is known ‘pogadi jib’ (broken tongue) (DCSF 2009). The Romani word ‘kushti’ which means good/nice could be related to the Punjabi and Hindi word ‘khushi’ which means happy or happiness. In fact some Romani words have filtered into common parlance through programmes such as ‘Only Fools and Horses’ for example, ‘*Mush, Pal, Posh, Bloke, Gaff, divvy, Lollipop, bamboozle, nark, Chavvy, put the mockers on*’ ([www.multiverse.ac.uk](http://www.multiverse.ac.uk)). We all use these words but have no appreciation of their origins.

The history of the Roma, Gypsy people is shaped and marred by the reactions of settled communities to the arrival of these ‘strangers’. In fact there is no appreciation for their history and no trace of them in history as constituted by the dominant discourse. When the ‘Rom’ first arrived in Britain in the 1500s they were treated with suspicion. They were seen as a threat to the established faith, Christianity because they were dark-skinned a colour associated with the devil, with being a lesser mortal, being inferior; they practised palmistry and professed to be able to tell your fortune a practice associated with the dark arts. So the foundations were laid for the preconceptions that prevail today, for example, the associations with superstition, wrong-doing and distrust. In fact Henry the Eighth and Elizabeth the First ‘made it a capital offence to be a gypsy’ ([www.mulitverse.ac.uk](http://www.mulitverse.ac.uk)). The most reviled act of hostility is encapsulated in the statistic that half a million Gypsies were killed by the Nazis in their extermination camps. It is not surprising that there is hostility towards Gypsy people these days it seems to be rooted in this history of reaction against and control of the ‘other’, the stranger. It is thought that Roma and Gypsy people have remained nomadic due to this hostility since they have never been welcomed nor allowed to settle anywhere.

Many people may have a different image of Roma people as encountered in London and other European cities. A United Nations Development Program Report in 2003 found that there are about 5 million Roma living in Central and Eastern Europe and that 1in 6 of these people face ‘constant starvation’ which has resulted from the negative treatment received by this group of people from the mainstream media, and neo-fascist groups. Many families have suffered racist attacks and been murdered by racist thugs ([www.multiverse.ac.uk](http://www.multiverse.ac.uk)). Since the Treaty of Accession of the European Union 2003 ten new European countries, including some from Central and Eastern Europe, persecuted Roma have fled to other countries in Europe to seek work as migrants and to escape racism, discrimination, hunger and poverty. Unfortunately in trying to escape racism in one country they have encountered it in others. For example, these Roma refugees have faced vilification even before they arrived in Britain with *The Daily Mail* in 2007 claiming ‘Thousands of Roma Gypsies will head for the UK for a better Life’ (www.dailymail.co.uk); *The Daily Express* in 2004 under a map entitled the ‘Great Invasion 2004’ showed how the Roma would flood into and invade Britain. And in 2008 claimed that gypsy Roma would flood into Britain for jobs ([www.express.co.uk](http://www.express.co.uk)). The use of such emotive words such as ‘invade’ and ‘flood’ are designed to cause alarm and inevitably create the notion of the ‘other’ as invading to plunder and take advantage of hard earned benefits by the majority. In this way the negative hype about Roma and Gypsy people is perpetuated. In a shameful incident of open racism in Northern Ireland in 2009 (Fox 2009) the article notes that thugs attacked 20 Romanian Gypsy families by throwing bricks and bottles at their homes. The attacks were so violent that the families had to leave their homes and seek shelter in a church. The majority of these people were Roma and the youths that attacked them were seen to be making Nazi salutes. The article notes that such attacks have been noted across Europe and that Neo-Nazi groups in Italy have encouraged violence against the Roma.

The Traveller group are not a homogeneous group. They include a range of peoples such as Gypsies, Roma, Scottish, Welsh and Irish Travellers and Show people such as circus and fairground people. They have their own specific heritage and history. Within the collective group known as Travellers are people who have their origins within Scottish, Welsh or Irish heritages. Originally they would have been itinerant workers or craftsman such as metal workers and tinsmiths who would be known as tinkers. Derrington and Kendall (2004) surmise that Irish travellers may have been forced to take up this life style during the oppression of Ireland by Cromwell or as a result of the Potato famine and indeed more recently in Ireland in 1963 the policy to force all travellers to settle in houses may have forced some to leave the country in order to maintain the travelling life style.

The other group known as Fairground or circus showmen distinguish themselves from Gypsies by considering themselves as travelling business people. Again this community have their own history which can probably be tracked back to the days when holy days and feast days were celebrated with fairs where there was entertainment and trade. Many showmen families stay on their own or rented land, or live in houses during the winter and then travel around the country to a series of events. Their season is well planned to ensure a good income.

Another distinct group of travellers are the New Age Travellers and as the name implies are a more modern cultural group. It is thought that this group probably started in the 1960s following the hippy culture and pop festivals of the time from venue to venue. More recently this group has also included people who have chosen to abandon a settled lifestyle to join environmental protest groups, or who have rejected the values of mainstream society to establish an alternative travelling lifestyle.

**Activity**

Background information – The top of a road has been closed in the village because the family of an elder and respected member of a local gypsy family has died. The road is closed because the family have erected a brazier in which they are burning things. The Roma believe that death and separation from loved ones angers the dying. This is why they do not leave a dying person on their own, there is always someone with them day and night and usually they are not left to die in the place in which they have lived. According to gypsy tradition all the belongings of their relative must be burned in order to ensure there is no *marimé* orcontamination from the deceased other Roma tribes believe that the deceased will need these possessions in the afterlife.

Imagine yourself as the proverbial ‘fly on the wall’ listening to the following conversation:

Terry: I don’t know why they have to have the road closed? If I started a fire in the road I would be in breech of some law wouldn’t I? But they can have the road closed for them. They don’t even pay taxes those gypsies. They don’t integrate into society, why have they be like that?

Mum: Well it’s their tradition and we should respect people’s traditions. It won’t be there for long and you have to admire people for holding onto their traditions even in this modern age don’t you?

Terry: I don’t see why they have to inconvenience everyone why can’t they burn it in the garden and any way they’ll leave a mess in the road and all the heat from that fire will damage the road.

Simon: Why are you such a fascist?

Terry: I’m not. I’m not racist but I don’t see why they have to close the road and out people who live here out. We have to go all the way round the other way.

Mum just holds her head in her hands she thought that her son would have a more understanding attitude. What do you think about this conversation? How would you help this mum out to help her son understand that essentially his attitude is racist?

**Travellers and settlers**

In microcosm in Britain it should be noted that whilst we refer collectively to Gypsy Roma and Traveller peoples as Travellers many of them are no longer nomadic travellers. They are settled and live in houses. So, teachers should be careful not to make assumptions when a child is identified as coming from a Traveller community. The erosion of a nomadic lifestyle has happened slowly over the years and shaped not only by the reactions of mainstream society but by the instrument of the law. In the 1500s the Egyptians Act was passed to rid the country of people mistakenly thought to be Egyptians, namely the Gypsies. Another law at that time encouraged the Gypsies to abandon their ungodly way of life and settle in houses ([www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org)). In each case the laws were accompanied by the threat of deportation or execution.

During the Second World War Gypsies worked on the farms since many men had been conscripted. At this time they may well have been tolerated since they were deemed to be contributing to maintaining the country’s food supply. But after the Second World War the traditional work for Gypsy people such as working on the land gathering the harvest, planting crops diminished due to mechanisation and the simultaneous industrialisation of farming. These changes decreased opportunities for itinerant and seasonal work. At the same time the British landscape changed with the growth of towns and cities leading to urbanisation and the passing of laws which restricted the use of land and thus for travellers restricted the legal stopping places they could access. Derrington, (2004 www.multiverse.ac.uk.) writes that a law passed in 1960 ‘*made it an offence for farmers to allow Gypsies to camp on their land*’. In addition they could not purchase land to over winter on unless they had a licence which needed to e gained through planning permission. This had the effect of forcing Gypsy Travellers to camp on roadsides. In 1968 Caravan Sites Act, stipulated that local councils had to provide accommodation or areas for Gypsies to stop and other areas could be designated sites which were inaccessible to Gypsies and further still if they were to stop on such land it would be a criminal offence. There were a minimum number of official pitches provided and residing on such pitches came with rules such as no trading, no keeping of animals. This had three major effects, firstly to drive Gypsy Travellers to other areas; secondly to limit their income since they could not trade from their pitches whereas this had been their traditional way of conducting business; thirdly and most importantly the restricted number of pitches served to breakdown the extended network in which families travelled. Also it restricted the family functions such as gatherings for marriages and deaths so affecting Gypsy cultural traditions.

The erosion of the Gypsy lifestyle has continued in more recent times. The 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act repealed part of the 1968 which required local councils to provide sites for Gypsies and Travellers to stay on. This was accompanied by the removal of the grant that enabled councils to build such sites. It increased the powers of police and councils to evict Travellers camping illegally by the roadside and if the Travellers refused to move they could be arrested and prosecuted. Indeed this law was draconian when used in conjunction with the Public Order Act 1986 which gave the Police power to remove people who trespassed on land or if they had six or more vehicles. This law also applied to encampments on roadsides. Such laws left Travellers with nowhere to turn since councils did not have to build sites and in the 1980s and 1990s could close down existing sites and in some case sell them off for housing developments. In fact Travellers can buy land that they can use as sites and some have done so, but in reality this is also difficult due to the process of applying for planning permission and local opposition. In effect the law has served not only to radically affect the life and traditional culture of Gypsies it has served to *‘criminalise it’* ([www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org)). This is why many Gypsy people are settled living in houses or on council or privately owned sites perhaps in static caravans. Often council sites or private sites are in inaccessible or in less desirable places such as close to railway lines, rubbish tips or sewage works. They can be miles from a road and accessible only via muddy tracks. Those that live on council sites have to pay rent for the concrete on which they park their trailers and they have to pay council tax but they do not have access to the same amenities as people who live in houses.

Interestingly the responsibility for the oversight and management of Travellers sites falls under the remit not of the local council housing department but that of the Environmental Health department. This is the department that deals with unhealthy, unclean issues, the department that deals with the extermination of rates and vermin. Is it surprising that some members of society continue to make the false assumption between Travellers as unclean and unwanted. It is not surprising then that those who are forced to physically live on the margins of society are also metaphorically thought of and treated like detritus by society.

**Activity**

Mary, a primary student teacher is a bit confused. She has a new child in her class, Danny, who is a child is from a Traveller background but he lives in a house not far from the school. She wonders why he is still referred to as a Traveller. What do you think?

For example, in the new topic entitled ‘Houses and Homes’ should she include pictures of trailers and caravans regardless of whether she has got Gypsy, Roma or Traveller children in her classroom? Or should she do it now she has Danny in her class?

To assume that a child’s identity is based on the locality of their homes is to deny their cultural heritage which remains the mainstay of their lives regardless of whether they live in a trailer or a house. So the answer is that they still ought to be referred to by their ethnicity. It is not their abode that determines their identity but their ethnicity and culture. It is this ethnicity which drives their language, traditions and customs whether they live in a house, a static trailer or choose to travel at some times of the year. It is the ethnicity and culture of this group that should be reflected in the classroom. This does not mean that they are no longer Gypsy, or Roma or Travellers any more.

Whilst the law has not outlawed the nomadic way of life it has served to restrict it and the life of those who chose to try to live by it. It seems that the nomadic lifestyle, to move around and not to be settled in a static home, seems to challenge the normative framework of values that mainstream society adheres to and promotes. Such vales are embedded in our reactions to the ‘other’, to their way of life as a less sociable way of existence one that does not suit us. Through the law and rejection we appear to bring’ into line’, or ‘normalise’ the ‘other’ and their way of life.

**We are all equal except some are more equal than others**

The continued stereotypes of Gypsy, Roma and Travellers and children is one of not belonging, dirty, a nuisance at the very least, criminals and thieves at the very worst as outcasts. The stereotype of being dirty could not be further from the truth. Gypsy traveller people are proud of their trailers and keep them in an immaculate condition. Their children are seen as unruly and some would say uneducable. Again, such myths are just that. It is these negative stereotypes that perpetuate the on-going prejudice and racism faced by Gypsy, Roma and Travellers. This discrimination has denied them access to many provisions. For example, their children have the right to access education without fear of prejudice or the subject to the deficit model of learning which operates in some educational establishments. Despite the fact that Gypsy, Roma and Irish travellers are recognised as a distinct ethnic group and so covered by the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 direct and indirect discrimination continues to affect the lives of youngsters in school and their families. Although we no longer see signs, as we did in the 1960s, saying, ‘No Blacks, No Irish and No Dogs’, unfortunately you can still see signs on pubs or clubs saying ‘No Travellers’. This is, of course, illegal. Yet it is ignored, there is no public outcry it appears to be silently accepted. In 2003 the BBC reported that a 14 year-old boy, John Delaney was kicked to death by two teenagers because he was from a traveller family. The teenagers claimed ‘he deserved it he was only a gypsy’ ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk))

**Activity What would you do?**

As you sit in the staffroom you hear a teacher who you admire as a good practitioner say the following about a gypsy family in the school, ‘I don’t know why they carry on having so many children. Can’t they stop?’ You were under the impression that this colleague was a tolerant liberal person. Should you say something or carry on eating your sandwich?

In the climate of a history of rejection it is not surprising that many children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families do not achieve in school.

**Equality and achievement – how do schools and teachers support the education and well being of Gypsy, Roma Traveller pupils?**

So far this chapter has focussed on the issue of systemic racism and discrimination that have affected the history and lives of people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds. It is not until we, as members of the ‘mainstream community’ and teachers within it recognise and acknowledge the negative factors that children from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities have endured and the reasons why they have existed on the margins of society that we will begin to understand the need that this can no longer continue in an age when every child matters it is the schools’ and the teachers’ legal and moral duty to promote the education and well being of pupils with Gypsy, Roma or Traveller heritages.

The underachievement of pupils from GRT groups is not a new phenomenon. It was noted in a HMI report in 1971, mentioned in the Swann Report Education for all in 1985 where the report acknowledged the extreme prejudice and alienation suffered by ‘Travellers’ children’ was also evident amongst children from BME groups. More recently the Ofsted Report (2003) *Provision and Support for Traveller Children* highlights the major concerns about access to education for Traveller children and schools’ duty under the Race Relations legislation. It notes how in the past ‘the rung alarm bells rung in earlier reports have yet to be heeded’ (2003:6). The report also indicates how Traveller children make good progress in lessons but that the attainment gap widens as they get older. It commends the work of local authority Traveller Education Support Services (TESS) but although all local authorities

are responding to the requirements of the Race Relations(Amendment) Act.

In one in four authorities, the Traveller education service had

made a significant contribution to this work. Many authorities have clear

statements about the inclusion of all pupils in education. However, in too many authorities, the ways in which they deal with unauthorised encampments contradict the principles set out in their public statements on inclusion, educational entitlement and race equality. Such contradictions undermine relationships and inhibit the effectiveness of the Traveller education services and other agencies. (ibid p5)

The report also highlighted the issue of Travellers not ascribing their own ethnicity on ethnic monitoring forms, the lack of Traveller culture reflected in the curriculum since they are not seen to be an ethnic minority and that Traveller pupils remain on the periphery.

The statistics for the attainment of Gypsy, Roma Travellers pupils show that 49.5% of Gypsy, or Roma pupils and 52% of children with Irish Traveller heritage ‘are in the bottom 20% of the Early Years Foundation Stage’ (DCSF 2009). From this starting point the gap continues to widen at Key Stage 1 and at Key Stage 2 where 40% [81%] of children from Gypsy or Roma families attain Level 4 in English whilst 33% of those from Irish Traveller heritage attain the same level in English. The percentages given in [ ] brackets show the attainment of all pupils (DCSF 2009). At secondary level only 15.7% [63.5%] of pupils from Gypsy Roma heritages gain five GCSEs at grade A\*-C and 17.4% for Traveller pupils of Irish heritage. Whilst 98.2% of all pupils attain GCSE passes at grade G or above only 71.6% of pupils from Traveller Irish heritage backgrounds gain the same GCSEs and 84.4% of Gypsy Roma pupils gain GCSEs at grade G and above. The recent DCSF (2009:14) National Strategies materials on Raising Gypsy, Roma and Traveller achievement note that

..the DCSF is able to identify trends and gaps relating to a number of educationally significant factors, such as rates of achievement and attendance, identification of educational needs (SEN) and rates of

exclusion. This data monitoring enables the cross reference of other factors that contribute to underachievement, such as eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) among these communities. In this regard it is significant to note that these poverty indicators are only marginal contributors to the underachievement of Gypsy, Roma Traveller pupils; the causes of their underachievement lie beyond these factors.

The excellent materials outline some of these other factors such as some schools, despite their legal duty, have discriminated against this group by refusing school places to children from Gypsy, Roma Traveller communities. Other schools, for whatever reason, have offered limited places so seemed to be unable to offer places to siblings. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller parents have rightly wanted to keep their children together for reasons not just of having support and solidarity from their siblings but just like any other parents from their strong feelings of responsibility and care for their children. Many GRT parents have probably been very wary of schools based perhaps on their negative experiences in the past. It should be noted that children in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are respected, loved and cared for by their parents who want, just like any other parent to protect their children from harm which can, in some situations come in the form of racist bullying (Derrington 2004).

In a very honest reflection on her own education and upbringing one teacher with a Gypsy, Roma, Traveller heritage (Multiverse 2009) writes how she kept her identity hidden whilst she was training to be a teacher and now as a teacher in school. This reflection sums up how even in today’s so called tolerant society not everybody feels that their identity is one which will be equally valued.

As teachers and educational professionals it is important that we are aware of our own perceptions and to be aware of the assumptions we may make about individual children and their families. It is these assumptions and perceptions which may implicitly affect the way we work with some children, their parents and other colleagues. It is our dedication and commitment to the well being, achievement and engagement with issues of equality in real classrooms that will make a difference to the lives of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils in our schools.

**Further Reading**

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**Websites**

# <http://www.gypsy-traveller.org/>

[www.multiverse.ac.uk](http://www.multiverse.ac.uk)

[www.natt.org.uk/](http://www.natt.org.uk/) National Association for the Teachers of Travellers + Other Professionals.

[www.teacherstv](http://www.teacherstv)

**Chapter 8**

**Refugee and Asylum seeker children**

This chapter explores:

* The distinction between the terms refugee and asylum seeker;
* How the experience of refugee and asylum seeking children may impact on their learning and achievement in school;
* How schools and teachers can support the well being of refugee and asylum seeker children through understanding the wider needs of their families.

**Introduction**

The particular educational needs of refugee and asylum seeking children is an area which is perhaps the least recognised and acknowledged within schools. This could be because the issue may be confined to certain schools in certain areas of Britain, for the simple reason that refugee and asylum seeker families are settled in certain areas. Therefore it is an issue which may be quite removed from the consciousness and experience of many student teachers and teachers. However the national consciousness is affected by negative headlines in newspapers which indicate that there are too many people in England seeking refuge. It should be noted that people who are referred to as asylum seekers or refugees are not the same as economic migrants. Since people in the former categories are fleeing persecution, conflict and war. Economic migrants, on the other hand, will have planned their stay in Britain and will still have a home and safe place to return to in their own country, when an dif they decide to return.

That refugees and asylum seekers are, as the term suggests, in fear of their lives in the country they have come from, highlights a number of inter related issues that impact on the education of refugee and asylum seeker children. For example, issues related to their emotional well-being, language, religion and ethnicity which are over laid by legal issues related to their status and applications to stay in Britain. These issues affect the children and their families. But some children may be in Britain on their own as a result of their families trying to find a better life for their child whilst they may remain in their country of origin which may be affected by war, or by political or ethnic tension and violence.

The needs of these children and their families can also be complex requiring the support of a number of services such as housing, medical, education and sometimes social services. Most refugees and asylum seekers arrive in Britain with very few possessions and nowhere to live and sometimes no family with them or no family to live with. Their plight is not to be envied but considered with compassion and understanding. For example, fleeing your home country leaving behind your extended family, house, possessions to become dispossessed is not a decision any father or mother makes lightly. It is only when their freedom and rights are severely restricted or their lives are in danger that they see and decide there is no alternative but to flee. As one young man said ‘No-one chooses to be a refugee’ ([www.teachers.tv](http://www.teachers.tv)).

**Case study**

Abdi is a 14 year old boy who has just arrived as an unaccompanied asylum seeker. He has just landed at Gatwick Airport, London. The Immigration and Border Control Officers take him to an interview room. Abdi appears tired, confused and bewildered by his surroundings. He was told by his uncle that there would be a better life for him in England. But it has been two months since he last saw his family and his village. It was then that the men with guns ran amok in his village shooting and killing anyone they saw. They murdered his father, mother and big brother. He had seen this all from his hiding place. After the sights he had seen he ran to the next village to tell his uncle. He took him to the capital of Somalia and handed him over to a man. The man took him to Mogadishu airport and put him on the plane. Abdi didn’t know he had a passport until then. Now he is in a room with a man who is asking him questions. He seems alright and Abdi can ascertain that he probably wants to know why he has come to England but Abdi can’t tell him because he doesn’t speak English.

This is how the story of some children’s lives as an asylum seeker in England can start. They arrive unaccompanied and sometimes they know why they have left their families behind sometimes they don’t. On arrival another phase of their life journey begins to unfold a phase that they have very little control over.

What do you think are Abdi’s immediate thoughts and feelings? Imagine yourself in his position, or imagine your son or daughter in this position. How would you like to see them supported?

Every year 3,000 unaccompanied children under the age of 17 arrive in the UK and apply for asylum ([www.mulitverse.ac.uk](http://www.mulitverse.ac.uk)). As you can imagine life must be pretty awful for a parent to send a beloved child on such a long and unknown journey and to trust the future of their child to strangers. To develop your understanding of the complex issues faced by these children you are advised to read Benjamin Zephaniah’s book ‘Refugee Boy’.

**History and definitions**

The 1951 Refugee Convention was designed to tackle issues of refugees after the Second World War and as such applied largely to a European context rather than a global one. The Convention was modified by the 1967 Protocol which extended its application across the world. It is known that 147 states have signed up for the Convention and its Protocol (UNHCR 2007). The Convention and its Protocol obliges host states to protect refugees. Although written in 1951 for a very different world situation ‘the Convention has proved remarkably resilient in helping to protect more than 50 million people in a wide variety of situations. (UNHCR 2007:9). Can you think of recent situations across the world in which the Convention and its Protocol would apply?

The Convention was the first international agreement to define the basic human rights of refugees. It defines who is and is not a refugee (for example war criminals are not considered refugees), their right to protection and services from countries that have signed up to the Convention. It defines who is a refugee and their rights to freedom, for example to practise their religion, to freedom of movement and their right to work and education. It also states that no country should return refugees to the country of origin if they fear persecution. People who are fleeing conflict in one area of the country but stay within the borders of the country, for example, Tamils in Sri Lanka or the people of Dafur in Sudan are referred to as Internally Displaced People. In this situation the Convention and its Protocol do not apply. To be referred to as a refugee you must cross an international border from one country to another. It is interesting to note that one stops being a refugee either when you have gained the right to permanently reside in the country in which you first sought asylum. The preferred option is that refugees return to their country of origin when it is safe to do so. This was the case when thousands of Rwandan refugees returned home after the genocide in 1996. It should be noted that under international law no country can return a refugee to their country of origin if they are still in danger of persecution (UNHCR 2007). The idea promulgated by the popular press of asylum seekers flooding the country is a common myth which deserves to be extinguished. The UNHCR (2007:16) note that the idea of asylum seekers swamping some countries is not borne out by the facts

Countries around the world, including some in Europe, believe they are

being overwhelmed by asylum seekers. The global number of asylum

seekers did increase in the 1980s and 1990s, but then decreased sharply

during the first years of the new millennium. The concerns of individual

states are relative. The bottom line is that some nations in Africa, Asia

and the Middle East – states with far fewer economic resources than the

major industrialized countries – sometimes host much larger numbers of

refugees over much longer periods.

In fact under 14% of the refugees in the world live in Europe ([www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk) ) It may be worth remembering this rather small figure when you read alarmist headlines or negative comments about refugees.

**Definitions of the terms ‘asylum seeker’ and refugee**

The two terms are often used interchangeably but it should be noted that in law they are different. In common parlance we do not distinguish between the two terms. But there are differences which teachers and education professional should appreciate.

**Definition of the term asylum seeker**

An asylum seeker is a person who has crossed an international border

in search of safety and refugee status in another country. The person and

dependents have applied for asylum. In the UK asylum seekers are people

who are awaiting a Home Office decision as to whether they can remain. (www.multiverse.ac.uk)

As noted earlier the 1951 UN Convention and 1967 UN Protocol define the rights of asylum seekers. A person can declare themselves to be seeking asylum when they arrive at an airport or port. They can also declare themselves as such when they are in the country. The Home Office has a special department, called the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) which processes all the applications for asylum. The person who has declared themselves as an asylum seeker is required to complete an application which should be supported by evidence. The IND then assesses the evidence and the claim. Rutter (2003) notes that there can be one of four outcomes which can result:

1. The claimant is assigned refugee status because there is evidence to show that there is a ‘ well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion’ (UNHCR 2007);
2. The applicant is granted ‘Humanitarian Protection’ but is not given refugee status. This protection covers a period of time and recognises that if returned to their country of origin the person would be in danger of being killed, or torture
3. Discretionary leave is granted to people who are not granted asylum and cannot be returned to their country of origin. This is often granted to unaccompanied children who have not been granted refugee status and who are under 18;
4. About 80% of applications are refused.Applicants whose claim is refused may have the right to appeal but only 25% are successful.

43% of people seeking asylum come from one of the following countries: Iraq, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Somalia and China and smaller numbers from other countries such as Sri Lanka and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The political situation in each of these countries is widely known and the violation of human right is reported in our news. Most people seeking asylum are men between the ages of 18-34. 3000 unaccompanied children under the age of 18 apply for asylum each year. They are usually alone and not accompanied by a close relative 9www.multiverse.ac.uk). People who apply for asylum cannot work but require care, support and housing. Rutter (2003) notes that asylum seekers do not have access to State benefits, children from asylum seeking families can access schooling. The National Asylum Support Service provides financial support and housing. They operate a policy of housing asylum seekers anywhere in the country in an attempt to control the numbers in London and the South East of England. This may sound straight forward but an asylum seeking family can be moved many times to different areas of the same city or region or to different parts of the country. This has the inevitable consequence of adding to their stress and insecurity. The children have to move schools as many times as they move home. It is not surprising then that the parents and even the children can often suffer mental health problems (www.bmj.com).

**Definition of a ‘refugee’**

Rutter (2003 www.multiverse.ac.uk) notes that the term is more a ‘legal construct’ which defines a ‘refugee as someone who has fled their own country or is unable to return to it owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group or political opinion’ (1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees).  Under the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol the country in which the person seeks refuge can deem the person to be a refugee. Usually people will seek asylum and make an application which, if successful, they will be granted refugee status. This status affords people protection of the state in which they have sought sanctuary and protection from being returned to their country of origin. It also means that people with refugee status can work, have access to benefits, housing medical care and education. A small number of asylum applications gain refugee status – only 6% in 2003. In 2009 the UK was home to only 2% of the 16 million refugees worldwide (refugeecouncil.org.uk). The most successful group of refugees in Britain are the Ugandan Asians that were expelled by President Idi Amin in 1972 ([www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)).

Rutter (2003) explains that whilst in law the status of an asylum seeker and refugee are clear schools tend not to delineate or know the difference, nor to ask. This is because the journey which describes the flight of asylum seekers and refugees from their countries of origin are not straightforward. They can often gain asylum or refugee status in one country and then migrate to another. Remember 80% of the world’s refugees are in camps or housing in countries within Africa or the Middle East, countries such as Kenya or Jordan or Syria. So for example, if you gain refugee status in Sweden as a Somali asylum seeker you may then later come to the UK. In this case the children may speak Somali, Swedish and depending on they age they may also have learnt English in Sweden.

It is estimated that there are 100,000 refugee children in the UK and that about 65% are found in the Greater London area. The largest proportion of refugee children in schools is from Somalia and the numbers indicate that approximately 6% of children in London schools are from refugee backgrounds (Rutter 2006).

**Case Study**

Farrah and her mother arrived in Dover after an arduous overland journey from Iraq. Farrah is eight and she is really not sure what has happened to her father. She just remembers being told they were visiting her grandmother and she was put in the car for what she thought was a weekend trip. Her memory is hazy because she was half asleep and half awake as they made through their way through the countryside, then via Syria and other countries on to Britain. She hears mum talking to an interpreter and she hears her tell her that they are seeking asylum.

Farrah and her mother are given accommodation in a detention centre here there were many people from around the world. They were then moved to Croydon where they had a small flat. Farrah’s mother told her she didn’t know how long they would be there but they would try to get her into a school, which they did with the help of a neighbour who was also from Iraq. She was at the school for just half a term and they got moved to North London where it took her mother 4 months to find a school for Farrah. They spent their days watching television and in that way they started to learn more English Farrah’s mother cried a lot sometimes she shouted at Farrah especially if she was messy in this new very small flat with very noisy neighbours above who were quite hostile. But Farrah is now in her second school in Britain in six months. She asks after her father almost every day and over the course of the days and now the months the answer has moved from ‘he will be with us soon’, to the same question her mother now says, ‘I don’t know’ and sometimes she cries and other times she stares out of the window as if willing him to appear.

As some one who works with Farrah how would you make Farrah welcome in your classroom? What would you want to know about her? How could the school support this family?

This case study provides a very small sample of the issues met by asylum seeker families and their children. They are often families that are emotional stressed who are trying to do their best for their children as any mother or father would seek to do. Schools can support such families by ensuring that they have access to the support services e.g. legal, social, medical and English language learning provision for the adults; that they encourage the children and their families to be part of the school community; they are sensitive to the fact that there may not be a lot of money since most people only get £35 or so a week to spend at the supermarket so there may not be enough to buy the correct uniform since they may have needed to move schools a few times due to the changes in accommodation. Can the school help by providing uniform from spare stock?

The research report by Aspinall and Watters (2010) funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to examine the dimensions of equality and human rights as related to the lives of asylum seeking and refugee adults and children notes that the policy of dispersal leads to uncertainties, disruption and a lack of continuity for the children’s education. Yet it is education which can provide these children with stability and help to support their well being. The policy of moving asylum seeking families to different areas in order to ensure that the resources in one area are not drawn on so much means that the children cannot assume that the first school they enter will be the school they are in the following year or month. The research report notes that schools with places have to admit asylum seeking and refugee children but that this is thwarted by some schools that are not prepared to receive these pupils and others that do not want the admission of these pupils to affect their GCSE results. The report provides the fact that in one London borough there were 189 children waiting for a school place and 125 of them were asylum seekers.

The report outlines barriers such as lack of resources in schools and variable practice which hider the integration and educational progress of asylum seeking and refugee children. The authors noted that varied practice in school in the admission of asylum seeking and refugee children stemmed from the assumption that this was a homogeneous group and a lack of a nuanced understanding about the needs of different groups. The Report (Aspinall and Watters 2010) highlights research undertaken by the Refugee Council to identify how schools could establish good practice to work with asylum seeking and refugee families and their children; for example to offer extended school provision which educates the children and works more broadly with their families and the wider community; to assign a home-school/community worker who can not only be a tangible link between the school and families, but who can also be involved in providing wider specialist support such as inducting families and helping them to access other support agencies; the establishment of peer mentors and specific language support in classes, as well as beyond the school day such as in extended provision, or on Saturday mornings helps other members of the family.

The right to education is a basic human right and asylum seeker and refugee children are entitled to education in the countries in which they seek refuge. In most European countries these children may be sent to centres where they are educated alongside others in a similar position where they gain proficiency in the language of that country, but in the UK these children are integrated into mainstream provision. What do you see as the advantages or disadvantages of these two approaches?

**The schools and teachers supporting the needs of asylum seeking and refugee children and their families**

It is important that schools do not see refugees and asylum seeking children as a homogeneous group. They come from a variety of countries for a variety of reasons, as described above. The DfES (2004:4) guidance notes that children from the same country may not come from the ‘same ethnic or linguistic backgrounds and their families may have different religious beliefs and political observances’. Teachers and schools should also note that children from asylum seeking and refugee backgrounds will have very different experiences of persecution in their countries of origin and their journeys to the country of refuge and varied experiences of being in that country. It is important to note that children will vary in how well they cope with the stresses associated with the change in their lives. In fact many refugee have shown how resilient they can be an outcome which Anderson (2004) describes as something which emerges from adversity rather than a quality a person possesses or not. Hamilton and Moore (2004) provide a developmental model which can track the changes refugee children have gone through during the sudden changes in their lives which require adaptation and resilience. Teachers need to become familiar with it as a means of recognising the factors which may have shaped the lives of these children. The model delineates factors associated with the three stages of transition in the lives of refugee children and the associated tensions resulting from unusual and aberrant life changing events or conditions. The stages and factors are :

1. **pre-migration factors** – experiencing the events of war or conflict such as bombing or shooting and as a consequence seeing dead and injured people; experiencing the death or injury to a member of their family, or being injured themselves, witnessing the violent death of a family member though torture; experiencing fear, trauma and panic themselves, but also in other trusted adults; being a child soldier; disruption to their everyday routines like going to school;
2. **trans-migration factors** – suffering the anxiety and tension involved in a long and dangerous journeys to escape; experiencing transition through several countries; experiencing life in a refugee camp; being at risk of exploitation and then trying to settle in different countries; the separation from parents or other loved ones;
3. **post-migration factors –** stress amongst children and adults;experiencing anxiety of whether they will be allowed to settle or not the whole process of application; fear of deportation; the sense loss of status and dependency on others when once the family were perhaps independent requiring no support; overcrowded or poor housing; racism and the struggle to access health and schooling.

Richman (1998) states that all these factors impact on the child’s well being and affect their sense of security, self and identity. Inevitably there may be consequences in terms of the child’s learning and progress in school yet as Richman (1998) asserts that a school’s policy and its implementation can have a beneficial effect on the well being of refugee children. Schools can help children feel safe and help them regain a sense of normality and each factor sets the climate for learning. Local authorities and schools are obliged to provide full time education for pupils of school age and to ensure there is no delay in providing schooling for asylum seeking and refugee children; local authorities should have policies and support services to assist asylum seeking and refugee families with, for example, admissions in the middle of a term since the conditions of war and flight from it do not conveniently coincide with the timing of school admissions; they should assist schools with access to interpreting services or access to Ethnic Minority Achievement Services (EMAS) staff who can assess the child’s language proficiency in their first language given an interpreter in the first language and they can then provide subsequent support for the child and the school. For children entering early years provision it is vital that the different services work together for the benefit of the child. For example, to ensure that health care professionals such as a health visitor are involved with the family and can provide them with support. Some Local authorities have a designated person whose responsibility involves the welfare and education of asylum seeking and refugee children.

A good school will have induction procedures for the parents and children from asylum seeking and refugee backgrounds. The induction process will need to involve initial parental orientation and expectations of schools since schools in the UK differ from perhaps the formal schooling structures of other countries. Well thought out and a patient approach to the induction process can provide these families with a sense of security and the beginnings of a trusting relationship can be established between the school and the family. It is advisable for the school staff to undertake some initial research into the conditions within the home country; the communities, languages and history of the country and some research on the schooling in that country. The information gathering process is an important stage for the school and the family but they may not want to recount the tensions that caused them to flee their country of origin. The DfES (2004:6) Guidance states,

Specifically, these children need provision that can:

meet their psychological needs, by, for example, using play

to help a child settle; respond to their language needs; challenge

racism and promote an understanding and positive acceptance of

cultural diversity; involve parents who may not be confident in

speaking English; support families who may be experiencing stress

and economic deprivation; address issues of religious belief.

Schools and teachers need to be aware of the language, emotional and physical needs of asylum seeker and refugee children. In order to understand these there needs to be staff in-service training such as finding out the child’s home language, encouraging the maintenance of their home language’ deploying the use of bilingual assistants; trying to learn a few key words of the child’s home language such as hello and good-bye; for young children knowing the child’s words for toilet or hungry or thirsty; having dual language signs and books in the classroom; involving the child in teaching the children in their class words from their home language; providing the child with good language role models who can also be their friends and be supportive, they do not have to be the same ethnicity as the asylum seeking or refugee child, but a trustworthy kind and helpful buddy who can show them the routines of the school and with the teacher’s help they can encourage the child to use greetings in English as a start to their development of English. For young children and their families play can provide a welcome return to normality and a means of parents and children being together through a normal childhood activity such as play. It can also help some children with a conduit to talk about their fears and hopes and in this way be therapeutic in helping them cope with the stresses they have endured. The last thing that an asylum seeking or refugee child needs to experience is isolation at school. To be alone in a strange school, in a strange country and not speak the language would initiate fear into any person adult or child; but for these children it would add to the stress and fear they have already experienced as a result of their transit to the UK. This is why schools need to be sensitive to the needs of the child and their family.

**Case Study**

Grace has just started at your school with her brother. She is 14 and has come to join her father but her mother is still in Zimbabwe. They are an asylum seeking family. Grace starts school in the middle of the Spring term just after half-term. As her form tutor what do you need to know about Grace? What research do you need to undertake? How will you welcome Grace into your classroom? How will her start mid-term affect her work and how as her teacher and the school can support Grace to achieve her best. She is keen to become a doctor.

What is interesting about this case study is that it can be tempting to think of that children from asylum seeker or refugee backgrounds are from deprived or poorly educated backgrounds. It is correct to think that the children’s education may have been disrupted, but, as we can see it is not necessarily the case that all children from these two groups come from backgrounds where they either have not been to school or that they have received minimal education in their country of origin. It is right to consider the child’s educational background alongside key facts such as the child’s level of language proficiency in their first language; the level of education in their home country and the education or the employment of the parents in their home country. Aspinall and Watters (2010:42) cite research which found that Somali children perform 22% below the average mean. Rutter (2006) notes that whilst Somali children performance is below the mean in two local authorities her research found that where schools worked closely with the Somali community the children in those schools outperformed the White students but were still 11% below the national average. There was significant under achievement amongst children from the Congo which Rutter (2006) surmised was due to the ‘fragility’ of their first language which then in turn impeded the acquisition of English and their subsequent attainment. She found that a relatively new group of refugees from Southern Sudan performed well in school and identified factors such as family status in their home country, level of schooling and education and the fact that English was spoken at home as supportive to their educational success. Her findings showed that where the schools merely worked on homogenised conceptions about asylum seeker and refugee children and failed to recognise the specific needs of the child that children did not achieve as well.

The duty on schools to promote community cohesion (DCSF 2007) should provide schools with a greater impetus to engage and liaise in tangible ways with all the communities it serves. The duty encompasses a number of other statutory requirements such as the need to promote the children’s spiritual, moral, social and cultural education (Education Act 2002) and the duty to promote race equality (Race Relations Amendment Act 2000). The duty to promote community cohesion is designed to be inclusive and to enable schools to prepare children to live in a globally diverse world but also to enable them to appreciate and live in a culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse British society. The duty is a positive attempt to help children wherever they live to value members of their school community, their local community and the global community.

This chapter has explored the distinctions between refugees and asylum seekers and how the experience of flight from their home country, the journey involving transitions from one country to another can affect their well being, their education and their achievement. The chapter provided links to the International Convention on Refugees and demonstrated how this can manifest itself in the provision of education for asylum seeking and refugee children. But most importantly the reader was encouraged to develop a nuanced concept of the children that are part of this group and to begin to understand that their individual stories will illuminate their fears, hopes and needs. Teachers and education professionals need to take time to understand the whole story to meet the needs of the individual child.

**Further Reading and websites**

Laird, E. (2007) Kiss the Dust London Macmillan Children’s Books.

Zephaniah, B. (2001) Refugee Boy London Bloomsbury

[www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

[www.multiverse.ac.uk](http://www.multiverse.ac.uk)

[www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

[www.refugee-migrant-justice.org.uk](http://www.refugee-migrant-justice.org.uk)

[www.sharedfutures.org.uk](http://www.sharedfutures.org.uk)

[www.teachers.tv](http://www.teachers.tv)

[www.unhcr.org](http://www.unhcr.org)

**Chapter 9**

**Looked after children – Children in care**

**This chapter explores:**

* What is meant by ‘looked-after’ and Children in Care;
* Why children become looked-after or need to be Children in Care;
* Children and loss;
* CiC and achievement at school;
* Resilience.

**Introduction**

*Children in children’s homes reported being more likely than most to be threatened or to have their property taken or damaged. Children in residential special schools reported being more likely than most to be hit or hurt, to be threatened, to be treated unfairly, and to have unpleasant mobile or computer messages sent to them. Fifty six per cent of those in residential special schools reported being hit or hurt, compared with 39% for all children (OfSTED 2008).*

**Children in care**

The DCSF (2009a) estimates that there are currently around 60,000 Children in care (CiC). 63% of the children who are taken in to care have become CiC because of abuse and neglect (DCSF 2009a p.3). Children are also taken in to care because their family may be experience a time of sever stress, because a parent may be – or have become disabled or because of the death of a parent. Many children who become CiC will be suffering loss, trauma and mental health problems (ibid) and while the state has deemed that the child be taken in to care for its *own protection and wellbeing* (ibid) the child themselves may still be very loyal to their family – whatever problems there have been and may, alongside feelings of loss and abandonment may also be dealing with feeling of guilt, believing they have caused this situation or have abandoned siblings. Children also become CiC because they are refugee or asylum seekers and may be suffering trauma due to their experiences in the country they have come from and their experience of the refugee/asylum process here. This is explored in more detail in chapter 9.

**Good practice in supporting CIC**

The following information comes from the QCDA website and outlines an example of how a midlands town works with CiC to help support their achievement at school.

**Relationships with school staff and feelings about school**

Every six weeks the children who are part of the scheme work with education staff to discuss *Pupil Attitudes to Self and School* (PASS). Through talking the adult and child can explore what is going well at school and what’s a challenge, particularly how they are feeling about school and how they feel the adults in the school are responding to them. for children who are not in care or looked after, these are the sorts of conversations they might have with adults at home, but for a child in care there may not be that opportunity or they may need to learn that everyone can find school challenging and gets one with some adults an not others. The atmosphere is informal as again the child may not have the life experience or another opportunity to put adults in school in a context other than being ‘authority’ figures. The QCDA state: *as a result, their relationships improve, they feel valued and are positive about being back in learning* (QCDA 2010a)

**Continuity support**

The local authority also provides a *team of teachers and learning mentors who support children, schools, carers and social workers* (ibid) to support the children and the schools. Some of the team are attached to the residential homes some of the children may be living in and, again, in this way can provide continuity for the child between ‘home’ and school.

**Personalising the curriculum**

It is recognised that in order to support the children to achieve providing equality of access to learning for them will mean ensuring their learning is personalised in a way that is appropriate for their needs. Which for these CiC included: ‘*Summer in the city’* which provided children in foster care with the opportunity to *try arts activities, music and dance, outdoor pursuits, canoeing, climbing, skiing, rollerblading and swimming* (ibid).

(QCDA 2010a)

**Attachment disorders**

In chapter 3 we explored how, in order to thrive and flourish, children need a home life n- however diverse that might be, that will enable them to form positive bonds with caregivers. For many CiC the opportunity for developing these attachment bonds in a way that will ensure the child can thrive may be disrupted or not immediately possible to achieve. As a result, some CiC will experience attachment disorders. Prior (2006) in exploring attachment disorder divides attachment disorder in to two distinct types: Disinhibited Attachment Disorder and Reactive Attachment Disorder.

**Disinhibited Attachment Disorder**

A child who might be said to be manifesting symptoms of a Disinhibited Attachment Disorder (DAD) may seem unable to selective about whom to form bonds or attachments with. In young children, who may not have had the opportunity to from secure attachments with positively responsive caregivers, the child may be indiscriminate in who they seek to form attachments with.

Where the attachment process develops in an appropriate way the young child will attach to a few primary caregivers and both child and caregiver learn to be responsive to each other. However the child who may have DAD may seek to form a bond with anyone who will respond and may be unselective about the responses the putative caregivers make. That is to say *any attention is better than no attention*. In this way the child may be vulnerable in that they seek attachments with those that may be shown to be abusive. The putative caregiver may not wish to bond with the child appropriately or they may be unable to respond with the appropriate care the child needs, this may result in physical or emotional neglect. In some instances the putative caregiver may be more systematically physically or sexually abusive. Research that explores ‘grooming’ by paedophiles seeking a sexual relationship with a child shows that abusers will seek out children who are vulnerable in this way, children who may, because of other things happening in their lives, be displaying behaviours that include over and indiscriminate familiarity with relative strangers (Prior 2006 p.185, NSPCC 2010, Knowles 2009).

Children with DAD may, for similar reasons, be unable to form secure friendship bonds with other children, they may seem to skip between friends or friendship groups. This can cause other children to reject the child as they become wary of the child’s inconsistent behaviour, particularly if the child discloses ‘secrets’ to other ‘fiends’ or friendship groups that they had been told in confidence. Children with DAD may also show other signs of *emotional or behavioural disturbance* (Prior 2006. p 185), by behaving ways not expected for a child of their age or at odds with their peer group.

**Reactive Attachment Disorder**

While the child who is showing behaviours consistent with DAD, in that they may be indiscriminate in seeking attachment with others, a child with Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) will often fail to *respond in a developmentally appropriate way to most social interactions (Prior 2006. p 185).* For example they may seem very watchful or avoid or resist comforting by others. They may seem unmoved by greetings or partings or others’ signs of distress. They may show signs of extreme misery, be fearful, aggressive or unresponsive (ibid). A child who shows signs of RAD may be one who has experienced abuse or neglect from caregivers. However, abuse does not always result in RAD.

**Attachment and being a CiC**

Depending on the age a child is placed in care and if they are placed in a family – with foster parents for example or in a children’s home will also have a bearing on the child’s experience of attachment. For example, if a child is placed in a home, while there will be those around who are caregivers in many respects the role of the caregiver in a home – where there are a number of children needing particular attention, is different to that which might, ideally, be offered by a foster family. In an institution it may not be appropriate for staff to allow children to become strongly attached to anyone person, in the main to protect the child who may be moving on to another placement or the staff may themselves leave. Such institutions may in all other respects provide excellent care for the child, but be unable to provide children with the secure attachment experiences they need. Similarly, those working in schools may be sought out by children seeking a secure attachment with a caregiver and this is picked up later in the chapter.

We also explored in chapter 4 how the work of Bronfenbrenner developed the concept of the interrelatedness of children’s growth and develop their experience of society and different social groups. A child who is placed in a children’s home of care institution for any length of time, including where a child is an asylum seeker or refugee child, that they will have a more restricted microsystem and mesosystem. It may also be that because their pool of adults and significant others that they come in to contact with may be more restricted than that of other children, this may limit or distorted how ideas and events are conveyed to them from the wider social sphere of the exosystem. Research shows that children who can be placed in foster care, with adoptive families or returned to their biological families, including grandparents or aunts and uncles if it is not possible for the child to be returned to their parents, before the age of 7 are more likely to be thrive in a way comparable with children who have not been CiC (Prior 2006).

**Activity**

Thinking about schools you have worked in, or the school you currently work in are you aware of:

The school’s policy for meeting the needs of CiC,

Any training the school has offered about the particular needs of CiC?

Would you know who to talk to about working with a CiC?

**Loss**

Loss is the term used to describe the emotional and sometimes physical traumatic reaction some children go though when someone or something of great psychological importance to them is lost. Children experience loss through parental separation and divorce, the death of caregiver, be that parents or significant others. They may have suffered loss because of war or having to flee their home. As we have repeatedly seen throughout this book, because of the diversity that exists in society no two children are likely to have an equal experience of life and because of the innate nature of the child, all children will respond differently to the influences in their environment and the things happening in it around them.

We have already seen how, in considering aspects of children’s development, particularly in relation to their achievement at school we need to be aware of the following four aspects of a child’s development and how the environment the child is in can impact on the long-term development of the child, It’s sense of self and its perception of its identity. Aspects of child development we have considered are the neurological system: these relate to the child’s developing nervous system and brain functioning. We have discussed the psychological system of child development that governs aspects of how the child feels and thinks and their emotions, responses, attitudes. We have explored the cognitive aspect of development which governs the child’s ability to think, reason, and remember and how a child forms developing moral understandings about the societal, cultural and personal rules and norms that abound.

Research has shown that sever trauma can impact significantly on what might be thought of as the usual progression of development in any of these functions, neurological, psychological, cognitive and moral. The impact may be short-lived, or it may be long-term. This is because of what Di Ciacco (2008) terms the *shattering* nature of loss. Di Ciaacco uses the term *shattering* as the child’s experience of loss, say of a parent for example, may seem to shatter or break the *expanding trust in himself, others, and the world* (Di Ciacco 2008. p 22) that the child is only just beginning to develop.

Through our exploration of the notion of identity, Bowlby and Bronfenbrenner we have seen how the early years of a child’s life can have lasting impact on the adult they grow-up to be and the values, attitudes and beliefs they hold. Di Ciacco (2008) suggests that:

*A significant loss can incur a deep psychological wound that sharply alters the child’s worldview and requires intervention to adjust that child’s expectations about life, to give her coping skills for future disappointments and to avoid missteps. With a trauma, a child unconsciously builds an invisible wall to hide her pain and shut out terror* (Di Ciacco 2008. p 24).

Loss can be particularly traumatic for children because as developing human beings they may not yet have the mature coping mechanisms in place to help the deal with the shock of the loss and the strength of the feelings it produces. They also do not have the life experience to be able to begin to contextualise why things have happened and the likelihood of them happening again. If a child has been bereaved or abandoned once, they may not have the cognitive maturity to rationalise how probable it is that it will happen again, indeed in chapter 4 we explored how 50% of remarriages also end in divorce, so a child who may be experiencing loss through the breakdown of the relationship between their biological parents may then have to deal with loss occasioned by the break-down of the remarriage.

Whatever the loss the child has experienced it is likely they may seem to retreat behind an *invisible wall (ibid).* This is a mechanism which allows the chid to protect themselves from the overwhelming feelings they may have and from dealing with the need to suffer others’ feelings or to have to ‘feel’ a response to those around them to may be seeking to comfort them. This approach will shield the child until they may have matured enough to be able to deal with their feelings or contextualise the loss. Di Ciacco (2008) suggests that this may take until the child is a young adult and is *generally able to understand death and loss, because the brain has developed and is now able to evaluate life in a more sophisticated manner using abstract reasoning (Di Ciacco 2008. p 25).*

**Dealing with loss**

People often refer to the ‘different stages of grief’. However how a child experiences grief may vary from child to child and there is no set time or pattern for ‘passing through’ any ‘stages’ linked to the grieving process. The information below will help you to reflect on why a child might be behaving as they are and how their reactions are probably a natural express of their loss, remembering that a child may show signs of grief for losses that include not only bereavement but also if parents separate.

Initially a child will usually exhibit signs of **shock and numbness**, which may seem to pass quite quickly – in minutes, or may last for weeks.

The child may then pass into denial. **Denial** is a protection mechanism, since it allows the child to block the awfulness of what has happened and helps them regulate the strong and possibly overwhelming feelings they may have. Denial is a normal part of the process of dealing with loss. A child may deny the loss has happened altogether, or they may deny the facts of the loss. For example, a child may deny that a parent is no longer living at home because their parents have separated this may particularly difficult to deal with if the parent has moved out to be with another partner or family. The child who is experiencing loss they may explain that their parent is ‘away on holiday’ or ‘staying with their friend’.

The child may understand the facts about the loss – that the parent died in a car accident, but be **unable to comprehend** what the wider implications of that might mean. A young child might know that ‘daddy was so ill he went to seep and didn’t wake up’, but not fully comprehend the permanence of death. Children may seek out stories and films that mirror their own loss as a way of helping them comprehend what has happened. Through exploring how it happened for others, how others felt and how they reacted it provides them with another source to help them understand what has happened to them (Chara 2005, Di Ciacco 2008 p.51, Knowles 2010).

The child may also **deny** that the loss necessitates **the need to change daily routines** or patterns of behaviour. They may be adamant that they want to do things in the same way as they were done before. It is as if not changing anything is part of the process of denying what has happened. Children can be helped to deal with this phase of grief by working with them to explain what will happen next, *who will do what, when, where and how* (Chara 2005, Di Ciacco 2008 p.52, Knowles 2010).

Again depending on how old the child is and their maturity and experience they may be feeling emotions they have never felt before and be unable to name. part of learning about ‘feelings’ is that we usually learn to name our emotions in a context, we are anticipating something nice happening, we feel like running around and laughing and someone says ‘you’re excited’ and gives permission for us to feel the emotion as something positive. In the usual run of things we would not expect that a child was used to experiencing grief, we may not have experienced it ourselves, however in the same way a child needs to know what feeling excited means; they need support in dealing with the **unfamiliar emotions** caused by grief. Emotions, like many of the things we learn we learn in a social context, emotions too have a cultural dimension, so it may be that children will have learn from dominant cultural values in Britain that girls can show *fear and depression, but not anger or aggression* (Di Ciacco 2008 p.52). While it is expected boys will *be more comfortable expressing anger, rather than fear (ibid)*

**Case Studies**

**Sheila** writes: my dad died when I was 7. With my mum we made a scrapbook about him. At the time it seemed a normal thing to do. We went through all the photos we had of him and other things we wanted to keep, like birthday cards that he’d signed, and chose the one’s that were important to us. I remember arguing with my brother about it. Then we wrote things under the things we put in to remind us why we’d chosen them. Looking back on it now I think how difficult it must have been for my mum. I don’t know if it was her idea, or if someone suggested it to her, but it was a brilliant idea – then and now. When he first died we used to look at it a lot and talk about the pictures, what he was doing, what we were doing with him. I’m so glad we’ve got it as I wouldn’t remember half the things now without it. When I got my GCSE results for a while I put the certificates in the back. I know it’s silly really, but I sort of thought ‘well I’m part of him; I got these GCSE’s so they’re part of his life too’. I suppose I wanted him to be part of the process though he wasn’t there any more.

When it happened obviously I knew he was dead, but in a strange way, for a long time, I was also waiting for him to come home. I used to dream about him quite often, he’d gone to work and got held up and he’d keep phoning and saying he’d be home soon.

**Suzanne** says: my parents divorced when I was very young. I used to have memories of when we all lived together, but now I have memories or having memories. I can’t remember any detail, but I know I used to know – if that makes sense. Both parents married again but until I was about 10 I still thought about my mum and dad getting back together. They never talked about their first marriage, it didn’t last long and everyone was so focused on getting on with the here-and-now. But sometimes it felt like it had never happened and that somehow I’d just ‘sprung up’ from nothing. Then many years later, I was in my 20s I think, an aunt gave me two slides showing my mum holding me at a few months old and my dad standing next to her. I had them made into the biggest photographs I could. When I first got them I would stare at them for ages and think ‘see, we were a family’. I could almost feel a hole filling up inside me.

Thinking about children suffering loss may be challenging for you, perhaps because it brings up memories of things that have happened in your own life. Or you may feel helpless in terms of knowing how to support a child. if you have your own memories you are finding it challenging to deal with it may help you to seek some support for yourself. When you are working with children, your first priority is them, so you will be better placed to support them if you are feeling strong yourself.

**Activity**

Many who work with children in schools know children who have or are suffering loss. However, without some training or guidance in the area it can be very hard to know how to help the child and many worry about making the situation worse.

Winnston’s Wish the charity for bereaved children offers support, training and guidance for those in schools working with children suffering loss. Visiting their web-site at: www.winstonswish.org.uk, is a good to look for help, guidance and reassurance that you are doing the correct things. Some of the resources it offers and explains how to use include the two listed below.

**A pocket full of plaster**: a resource comprised of *10 ‘plasters’ of advice* that children suffering loss have found have comforted them (www.winstonswish.org.uk).

**A little box of big thoughts**: a box containing cards, some of which are blank and some have prompts such as *'I love you because...' and 'A favourite memory I have is...'*.

The charity uses and offers this resource as it helps children and families *create meaningful memories of important relationships* particularly *when family life is threatened by serious illness it becomes even more important to find ways to show children they are loved (ibid).*

Researching this site will be helpful to you as a practitioners as it shows how to acknowledge with children their loss, and provide them with support to deal with the feelings and memories they have.

**Adoption**

For many children who are adopted being ‘an adopted child’ will occasion more challenges that those experienced as part of the general challenges of growing up. However, usually, at some point in their lives the adopted child will have feelings of loss that may need to be addressed. A child will need to grieve for the loss of their birthmother and birth family. Where a child was adopted at a very young age and has a ‘usual’ parent – child relationship with their adoptive parents their feelings may also be compounded by feeling guilty about loving the parents they are with but also missing their birth mother. Children do not always have the words or experience to explain how they are feeling. A child who has been adopted at a very young age may have been told their ‘adoption story’ and may often repeat it in what seems to be a very matter of fact way. However, this apparent clarity in the telling of the story may mask very strong feelings a child has about what actually happened. For example, they may have feelings about having ‘lost’ their birth mother or having been rejected and abandoned by their birth mother. These feelings may intensify as the child gets older and begins to understand the wider implications of what it means to be adopted. Similarly the situation may be compounded where the child has been adopted from a birth culture or country different to that they are now living in.

There is considerable support available to both adopted children and adoptive families and the grief and loss experienced by adopted children is well documented. It is now understood, particularly in terms of identity development ,the importance of enabling a child to have contact with their birth culture or country, where they have been adopted in to another culture or removed from the country they were born in. There is also support available to children for when and if they want to make contact with their birth mother. However, what we know to be the case and what the child might actually be experiencing is often odds and a child’s behaviour might not always signal to us that they are dealing with grief or loss. Or we may not be sure how to react to the child. For these reasons it is important to be aware of some of the issues adopted children may need to deal with.

**The impact of being a CiC on the child’s ability to achieve in school**

In 2009 the Department for Children Schools and families published: *Improving the Educational Attainment of Children in Care* (Looked after Children). In part the publication is in response to its findings that: *in 2008, just 14% of children in care achieved 5, A\* – C grade GCSEs* (DCSF 2009a p.2), where the expected average is that 50.7% of children should be achieving *, A\* – C grade GCSEs* (DCSF 2010). It is the DCSF’s concern that CiC are failing to achieve as they should, and in line with their peer group.

In particular the child’s experience of the care system, particularly if they have been moved to and from a number of placement will impact on their engagement with school. The DCSF’s findings (2009a) also show that some of the barriers to achievement CiC encounter at school are because:

*the school system itself doesn’t do enough to help looked after children catch up and keep up – either because schools don’t know that children are in care or because they do not know what can be done to accelerate their learning (ibid).*

While being a CiC may address a child’s immediate needs for a home and care the concern is that CiC do not seem to be thriving at school. Not only are CiC moved from school to schools more times than others in their peer group but research also shows that a higher proportion of CiC are deemed to have an SEN as compared with other members of their peer group: 28%, where as the average is 3% (ibid). lack of educational achievement in the primary phase can have a cumulative effect such that when children who have been CiC leave school a higher proportion of them, compared to the rest of their peer group, will leave at 16 and a disproportionate number will *end up in education, employment or training as their peers and there is a disproportionate probability that they will be teenage parents (ibid).* Research also shows that c*hildren in care who have been moved frequently from placement to placement are nearly three times more likely to be detained in a youth offending institution or prison (*www.communitycare.co.uk 2007).

**Removing barriers to the achievement of CiC – ensuring equal access to achievement in school**

In response to the concern for CIC lack of achievement the DCSF have recommended that the following procedures are put in place to support CiC:

* that admissions procedures prioritise CiC to ensure they have access to the schools best suited to meet their needs;
* that movement between schools should be kept at an absolute minimum;
* that personalised learning is ensured for all CiC and that it will be supported by a Personal Education Allowance of £500;
* that each school is required, by law, to provide a designated teacher who supports the learning of CiC and is aware of the particular needs of CiC ;
* that the school’s leadership team ensure a school ethos of inclusive support for CiC.

(DCSF 2009a)

**Activity**

Below is a checklist that indicates what to look for in terms of the role of the designated teacher and personalised learning for CiC. When you next have the opportunity to be in a school use the checklist to find out what provision is being made for the schools available for the CiC.

The designated teacher is responsible for ensuring that each cic has a **Personal Education Plan (PEP)**, this will include noting any particular needs the child has and strategies that will support the child’s learning.

The £500 Personal Educational Allowance can be used to provide any additional activities the child might benefit from: after school activities, books and other resources, trips - to the theatre, for example, as might usually be provided by parent.

The PEP mat also stipulate that a strategy the child might benefit from is one-to-one tuition. The child should be involved in the drawing up and regular reviews of their PEP.

The designated teacher is responsible for ensuring educational opportunities are created for the child which will provide them with equality of access to learning to enable them to achieve in ways comparable to other children in their peer group. They are responsible for understanding the wider needs of the child – that is, to be aware of the opportunities the child may not have access to, because they are a CiC.

The designated teacher is also responsible for ensuring the child’s social worker and carers are involved in the PEP.

**Teachers as significant others**

At a minimum, between the ages of 5 and 16, *children in the UK spend most of their waking hours in formal education* (Foley et al 2001 p.20). Schools are generally very consistent, safe, ordered places with well-structured days, routines and regulations which are generally appropriately enforced. While this can sometimes seem quite limiting, in many ways it is the role of schools to perform these functions. For CiC who may have experienced very chaotic lives the structure of the school day can be both liberating and confining. It is part of normal child development for child to ‘test’ those who are looking after them. Testing caregivers in this way serves two functions, firstly such testing is often the child, unconsciously testing the caregiver to see if they will still love them unconditionally, even though they have been ‘naughty’ secondly, the child will ‘test boundaries’ to see how far they can go with particular behaviours before they are sanctioned. If children do not learn about boundaries they can make themselves vulnerable, or abuse others – through violent behaviour and bullying, for example. In the usual course of events, children learn to regulate themselves and their behaviours through interaction with parents and other family members, but for a CiC, depending on where they are placed and their life experiences, teachers and other adults in school may be those who the child is testing their behaviour against. While a child may seem to be rebelling against the routines and rules of the school, they are actually testing boundaries and need to know that there are boundaries and this is what makes school secure and safe palces and teachers and other adults people who can be trusted (Waterman 2003). Depending on what a CiC has experienced their behaviour may be very testing for the school, as Waterman (2003) states:

*…the child has to have enough opportunity to ruthlessly use the parent (or therapist [or adult in school]) for his own emotional purposes (as an extension of self ) without any regard for the parent’s needs or individuality (Waterman 2003 p.133).*

Only when a child has been through this phase – which in the normal course of events will happen between the ages of two to seven, depending on when the child has had the opportunity to undergo this developmental process, will the child be *emotionally and cognitively (ibid)* ready to take on the responsibility of managing their responsibility for their own actions and for their actions towards others. For CiC this process may be delayed because there has not yet been a safe enough place for the development to take place.

**Resilience**

Many of the issues explored in this book serve to highlight just how diverse the lives of even very young children can be. It can be tempting to want to romanticise childhood and think of it as charmed time of innocence and joy and this view of childhood is one that is supported by many dominant discourses in society. Many children do enjoy a childhood as loved and cherished children, however, most families and children will experience some life events that will be a testing time for them and their families. Schools have both a legal and moral responsibility to recognise the diverse life experiences children have and to work with children and often their families to support them through these events. It is not possible to ‘fix’ some of the issues children are having to deal with, but what has been shown is that where children are supported through the challenges they are dealing with, whether, in this instance, that is being taken in to care or suffering some form of loss, children will find the resources to deal with the situation and move on. This capacity to adjust to and survive such challenges is known as *resilience — the ability to rebound from crisis and overcome life challenges— (Walsh 2006 p.ix).* Resilience is not necessarily something some children seem to have been born with and others not. Resilience, just as any capacity we have, can be developed and strengthened. Resilience is developed through acknowledging that there is adversity and finding ways of dealing with it. It might not be possible, in the short-term to ‘solve’ the problem that is causing the adversity, but by finding strategies for addressing the aspects of it that can be dealt with the child can be enabled to have some control over some of what is happening to them. This will also make the problem seem less like a chaotic mess about which the child can do nothing. As Walsh (2006) discusses, resilience is developed through working effectively through difficulties, both in terms of dealing with our own reactions and feelings to them and through taking control of those things we can do something about – or solving some of the problems. Resilience is about integrating *the fullness of a crisis experience into the fabric of our individual and collective identity, influencing how we go on to live our lives (Walsh 2006 p.6).*

In the examples of good practice cited earlier in the chapter that discuss how CiC or dealing with loss have been helped most was where they had a designated adult to support them. the role of this adult being both to meet with them regularly and to listen to how the child is really experiencing things. To discuss what might be going well and what is still challenging and, very importantly, it is the role of this adult to hear what the child is saying and act as the child’s advocate to ‘get things done’ for the child. the designated adult – or advocate in this instance is the link for the child between the child and the wider workings of the school and society. Depending on what the needs of the child might be the designated adult can liaise with others in the school, or outside agencies to gain more direct support. Again, as Walsh explores: *with supportive relationships, training, and practice, we can strengthen resilience (Walsh 2006 p.7),* in this way we can enable children to *deal better with traumatic events and life challenges (ibid).* For example, the designated adult may, after having had one of their regular reviews – or ‘check-in chats’ with the child need to then explore with a colleague that the child is anxious because they have been repeatedly told off for being late. Explaining that this is a temporary situation since, because of what is currently happening in the child’s life they are living with their grandmother who lives quite a distance from the school. Indeed the school are very supportive of the grandmother for taking on this responsibility, since she is working with the school to ensure the child continues to attend, providing the child with continuity as well as care. In this way the designated adult can enable the child to develop resilience by seeing that some aspects of the problem can be solved, particularly internal tensions in the school, such as ensuring the child has the necessary resources and access to materials to complete homework – including have somewhere to do the work.

**Further reading**

1. Baker. L., and Credland, S., (Ed) (2004) *Listen up: the voices of homeless children* Shelter
2. Chara, K., A., (2005) *Safe Place for Caleb : An Interactive Book for Kids, Teens and Adults with Issues of Attachment, Grief, Loss or Early Trauma* Jessica Kingsley Publishers
3. Knowles, G., (Ed) (2010) *Supporting Inclusive Practice 2nd Edition* Routledge
4. OfSTED (2008) *Children’s care monitor 2008 Children’s views on how care is doing A report by the Children’s Rights Director* OfSTED
5. Prior, V., (2006) *Understanding Attachment and Attachment Disorders : Theory, Evidence and Practice* Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006. p 15.
6. Walsh, F., (2006) *Strengthening Family Resilience* Guilford Press
7. Waterman, B., (2003) *Birth of an Adoptive, Foster or Stepmother : Beyond Biological Mothering Attachments J*essica Kingsley Publishers

**Chapter 10**

**Enabling equality and achievement for children with disability**

**This chapter explores:**

* Disability and the law in Britain;
* What ‘being disabled’ means;
* Barriers to learning for disabled children, including the prevalence of bullying;
* What constitutes good practice in providing for disabled children and their families;
* Supporting equality of opportunity and the achievement of disabled children.

**Introduction**

*‘The poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by many disabled people is not the inevitable result of their impairments or medical conditions, but rather stems from attitudinal and environmental barriers’…..it is social ‘barriers’ which cause ‘disability’ not impairments or medical conditions….These barriers can be:*

* *prejudice and stereotypes*
* *the way things are organised and run*
* *the way things are designed, such as little or no access to information, buildings and transport (OfSTED 2008a p.13-14).*

In terms of equality of opportunity, disabled children are amongst the most marginalised and underachieving children in mainstream schools (Stobbs 2008). The Disability and Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) and the subsequent Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 have meant that since 2002: *it has been unlawful to discriminate against disabled children and young people in the provision of any service (ibid p.8).* While some of the legislation in these acts requires different things from different providers, in terms of schools’ provision there are two main duties under the DDA which schools have a legal duty to comply with. Schools must not treat disabled children ‘less favourably’ than other children and that they must make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to enable disabled children to attend school and enjoy and achieve at school (ibid p.9). While many school responded well to the DDA and made reasonable adjustments to their provision to enable disabled children to attend school some schools stated that the adjustments they would have to make to meet the needs of disabled children that wanted to attend their school were unreasonable. That is, the adjustments they would have to make could not reasonably be made, in terms of the cost to the school, the expertise the school could offer a disabled child, that the child would not reasonably be able to get to the school or move around the school – because of the nature of the premises once there. In 2005 the DDA was further strengthened by bringing in the *disability equality duty for all ‘public authorities’* (ibid). The disability equality duty (DED) requires that all public authorities, including schools rather than responding to issues relating to disability as they happen become pro-active in putting into place policies and actions that will ensure disabled children have an equally opportunity to achieve alongside able-bodied children. Therefore, while previously a school might have felt that the adjustments it would have to make to its provision to accept a disabled child would be beyond that which might be deemed ‘reasonable’, now all schools must ensure that they are actively seeking to ensure that they are in a position to provide for the needs of a disabled child who may wish to attend the school (Disability Rights Commission 2010).

**Activity**

The principles underpinning the disability equality duty (DED) are that it should actively promote equal opportunities for disabled children. This means schools need to think ahead to prepare and plan for disabled children’s needs, rather than reactively trying to put something in place when a child with a disability wants to come the school.

Schools must ensure that there is no unlawful discrimination in the school, as defined by the DDA. This may mean that all adults who work in the school would benefit from additional professional development to ensure they are up-to-date with the recent legislation and how to engender a culture that supports the achievement of children with disabilities in the school. As we have seen, proving equality of opportunity is about something more that ensuring everyone has ‘the same’. Indeed under DED schools should be actively promoting positive attitudes towards disabled children and adults and ensuring children are not bullied because of their disability.

Schools should also be pro-active in seeking to meet the needs of disabled children even if this means the disabled children in the school are being more favourably treated than the able-bodied children in the school (Disability Rights Commission 2010).

When you are next in a school and have the opportunity:

* Read the school’s polices that deal directly with meeting the needs of disabled children – are there policies that deal specifically with the needs of children who are disabled, or do children with disabilities feature in a range of policies?
* How clear are you about the legislation relating to the Disability Discrimination Act? Does the school have any helpful information about it? Has there been any recent professional development for staff about children with disabilities? If not, is any planned?
* What is the school’s response to the disability equality duty – is there readily available information for all adults working in the school that outlines how the school is dealing with it?
* Is the school actively promoting positive images of disability - what can you see around the school that shows it is?
* Is disability routinely discussed in lessons? Through PSE lessons activities, for example?
* Is work done with parents and in the community to better help understanding about disability?

**What does ‘being disabled’ mean?**

*The DDA says that ‘a person has a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities’ (OfSTED 2008a p.13)*

The Disability Rights Commission in their *Code of Practice for Schools* (2005) define a substantial adverse effect as being *a limitation going beyond the normal differences in ability which might exist among people* (DRC 2005 p.144). These limitations are also ones that are likely to last longer than 12 months, so for example, an able-bodied adult or child might break their leg and have temporary mobility problems, but in the normal course of events their leg should heal and they should return to their usual mobile self within 12 months. In the same way, the notion of ‘normal difference’ recognizes that there are differences between children in terms of their cognitive abilities for example, or their height, their ability to run quickly or not, however these differences usually falls into a range of what is usually expected in a child of a given age. Anything that impacts on a child’s capacity to move around, manipulate objects, physical co-ordination, ability to control bodily functions, speak, hear, see, cognition – including concentration and being able to perceive danger, that falls outside this usual range, may have a disability (*ibid* p.145). Particularly if the child is limited in doing those normal activities which other children of the same age can undertake. However, what it is perhaps most important to bear in mind is that a child may have a physical disability but this does not mean they will, therefore, have a cognitive impairment. Having a physical disability does not necessarily impact on a child’s ability to learn – or to want to do all the things they see other children doing (Westwood 2007 p.34).

Case study

My brother Nehanda is 10. When you just see him he looks fine, but he has problems with learning things, so he doesn’t know about what you should behave like when you’re out. He also can’t talk which is why I am telling you all this. At home we know about Nehanda and what he likes, when he’s happy and when he is upset. He likes it when I read books to him and tell him stories with these puppets I’ve got. He likes pizza and he likes to dance!

When I was little I used to hate going out with him as it was so embarrassing, people would stare and or, if he was behaving badly, move away from him. Now I’m older I just get angry. We can’t go anywhere where we have to wait for something or queue up – so we can’t go to any theme parks and go on rides. We can’t go out and eat in restaurants as his behaviour ‘upsets the other customers’. It’s really hard to do something like go on holiday and go somewhere really different, or even to take him swimming at the local leisure centre. It’s so unfair, it’s not just Nehanda it affects, it also affects my life and mum’s. He’s not violent or anything, he just needs people to be more open minded about what they expect from him. People at the local shops and the library, who have known him for years are OK, it’s just strangers. You’d think people nowadays would know about disability and make the effort, but it’s always my mum having to say ‘oh I’m so sorry about my son’s behaviour’. I won’t say sorry, I just stare back.

The social model of disability

While the DDA outlines what disability means in terms of physical and sensory impairment, this model of establishing ‘disability’ has been criticised. Discussing disability in this way problematises the concept of disability. This is evident from the language used to discuss disability, where terms such as ‘impairment’ and ‘limitation’ are used. In many ways it is the language of the able-bodied who have the world constructed to meet their needs and therefore view those with disabilities as being limited, because the able-bodied have built a world of stairs and narrow doors. Who only present information is ways that have to be seen or heard. The social model of disability explores the idea that:

The 'problem' of disability results from social structures and attitudes, rather than from a person’s impairment or medical condition…….. the aim of which is to understand and dismantle the barriers which exclude and limit the life chances of disabled people (Disability Rights Commission 2010a)

Issues of access, either to places or information are technical problems which, compared to changing peoples attitudes, are quite straightforward to address. Where the challenge lies, in ensuring children with particular physical or sensory needs are enabled to have the equality of opportunity to achieve, is more often with changing people’s attitudes to enabling it to happen, as much as making ‘disabled friendly’ changes to the environment. As we can see from what Nehanda’s sister says, it is others values, attitudes and beliefs that are limiting the life of her brother and also her life and that of her mother.

One of the principles of the disability equality duty is that children and adults, who have a sensory or physical disability, are consulted and their views sought and acted upon to ensure things are effectively improved for them (Disability Rights Commission 2010 P.8).

**The voice of the child with disability**

As with many activities we engage children in at school, it can be very tempting to plan and organise something for children that we believe they will find motivating and interesting. It can be a very illuminating experience to talk to children about what they do actually find interesting about their learning and in what ways they think it could be even more stimulating. The currect OfSTED Inspection Framework for Primary Schools requires, as part of the inspection process, that children’s opinions about the school are canvassed and that inspectors write a letter to the children explaining the inspectors’ findings after the inspection.

In the same way, in terms of seeking to ensure equal opportunities for children with disability, schools have often fallen into the trap of assuming they know what the children need. This may be true with regards to ensuring access to and around the school and other forms of practical support, but this is more about the disability rather than the child. In 2009 the National Children’s Bureau published *What is the Disabled Children’s manifesto for Change? (*National Children’s Bureau 2009), where in canvassing children’s views about what they wanted to be happening for them, the children and young people said:

“Give me a choice and don’t assume you know what I want.”

“ I get fed up because there aren’t enough places to go with suitable activities for young people.” Patrick

“ You can’t get to places, like if you want to go and meet your friends in town.” Kim (National Children’s Bureau 2009 p.5)

“ When they don’t talk to you or talk to your parents…it’s like I’M HERE!” Danielle (ibid p.6)

Since the DDA and increased access to mainstream schools for children with disabilities, what many adults working with children with disabilities have found is how like all children, children with disabilities are. Once people have learnt to see beyond the *problem* of the disability, they understand that children with disabilities, just like all children, can be naughty, anxious, funny, have their likes and dislikes, may not want to do maths today but do want to use the computer.

Research also shows that in schools where all children know about disability and there is a culture of respect and mutual support for all children, where it is expected that all children will be included in all activities, then all children, including children with disabilities thrive.

**The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice**

The *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2001)* is the DfES/DCSF document used in schools to outline how schools should work with children and families with special needs, including disabilities. The *SEN Code of Practice defines* physical and mental *impairment* in the following way:

There is a wide spectrum of sensory, multi-sensory and physical difficulties. The sensory range extends from profound and permanent deafness or visual impairment through to lesser levels of loss…Physical impairments may arise from physical, neurological or metabolic causes that only require appropriate access to educational facilities and equipment; others may lead to more complex learning and social needs; a few children will have multi-sensory difficulties some with associated physical difficulties (DfES 2001: 88)

By mental impairment the document means children who have learning difficulties and or impairment resulting from, or consisting of, a mental illness. A child who has suffered severe disfigurement is also covered by the DDA since this is an impairment which will require the school to be sensitive to not only the condition the child has, but also the social and psychological challenges that the condition might occasion.

Also covered by the DDA are some medical conditions, particularly those that may change or degenerate as the child gets older, for example, muscular dystrophy. The DDA is also very specific in stating that children and adults with cancer, multiple sclerosis and HIV infection are covered by the DDA definition of disabled; as well as children and adults registered blind or partially sighted. the underlying principle of what constitutes disability is understanding that the term refers to the long-term effect on a child’s ability to carry out normal everyday activities.

**Bullying**

There is a range of research (Lamb 2009, OfSTED 2008, DfES 2006) that shows that children with disabilities are more likely to be bullied than any other group of children. The 2008 OfSTED report *Children’s care monitor 2008 Children’s views on how care is doing A report by the Children’s Rights Director* found:

*…children with a disability were more likely to be bullied. Twenty per cent of children with a disability were being bullied often or always, compared with 9% for all children, and 43% of children with a disability said they were never or hardly ever bullied, compared with 67% for everyone(OfSTED 2008 p.14).*

That the bullying of children with disabilities seems to go unreported, or unnoticed or is even more acceptable than bullying of other children is reflected in wider society’s seeming almost *acceptance* of bullying of disabled adults.

**Bullying and disability**

In 2007 Fiona Pilkington set fire to her car killing both herself and her disabled daughter. At the inquest into the deaths the coroner and jury heard how Fiona and her son and daughter had been subjected to violence and abuse from, mainly youths, in their community. *Ms Pilkington's son Anthony, who has severe dyslexia, was locked in a shed at knifepoint and beaten with a metal bar (BBC 2009b).* Fiona’s daughter Francecca, who had learning difficulties, was shouted at by the gang and told *to lift up her nightdress. They also pelted the family's home with eggs, flour and stones and shouted insults about the children’s disabilities (ibid).*

Although Fiona had contacted Leicestershire Police had 33 times between 2000 and 2007 and had contacted them 13 times *in the 10 months before her death…….police filed the incidents as the less serious "grade two" and considered her to be "over-reacting" (ibid).*

While this might seem to be a particularly tragic and unusual case there is evidence that the BBC have been reporting that bullying of children and adults with disabilities is higher than for other members of the population since 1999 (BBC 1999). Similarly in 1999 Mencap, the charity organisation that supports the needs of those with learning difficulties published Living In Fear its research in the experiences of being disabled and being bullied (Mencap 1999).

As we have already discussed, it is often people values, attitudes and beliefs about disability that causes those who are disabled to experience discrimination, including bullying. Where schools and able-bodied children are working with the belief that: *students with disabilities are more like all other children than they are different from them (Westwood 2007 p.17),* disabled children are likely to experience an inclusive learning environment that meets their needs. Similarly,schools and need to keep in mind that children: *with a particular disability…as a group are just as diverse in their personal characteristics, behaviour, interests, and learning aptitudes as any other group of students* (ibid). Sometimes, there can be the assumption that the disabled child is the disability. That is, all children who, for example, have cerebral palsy, can be ‘treated’ as if they were a homogenous group rather than understanding that, as with all children, we are working with indidivuals and individuals who have their own identity and personality.

**Stopping bullying**

The resource pack *Make Them Go Away* (2009) outlines some helpful guidance for schools to support them in understanding and dealing with bullying of disabled children.

Bullying of this nature can, as with racism, be unwitting or institutional. The bullying experienced by disabled children may be covert through being in an environment where there are *negative attitudes to disability*.

A child with a disability may be more prone to being bullied as they may *find it more difficult to resist bullies* or *be isolated and without protective friends.* Similarly, *they may not understand or recognise that they are bullied; have difficulty reporting bullying* or be able give details about the events that have happened.

Disabled children may also repeat bullying behaviours they have been subject to and *be unaware that they are bullying others.* Disabled children may also *find it difficult to regulate their anger and emotions* and, like many children, need support in dealing with their feelings.

(DCSF 2009b p.8)

**A checklist of good practice in working with children with disability**

In most instances, again as with many children, it will be the child’s parents that the school will first have contact with. For parents of disabled children research shows that some of the things that they are most concerned about are explored below. As you read through the list, you might reflect on schools you have experience of and think about when you have seen this good practice in place.

Parents of children with disabilities want to know that their child will be safe, particularly in terms of knowing that the school has made, or has the ability to make adjustments to ensure their child is truly included. Will their child be physically safe moving around the school, and will they be emotionally safe – does the school and do the other children understand about disability?

**Case study**

Fiona says: Jamie has cerebral palsy, when we were looking for pre-school provision for him because he was easy to carry around and a sweet looking, quiet boy they the place we first approached said ‘oh yes, we’ll have no problem taking him’. But what people don’t realise is that this is with Jamie for life, it’s not like a cold, it doesn’t go away after a few days. To begin with there were problems like if the key worker who did Jamie’s exercises with him was ill, they wouldn’t be able to take him that day. Which meant I would have to take a day off work. Or they didn’t have enough experience of the condition, so they’d be on the phone saying ‘Mrs Reid, it is Ok if Jamie does so-and-so……..Is it Ok if we let Jamie…..’ Or there were things that he could do and they wouldn’t let him because they thought he couldn’t. I know I sound a bit mean, but sometimes I did think ‘well these people are the professionals and they’re asking me’.

When we began to look around for a school for Jamie we had a much better idea of what to expect and what sorts of questions to ask. When I first met the headteacher I think she thought ‘we’ve got a right interfering mother here’ and we did have some teething problems at first. I said I wanted the other children to know that Jamie had cerebral palsy and I wanted it explained to them and even the other parents if necessary, she was a bit taken aback by that, but after Jamie had been there a couple of days and the children asked questions and one of the parents was overheard telling her daughter not to play with him as ‘he wasn’t all there’ she did what we had suggested. We have a really good relationship now and because they are the professionals they say, well we think Jamie should be learning this and trying this and sometimes I think ‘oh yeah?’ But they have been right and they have got more from him and expect more of him than I do sometimes. He’s even been on a residential trip with them – they have been great.

A key worker, or outreach worker has proved to be a very useful support mechanism for the child the family and the school. Someone whose role is not to teach, but to coordinate the team who can provide the support for the child, including being able to liaise with external agencies keeps the communication between all parties open is a good way of ensuring equality of opportunity for the child (Stobbs 2008 p.31).

Schools receive additional funding to support children with disabilities and it can be tempting to think that all a child’s needs can be met by having someone there to provide one-to-one support for them. It is rarely the case that a child needs, or benefits from, one-to-one support all the time. It may be the role of the supporting adult is to help the child become more independent and to work with the school and the other children to ensure the child with disabilities is in an inclusive environment, so that it is the environment that supports the child, not one person.

*Some children need 1:1 at particular times and some settings have clearly considered carefully how to target support at the most critical times of the session. These times will be different according to the needs of the child (Stobbs 2008 p.32).*

Where children with disabilities thrive in mainstream schools is where there is a whole school ethos that supports them and the staff attitude is one of ‘can do’ (ibid p.33).

**Particular skills, particular staff**

All children with disabilities will benefit from being in a school where the adults in the school have had some training about working with children with disabilities. Some of the conditions children will come to school with will have specific requirements that will be better supported if those working with the child have had specific training to meet those needs.

Stobbs (2008) states that in supporting children with disabilities *there are layers of skill and expertise that contribute to the inclusion of disabled children (Stobbs 2008 p.34*). In her report for the DCSF she outlines the training and skills that will best support the child and the school.

**Generic learning support skills**

These are skills that those working with the child will use all the time and are not necessarily specific to working with children with disabilities, these are: *observation, behaviour management, inclusive play, working with parents (ibid).*

**Specific skills**

These are skills that adults might require specific training in or knowledge of to ensure they can meet the needs of children with disabilities *for example: alternative methods of communication, moving and handling (ibid).*

**Individual techniques**

These will be skills and knowledge needed to support the individual needs of specific children *for example: the administration of a particular medicine, a particular method of communication or a particular feeding technique (ibid).*

**Multi-agency working**

Since the inception of the ECM agenda all schools have been working to develop their multi-agency practice. Multi-agency working is particularly beneficial for children with disabilities as it can:

* *reduce the number of appointments and visits that families need to make;*
* *make for better co-ordinated provision;*
* *enable disabled children to join in activities with their peers; and act as outreach and draw children and families into provision that they might not have visited otherwise (Stobbs 2008 p.35).*

Many local authorities, particularly through their development of Children’s Centers provide multi-agency support for disabled children and their families, which can also be accessed by schools to help support children to achieve in their learning. Such provision will include *weekly drop-in play and talk sessions for under-fives (ibid p.14),* which can be particularly supportive for the family of a disabled child. Such centres will also provide access to *speech and language therapists and family support workers (ibid).* Often a centre will be able to provide specialist:

..sessions are designed to promote children’s play, listening, talking and social skills in a group setting and to support parents in promoting their child’s communication skills through play and everyday activities. Children may be referred to the groups where there are concerns about their play or communication skills (ibid).

**How *The Children’s Plan* seeks to support the achievement of children with disabilities**

In 2007 the DCSF published its first *Children’s Plan* (DCSF 2007) which further supports the government’s realization of the Every Child Matters agenda. In terms of how children can be supported and provided with the equality of opportunity to ‘enjoy and achieve’ one of its central principles is that of personalised learning. The notion of personalised learning as a strategy to support the achievement of children with disabilities was introduced in the Department for education and Skills (DfES) document *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DFES 2004). The notion of how personalised learning can provide equality of opportunity for children with disabilities to achieve is outlined below.

**Personalising learning for children with disabilities**

Personalised learning is about ensuring the learning activities provided for children reflect the individual needs and interests of the child. One of its central principles is that all children can achieve in their learning and that those working with them should not lower their expectations because of the particular needs or challenging circumstances a child has. It may be the case that some careful thought will have to be given to how the child can access the learning, but know what interests and motivates the child will provide an entry point into the learning.

Personalised learning activities are characterised by the features given below.

* The planning of the activity being informed by discussion with the child – for example, if you want to develop a particular writing genres with a child, writing a report or instructions, discuss with the child and provide an actual experience they can write about.
* Depending on the learning intended, not all proof of learning needs to be written down. Provide a choice to pupils as to how they can present their learning – it might be possible to do it though making a model, using rap, making a poster, etc.
* Those planning learning activities worry that personalised learning will involve having to devise separate learning activities for every child in the class. This is not necessary. You need to decide what the main learning objective is about and ensure there is enough breadth in the way you have designed it such that there is more than one way of demonstrating the outcome of the learning. What will then happen is that the children will self-select themselves into ‘groups’ who want to pursue the learning in a similar way.

The important things, with regard to personalised learning, to keep in mind are:

*• having high expectations of all children*

*• building on the knowledge, interests and aptitudes of every child*

*• involving children in their own learning through shared objectives*

*and feedback (assessment for learning)*

*• helping children to become confident learners (DfES 2004 p.55)*

*Effective teaching for children with SEN shares most of the characteristics of effective teaching for all children (ibid).*

Although the discussion about personalised learning forms part of this chapter on children and disability, as with many of the ideas covered in this book, well constructed learning experiences benefit all children. That is, in this instance personalised learning is a good learning activity that encourages achievement. We have discussed it here to show how it can benefit children with a disability, however, as with many of the learning approaches discussed in this book, although discussed with reference to a particular group of children, are approaches to learning that will benefit all children. What the diversity, equality and achievement debate has served to do is raise awareness of what constitutes good learning for particular groups of children and has, by default, often improved the learning experiences of all children. Essentially, where you seek to be working to develop your professional practice to improve your ability to provide motivating and interesting learning experiences for children, whatever prompts you to begin to research how you can meet the needs of particular children you work with, your whole practice as a professional will become better developed. You may have picked up this book because you wanted to know more about working with children from a different cultural background to yourself, or children who are a different gender to you, or are differently-abled to you. Whatever your reason for reading this book, or parts of it, the skills, knowledge and understanding you will have explored will have a positive impact on your work with all children, whatever their culture, ethnicity, gender, class or background.

**Further reading**

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