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HOW TO SUPPORT PUPILS TO LEARN ABOUT DISABILITY

Disability does not often appear within the National Curriculum, however it is estimated that 11% of children in the UK are disabled, meaning that it is likely that you will have disabled pupils in your classroom and within your education setting.

Additionally, it is likely that most, if not all, of the pupils in your school will have disabled friends or family members.

It is therefore important that pupils are supported to learn about disability in a way that helps them question dominant stereotypical views about disabled people that they might see in the media, for instance that disability is a tragedy or burden or that disabled people are a source of inspiration or have superpowers.

Together with Professor Priya Lalvani (Montclair State University, USA), to whom we are very grateful, we provide some suggestions as to how you can infuse learning about disability rights and inclusion into your curriculum to embed learning about disability within existing curricula.

These are just a few examples, we are sure you can think of many more!

- **History**
- **English literature/language**
- **Science**
- **Geography**
- **Maths**
- **Art/Drama**

History

- **When learning about other civil rights movements, learn about the disability rights movement too.**
- **When learning about how laws are passed, learn about the Equalities Act 2010 and the role disabled people played in its conception.**
- **When discussing the Holocaust, include a discussion about the T4 programme and how disabled people were treated. Discuss the history of eugenics.**
- **Recognise the important contributions that disabled people have made through history.**
- **Ask pupils to do an oral history interview with a family member or friend who is disabled.**

Geography

- **Research employment rates or other key statistics relating to disabled people. Compare with other countries or regions.**
- **Draw a map of the school or local community, marking access features on it (eg ramps, lifts).**

Maths

- **Learn about accessibility and use maths concepts to investigate how accessible the school is. For example, counting accessible lifts; measuring the width of doorways or the height of sinks. Plot the data and create graphs, etc.**
- **Prepare an accessibility report based on the data about your school building or playground.**
- **Study the mathematical basis of Braille code and use Braille for message codes.**

English literature/language

- **Consider ableist messages and portrayals of disability in popular fiction and entertainment (eg Of Mice and Men, Dr Strangelove, Rain Man). Contrast with more complex and fully developed disabled characters (eg Peanut Butter Falcon).**
- **Read memoirs of disability rights activists.**
- **Write a persuasive letter or create a video to make recommendations for change.**
- **Ask your class to write children's stories with portrayals of disabled people that challenge common stereotypes or misconceptions.**

Art/drama

- **Create a video or collectively write a script for a play which takes on a topical issue about disability.**
- **Learn about disabled artists and writers, explore their art.**
- **Create a 3D model of a fully accessible playground or classroom.**
- **Design a a play that incorporates Makaton signing.**

Other ideas

- **Think about the language you use and whether it is unintentionally exclusionary.**
- **Select books that represent all forms of diversity including disability.**
- **Design field trips to conduct an 'accessibility survey' assessing public buildings, parks or recreation spaces in the community to check if all people would be able to access them. Look out for ramps, lower curbs, how easy it is to read signs, use of Braille etc.**
- **Ask pupils to prepare a photo essay about the barriers disabled people face in the local community.**
- **When you invite guest speakers from the community, ensure that disabled people are represented in an authentic way that does not perpetuate stereotypes.**
- **Learn Makaton sign language and incorporate it into all school events.**
- **Incorporate UK Disability History Month into your school/college calendar.**

Importantly, when teaching about any topic, you might ask yourself:

- **From whose perspective does this originate?**
- **What dominant narratives about disability are presented in this lesson? What does this teach us about disability?**
- **What are the counter narratives that are present in this lesson?**
- **Do you think this lesson promotes or disrupts ableism? Why?**

We are very grateful to Professor Lalvani for her contribution to this resource.

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