

## **Ideas to avoid reinforcing stereotypes when planning to introduce a global perspective using images and artefacts**

### ***Introduction***

It is not easy to challenge, even recognise stereotypes at times. This guidance provides suggestions to help children recognise, understand and challenge stereotypes and help teachers to choose appropriate stimuli and then confidently facilitate a discussion whilst avoiding reinforcing stereotypes.

The first stereotype to challenge is the one that assumes that a global perspective always refers to other countries. The global can always be found in the local and vice versa, whether this be the food we eat, the music we listen to, the media we read/watch/listen to, the diversity of people living with the UK. This is an important point to always bear in mind if you are considering introducing a global perspective in your classroom. Always ask yourself first if you can use an image/artefact from your home town/city/county/country.

### ***Choosing appropriate stimuli - adapted from 'Evaluating Artefacts' Resource Centre for Multicultural Education, Leicester***

- What is your objective in using this image/artefact? (it could be any one or several of the following – what is important is to be clear yourself)
  - to bring in global perspectives within a specific curriculum area
  - as part of a specific curriculum area/scheme of work
  - to bring in global perspectives without any other context
  - to illustrate similarities/commonalities in lives of children/adults around the world
  - to illustrate local/global inequalities and explore the reasons behind them
  - other reasons
  
- How much preliminary work should be done before the pupils work with the image/object?
- What do you think the pupils will gain from working with this image/ artefact?
- Can you anticipate any possible negative comments made about this image/artefact?
- Would the handling of the object cause offence to anyone (e.g. certain religious artefacts)?
- Can you explain the cultural context of the image/artefact (doesn't have to be in great detail)?
- If it is to be used in isolation how can it best be placed in context?
- Does this image/artefact link with the children's lives, if so how?
- Does it portray people, especially from Southern (developing) countries being in control/active rather than as victims/passive? (*unless related to extraordinary circumstances e.g.: natural disaster, war*)
- Do you want your children to compare life as depicted in an image/video and/or the technology inherent in an artefact with their own experiences? If yes, why? If not, encourage the children to reflect on the subject matter in front of them without comparing it to their own lives.

- If you are making comparisons between images/objects – be clear why - and ensure that the language being used accentuates positive aspects of both situations:
  - Images - are we comparing like with like? E.g.:
    - middle class to middle class
    - city to city
    - rural to rural – e.g. should we introduce rural farming life from another country when we perhaps haven't studied rural farming life in Britain
  - Artefacts/objects - are we comparing like with like?
    - 'everyday' – clothes, cooking utensils, food, transport etc.
    - 'exotic' – e.g. ceremonial and/or traditional clothing
      - weddings, funerals etc.
      - traditional dance costumes, e.g. English Morris dancers and Balinese Gamelan dancers

As well as distinguishing between 'everyday' and 'exotic' items it is important to establish whether the artefacts/objects are:

- traditional or contemporary
- made for the local population or for tourists
- typical of that country/region or international/universal (e.g. soft drinks, burgers, mobile phones, football)

By establishing these distinctions the children can start to appreciate the complexities surrounding artefacts/culture. For example:

- it could be argued that football is a big part of British/English culture but it is also international;
- 'Exotic' ceremonial wedding dresses could be very traditional or contemporary.

## ***Enabling children to recognise, understand and challenge stereotypes***

2 possible strategies:

***Foundation and KS1 children:*** choose a stimulus that challenges stereotypes, e.g. non-traditional gender working roles - female lorry driver, male ballet dancer etc. (this avoids reinforcing stereotypes by meeting/challenging them head on).

***KS2, 3 & 4 children:*** choose a stimulus that will help children recognise, understand and critically challenge any stereotypes that may arise (this avoids reinforcing stereotypes by acknowledging and then breaking down what a stereotype actually is)

Activities to recognise and understand stereotypes:

1. Start by examining a commercially produced 'country artefact box' and discussing the contents. Follow this by asking your class in groups to design a British artefact box of 10 things, e.g. fish and chips, the Queen, red buses. Afterwards ask if they feel that all these things represent them. Are they all stereotypical? Can this be avoided? Was the 'country artefact box' stereotypical?

Finally bring in personal images/artefacts and/or take digital photos of your school and immediate surroundings. Collate these to form a class/school artefact box. Discuss this box. Discuss the complexity of trying to represent one culture/country with an artefact box.

2. *The Big City pack: A photo pack for 5 – 11 year olds, Oxfam 1994.* Consists of photos and activities around the photos of 4 cities from around the world (one city is in Britain). **Photo activity: Locations - Britain or not?** 8 photos - write down for each photo Britain or not Britain and what you have based your decision on. The activity aims to challenge children's (possibly stereotypical) views of Southern and Northern (economically developing and developed) countries.

When children can recognise and understand stereotypes they are ready to critically challenge them, e.g. when using several images of a place and/or situation you could use a mix of images and then deconstruct them, e.g.

1. Some images that do reinforce stereotypes
2. Some images that challenge stereotypes
3. Some images that are more neutral

### ***Enabling teachers to confidently facilitate a discussion and avoid reinforcing stereotypes***

However carefully the stimulus is chosen and planned for, young children are naturally curious and will ask questions, some of which may be 'awkward'. When facilitating a discussion, some suggestions to bear in mind are:

- Be prepared for comments/questions that may suggest that stereotypes have been reinforced. Stereotypical views of rural poverty in Southern (developing) countries can produce feelings of guilt, pity and fear and attitudes of superiority, paternalism, benevolence and patronage. Common beliefs could be:
  - 'the people in the picture are poor but happy'
  - 'It is their fault that they are poor'
  - 'It is their government's fault that they are poor – due to corruption'
  - 'Aren't I lucky – I don't have to walk miles for water/I have electricity etc. etc'
  - 'We should fundraise to help the poor people'

Common questions could be:

- 'Why is that machine so old fashioned?'
- 'Why is he not wearing shoes?'
- In responding to any of these questions or statements of belief, teachers have the following options:
  - Give as much information as you can from your preparation in choosing the stimulus, bearing in mind your objective(s) for using the image/artefact - you do have to have some background contextual knowledge when using an image/artefact but you don't have to be an expert

- Don't be afraid to say: 'I don't know why – shall we try and find out together. Where can we find more information?'
- Field the statement/question back to the children: 'Why do you think he is not wearing any shoes?' This can start a dialogue whereby the teacher could ask the children 'Why would it be difficult in this country to not wear shoes? Possibly because of it being too cold/dirty/broken glass and/or dog mess on the ground'
- Try and avoid fudging your answer thus allowing children to learn that some subjects are taboo and that they shouldn't ask questions about them.

### ***Further support and reassurance:***

It is indeed, not easy to challenge or even recognise stereotypes at times. A final word of reassurance:

- Talk to colleagues – discuss successes and challenges
- Find further support: LEAs, Development Education Centres (DECs, e.g. MUNDI), Non-governmental organisations (NGOs, e.g. Oxfam etc.)
- It is better to have a go and not do it very well than fudge an answer thus allowing children to learn that some subjects are taboo and that they shouldn't ask questions about them.
- Challenging stereotypes and dealing with controversial issues in the classroom is a journey – don't be afraid to involve the pupils in this journey by sometimes admitting 'I don't know – let's find this out together'

### ***Example case study- Fernwood Infants in Nottingham, UK linked with Hatfield Infants in Harare, Zimbabwe***

The link teacher had access to a resource produced by a well-known NGO that had two posters depicting a day in the life of a girl in a town in the UK, and a boy in rural Africa. The posters gave the impression of a very unequal life, with the boy having to do a lot of extra work, walking many miles to school, living in a house with no running water, and having no time to play. The girl in comparison was driven to school, had no household responsibilities, lived in a comfortable house, and had time to play and dress up. In addition, the suggested language emphasised how difficult the boy's life was, and how pleasant the girl's life was. As well as all of the above the posters were suggesting to compare a country to a continent, thus reinforcing one of the biggest stereotypes ever produced, that Africa is a country. The teacher had produced an alternative set of images based on a pupil in her school, and a boy in Hatfield Infants. Both came from middle class backgrounds, and both lived in a city. The new images and text were far more comparable, showing both helping in the home and having time to play. This emphasised the need to compare like with like, as opposed to skewed images which lent themselves to unfair comparisons.