

Teaching for **SOLIDARITY**

Vision and Values: A community cohesion project Session Two – Difference and diversity

Aims

- To recognise that there has always been hostility to those perceived as 'other'
- To explore some of the many reasons for this hostility
- To reflect on the consequences for individuals and society

Outcome

- Students will be able to describe some of the many roots and consequences of fear of 'difference'

Resources (depending on your choices)

- Access to www
- Copies of Kia Abdullah's article
- Copies of cutting about Sophie Lancaster
- DVD – *If I could change one thing*
- Handout on social and medical models of disability
- Copies of *What Do You Do with a Variation* poem
- Copies of *School on the Edge of the Forest*

Introduction

There has always been hostility towards perceived difference between people and attempts to scapegoat e.g. In 1666 the Great Fire of London destroyed many buildings and killed six people. 'Foreigners' and Roman Catholics became The Enemy and there was a climate of paranoia. Frenchmen were attacked for carrying tennis balls thought to be grenades! And a Portuguese man was arrested for 'picking up a piece of bread in a suspicious way!'

Now, with mass media, education, global movement and trade, there is still stereotyping, mistrust and fear of 'the other'. What is 'normal'? Who decides what's normal? Introduce various examples of attitudes towards 'difference'

'You brought it on yourself by looking different' (Black woman 1970s quoted on *Dread, Beat an' Blood* Radio 4 22 July 2008)

'Being different incited such hostility' (Yasmin Hai in *The Making of Mr Hai's Daughter – Becoming British*) British Asian girl 1980s.

There are attacks on and negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. Seen as 'less than'. Show 7 min DVD featuring young people with disabilities, called *If I could change one thing* Made by Every Disabled Child Matters and shown to packed houses

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at the party conferences in 2007. Young people with disabilities talk about wanting peace and things to do in their leisure time, wanting to see more of their dad etc.

Advert on the tube: 'It's not the wheelchair that gets in the way of sex. It's the obstacles in people's minds.'

See Teachers' notes on the social psychology experiment involving a man falling down the stairs at Liverpool St station and altruism.

Why do some people disapprove of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller lifestyle?

Kia Abullah (young journalist who writes for *The Guardian* on labels, 'immigrant' and fear of difference.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/may/01/relationships.gender>

Sophie Lancaster died following the horrific attack on her and her partner Rob in Stubbeylee Park, Bacup, Lancashire on 11th August 2007. Sophie and Rob dressed in their unique way, expressing their individuality as creative artistic people and Sophie was murdered because of the way she looked.

<http://www.myspace.com/inmemoryofsophie> to see film of her funeral and:

www.itv.com/PressCentre/Tonight/Ep45FixingBrokenBritainWk2608/default.html

There are many uncomfortable questions related to diversity and difference e.g. why are Muslims stopped and searched so often? Why is homophobia still widely acceptable and why is the Anglican Church obsessed by it when millions are starving? Why is the number of Black people in prison so disproportionately high? Why is the Bangladeshi community in London so poor? Why are there so few women in Parliament? **These are key Citizenship questions.**

John O'Donohue, writer and poet on difference:

One of the great mysteries of the world is the mystery of difference. No two things are ever the same...In a landscape, each stone, tree and field are different. But difference doesn't seem to trouble nature. Each stone dwells in its own shape of stillness...Outside, millions of years pass, but can never enter or intrude on it. For humans though, difference is always intense. No two faces are ever the same and behind each face there is a hidden world that no-one else can see. Each life is a narrative that remains mostly hidden. This is why it's so difficult to be human...You live in two worlds....The outer world of name, family, address and role and the inner world which is profoundly nameless, where no-one else can enter and which remains intimate though unknown largely to you. Yet so much depends on how you see and understand this amazing concealed world that you carry round every moment.

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If you live only in the outside world your heart will wither in the famine fields of image, information and noise. You will become so weary and worn, struggling on the treadmills of competition, impression and pretence, that you will never learn to be yourself. One of the most noble duties of a human being is to learn the art of individuality....Each one of us is completely individual, no-one else sees the world as you do, no-one else feels things as you, no-one else has the view from where you stand and no other carries the memories and gifts and wounds that you do.

Activity 1: Attitudes towards 'difference'

Poem – *What do you do with a variation?* and questions which follow (taken from Facing History and Ourselves key textbook *The Holocaust and Human Behaviour*).

Activity 2: What do we mean by 'difference'? Brainstorm and record some of the domains of difference (with reference to the table in Teachers' Notes Session 2)

Activity 3: *The School on the Edge of the Forest* from *Good Thinking – Education for Citizenship and Moral Responsibility Volume 3* by Ted Huddleston and Don Rowe (Addresses schools in a pluralist society).

Discussion

Are we **born** with a fear of difference? Where does the fear come from? And the notion of 'us' and 'them'? Is it biological, psychological, historical, social, political, taught via religion? The media? At school? Do we need 'enemies'? Can laws affect attitudes?

Tension around immigration and services – a case study

Ama Sumani from Ghana had a life-threatening illness and was sent back to Ghana from the UK in 2008 because her treatment was deemed too expensive.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-507058/Immigration-officials-send-terminally-ill-Ghanaian-woman-home.html>

She died. Should she have been sent back or treated here? Set up a spectrum of views. Ask students to take their place in a line (one end = agree she should have been sent to Ghana and at the other end, those who think she should have continued to be treated in the UK). Defend your position and you can move up and down the line as you change your opinion. There are no simple answers. Discussion might include: Ethics, morality, values, the concept of people who are 'our own'. Who are 'we'? There are people who define themselves as belonging to one race only, the human race. What is your response?