

# Research to reflect on: developing a culturally responsive pedagogy



## Helpful practices for supporting and valuing the cultural identities of disadvantaged and Black pupils\*

A culturally responsive pedagogy can be defined as a teaching philosophy that is premised on the idea that valuing the cultural world of our pupils is central to learning. Staff need to take time to understand the sociocultural worlds of their pupils, listen to them, value them and incorporate their cultural identities and histories within teaching practice.

Such an approach empowers pupils intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically and prepares them for a contemporary multicultural and multiracial world (Lucas & Villegas, 2013; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter, 2011). It also enhances their cognitive development and self-esteem, enables children to express (and take pride in) their own cultural identities, and prepares them to compete economically in a global society.

This is a summary of practical approaches for ensuring that our teaching is underpinned by a culturally responsive pedagogy, drawing on qualitative ethnographic research by Hoque (2015, 2018).



### Culturally responsive pedagogy:

Staff need to consider some key philosophical and professional questions:

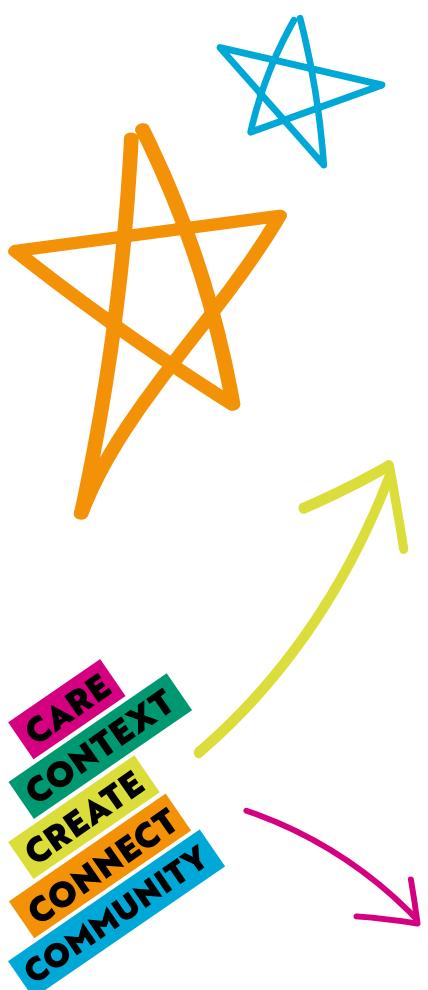
1. Do we really know who our pupils are?
2. Are we aware of the wider social, community and cultural issues that many of our pupils are living through?
3. How do we get to know our pupils and ensure that their views, interests, lived experiences, aspirations inform and guide our pedagogical practices?

### Do we know who our pupils are?

- If you really want to know what is going on, then go and see it for yourself. Understand the local community. Try and get some insight. Read local papers and websites. Speak to community leaders and other professionals. Examine government data. Take part in community events. It is important that you try and view the world from the perspective of your pupils. Take a walk in their shoes.
- Value and respect the sociocultural backgrounds of your pupils. Ensure that learning is relevant, dialogical, responsive, inclusive and experiential to the lives of young people. Ask children what they are interested in and take note of any feedback and suggestions. Listen to them. Make the invisible visible. Give voice to the voiceless.
- The 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al, 1992) that pupils bring to school should become central to their learning. Children are better integrated, happier and perform better academically if value and importance are attributed to their identities, mother tongue and home cultures.

## Are we aware of the wider social, cultural and community issues that many of our pupils are living through?

- Harness an active link between the school and the community. The line between the school and the community should be blurred.
- The way that you approach your pupils, speak to, and introduce the work will demonstrate how much you value who they are. Approach with enthusiasm, and use positive, supportive and encouraging language.
- Consider this – children do not leave their sociocultural worlds behind once they enter the school gates, and nor should they.
- As a teacher, if you don't understand something about the cultural world of your pupils, **ask them to tell you about it!** Be non-judgemental and don't just fall back on your own prejudices and bias. Take a reflexive approach.



## How do we get to know our pupils and ensure that their views, interests and experiences guide pedagogical practices?

- Develop schoolwork that pupils are interested in and set activities that celebrates who they are. This can provide opportunities for pupils to express their feelings and emotions, develop independence, maintain motivation and build resilience (especially in these uncertain and challenging times).
- Ensure that the teaching material available for pupils is diverse and inclusive. Consider developing basic (instructional) material in the home languages of your pupils. Encourage parental/ family engagement.
- Within the framework of a national curriculum, adapt the teaching to be relevant, localized, child-centred and flexible.
- There is no such thing as a single story. We all have stories. We all have identities. It is more appropriate to talk about multiple stories. As educators, we need to tease out and value these hidden and alternative stories.

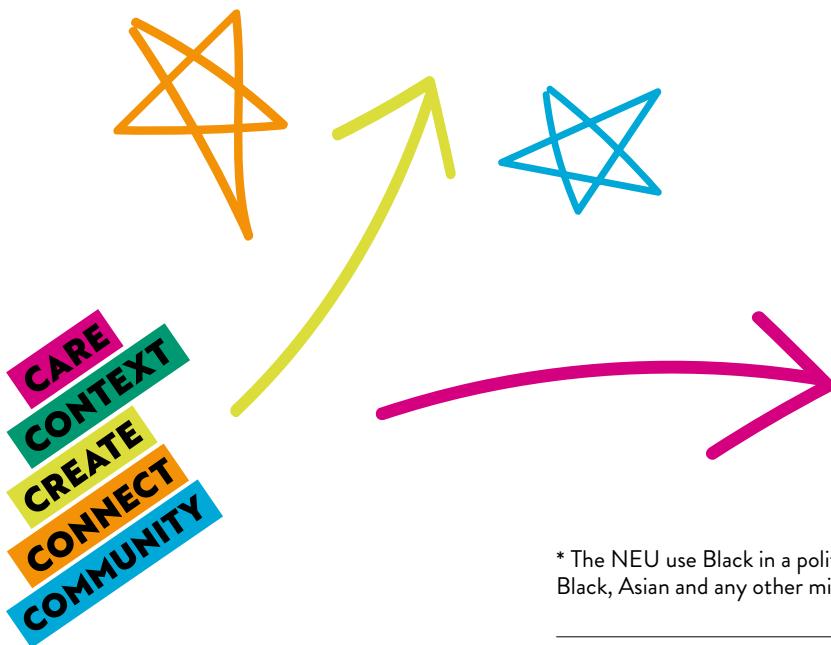
### Some practical suggestions:

- The teacher should lead by example. Demonstrate how it can be done. Share your own migration story with your pupils, memories of childhood, who you are? Choose your own favourite book/ movie that represents your own culture and share with pupils. Discuss your own multifaceted identity with children. Let them know that you are human and approachable.
- Creative (and practical) educational projects that celebrates and values the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, gender and religious identities of pupils can include activities such as: researching and drawing a family tree; country specific research; learning about and growing vegetables from around the

world; playing traditional non-European folk sports games such as Ta Kurt Om El Mahag, Zamma, Jianzi, Dariabandha; a poster competition on race equality using only non-English words and images; blogging/ vlogging about the Windrush scandal; a research project about Islamophobia, Anti-Semitism – what do these two terms mean?, and so on.

- In light of the global #Blacklivesmatter movement, ask pupils to research, celebrate and write about some key, local (unknown) people from the Black community\*. Encourage them to write a short story or poem about this individual, make a photo or video documentary, devise a poster etc. Share the work with the rest of the class.
- Seize on wider momentum and set activities that are relevant and topical. Perhaps you can set projects that explore historical watershed moments for race relations ie; George Floyd (2020), Stephen Lawrence (1993), Altab Ali (1978) and why the #Blacklivesmatter movement is so important and what it means?
- Ask pupils to become heritage researchers. Encourage them to spend some time with family members (parents, grandparents, aunts/uncles etc) and interview them about their migration history – why they came here? When they came here? Where is 'home'? What were their experiences upon arrival? Go through old photo albums, letters, newspaper articles, key historical/ cultural artifacts such as first ever passport, work voucher etc. This nearly always stimulates meaningful conversation and allows children to be proud of who they are. This also helps construct emotional avenues to get connected to their history, heritage, ancestry and roots.

- Children should be actively encouraged to become ambassadors of their own cultures and confidently talk about and share aspects of their identity with others.
- Write a descriptive poem about the complexity of 'home', especially when you factor in that many Black pupils feel like a 'tourist' in both their country of birth and the country of their ancestors.
- The poem **Citizen of the World** by David Calder will get your class thinking about how refugee/asylum seeker children feel when they arrive in a new place.
- Suggest that they watch educational documentaries on catch up TV that grapples with complex and challenging themes such as race, racism, migration, equality, social justice, 'Britishness' etc. *A Very British History* is a collection of documentary stories of 20th Century Britain through the eyes of minority communities across Britain. One such example is the story of **British Bangladeshis**. Schools should ensure that all pupils get to watch such documentaries if access is an issue. Encourage them to write a review of the documentary and share with the class.
- Or watch age-appropriate movies in different languages and devise a class quiz about the movie? Encourage the children to watch the movies with their families and discuss any difficult themes that may emerge.
- It is important that young people be given opportunities to discuss ethically challenging issues in safe spaces and stumble their way around often difficult ideas and debates. Here, the role of the teacher as trusted mentor and confidant is key. Teachers need more training and support on how to enable and manage complex and sensitive discussions.
- Facilitate creative culturally rich opportunities, such as art, drama, role play, animation, music, food, language that helps children explore and understand alternative/ hidden histories. Children can perhaps learn to communicate with others in their mother tongue or learn to play a traditional instrument from different parts of the world. Finding out about each other's cultures will foster social and positive relationships among peers.
- Provide a wide range of multicultural literature from across the globe. Ask pupils to find a book from their country of origin and share traditional folk tales with the rest of their class.
- Ask your pupils to research more about **their** community. For example, why is a certain building/street named after a particular individual? Encourage them to become more politically literate, active citizens and take pride in their community. Remember – they know their communities best!
- Black history needs to become a mandatory part of the curriculum and taught throughout the year and not just in October.
- Develop educational activities that celebrate cultural differences, but also focuses on similarities that bind young people together.



\* The NEU use Black in a political context to encompass all members who self-identify as Black, Asian and any other minority ethnic groups who do not identify themselves as white.

## Main references:

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