

'Respecting me, respecting you: exploring and appreciating cultural diversity through children's literature'.



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Title

‘Respecting me, respecting you: exploring and appreciating cultural diversity through children’s literature’.

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Standards for Childhood Practice

Standards for childhood practice which I have met through engaging in this project

Standard	How I have worked to meet this standard.
3. Professional Knowledge and Understanding	
<p>Children and Childhoods</p> <p>3.1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a critical understanding of children as thinkers and active learners and can link this to decisions about provision. 	<p>Through study and reflection. Engaging in collaborative practice. Providing drama activities based on appropriate literature.</p>
<p>Frameworks and Programmes</p> <p>3.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have detailed knowledge of how to make effective personalised provision for children, taking account of their interests and abilities and of respect for diversity, equality and inclusion. 	<p>Engaging in reflective practice. Applying knowledge to planning and provision. Observing and assessing needs of children to develop suitable experiences and opportunities which support personal identity and promote positive attitudes to others.</p>
4. Professional Skills and abilities	
<p>Supporting play, learning opportunities and experiences</p> <p>4.2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for children to develop positive and supportive relationships with each other. 	<p>By providing a range of opportunities and experiences for children to develop a positive self identity and respectful relationships with others. By providing children with a positive role model.</p>
<p>Supporting play, learning opportunities and experiences</p> <p>4.5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use reflection on practice to act on and improve their own practice and that of colleagues Draw on a range of sources of evidence to question and be critical of practice and to support innovation and change. 	<p>By Sharing knowledge and skills with others learning from their experience. By continuing to critically analyse practice and supporting and instigating development of practice.</p>

Chapter 1

Introduction/ Rationale

This study considers the relationship between children's literature and a child's developing awareness of other cultures with the intention of looking for ways of promoting positive attitudes towards diversity. Exploring ways of supporting children's own identity and helping them to engage with others respectfully is what I set out to do. This area of study was selected for two main reasons. I found whilst studying for my previous module we had not as a staff team given much consideration to how we select and present literature and resources to promote diversity and inclusion. I felt this was important as research indicated that this was an important time for children to develop the thinking required to enable them to successfully integrate with others. 'between the third and sixth birthday that children develop the understanding that lies behind all of their ability to co-operate with others' (Baldock 2010 p.122).

Secondly, I had identified that children from similar cultural backgrounds may feel a sense of integration and security but a lack of understanding of the beliefs and cultures of others dissimilar to themselves and this may lead to them forming a view of cultural superiority.

I carried out some preliminary observations and research and felt that there would be scope to develop this work in this area. I would also be able to work towards meeting the 'Standards for Childhood Practice' (2007).

I also wanted to find sensitive ways of engaging parents in the work of the centre as we'd identified possible barriers to inclusion such as language barriers, seeing the setting as a largely female domain, etc.

Discussions with my tutor helped me to clarify the focus of my research I wrote my project proposal (appendix 1).

The project develops the ideas from my proposal into practice – looking at the literature we use with children and how we can effectively use it to develop respectful attitudes towards cultural diversity.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This literature review looks at ideas from a variety of texts relating to how we as early years professionals can encourage children to develop an understanding of the beliefs and values of others and build positive and respectful relationships with others from cultural backgrounds which may differ from their own.

In the past fifty years international research has indicated that children as young as three may show racial prejudice and 'both black and white children show a positive bias towards whiteness and a negative bias towards blackness' (McNaughton 2003 p.46). A Piagetan framework would suggest that children's attitudes are due to their inability to hold multiple perspectives and also their need to classify and sort both objects and people. If this view was held then it would seem that bias was developmental and it would be of little value to raise the concept of respecting others until the child was cognitively ready. This theory does not, however, explain the bias which McNaughton describes. Brofenbrenner's systems theory suggests that children develop within a complex social system and are influenced by their relationships and their environment. He suggests that although children have innate personal characteristics their various relationships and environments will affect their development. Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) appear to hold this view stating that 'young children's attitudes are forming from a very young age and there is a need for them to be exposed to positive images of diversity in the early years setting' (p.18).

Kupetz (2011) explains that at around two or three children start to notice physical differences among people – some are short, some are tall etc. The way they deal with and interpret this can be affected by a variety of influences – what they see at home or at school or in the media. If this is the case then it is perhaps necessary for early years professionals to have a shared understanding of how to respond in positive ways to counter negative stereotypes.

A study in Northern Ireland of children between the ages of three and six by Connolly et al. (2002) looked at their awareness and preference of particular cultural events and symbols and a tendency to identify with a particular community. Connolly *et al.* (2002), cited in Nutbrown and Clough (2006), identified implications for practice to encourage more inclusive attitudes:

'from the age of three to explore and experience a range of different cultural practices and to appreciate and respect difference and cultural diversity' and 'from

age five onwards...encouraged to understand the negative effects of sectarian stereotypes and prejudices and be able to identify them in their own attitudes, where appropriate'

(page7)

They also identified a need to work closely with parents and local communities. So what type of professional encourages the most inclusive attitudes?

Johnston and Nahmad-Williams (2009) describe different types of professionals – 'mono-cultural' (seeing diversity as an obstacle to work with children), 'multi-cultural' (attempts to understand cultural differences and works proactively to create opportunities for all, while the 'intercultural' professional tries to bridge any cultural divide and uses cultural diversity to enrich the learning process and promote knowledge and understanding of others.

Lindon (2011) suggests that children learn their identity through their family life and that Nursery should reinforce this. If they understand their own culture children can learn about and make sense of other cultures. Stead (2003) further explains how this can be done and how culture is often approached in settings – through celebrating cultural festivals and having theme days. Although this can introduce children to diversity and the way in which others live their lives, it can also give an impression that differences are only on the surface and only relate to things like dress, food and music. This fails to address the need to understand how individuals may be shaped by their cultures. Stead suggests that:

'a good way to teach children about the needs of others is to make meeting individual needs of children part of everyday practice, and to be explicit about this – explaining your thinking to the children'.

(no page)

She talks of a 'culturally sensitive setting' where children are able to express themselves in a variety of different ways – understanding how their own background has influenced how they express themselves. Play which is based on TV is valued just as highly as that which is based on books or stories, for example. Foertsch (1998) reiterates this saying that 'children's experiences of literacy vary from culture to culture and children are literate in ways defined by their community' (no page).

If children are influenced by their environments and the people within them then it could be argued that early years professionals have a role to fulfil in promoting positive attitudes in an

inclusive environment. This led me to exploring how children's literature may be used to help support this learning.

Potter (2009) comments that:

'children's literature is a powerful resource that teachers can use to help children enjoy their known world and then travel beyond to explore the unfamiliar. It can support personality development by exploring cultural identity and diversity as well as helping to explain emotions and traumatic events and experiences. Quality children's literature can be used to expand children's perceptions of the world'.

(no page)

Kupetz supports this idea by suggesting that Opportunities for exposure to a variety of different cultures can help children to realise that other children have similarities to themselves as well as differences. Kupetz also suggests using books to experience new cultures and see similarities and differences.

Nutbrown and Clough (2006) explain that:

'stories can help children to think about moral dilemmas and give them the opportunity, will and desire to participate in thinking about solutions.....stories are powerful means of opening up the world and of helping children to 'story' parts of their own lives. They can have a positive effect too, on children's thinking and behaviour'.

(p. 146)

Young children use drama and fiction to make sense of their lives – acting out aspects of living, testing their actions and exploring emotions in what is a safe environment for them.

Toye and Prendiville (2000) suggest:

'Drama very often puts pupils in a position of confronting particular ethical principles and personal values. The distinct advantage that drama has in this process is its fictional base. This enables pupils to look at dilemmas and try out solutions without the consequences that real life brings to the situation'.

(p. 78)

Further to this they suggest that in order to use literature and drama effectively together it is better to focus on key moments, characters and the dilemmas they experience rather than simply acting out the narrative.

The main issues from this literature review and which form the basis of this piece of research are:

- Negative attitudes to cultural diversity may be apparent in children as young as two.
- Children at around the age of two begin to notice similarities and differences in others.
- Staff have an important role to fulfil in encouraging positive attitudes towards diversity – both in their work with children, parents and the wider community.
- Children need to feel positive about their own identity and from this they may develop an understanding of others both similar and different to themselves.
- Children's literature may be a useful way of developing children's awareness of themselves and others.
- Drama may be a powerful tool in moving ideas and thoughts from literature and applying them to real life situations. It provides a safe area for children to explore their behaviour.

Chapter 3

The Research Questions

The review of literature on my area of interest led to the formulation of the following research questions.

How can we effectively use children's literature and drama to explore cultural diversity and encourage respect for others?

- What can we as early years professionals do to develop a shared understanding of cultural diversity and respect for others which reflects best practice?
- What is our current approach to choosing literature to explore diversity and encourage respect for others? What consideration do we give to the way we present this to children?
- Using literature, what are effective activities to help children develop a secure sense of their own cultural identity and an acceptance and understanding of the identities of others?

The main research question defines the area of study and what I intend to explore. As this is action research with the intention of improving practice my questions were designed to not only to focus on finding answers but also to stimulate interest on the identified issues. I spent time discussing my area of interest with my tutor, colleagues and critical friends. I wanted an area where staff could work and learn together in ways which would be stimulating for the team who had worked together for some time. I also wanted to test out some of the claims about literature and drama being a powerful tool which can influence children's thinking and behaviour.

Chapter 4

Investigative Design

This short term action research project uses a systematic approach to gathering mainly qualitative data. This approach was used as I wanted to consider ways of developing our knowledge and practice with regard to cultural diversity. I also realised that I would perhaps be dealing with some ambiguous and complex areas of social reality. In order to support my findings in more than one way I used a focus group with staff, a survey involving parents to obtain some quantitative data and observations of planned story-telling activities and drama activities. In addition to this I planned to evaluate activities with children and staff. I also planned to keep a research diary for significant information relating to the project – comments from participants, my own thoughts and feelings and relevant data from other sources. This use of triangulation (or using more than one method) would give more validity to my findings if the results showed consistency. The survey was designed to give me a broad overall view of the types of literature that children were experiencing at home. It was a face-to face survey as I wanted an efficient method with a good response rate.

The focus group was chosen as I felt I needed a deeper understanding of staff values, beliefs and experience. Staff had indicated that they did not feel 'knowledgeable' about cultural diversity so I was keen to see what we could do to address this. I felt that this method may be useful in finding ways to motivate the staff group – seeing how they interact and what opinions were dominant. As a starting point to my research I required some rich data within a relatively short period of time. The group consisted of 7 staff who would be involved in the project. I prepared questions to help me focus the discussion and prepared an outline of my role as a facilitator and the expectations of the group (appendix 2). I used a dictaphone to record the discussion and enable me to concentrate on keeping the group on track.

The selection of participants was fairly straightforward in that I was setting out to improve practice in my own setting so I would be using the staff, children and parents from the centre. I decided not to use the younger children as I was limited by the area I am designated to. Numbers of children in the setting were fairly low at the start of the term as new children settled in at different times. Again the parents who came to read to children were those that were available to come in on days off. As it was early in the year we had many children who had just turned three and were having first experiences of nursery. I anticipated that I would need to use a degree of 'artistry' and be ready to 'invent new methods and endeavour to develop in myself the ability of discovering them' (Schon 1991 p.66).

As this was action research – I anticipated that the research would develop in response to the information that I gained. I planned to invite parents to read with children and I also realised we needed not just one approach for all parents but a variety of approaches to suit the range of parents we have. I contacted the central library to see if they had any contacts that could read us stories from other parts of the world and the librarian said that she and another member of staff could read a story in Spanish and a story in Urdu. I decided I would use a narrative method for recording observations of storytelling as I wanted to capture the essence of the experience rather than specific behaviours and I anticipated that each storyteller would approach the experience differently.

I began researching drama methods and selected suitable activities which I then adapted to suit the children's current interests and development needs. I designed an observation schedule for the activities which would outline the learning intentions and also provide a framework for evaluating my research questions. I decided that in order to get a balanced view of what was happening I would ask staff to assist with the observations, evaluations and obtaining photographic evidence.

At the end of the research development period I planned to ask children and staff to evaluate the activities. I planned to use power point to present the research findings to staff. I felt that this may be more memorable to them – summarising what has been achieved and giving opportunity to promote further development work. For parents I decided that I would produce a poster of the main findings.

Chapter 5

Implementation

The first stage of this action research project was to obtain the necessary permissions and look at ethical considerations. I requested permission from my manager, discussing my plan, giving her a copy of my proposal and including my completed ethics form for her scrutiny. (Appendix 3 shows request letter) Once permission was granted I asked parents and staff for permission for their participation and for that of their child (appendix 3). Besides the written permission I would ensure that throughout the project that permissions are continually negotiated, particularly where children are concerned as their communication of an unwillingness to participate may be non-verbal.

I kept as much as possible to my timescales (appendix 4) keeping notes of activities carried out and evaluating them as I went along.

A focus group was carried out with staff and the transcription of the recording written up (appendix 5) and the results evaluated (appendix 6). This group served not only to gain information but also to engage staff in the project as co-researchers. I also included a short drama session for staff at the end of the group so that staff could experience working together with their peers in a similar way to children involved in a drama activity. I recorded my thoughts in my research diary (appendix 7) reflecting on my practice and considering where I could adjust and improve practice.

I carried out a survey in order to see what types of literature children are reading at home – which will reflect their culture in some way (appendix 8). I kept the number of questions small and used a ‘face-to-face’ approach as I had previously used written questionnaires which had a low rate of return. This method also meant that I could engage with parents and find out if anyone would be willing to come in and read with children.

Also at this time I was exploring the possibilities of having guest readers from other cultures and contacted the central library to see if they had any contacts. The librarian was very helpful and although she had someone who could read Urdu she was not available at the time. She volunteered her own services to read to children in Spanish and so I planned a visit to the library for this. I carried out the necessary risk assessments, obtained permissions and arranged transport and staffing. This visit allowed children to experience going to the library, meet someone new, hear a story in another language, join in with some Spanish words and guess what the words meant in English. Children were able to choose

books to take back to nursery and we also borrowed the ones that the librarian had read so children could revisit them.

I gathered information about staff's all time favourite books for reading with children so that we could learn a little about one another's reading choices and culture. This also made staff think about what they value in a book. At this time I was reviewing documentary evidence (appendix 8a.)

Parents were invited to read stories with their children and brought books from home – children had stories read in Polish, Portuguese and English (observations of this can be seen in appendix 9).

Drama activities were developed from the children's interests and adapted to give children opportunities to respond to others – allowing them to think about their attitudes and values and what would be the best moral position to take. I discussed the activities with my colleagues and critical friends as I went along so that they were appropriate to children's learning. I spoke regularly with our teacher who has responsibility for the curriculum planning and she incorporated our activities into the main planning.

As it was the start of the year I firstly used a very simple 'hot-seating' activity based on Humpty Dumpty. Most of the children were familiar with this and they had been playing at humpty dumpty and pretending to fall off the wall during outdoor play. Drama activities including 'Goldilocks' (appendix 10), 'Meeting the Teddy Minder' (appendix 11), 'A Letter Arrives at Nursery' (appendix 12) and 'Meeting Granny Ogilvie' (appendix 13) then followed on from this. Children were encouraged to think beyond the original story lines through activities exploring thoughts and feelings, cultural difference, and problems needing solved. In order to make observations of the activities I worked together with other members of staff.

At the end of the implementation period of this project I carried out evaluations with staff and children. Children had all been involved in some of the activities (although due to the nature of children's hours, not all children could experience them all). I felt, however, that it was appropriate to ask them if they would like to experience any of the activities again.

Chapter 6

Findings

I have summarised my findings in the tables below. Full details can be seen in appendices as indicated. The tables below show the findings which I have identified as significant in answering my research questions.

Research Question
What can we as early years professionals do to develop a shared understanding of cultural diversity and respect for others which reflects best practice?
Method
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus Group (appendix 5 shows focus group transcript excerpts and appendix 6 shows the focus group evaluation).
Findings
<p><u>Focus Group</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff had some understanding of the term 'culture' but felt they lacked knowledge of different religions and cultural backgrounds.• Staff felt that we needed a better selection of books• Staff did not presently give much thought to cultural diversity when choosing books.• Staff felt that specific consideration could be given to cultural diversity within our planning.• Using puppets and developing role play were identified as ways of developing our work on cultural diversity• Special events which deal with different cultures and festivals could be held• Staff felt that we could make more use of parent's knowledge and skills and we could look at what is available within the community.• Staff identified a lack of confidence in how to approach cultural diversity.
Analysis and Interpretation of findings
<p>The focus group participants felt in need of support to take this work forward. Parents are experts in their own culture and could share this with the nursery staff and children – through reading and other activities.</p> <p>Staff would like to be more involved in selecting appropriate books.</p> <p>As a staff team we need to be more proactive in learning about other cultures including our own – inviting guests from other cultures where possible may be helpful.</p>

Research Question

What is our current approach to choosing literature to explore diversity and encourage respect for others? What consideration do we give to the way we present this to children?

Method

Focus Group (appendix 5 and 6)

Survey of literature parents use with their child (appendix 8)

Documentary Evidence

FindingsFocus Group

- Staff were enthusiastic about using literature but felt that our resources were lacking There was not a systematic or informed approach given generally to the choosing of literature – either buying or selecting from our choices.
- Staff felt that more consideration should be given to our choice of literature and how we are going to present this to children within our planning.
- Staff had said they wanted to give more consideration to how we make use of literature but needed support to do this.
- Staff participated enthusiastically in short drama activity within focus group and felt we needed to have more ‘fun’ experiences with our children.

Survey

- All parents said that they read with their child and of the 23 questioned over a third of those questioned said that they make use of a library.
- Reading was largely a shared experience between parent and child with the child choosing the story or choosing it with the parent.
- Parents identified the types of books that children preferred.
- Many parents were willing to read with children in nursery and share parts of their own culture with them

Documentary Evidence

- There was little documentary evidence in our centre which specifically showed how we made use of literature

Analysis and Interpretation of findings

It was identified that we could be more selective in choosing literature, perhaps making more use of the libraries. Developing a set of criteria for choosing literature which considers cultural diversity and promotes respect for others would be helpful in clarifying our shared values. Book weeks or activities which link home and nursery would help us develop shared understandings with children and families.

Research Question

Using Literature, what are effective activities to help children develop a secure sense of their own cultural identity and an acceptance and understanding of the identities of others?

Method

- Observations of storytelling (appendix 9)
- Observations of drama activities (appendix 10-13)
- Evaluations of activities (appendix 14)

FindingsObservations of storytelling

- It was evident on the library visit and when parents read that children were receptive to hearing other languages spoken.
- Children were excited by going on a trip and the large range of different books that were available in the library.
- The library visit which allowed them time to explore and read books of their choice with enough adults to read them was effective.
- Children were drawn to books visually.
- Children of the parents who read in nursery listened attentively to their parents reading – perhaps suggesting that they felt secure and supported

Observations of drama activities

- Drama activities were developed in response to children's interests and were successful in encouraging children to think about others and their feelings.
- I found that I need to develop and refine my skills in teaching drama and learn about further methods which will enhance learning.
- Children who feel positive about their own identity are more likely to consider the thoughts and feelings of others.
- Staff and children responded positively to the activities and were keen to continue this in the future.
- Children themselves brought a wealth of cultural experience to the activities and this was able to be valued and built upon.

Evaluations of Activities

- Although the method for children to evaluate the activities was not reliable in terms of data gathering, it did indicate that the two most popular drama activities were 'A Letter Arrives at Nursery' and 'Meeting Granny Ogilvie'. Staff favoured these also in addition to the library visit and story CDs.

Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

Stories and drama can help children develop a secure sense of their own cultural identity and an acceptance and understanding of the identities of others. Traditional stories have worked well during this project but other stories could be used. It is helpful to have a learning intention and to have considered how best to assign adult and child roles ensuring that children are comfortable with them and ready to consider the views of others. Children can deal positively with some complex issues through drama and will bring in their own culture and many of their own ideas.

Chapter 7

Discussion of Findings

Returning to the research question 'How can we effectively use children's literature and drama to explore cultural diversity and encourage respect for others'? The evidence gathered during this project suggests that a number of things that can be done.

It would seem we can develop a shared understanding of cultural diversity and respect for others which reflects best practice by becoming more pro-active as a team in learning about other cultures, including our own. This could be done by inviting guests from other cultures where possible and involving parents in reading and other cultural activities.

Throughout the project many staff have been supportive of one another and this I feel is key to making further progress. I think that rather than worrying about saying or doing the wrong thing we need to discuss our thoughts and feelings together and be understanding of everyone's cultural and social background so that we can work on our shared understandings.

I believe that staff can and should be more involved in the reviewing and selecting of literature so that we are ensuring that children are not inadvertently feeling excluded. Mitchell (2003) comments:

'Children expect the world as they know it to be represented in some of the books they read. If they see no reflections of themselves or the world they live in they begin to wonder about themselves'.

(p.172)

Our current approach to choosing literature to explore diversity and encourage respect for others is changing. Previously staff indicated that they had not given this a great deal of thought. We now give more consideration to how we present this.

Effective activities using literature to help children develop a secure sense of their own cultural identity and an acceptance and understanding of the identities of others were undoubtedly the drama activities. I would also suggest that guest readers whether parents or other members of the community can offer children affirmation that all members of their community are valued. Demonstrating an acceptance of individuals with their own unique cultural background not only provides us with additional skills and knowledge but serves to demonstrate that respect for others is desirable behaviour.

Activities where children are encouraged to move from the narrative and into a situation which challenges their thinking by presenting them with an alternative viewpoint can develop children's moral actions. The adult can help children to experience and consider similarities and differences. For example, in the Humpty Dumpty drama, children learned that although Humpty looked different to the children in nursery his feelings were just the same and he could not help looking different – he had been born that way!

I think that the research question has been answered although I do think that developing our skills of delivering drama will lead to finding further ways of effectively exploring cultural diversity and encouraging respect for others. I would conclude, however, that there is a heightened awareness of how we use literature now and I firmly believe that as professionals we have an important role to play in showing and encouraging respect for others.

Chapter 8

Implications

I feel that this research project has been significant not only for my own setting. In a wider context I believe that developing some of the methods used in the project across the sector could have distinct benefits for children in giving them a secure sense of identity and an acceptance and understanding of others – perhaps helping to promote a more harmonious society.

I feel that as early years professionals we have a role in promoting positive attitudes to diversity although I can understand the feelings that staff described when they said they felt they lacked understanding and knowledge of different cultures and how they worried about not being 'politically correct'. Mitchell, D. (2007 p.179) says that 'for those outside a culture or class, it is difficult to know what is offensive to those in it'.

This is perhaps why staff feel more comfortable when delivering topics within their own culture. I think it is therefore important for us to speak with others who have different cultural backgrounds and listen to their views. I have arranged for a guest to talk to children about Diwali next week and will continue to look at ways of gaining support for the team on other cultures. Thompson (2003) comments that in promoting equality:

'what is needed, then, is a degree of humility, a recognition that, however skilled, experienced or well informed we are, there is always margin for error, and always scope for learning – an important principle on which to base all our attempts to promote equality'.

(p.236)

If we can take account of this then we might be playing a part in creating a generation of people who value diversity, don't make judgements based on outward appearance and are tolerant of different cultural backgrounds. We may then be working towards becoming 'intercultural' professionals as described by Johnston and Nahmad-Williams (2009).

Chapter 9

Conclusions

In this project I have studied how we can effectively use children's literature and drama to explore cultural diversity and encourage respect for others. I found the topic stimulating which helped sustain my enthusiasm for what became a large area of research. The project proposal helped me focus my research by returning frequently to the research questions. There were times when I felt that the focus was moving off from the topic but on reflection I realised that the staff and children would bring their own understandings to the activities and this would actually enhance the findings. If I were to do things differently in the future I would narrow the focus – exploring some of the issues raised in more depth. I would, for example, like to find out more about the children's shared experiences of literature at home. Talking with parents highlighted areas of our provision that could be developed. How we work with our bi-lingual children is one such area. Many parents indicated an interest in reading and I shall set up a 'diary of storytellers' for the coming months.

Staff reported enjoying the project and would like to continue developing the work. I think this is extremely positive and my manager has agreed that it would be good to share my power point presentation with staff. I think this is important to do to recognise their contributions and thank them for their participation (appendix 15). McNiff and Whitehead (2010 p.61) reiterate this saying 'affirmation goes further than any other incentive. You cannot afford not to let your participants know they are valued'. In order to share my findings with parents I have made a poster of key messages (appendix 14).

It is certainly worth being critical of the literature we use with children as they will pick many aspects of books – and whether it is the aesthetic quality, the heartfelt emotion or the humorous characters that appeal children will have their own preferences. The project has been personally and professionally meaningful for me.

By encouraging children to think about how the characters in books are depicted and what viewpoint is being voiced can encourage children to begin to think critically about literature – and decide for themselves what values they will adopt and what they will reject. Every book that you share with a child reflects in some way what you value.

If we truly value one another then we need to reach out to others, listening, learning and respecting their cultural backgrounds. We need to provide contexts for young children to explore their worlds as my research has shown that young children can appreciate diverse cultures and are eager to share their own. Perhaps the most accurate barometer of success

is a child's opinion and it was at a moment when a little girl pointedly asked 'can we do that again'? that I realised that the project was working.

Throughout this project staff, parents and children have worked together and this will hopefully continue for although we may have our differences we also have similarities and we all belong to the human race. If we learn to respect and appreciate one another our lives may become richer in experience and society more harmonious.

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