

# Developing an Anti-Bias Curriculum for use with SEAL

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## 1.1 Introduction: SEAL, whole-school learning and the Anti-Bias Curriculum

*Social, emotional and behavioural skills underlie almost every aspect of school, home and community life, including effective learning and getting on with other people. They are fundamental to school improvement.*<sup>1</sup>

The context of learning for schools today is one characterised by the increasing impacts of globalisation, multiculturalism and inequality. Developing an Anti-Bias Curriculum helps learners to acquire social, emotional and behavioural skills and fits in with many of the themes of the SEAL curriculum (see Section 1.6). It also fulfils parts of the PHSE and Citizenship curricula, and enhances whole-school initiatives such as Every Child Matters, Community Cohesion, Race Equality, Healthy Schools, Well-being and Sustainable Schools.

Prejudice and discrimination are learned responses (see *Figure 1*). Children become aware of difference at a young age, but the way they respond to it is based on their observations of the adult world.

Watch the video *White Doll, Black Doll*. Which one is the nice doll?

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybDa0gSuAcg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybDa0gSuAcg)<sup>2</sup>

Bias has damaging consequences for everyone:

*All children are harmed. On the one hand, struggling against bias that declares a person inferior because of gender, race, ethnicity, or disability sucks energy from and undercuts a child's full development. On the other hand, learning to believe they are superior because they are White, or male, or able-bodied, dehumanizes and distorts reality for growing children, even while they may be receiving the benefits of institutional privilege.*<sup>3</sup>

This set of teaching materials is based on the Anti-Bias Curriculum approach developed by Louise Derman-Sparks.<sup>4</sup>

There are four goals (with adapted explanations).

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1 Excellence and Enjoyment: social and emotional aspects of learning – Guidance, DCSF page 7

2 This is an extract from a documentary *A Girl Like Me* Kiri Davis 2005, that recreates the experiments done by Mamie and Kenneth Clark in the 1930s and 1940s which showed that most black children preferred white dolls over black. This was still the case in Davis's experiment [www.mediathatmattersfest.org/watch/6/#](http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/watch/6/#)

3 ANTI-BIAS CURRICULUM: TOOLS FOR EMPOWERING YOUNG CHILDREN Louise Derman-Sparks and the A.B.C. Task Force, Introduction [www.teachingforchange.org/files/025-A.pdf](http://www.teachingforchange.org/files/025-A.pdf)

4 Goals and Teaching Guidelines for Anti-Bias Education with Young Children Louise Derman-Sparks 2007 [www.achievementseminars.com/...2007.../sparks\\_goals%20and%20teaching%20guidelines.pdf](http://www.achievementseminars.com/...2007.../sparks_goals%20and%20teaching%20guidelines.pdf)

# THERE ARE LOTS OF PLACES IN BRITAIN WHERE RACISM DOESN'T EXIST.



Figure 1: Commission for Racial Equality

## 1.2 The Four Goals of Anti-Bias Education

Goal One: Nurture every child's construction of knowledge, confident self identity and group identity.

Create educational settings in which all children are able to:

- Like themselves, without needing to feel superior to someone else
- Feel comfortable about their home, school or other cultures
- Develop the capacity for comfortable and equitable cross-cultural interaction (especially amongst those from the dominant culture)

Goal Two: Promote each child's comfortable, empathetic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.

Guide children's development of their thinking (cognitive awareness), feelings (emotional disposition) and behavioural skills needed to:

- Respectfully and effectively learn about (with and from) differences
- Comfortably negotiate and adapt to differences
- Understand and accept the common humanity that all people share.

Goal Three: Foster each child's critical thinking about bias.

Guide children's thinking skills to identify stereotypes and how they can be unfair and damaging

- Help children become aware of comments (teasing, name-calling) and behaviours (exclusion, discrimination) directed at someone because of their gender, race, ethnicity, disability, class, age, weight, or other such personal characteristics.<sup>5</sup>
- Help children to develop empathy so that they know that all kinds of bias hurt someone

5 Sexuality is also an area of exclusion and discrimination in later years of primary school. Homophobic name-calling is prevalent in most schools. A recent survey showed that only 6% of schools had effective policies for tackling homophobic name-calling (Independent 4/11/09)

Goal Four: Cultivate each child's ability to stand up for herself or himself and for others in the face of bias.

Goal Four builds on Goal Three. Critical thinking and empathy are necessary components of acting for oneself or others in the face of bias.

This activist goal includes helping every child learn and practice a variety of ways to think and act when:

- another child acts in a biased manner toward her/him
- one child acts in a biased manner toward another child
- an adult acts in a biased manner.

*Anti-bias activism is a natural outgrowth of children's awareness of what's fair and not fair, a natural response to their readiness to act for fairness.*<sup>6</sup>

These goals are for all children, although the specific issues and tasks necessary for working towards them will vary depending on children's cultural backgrounds, ages and life experiences. The four goals interact with and build on each other and aim to *promote critical thinkers and activists who can work for social change and participate in creating a caring culture in a world of differences.*<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3 Understanding key terms

**Prejudice:** an opinion that is formed without knowing or understanding all the facts

**Discrimination:** the act of treating some people unfairly because of prejudice

**Stereotype:** standardised and usually oversimplified conception held in common by many people

**Bias:** an opinion or liking that does not let one be fair; prejudice<sup>8</sup>

N. B. All stories and books are biased because they represent the point of view (the lenses with which we see the world) of the person/group who have written them.

*By the ages of four and five, children have fully taken in the messages about what boys, girls, men and women are "supposed" to do. They will actively work to maintain these stereotypes. Children many also be very negative about others on the basis of race, language and religion. They may also be uncomfortable with and reject people with disabilities. This is not inevitable, but we should not be surprised if children do exhibit prejudice or bias if we have not intervened and actively promoted an anti-bias curriculum from a very early age.*<sup>9</sup>

This means that most children arriving at primary school will already have developed many of their biases. Whilst it may be beneficial to have a dialogue with Early Years practitioners in your catchment area, it is also possible to get children to question and unlearn prejudices, stereotypes, biases and resulting discrimination.

Key messages from those who have worked with the Anti-Bias Curriculum are:

1. We must examine our own attitudes first if we are to support the development of children's anti-bias thinking.<sup>10</sup>
2. Tackling discrimination or bias must be (critical, reflective) active and practical.

6 That's Not Fair: A Teacher's Guide to Activism with Young Children Ann Pelo and Fran Davidson, Redleaf Press, 2000, page 9

7 ANTI-BIAS EDUCATION GOALS Louise Derman-Sparks, 1992 Revised, 1997  
<http://staffwww.fullcoll.edu/clamm/122%20Anti-bias%20Education%20Goals.doc>

8 Definitions from [www.wordsmyth.net](http://www.wordsmyth.net)

9 Anti-Bias Approaches in the Early Years Save the Children Fund 2003, page 10

10 Ibid. page 20

## 1.4 Questions to develop your own thinking about the four Anti-Bias Goals

**Goal One:** Nurture every child's construction of knowledge, confident self identity and group identity.

How do we develop personal identity?

How do the groups we belong to enable us to develop a group identity?

What are the positive and negative aspects of group identity?

What does it mean to develop multiple identities?

How is your identity transformed by wider society?

How can schooling help or hinder the development of confident self and group identities amongst children?

Why are 21st century learners challenging notions of a fixed identity?

**Goal Two:** Promote each child's comfortable, empathetic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.

How do children begin to develop their responses to difference?

How can an appreciation of difference be developed amongst children of similar backgrounds?

What is the relationship between acceptance of difference and positive self and group identity?

Why do many cultures have a fear of difference?

What is the difference between sympathy and empathy?

How can empathy be developed at a range of levels (personal, group, humanity, global)?

How can we value difference but develop shared understanding?

**Goal Three:** Foster each child's critical thinking about bias.

Why do people develop prejudices, stereotypes and biases about others?

How do children develop and determine their sense of fairness?

What is the impact of social biases on personal and group identities?

How can critical thinking be developed amongst young children?

How can children feel comfortable to critically engage with the assumptions and implications of biases learned from their own backgrounds?

**Goal Four:** Cultivate each child's ability to stand up for herself or himself and for others in the face of bias.

How can assertive, but not aggressive, behaviour be developed?

Is it possible to understand and accept difference but not accept unfair beliefs or acts?

Why can speaking on behalf of other individuals or groups be contested?

What are the implications of children developing their own sense of agency in the face of bias?

How can people develop personal self-esteem, leading to a sense of global solidarity and ethical and responsible choices & actions?

## 1.5 Developing your own Anti-Bias Curriculum

*A belief in the value of human diversity and the fair treatment of all people is a prerequisite for doing anti-bias work.*<sup>11</sup>

Educational research from the U.S.A. into teachers engaging with the Anti-Bias Curriculum<sup>12</sup> suggests their learning goes through four phases:

### **i) Teachers raising their own awareness of anti-bias issues related to themselves, their curriculum, and the children in their care.**

a) Building self-awareness. Setting up a support group including other staff and parents to develop anti-bias awareness and knowledge through cooperative learning and providing diverse perspectives. Group members should share their responses, and the implications for learning, to questions such as: How did I become aware of the various aspects of my identity? What differences among people make me feel uncomfortable? When have I experienced or witnessed bias in my life and how did I respond?

b) Finding out what ideas children have about diversity by observing them and asking them questions, looking for signs of misinformation and discomfort. Responses alert the teacher to necessary directions for curriculum activities.

c) Evaluating the classroom environment and beginning to make necessary changes. Teachers must take a critical look at all the materials in the classroom environment, asking themselves what messages about diversity the children get from them, and making adjustments as needed.

d) Teachers can begin to identify parents who might be interested in the anti-bias curriculum, and invite them to participate in the process of changing the environment.

### **ii) Teachers begin to explore the process of doing anti-bias activities.**

“Teachable moments” that arise from observing and interviewing children are one starting point. For example, the arrival of a child with a disability may stimulate questions or discomfort from some children. The teacher can get ideas about what to do by reading relevant curriculum materials, talking with other teachers about how they might handle the situation, and taking the plunge of initiating some activities e.g. role plays.

In this second phase, it is crucial to begin involving all parents. Parents should be informed about how and why anti-bias activities are now part of the children’s curriculum and invited to participate. Newsletters, parent meetings, and individual discussions are all useful. Plan a parent education session about how children develop identity and attitudes.

As teachers explore the process of doing anti-bias work with children and parents, they also continue their own personal growth and support group on anti-bias issues. to share the successes, evaluate the mistakes, provide encouragement, and plan what to do next.

### **iii) Developing more systematic, long-term planning.**

Reflect on what has been tried so far and ask, What issues have surfaced? What has been accomplished? What areas need further work?

Teachers can consider ways to regularly integrate all anti-bias goals and issues into all aspects of the ongoing curriculum. Children’s backgrounds and developmental needs should be taken into account in the planning of culturally inclusive curricula. Parents should regularly be involved in the planning and implementation of activities, and in group discussions about specific anti-bias issues. Teachers should continue to work on personal issues that arise in the course of teaching children and parents and continue to meet with a support group.

### **iv) Learning about diversity and equity permeates all activities**

The anti-bias perspective becomes a filter through which the teacher plans, implements, and evaluates all materials, activities, and interactions with children, parents, and staff. As children engage in activities, they respond with comments and questions that become further “teachable moments” and the cycle continues as a part of daily classroom life. The teacher adapts the curriculum to the changing needs of children; continues to consult with parents about their current issues; and continues to deepen his or her own awareness of anti-bias issues. Doing anti-bias curriculum is now a way of life.

11 Implementing an Anti-Bias Curriculum in Early Childhood Classrooms. Hohensee, Julie Bisson and Derman-Sparks, Louise ERIC Digest 1992 [www.ericdigests.org/1992-1/early.htm](http://www.ericdigests.org/1992-1/early.htm)

12 Ibid

## 1.6 How the Anti-Bias Curriculum relates to SEAL Themes

Goal 1: Nurture each child's construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-concept and group identity

- New Beginnings (Belonging, Self-awareness)
- Getting on and falling out (Friendship)
- Say no to bullying
- Going for Goals (Knowing myself)
- Good to be me (Knowing myself, Understanding my feelings)
- Relationships (Knowing myself, Understanding my feelings)
- Changes (Knowing myself, Understanding my feelings, Belonging to a community)

Goal 2: Promote each child's comfortable, empathetic interaction with people of diverse backgrounds

- New Beginnings (Understanding my feelings, Managing my feelings, Understanding the feelings of others, Social Skills)
- Getting on and falling out (Friendship, Seeing things from another point of view, Working together)
- Say no to bullying
- Going for Goals (Setting a realistic target, Planning to reach a goal, Persistence, Making choices)
- Good to be me (Managing my feelings)
- Relationships (Managing my feelings, Understanding the feelings of others)
- Changes (Understanding my feelings, Understanding the feelings of others, Managing my feelings)

Goal 3: Foster each child's critical thinking about bias

- New Beginnings (Understanding the feelings of others, Making choices)
- Getting on and falling out (Seeing things from another point of view, Working together)
- Say no to bullying
- Going for Goals (Persistence, Making choices)
- Good to be me (Making choices)
- Relationships (Understanding the feelings of others, Making choices)
- Changes (Understanding the feelings of others)

Goal 4: Cultivate each child's ability to stand up for her/himself and for others in the face of bias.

- New Beginnings (Understanding rights and responsibilities)
- Getting on and falling out (Managing feelings)
- Say no to bullying
- Going for Goals (Making choices, Evaluation and review)
- Good to be me (Standing up for myself, Making choices)
- Relationships (Social Skills, Making choices)
- Changes (Planning to reach a goal, Belonging to a community, Making choices)