

7-11 years. Supporting a child with a disfigurement: a teacher's guide

Guide 4. Working inclusively with groups

1 WORKING WITH APPEARANCE AND DIFFERENCE

Children in their junior years are interested in practically everything. With age, they also gain a sharpened awareness of their own and others' appearance, and tend to make more judgements based on appearance. Dislike of people with disfigurements begins to show as children go through the junior years: they become less accepting¹. It is therefore important to include learning activities about appearance and difference, even if you do not have a pupil with a disfigurement in your school at this time.

Every child needs to be able to feel both that he is an individual and that he shares things in common with others. Teaching about difference should address issues of disfigurement in among all the other differences that make everyone an individual.

It is sometimes thought that it will be helpful to talk to all the pupils about a pupil who is different, perhaps just before he joins the school, or before he returns after an injury or illness which has altered his appearance. However, even if the message aims to encourage pupils to behave inclusively and pleasantly, research has shown that talking to a group of children about a child tends to have the opposite effect.²

It is important that a learning activity is not led by disfigurement. This would tend to construct disfigurement as a problem rather than as a part of the ordinary variety that can be recognised among all people.

2 INTEGRATING LESSON IDEAS INTO YOUR CURRICULUM

English

The activities outlined here will help pupils to extend their vocabulary and include telling and listening to stories, both factual and creative. In particular, there are opportunities to learn simple, neutral, appropriate words for talking about how we look including any noticeable or unusual features which some people have.

PSHE, RE, Citizenship

All the activities help children to develop an appreciative interest in themselves and each other as individuals with some shared and some unique personal characteristics, both of appearance and of inner qualities.

¹ Richardson (1970) quoted in Bull,R. & Rumsey,N. (1988) *The Social Psychology of Facial Appearance*, Springer-Verlag, New York Inc.

² Vandell,D.L. & George,L.B. (1981) in Frances,J. (2004) *Educating Children with Facial Disfigurement – Creating Inclusive School Communities*, RoutledgeFalmer, London. p36.

Lesson idea 1: 'Mirror insights'

Aims

- to broaden and deepen the way pupils 'see' themselves and each other
- to enhance observational and descriptive powers and increase vocabulary
- to promote awareness and enjoyment of individuality and diversity.

Preparation beforehand

1. Draw up an extensive list of words and phrases describing the widest possible range of people's inner qualities, personality traits, prevailing moods or attitudes and other individual characteristics. (Be as inclusive as possible – e.g. adjectival phrases like 'good in a crisis' and non-mainstream words like 'stickability' can be very useful). This will help you to press the class to extend themselves when the task is theirs.
2. Repeat this preparation for objective words and phrases to describe all aspects of appearance.

When selecting words to describe both outer and inner qualities, it is important to stick firmly to objective description not judgement. Long eyelashes is a description; beautiful, ugly etc are judgements.

3. It will be useful to think over the activity as a whole, and reflect upon the group you will be running it with. Some classes can manage negative-seeming as well as positive-seeming descriptions, e.g. never stops talking, as well as good listener. Other pupils get on better if only positive personal qualities are to be listed. Your professional knowledge of your pupils will be the best guide here.
4. For the second part of the activity you will need enough pieces of stiff paper or thin card, cut to A5 size, for each pupil to have one, and a roll of sticky tape.

Activity 1

- a. Organise* pupils into small groups/teams at separate tables. Appoint a scribe for each team. Set the (competitive) task of listing as many words as possible which describe people's inner qualities, character, personality, preferences etc. Time limit: 5 minutes.
- b. Count words to identify the winning team. This team then read out their list to enable the other teams to add any useful words which they don't have to their own lists. The other teams can score extra points by reading out any further words which they have but which the winning team did not have. (Record scores on the blackboard or whiteboard.)
- c. Each team should now have a comprehensive reference list of describing words. Ensure that any less frequently heard words are understood by all.

* When pupils need to get into groups, ensure that this happens without putting any child in the position of feeling not wanted – often a cruel side-effect of asking the pupils to get themselves into groups. For a class of 28 to get into groups of 4, go quickly around the group allocating each pupil a number from 1 to 7, and then instruct all the 1s to get into a group, all the 2s to get into a group and so on. See also the *Guide on Teasing, name-calling and bullying*.

- d. Each team now (very quietly) chooses a member of the class and draws up a list of words which describe them *but without saying anything about what they look like*. The teams must not be able to overhear each other's work on this.
- e. The first team reads out from their individual list, one adjective at a time so as to describe their chosen person's inner qualities. The other teams have to work out who is being described. (Score this so that good descriptions win points as well as good listening and efficiently working out who is being described.)
- f. Repeat (e) until every team has had their turn, with the other teams competing to identify the person they've described.

Activity 2

- g. Repeat (a) but this time the teams are required to list, competitively, all the words and phrases they can think of to describe what we look like. Only objective descriptions will count towards their scores. (Record scores as before.)
- h. While (g) is underway, go around the class and tape a piece of the card to each pupil's back. Tell them just to leave it there and all will become clear.
- i. Repeat (b) to find the best list and ensure everyone has a good collection of words and phrases and knows all the meanings.

Activity 3

- j. Explain to the class that they are now going to walk quietly around the room together, looking at each other and pausing to write a word or phrase on each other's backs which they think describes them accurately.
 - (A) describe an aspect of appearance.
 - (B) describe an inner quality.

It is useful to award points and bonus points for quietness and efficiency during this part of the activity!

- k. When every child has two or three words or phrases for A and for B, everyone can sit down and help each other to retrieve their cards from their backs. It can be useful to place these 'mirror insights' cards next to a mirror (if they have one in their bedroom, say) when they get home. Then whenever they look at their face, they can be reminded of their inner qualities too.

Lesson idea 2: Chat Friend

Aims

- to see beyond superficial similarities and differences
- to devise and practice conversational skills.

Preparation beforehand

Record a couple of short video extracts from a film or programme popular with children eg Grange Hill, Byker Grove or possibly Hollyoaks. Extract A should show two people who know each other meeting up, chatting briefly, then parting. Extract B should show two people meeting who haven't met before, finding something out about each other, then parting.

Alternatively, use extracts from story books where these two situations are described. E.g., Jean Ure's book *Bad Alice* gives a good account, pages 2-8, of two boys being put together by their parents/grandmother in the hope that they will become friends over the summer holidays – but there is no way they are going to be friends!

Activity 1

- a. Invite the class to think about how we 'chat' with people we know. How do we greet each other? What kinds of things do we talk about? How do we take leave?
- b. Introduce Extract A - a few minutes of video or a short reading from a book. How can you tell the participants already know each other fairly well?
- c. Organise the class into pairs. Working together, each pair now needs to envisage a conversation between themselves where they discover something they don't know about each other and which is different for each of them.
- d. Create a script – meeting, chatting to find out something new and different about each other, leave-taking.
- e. Some of the pairs can now enact their scripts for the class.

Activity 2

- f. Working with the class as a whole again, reflect upon meeting and chatting with someone new. How do you greet each other? How do you get a conversation started? How do you keep it going for long enough to start getting to know each other? How do you take your leave?
- g. Introduce Extract B – a video extract or a book reading. What was helpful and what was unhelpful in getting this conversation going or keeping it going?
- h. Organise the class into pairs again. Each pair now needs to envisage a conversation between participants who have never met before, and perhaps who are generally thought to be unlikely to meet together or to get on together. How can they find out what they may have in common?

*Hello, my name's Rory. Don't mind my nose
It's just the way it is. What is your name?*

I'm Ganda. Hi

Ganda, why's your neck so long?

*It's a gene I guess. It helps me look out for lions
and eat the leaves off tall trees*

*Is that what you eat? I eat grass and things
like that*

I guess we're both vegetarians then.

