Learning the anti-discriminatory way

If we begin with our children and our grandchildren then we just might live to see a community and nation and world which respects and celebrates diversity, a world in which we all live together without prejudice, discrimination, bigotry and hate. Source unknown

This chapter explores how we can reflect on our own educational practice, attitudes and feelings and build on our understanding, skills and knowledge so that children can learn from our example. Statements like 'I treat all children the same' and 'I don't know what colour my children are, I never notice,' are critically examined. Issues around resourcing for equality are discussed and a checklist is provided to indicate how successfully we are creating an anti-discriminatory environment.

Celebrating diversity within an anti-discriminatory framework is a rewarding and stimulating process that calls for flexibility, a willingness to consider and adopt new ideas, and sensitive understanding of children who are harassed because they are different. We need to be able to encourage children to see others as special, to enjoy learning about one another's lives and to appreciate the similarities and differences that exist between them. We need to help them understand why they should not hurt and tease each other about their differences but, rather, value and appreciate them.

Although racism is alive and well in Britain today the justifications for it have undergone subtle change. The 'problem' is nowadays expressed more in terms of cultural difference i.e. Black people have a different culture, a different life-style which is seen to be threatening British traditions and cultural heritage. The British way of life is considered to be in danger and in need of protection from 'alien' cultures. This anxiety was played upon by Margaret Thatcher in 1978 when she declared: 'People are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people with a different culture'. Islam tends to be seen as the greatest threat (Runnymede Trust, 1997). That these views are widely held does not necessarily mean that all, or even most White educators agree with them but it is highly likely that everyone is influenced by them.

The trend toward formal teaching and the emphasis on narrowly defined academic skills makes it even more important to implement a culturally relevant curriculum that engages children's feelings, and that reflects and respects the lives, beliefs and experiences of girls and boys from various ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds and from a wide range of ability levels. It involves making decisions about what to teach, how to teach, when to teach it and how to evaluate the impact on children's learning. It is essential that we are aware of the 'hidden' curriculum. For instance:

What criteria do we use when we select books, toys and other learning resources?

How do our attitudes, assumptions and expectations of children and their parents affect the way we relate to them?

How do we group children and by what criteria do we choose them to do various activities or tasks?

How do we maintain discipline and what reward system do we use?

Much of children's learning is promoted through planned play activities. Play, according to Vygotsky, is a revolutionary activity because it involves original, creative ways of thinking in imaginative situations which in turn heighten cognitive performance. Through individual and group play children can learn and consolidate social and physical skills, share ideas, experiences and feelings, explore, experiment and create. We enrich the quality of their play and learning by providing a well-planned curriculum that effectively teaches children the skills and strategies they need, promotes problem solving and decision making, and strikes a balance between child-initiated and adult directed activities. It is accessible to everyone and enables all children to feel self-confident, proud of themselves and their families without feeling superior or inferior to others. A project on ourselves and other people, for example, could encourage all children to talk and to draw (older ones could write) about themselves -their names, their physical features, their family, their friends, their cultural practices, their favourite foods, music, toys and games.

When we work from an anti-discriminatory perspective we recognise the right of both girls and boys to have a curriculum that values each sex equally and gives equal opportunity to participate in all its aspects. Books, games and packaging are carefully selected in favour of those which portray both girls and boys as active and powerful. To broaden children's experience, women and men who are doing non-traditional jobs can be invited to come in to the nursery/school to talk to the children about their work. Children can be given opportunities to learn about women's and men's contribution to challenging discrimination and injustice. By celebrating special events like Women's Day on March 8th, children, educators and parents honour the women they know as well as famous women. Mother's Day can be celebrated by focusing on the work mothers do in and outside the home.

The individuality of children with developmental or physical impairment is respected and valued when the curriculum is based on a flexible approach to education and care. Appropriate expectations are set for each child and their educators have a sensitive awareness of their rights and needs. Inclusion of children with special needs hinges on our meeting the needs of all the children and adapting the curriculum accordingly.

**Developing understanding**

We need to develop our own respect and appreciation for those who are different from ourselves and to be willing to discuss these differences openly. We require accurate information, sensitive awareness and commitment to counter discriminatory attitudes and practices. This may mean that there is much that we need to learn and much to be unlearned. For example, if we have grown up thinking that men, White people and abled people are superior to everyone else then we may well give children a distorted view of life and a false picture of the world. So we need time to reflect continually on our own attitudes, feelings and practice and seize opportunities to learn about and appreciate a variety of life-styles and the contribution that Black people, women, people with disabilities and working class men and women have made and are making to human progress. Ongoing inservice anti-discriminatory training can provide

knowledge and expertise and help develop the confidence all this demands. However, although excellent training opportunities are available, lack of funding and staff cuts prevent many hard-working, stressed-out educators from taking advantage of them.

For those who may not have much experience of working from an anti-discriminatory perspective, a good place to begin is to learn about and take pride in their own cultures and then inform themselves about the cultures of the children in the nursery/school. It may come as a surprise to find how much our own prejudices and training get in the way of being prepared to accept new ideas, try new ways of doing things, taste different foods, listen to unfamiliar music, and learn other languages. Developing sensitive awareness and commitment to counter racism and other forms of discrimination is vital. Lack of appropriate knowledge and a fixed belief in the superiority of their own cultural practices may cause White educators to act in a racist way, consciously or unconsciously, as the following examples illustrate:

An Asian child was busy pretending to make tea in the home corner.
A member of staff intervened. 'No dear, we don't use the saucepan, we use the teapot.'
The little girl was going to make tea in the way her mother did at home -boiling the tea, milk and sugar together in a saucepan. She was left feeling frustrated, bewildered and wondering why her mother didn't know how to make tea properly.

An incident described by Iram Siraj-Blatchford (1991:12) highlights the importance of involving non-teaching staff in discussions and in-service training:

In an infant school a four-year old continued to struggle with a knife and fork at lunch times over a period of several weeks. At home his parents ate Pakistani food, chapattis and rice were eaten by hand, as is normal practice. The child was learning for the first time that food could be eaten using implements other than hands. The teachers encouraged his development. One lunch time, after struggling to balance baked beans on his fork for some time, he resorted to using his hands. The school secretary (who collected payment for meals in the hall) shouted across the hall to this little boy, 'Stop eating with your hands, only animals eat with their hands!' The look on the four-year-old's face was one of bewilderment, hurt and embarrassment. She had indicated that not only was his behaviour deviant and animal-like, but by implication so was his parents' and that of the community.

Headteachers too may be unaware and ill-informed - as this incident that I witnessed illustrates:

The Head of a junior school in the North of England was conducting an assembly on Diwali. The previous week he had admitted Asian twins from a practising Muslim family. He now turned to them and asked them to tell all the children what they did at home to celebrate Diwali. The bewildered children remained silent and the Headteacher, interpreted their silence as shyness. It was later pointed out to him by

their class teacher that Diwali is a Hindu festival so would not be celebrated by Muslims.

The dangers of a 'White is best' approach

There is an argument that educators can create a neutral environment in which children's natural innocence is being preserved and in which all have the same opportunity to blossom. But is it possible to create a neutral environment? Don't personal values and beliefs inevitably creep in and actively influence the content and the way equipment and learning activities are presented to children? Isn't it likely that the 'neutral' environment reflects the educator's view of the world and the people in it?

The claim to 'treat children all the same' is neither likely nor desirable. Children's stage of development, their abilities, individual likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses all influence the way they are treated. It is generally accepted that aggressive children need to be responded to differently from those who are withdrawn and that new children need to be treated differently from 'old-timers'. Treating all children in the same way and ignoring their differences might, unwittingly, be putting pressure on children to deny their differences so that they can be the 'same' as those in the dominant group. Rejecting part of themselves in this way can seriously affect children's sense of identity and self-worth. Similarly, working with Black and White children and sincerely believing that the colour of their skin is irrelevant because they are all just children and so should all be treated alike runs the risk of equating, 'they are all the same' with 'they are all White'. The Swann Report (1985:26) calls this the 'colour-blind' approach:

...many of the teachers to whom we spoke on our visits were at pains to assert that they deliberately made no distinction between 'black' pupils and others: they were 'colour blind'. In this way they claimed to fulfil the first duty of a teacher which they saw as regarding all pupils equally... We ourselves regard 'colour-blindness' however as potentially just as negative as a straightforward rejection of people with a different skin colour since both types of attitude seek to deny the validity of an important aspect of a person's identity.

Implicit in the colour-blind approach is the assumption that White customs, traditions and way of life are the 'right ones' and that others, being different, are not quite as 'good' -a superior attitude that is perfectly conveyed in this extract from a rhyme popular in the 1930s,

And if they all were English, it would save a lot of fuss,  
And wouldn't it be nice for them, if they were all like us?

Adopting a 'colour-blind' approach is likely to reinforce White children's feelings of superiority, deny the life experiences of Black children, miseducate everyone and arouse responses like this one quoted by Ramdeen (1988:29):

My teacher is always telling me that she does not see my colour and that she treats all the children the same. If she does not see my colour then she does not see ME.

In their study Ogilvy and others (1990) showed that although educators in multi-ethnic Scottish nurseries thought that they treated the children according to their individual needs, observations and videotapes of interactions between adults and children showed that South Asian children were given less attention, were spoken to less and that staff used poor models of English when explaining things to them. This practice was also noted by Biggs and Edwards (1992:163):

Teachers were found to interact less frequently with black children than with white, they had fewer exchanges lasting more than thirty seconds with black children, they also spent less time with them discussing the particular task which had been set.

Treating children 'all the same' ignores the very differences that make them unique individuals. It is the opposite of an anti-discriminatory approach in which they are treated equally, with equal concern and their different needs -psychological, cultural and social -are recognised and responded to. This approach encourages children to learn about and value each other's cultures, languages, abilities and life-styles and draw strength from their own. The criteria suggested by the Schools Council and endorsed and extended in the Swann Report (1985:329) provide a useful guide:

I. The variety of social, cultural and ethnic groups and a perspective of the world should be evident in visuals, stories, conversation and information.
II. People from social, cultural and ethnic groups should be presented as individuals with every human attribute.
III. Cultures should be empathetically described in their own terms and not judged against some notion of 'ethnocentric' or 'euro-centric' culture.
IV. The curriculum should include accurate information on racial and cultural differences and similarities.

We strongly support these criteria but would wish to add a further two ...

- All children should be encouraged to see cultural diversity in a positive light.
- The issue of racism, at both institutional and individual level, should be considered openly and efforts made to counter it.

**Inequality and diversity: Black children**

To support children's learning we need to be alert to the obvious and subtle discriminatory factors in society and the nursery/school. Many developmental tests, for example, are culturally biased because they are standardised on White, middle class children and may include toys and equipment unfamiliar to Black and working class children. Assessments based on such tests may therefore be inaccurate. For example, a three year old girl was given a doll’s table, chairs and a small tablecloth, which she used to wipe her nose instead of putting it on the table. She knew about handkerchiefs but not about tablecloths! Measuring certain accomplishments to assess
children's developmental progress might well be inappropriate. The ability to handle a knife and fork is likely to be less developed in children whose families traditionally eat with their hands or chopsticks, so they could be incorrectly assessed. Jennie Lindon (1993) points out that eating with a knife and fork is still listed in some development charts or guidelines. It's also possible that we might not appreciate that children learning English as an additional language may understand the concepts involved in assessment tests but not have the English vocabulary they need. A more accurate result could be obtained if the tests were administered to the children in their home language.

Most of us help children to value their own and a range of cultural traditions. However, we may not have realised the conflict that children exposed to racism experience. Morgan (1996:39) suggests that:

Children of African-Caribbean heritage in Britain are caught up between two cultures, one which they see devalued and the other with which they do not fully identify but which is seen as superior by society. Just coping with being Black and watching and listening as society devalues us can be stressful and contribute to low self-esteem, poor motivation, depression and even anti-social behaviour.

THE SHADOW
A lonely figure enters
He produces a ball.
'Anyone want to play?'
They turn away,
He is different.

'My father told me to stay clear of them sort'.
He moves towards the playground wall
He knows each red brick almost by name
The wall is his friend.
He scratches his curly black hair
    'Go back to where you came from!'
The daily chant begins
He closes his ears
and moves on.

School finishes
At the back of the bus queue he stands
desolate and alone
His expressionless face
disguises the day's deep damage
like a veil.

He climbs the stairs to his humble flat,
the lift is out of order
He reaches for his key, enters
He greets his mother and his sister

goes quickly to his room.
He covers his black face
with his black hands
and cries softly into the pillow
which knows his tears so well.

This poem, written by a 14 year old underlines how important it is to intervene when children are called names, teased or are physically abused.

Never underestimate how overwhelming feelings of isolation, alienation, anger, bewilderment and rejection can be for children who are harassed or excluded from play, nor the extent to which their learning can be affected when they are unhappy, angry, or anxious. This tale was told to me by a friend of the family.

A five year old Sikh boy had eagerly anticipated starting infant school but within months of his being a pupil at the school, he radically changed from being active, bright and outgoing, into a withdrawn child no longer communicating with anyone, wetting himself and having nightmares. A few sessions at a clinic revealed that he was frightened to go to school because the other children teased him for wearing a 'handkerchief' and mocked his grandfather who wore a turban when he brought him to school each morning. The school did not seem to consider that it was its responsibility to challenge the racist behaviour of the pupils and so did nothing. The head teacher advised the parents, 'to transfer him to another school where there were more Asian children.'

**Inequality and diversity: refugees**

We need to know how to help the refugee children in nursery/school, especially those who have fled a war zone, repression or organised violence. Jill Rutter (1994), the Education Officer for the Refugee Council advises that we should find out about the political situation in the country from which families have fled and try and understand the experiences they have gone through and the difficulties involved in settling in a strange, often hostile, environment. We may need to try various strategies to give these children the emotional support they need, help them deal with their feelings and gain their trust and confidence.

**Inequality and diversity: girls and boys**

Educators may be surprised to learn that we need to help young children understand that being a girl or a boy depends on their anatomy and not on the games they play, the clothes they wear or their hairstyles. Children who are happy to play in non-stereotypical ways need encouragement and support and all should be helped to counter stereotypes.

Sometimes, though, they sort things out for themselves, as this child from a nursery school in Scotland did:

Four year old James was washing a doll.
Robert said to him, 'Ooooh -only girls play with dolls.'
'It's fun with all the bubbles,' James replied.
Robert looked at him, at the teacher who was standing nearby and went over to the water, watched James for a bit, then tentatively picked up a doll and joined in.

Girls do not always have the freedom, space, time and support to experience and learn a range of skills and become confident. We might need to devise ways to encourage them to join in physical activities like climbing, kicking balls and riding bikes. This may be complicated by the fact that boys tend to take up space as of right and to monopolise the equipment.

We might be unconsciously sending sexist messages by, for example, allowing rowdiness and fighting from boys, but intervening if girls fight or are rowdy. We may not cuddle boys as often as girls or encourage them to express their feelings and be gentle with one another. We may not reassure them that it is alright for boys to cry but it is important to do so because they seldom see men behaving in this way.

The words we use can influence children's play choices. For example, if we call the home corner the 'dramatic play area' and resource it suitably then some of the boys who feel they have no role in the 'home corner' may play in it. By encouraging boys and girls to play in a wide variety of imaginative scenarios such as hospitals, factories, space ships, trailers, garages; and to use the dressing-up clothes, jewellery, hats, wigs; and by providing tool chests, hard hats, overalls and other work-related clothes, we can help children change stereotyped attitudes they may already hold.

Debbie Epstein (1995:63) suggests that these strategies are insufficient in themselves. She argues that children are strongly wedded to their gender beliefs i.e. what it means to be a boy or a girl, as these help them to make sense of themselves. She maintains that providing boys and girls with positive images and role models and helping them to recognise and challenge discrimination needs to be set in a context in which they are offered alternative understandings of what it means to be a boy and what it means to be a girl. Her interpretation of the following incident helps to crystallise her approach:

Clare, Becky and Natasha came to see me with a complaint: they were being prevented from playing with the large bricks by Michael, Nathan and Ben. Furthermore, said Clare, Michael says girls don't play bricks. If I want to play in the bricks I must be a boy! Clare was extremely upset, more by the accusation of being a boy than being denied the chance to play with the bricks (though she wanted to do that as well). She clearly felt that being told she must be a boy was one of the worst insults that could be thrown at her and perhaps this is not surprising in the light of young children's attachment to gender difference (and in the light of the intended insult).
Epstein's response was to introduce times in the week when only the girls could play with the bricks. Their constructions related to domestic play and fairy tales, which she noted, enabled them to hold on to their 'girlish' ways and at the same time challenge stereotypes of what it means to be a girl. The girls were very proud of the large and complicated palace they built. It was much admired and Michael, who had initially not wanted the girls to play with the bricks, dictated the following diary entry: *I used to think girls don't do bricks. They made really good houses, specially Clare. Now I like to play with Clare in the bricks. We make lots of good buildings.* Epstein never saw them building together but she argues that the fact that he now wanted to include Clare in a 'masculine' activity was an important breakthrough.

A teacher I know, working in an infant school in Liverpool, sought to provide experiences that might offer children alternative understandings. She gave her class of top infants an activity which, she hoped, would encourage them to see themselves and each other through different eyes and to learn from one another.

The children were asked to draw their very own dream ship in which they could travel wherever they wanted to. The teacher explained that they should draw it so that everyone could see what was inside it –like a doll's house with the front opened. Not surprisingly, the boys had guns and radar as well as engines or sails on their ships. One boy included a fridge with beer in it. The girls concentrated on the living quarters, papering the walls, providing kitchens with appliances and food, and one girl even put in a sick bay. The pictures were then put on the walls for the children to look at. During the ensuing discussion the boys poured scorn on the girls because none of them had provided their ships with engines and one had given hers wheels. They stopped laughing when it was pointed out that they would have had a very uncomfortable voyage as they had nowhere to sit or sleep and they would have died of hunger and thirst.

To try and break down girls' stereotypical play, Ross and Browne (1993) propose a very different strategy. They recommend removing the windows, doors, floor and 'play people' from construction sets like lego so as to encourage girls to use the materials in different ways rather than constructing houses and playing 'families'.

**Inequality and diversity: Traveller children**

Whether or not there are Traveller children in the group, we need to appreciate that they are discriminated against largely because of their nomadic life-style. Laws banishing 'Gypsies' (most prefer the term Travellers) and threatening anyone associating with them with death were passed under Henry VIII in the 16th century and only repealed in the late 18th century. Attitudes are deep-rooted. Consequently, opportunities should be provided to talk about any negative feelings we may have. Learning about how Traveller families live may dispel myths that we might have unconsciously absorbed. Many Travellers live in houses but, as Brian Foster (1993:54) describes, others live in trailers:

Traveller camps are not random groups of individual families in individual trailers. ...children grow up in a large, close-knit community, surrounded by grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings. This community offers care, support and education, and can help share and dissipate the tensions which prejudice and hostility can generate.

James Coyle (1996:14) writes: *I live with my mum and dad and three brothers. It is cosy and warm in our trailer: We have a chimney, a fridge and a television. We have two bedrooms.*

Michael McDonagh (1996:51) writes:

I like this school. I have lived in thirteen houses and a lot of sites, one in Dublin. I had two big dogs, Lassie and Wolf. My sisters go to school and my big sister goes to secondary school and her reading is good. I live in a house in Tottenham and I have been in this school for a year now. I have lots of friends, Jamil, Kelvin, Mattie, Michael and Daniel. They know I am a Traveller and they like me. I play football with them. I have a good teacher and a teacher for Travellers comes in to see me every week. A lady called Ivy helps me as well. I am better at reading and I have good writing. I can sound out letters and make words. I like the computer. In my last school the children were not nice to me and I was fighting a lot. Here I have learned to get on better with other children. I like school.

If children from Traveller families are about to join the nursery/school it is important that we find out whether they live in houses or trailers. For those who live in trailers starting nursery/school can be a traumatic experience because it could be the first time that they have been in a large indoor space or encountered running water and flushing toilets. The concept of looking after play materials may be new to them because at home they may play with scrap metals and other odds and ends which are then discarded. As their parents may be illiterate and their access to books and writing materials limited, the children's reading and writing readiness may be less developed than most children from settled communities. Providing suitable play materials and books which depict trailers and other features of the Traveller way of life can help Traveller children feel more comfortable and enable everyone to enjoy and benefit from the experiences being offered. As with all families, each Traveller family will have its own history and experiences, beliefs and values which need to be understood to ensure that the provision is culturally appropriate. Parents and the children themselves are the best source of such information. Setting up a trailer home corner and themes such as transport, working animals or homes can easily be integrated into a culturally appropriate curriculum.

**Inequality and diversity: disabled children**

It may be difficult for abled educators to appreciate the extent to which the lives of most disabled children are defined by their disability or the degree to which their needs, desires and hopes get pushed to one side. Black children's disability can also
take centre stage, thus marginalising racism, which means that a significant part of their identity and their needs may be ignored and unmet. The presence of disabled children in the nursery/school may be the first time that educators come into close contact with a child who has a physical or learning disability. The generally accepted principle, 'build on what children can do' is particularly relevant and important because disabled children need to have their abilities focused on, not their disabilities. They need time to develop at their own pace and to have access to equipment and materials with different textures and tactile qualities as well as those that require varying degrees of manual dexterity. While we juggle with tight budgets we may need to remind ourselves that such resources benefit both the disabled and the abled children. To encourage physically disabled and abled children to interact with and learn from one another, we may have to rearrange the room so that all areas and equipment, toys and activities are easily accessible. For example, cushions and large bean-bags may be needed to provide extra support if activities are on the floor. A valuable lesson that we and the children can learn is that nobody is perfect, everyone is impaired in some way.

**Inequality and diversity: children from homosexual families**

We may feel uncomfortable about addressing issues around sexuality because in many cultures and religions homosexuality is not accepted or is considered to be a sin. We may share the concerns of many parents that having a book about a lesbian or gay family will promote homosexuality or that boys wearing skirts and playing with dolls will encourage them to 'grow up queer'. Opportunities may need to be provided to enable staff and parents to express such anxieties, to be reassured that children benefit from this type of play and to understand that encouraging gender equality can extend the emotional, social and cognitive development of all children. Some educators may be shocked to discover that they are working with lesbian and gay colleagues or with children from lesbian and gay families who, because of attitudes towards homosexuality, may be living with a 'secret'. Their parents need to know that hurtful comments and name-calling would be routinely challenged and that we will constantly check that the language and the resources we use do not only reflect the 'ideal' family of biological mother, father and 2.2 children. Patrick and Burke (1993:201) quote Ackroy, a lesbian mother and educationalist:

> I want primary teachers to inform children about alternatives to the nuclear family and to integrate this into all their work concerning home backgrounds. I want them to use the words 'lesbian' and 'gay' and to present them as a valid personal and political identity (and not a sexual act).

**Resourcing for change**

For parents or children who come into nurseries/schools in which their cultures are not being acknowledged and represented, it is like looking in a mirror and not seeing a reflection. To ensure that conscious and unconscious racism, sexism, class, ablism and homophobia are eliminated and that all children's general knowledge, imagination and self-esteem are fostered, resources need to be continually reviewed and evaluated.

Concern stems from the fact that children can pick up negative messages about themselves and others through the resources they encounter. Some manufacturers and publishers are producing toys, books and other learning materials which challenge stereotypes and present positive images of and for all children. But there are not enough of them and their products tend to be on sale in specialist shops or only a few High Street shops. We educators can order these resources through catalogues but they are not generally available to parents.

To extend the range of resources being presented to children and to show them that the nursery/school values diversity, we can invite parents to contribute their knowledge and skills to help produce appropriate books and wall displays. The teaching of numeracy could include different ways of counting -on the fingers, on the knuckles -and equipment that various cultures use, such as the abacus, could be provided. Children are likely to enjoy the experience of carefully examining textiles produced and decorated in various ways from many parts of the world, such as Peruvian weaving and knitting, mirror-work from India and the Middle East, cotton batiks from Africa. These can then be appropriately incorporated into the general resources in the nursery/school.

Remember that even when all toys and other learning materials have been carefully chosen, the critical issue is how they are used. Resources and the way they are presented can enable children to see beyond society's definition of who and what is generally accepted as beautiful. They can help them to value and respect various shades of skin colour, a variety of hair textures and facial features, and a range of body shapes. When we adopt this approach and provide positive images we reduce the scope for ridicule and feelings of superiority and help to promote self-respect and pride.

If our society were free of discrimination we would not need to be so concerned about the fact that, for example, there are so many positive images of White people and of abled people but so few of Black people and of disabled people. Resources that feature Black people are generally thought to be for Black children and the importance of providing them for White children is seldom recognised. Similarly, the few that feature disabled children are seldom found in nurseries/schools where there are only abled children.

One image that definitely does not belong in any nursery/school is the golliwog. It reinforces a negative stereotype of Black people as being comical, foolish and unattractive. In the Oxford dictionary it is defined as: 'a grotesque doll with fuzzy hair, round eyes, thickened lips and fixed grin'. Do you know that the abusive term 'wog' is derived from the golliwog? There is a further twist. At the beginning of this century when Jewish people were fleeing to Britain to escape a series of pogroms in Eastern Europe, a new toy made its appearance -a hooked nose and leering features were stamped on to the head and body of the golliwog.

In Enid Blyton's original stories about three golliwogs, the negative qualities attributed to darkness, i.e. fear and danger, are also applied to them and none of the other toys play with them because their mistress, Angela, does not like their black faces. To add insult to injury, nine of the eleven stories are based on mistaken identity -the three golliwogs all look alike.

Golliwogs don't only appear in stories. The image is still featured on fabrics like curtaining material and on Robertson's jam jars. Although the 'golly' is remembered with affection by some White and a few Black adults, many Black parents vividly recall their pain and humiliation when, as children, they were taunted about golliwogs and compared to them. They don't want their children to be submitted to similar ordeals.

We should be sure to give children the message that even though members of a particular culture share certain common beliefs and practices, there are considerable variations. Not all Hindu women wear saris, not all Greek families attend the Orthodox Church, not all Jewish men and boys wear skullcaps and not all African people are good at or even interested in music. Focusing on differences while ignoring similarities and overlooking the differences between people from the same group does little to eradicate stereotypes.

Care needs to be taken that the dressing-up clothes represent the everyday clothes from a range of cultures rather than 'national costumes'. Consultation with parents can ensure that resources do in fact reflect the life-styles of the children. A useful strategy was adopted by educators in an Australian nursery school I visited:

They knew from experience that although there were great similarities within an ethnic group, each family practised its culture in its own way and that there could be differences in their child-rearing practices. When a number of Vietnamese children were admitted, they asked each of the Vietnamese parents about what to them was meaningful and relevant in their culture. Armed with this information they were then able to introduce a Vietnamese perspective into their provision which was culturally appropriate for all the children.

For many children the experience of being cared for and educated outside their home is a culture shock. Only when we appreciate this will we be ready and able to support them. How might children feel coming into an environment in which the adults and all or most of the children have a different skin colour, the women wear quite different clothes from those worn by women in their family and communities, and the equipment, especially in the home corner, is unfamiliar? By empathising with and supporting children who are disabled and adapting our provision and practice accordingly we can help them feel more comfortable. We may need to give children who live in cramped conditions opportunities and space to enable them to play freely, to make a noise and to express their feelings. For many parents handing their children over to us arouses anxiety and concern - we are after all strangers. The likelihood that they and their children will have a positive experience in the nursery/school depends to a large extent on how welcome we make them feel. We need to create an environment where children can develop skills, confidence in their own talents and respect for others, and in which policy and practice recognise and counteract stereotyping and celebrate diversity. To do this successfully we need to look at our own practice.

An opportunity to rate yourself

You can gain a sense of whether you are creating an anti-discriminatory environment by rating yourself on this checklist. For each statement ring the words that best describe your provision and practice.

In my workplace I use resources and provide activities that reflect and teach about:

1. all the children and their families in my group
   - often
   - sometimes
   - never

2. children and adults from the main ethnic groups living in the vicinity of the nursery/school
   - often
   - sometimes
   - never

3. a range of languages especially those spoken by parents and children in the nursery/school
   - often
   - sometimes
   - never

4. people from class, cultural and ethnic backgrounds that are different from my own without encouraging or reinforcing stereotypical thinking
   - often
   - sometimes
   - never

5. a range of families including single mothers or fathers, mothers in jobs outside the home and fathers at home, fathers in jobs outside the home and mothers at home, families with two mothers or two fathers, middle class and working class families, families with differently able members and those with members from different ethnic and cultural groups
   - often
   - sometimes
   - never

6. Black and White women and men doing a range of tasks in the home
   - often
   - sometimes
   - never

7. differently abled people at work, at leisure and being with their families
   - often
   - sometimes
   - never

8. people from different backgrounds who contribute, or have contributed to our lives, including those who have been involved in the fight for justice.
   - often
   - sometimes
   - never

Now total your points and examine the results:
For every **often** answer give yourself 2 points.
For every **sometimes** answer give yourself 1 point.
For every **never** answer give yourself 0 points.

If you scored between **14 and 16** you are using an anti-discriminatory approach

If you scored between **11 and 13** you are using an anti-discriminatory approach in some areas

If you scored between **5 and 10** you are introducing cultural activities and celebrations at special times, seeing other cultures as 'exotic' and not incorporating them into all aspects of the programme. This approach doesn't give children the tools they need to interact comfortably, empathically and fairly with diversity.

If your score is 4 or below, you are reflecting and teaching from the dominant culture's viewpoint and ignoring the experiences and views of people from groups different from your own.