



Taking a hard look at ourselves: starting your anti-racist learning

Background:

Mudiad Meithrin staff and childcare practitioners from Cylchoedd Meithrin and day nurseries have been learning about race and ethnicity with Rachel Clarke. Why is race and ethnicity such an important topic for early years practitioners to explore? Menna Machreth, Head Officer for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion, offers some key learning points from the training day.

The Welsh Government have set an ambitious target of eradicating racism in Wales by 2030. The hope is that the young children in our Cylchoedd Meithrin will live in a society where skin colour will not affect the way they are treated or judged, and they will not experience racism. If this is to become a reality, it demands all of us to make changes – whoever we are and whatever we do – to de-root racism from our lives and communities. This is especially true of childcare and early years settings, where we have an opportunity to recognise and subvert racial stereotyping which children will pick up from us, their families, community and media.

Where do I start?

We can't pretend this is an easy task. As Rachel Clarke told us, it will take courage to look honestly and openly at ourselves. This takes courage, as we may not be comfortable with what we see in ourselves. Here are some questions to probe your thinking:

- *When were you first aware of your race?*
- *How have external factors influenced your thinking about racial difference? Good or bad? People, things, media...?*
- *How has race showed up in your personal life?*

For myself as a White woman, it can be difficult to talk about the impact of living in a racist Society; e.g. I remember feeling uncomfortable as a young child when I realised I was in a space where the majority of people were Black. Why did I feel that way? Racism is embedded in all of society, and acknowledging this and our need to look at our own way of seeing the world.

Rachel shared her own lived experience of being a Black woman, a teacher and mother, and how her race has meant she has been judged on the basis of her skin colour all of her life.

She shared stories about her grandmother, Betty Campbell, a trailblazer who became Wales's first Black head teacher, and who was passionate about giving everychild in Butetown, Cardiff, the opportunities they deserved. When we move out of our comfort zone, we recognise our need to listen and learn.

We all have our own story, our own background, our own identities. We were challenged to think how close to power we are on the basis of our skin colour and other characteristics. It's well worth taking a look at this powerful video, where children recognise that they have been born with different privileges, which will give some a head-start in life: [Heartbreaking Moment When Kids Learn About White Privilege | The School That Tried to End Racism](#)

'Racism is the water, not the shark. If we want to do better, we have to fix our entire culture and systems, not just people.'

In the past, people have tended to think of racism as an incident (verbal or physical abuse) rather than the culture we're surrounded by. To turn the tide on racism, all of us must look at our structures and environments to see if they truly make every child feel they belong.

One of the most horrifying images of the day was a the story of a little Black girl who has attended Nursery. Before starting at the Nursery, she drew a Picture of herself as a Black girl; by the time she had finished her time in Nursery, she drew herself to look like a blonde White girl. What made her do that? Not a shark or any particular incident – it was the water she was in which gave preference to White skin colour.

Of course, Childcare and early years settings want to extend a welcome to all, but this may require more work to ensure all feel they belong. The concept of 'Cynefin' is a strong element of the new Curriculum, but we must ensure that all races and ethnicities are part of that Cynefin. It may mean more effort in including the child and their family in your setting, learning how to bring in and represent their identities in an authentic way at the setting.

Here is Rachel's guidance on being open to questions about race from children:

Child development 0-5 years:

At this age, children may begin to notice and point out differences in people they see around them. As a practitioner, you have the opportunity to gently lay the foundation of their worldview. Use language that's age-appropriate and easy for them to understand.

Recognize and celebrate differences: if a child asks about someone's skin colour, you can use it as an opportunity to acknowledge that people do indeed look different, but to point out things we have in common. You could say, "We are all human, but we are all unique, isn't that amazing"!

Be open: Make it clear that you're always open to your children's questions and encourage them to come to you with them. If your children point out people who look different – as young children can often do from curiosity – avoid shushing them or they will start to believe that it's a taboo topic.

Use fairness: Children, especially those around 5, tend to understand the concept of fairness quite well. Talk about racism as unfair and unacceptable and that's why we need to work together to make it better.

This is an on-going learning journey for all, but it's an important journey to be on. Mudiad Meithrin's vision is that every child in Wales will have the opportunity to have Welsh medium Childcare and early years education, and every child means every race and ethnicity. In doing so, we cannot be blind to the racism embedded in society which will damage the young children in our care, and we reject the view that Welsh Language education is for mostly White children, and not for all.



Published by Menna Machreth, Mudiad Meithrin's Chief Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Officer

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