

Diversity Equity Inclusion

A resource for the primary school levels



Diversity Equity Inclusion: A resource for the primary school levels

Co-Authors:

Sylvie Kerger
Sergei Glotov
Nathalie Atten

In collaboration with Christina Siry, Daniela Bertoli and the SciTeach Center Team. We also thank other colleagues at the University of Luxembourg for their support and critical comments.

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Cess Frias (@cessilustra)

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Child's drawing as a part of Case one activity

INTRODUCTION

Classrooms are becoming more diverse, especially here in Luxembourg. How can you, as a teacher, support and embrace this diversity? The aim of this resource is to help you by providing inspirations, ideas, and concrete examples from practice. Teachers play a huge role in a child's life and can help shape their worldview, future aspirations and hobbies. You can provide an environment that helps children to be confident and proud of who they are, their languages, their cultures, their identities, and this resource can be used as a tool to achieve that.

The aim of this resource is to lay the foundation for a more equitable and inclusive society by using stories to instill the values of diversity, equity and inclusion from an early age. It is a product of collaboration between in-service teachers in Luxembourg and researchers at the University of Luxembourg, using cases from practice, real school contexts and existing research.

Difference is not something to be ignored or feared, it is normal and valuable. It is not enough to simply treat each child equally, as all children are different, and there is nothing wrong with that, because it is difference that shapes our world. This resource normalises differences and showcases how these can be recognised and used in your practice.

The resource is centered around reflection and storytelling, encouraging you to reflect on yourself and your practice, while providing ideas and inspirations for working around the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion with children's literature. It also includes a chapter on involving parents or caretakers and links to more resources.

We hope you enjoy this resource and find it useful for your practice!

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Children's well-being

It is important to talk to children about diversity because it helps them to learn that people are all different, and that it is normal to be different. If children learn to accept and respect differences at an early age, they develop more understanding and awareness of diversities. This can help to prevent exclusion, prejudice and bullying that children often face for being different. Children who know and appreciate diversity grow up to be more open, friendly and self-confident – and help to ensure that everyone feels comfortable and safe.

Moreover, promoting diversity, equity and inclusion within school can support children's mental and physical well-being. It shows that the school is the place where a child is welcomed and nurtured, and their uniqueness is valued and celebrated. This in turn can support children's learning process.

Drawing from Research

Diversity education helps to create an inclusive and respectful classroom where students feel accepted. It promotes understanding, tolerance, empathy and critical thinking about social prejudices. By addressing diversity, students develop strong social skills, build positive relationships and become more open to other cultures. Anti-bias education builds self-esteem and reduces discrimination. With the right pedagogical support, teaching about diversity improves identity development, inclusion, and social behavior and prepares children for life in a multicultural society (see References at the end).

National context

In 2024, petitions in Luxembourg (n°3198 and n°3281) showed that the topic of LGBT people is widely discussed in society. The first petition was about excluding LGBT topics from the education of minors. A counter-petition then called for greater inclusion of these topics. Both petitions very quickly reached the necessary number of signatures to be discussed in the Chambre des députés. This shows that these topics polarise opinion very strongly. The discussions are also often associated with misconceptions that children could be sexually educated too early, that these topics could shock them or impose a particular sexual orientation on them.

It is therefore important to know how these topics can be addressed in school in an age-appropriate and child-friendly way. This focus in education is not about sexuality, but about respect, empathy and understanding of diversity, including cultures, religions, disabilities and more.

Luxembourg law and curriculum

In the Luxembourg school law, Section 3 - Article 6, the 6th point states that pupils should be taught civic-mindedness and a sense of responsibility and respect for others to enable them to pursue further education and lifelong learning.

Additionally, the treatment of the topic of diversity is enshrined in the school curriculum, where one of the transversal competences is living democratic values. According to this, pupils should respect democratic values based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They should learn to form their own opinions, think critically, avoid prejudices and stereotypes, assert their rights, take responsibility, and show solidarity, and actively participate in the organisation of school life.

MEANING OF WORDS

Culture

Culture is defined as the attitudes, behaviors, opinions, and other characteristics of a specific group of people within society, i.e. Luxembourgish, skateboard culture, aboriginal culture, theater culture.

Gender

Gender refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, and traits that society considers suitable for men and women. These gender norms and expectations are continuously shaped by society and influence individuals throughout their lives, including within the family, at school, and through the media.

Gender identity is a person's deeply felt, personal understanding of their own gender. It refers to how one identifies oneself as female, male, non-binary, or agender, to name a few. This identity may match or differ from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender expression refers to how a person expresses their gender identity to others. This can involve behavior, appearance, clothing, hairstyle, makeup, body language, and voice. Using a chosen name as well as pronouns is also a common way to express gender.

LGBTIQ+

An umbrella term that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and other people whose sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, or sex characteristics do not conform to heteronormative ideals.

Persons with disability

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Racism

Racism is the process by which systems and policies, actions and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on race. Racism is more than just prejudice in thought or action. It occurs when this prejudice – whether individual or institutional, conscious or unconscious – is accompanied by the power to discriminate against, oppress or limit the rights of others.

Sex

It refers to one's biological and physiological traits, including reproductive organs, chromosomes, and hormones, identifying them as female, male or intersex.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation refers to a person's ability to experience sexual attraction to others. Some of the most common orientations are heterosexual (sexual attraction to the opposite sex), homosexual (sexual attraction to the same sex), and bisexual (sexual attraction to both sexes), but these are by no means exhaustive. One can also be asexual (not sexually attracted to any sex) or pansexual (sexually attracted to all people regardless of gender and sex) and more.

Further resources:

[Council of Europe - Gender Matters Glossary](#)

[OHSU - Inclusive Language Guide](#)

[European Institute for Gender Equality - Glossary and thesaurus](#)



SELF-REFLECTION

Before moving further, let's reflect about who you are, where you come from, and what ideas you have. Name, clothes, skin, job: there are many characteristics that define people but also define everyone in the eyes of others. First, let's start with something simple:

What is your name?
What is the story of your name?

A name can be used to assume your nationality, gender, economic status, parents' background, religion, and hobbies. It can define your employment, your housing situation, your relationships and more. These assumptions can be used against individuals.

Most importantly, the name is a way to refer to a person. It does not signify a person's qualities or lifestyle.



TIP #1

It is crucial to learn how to pronounce the children's names correctly. When you do that, don't make distinctions between children, ask all of them to teach you how to pronounce their names.

TIP #2

Conduct all these reflective activities with your children. A name's story can be a powerful activity to connect with children and involve family/caretakers. Discuss with children which place they connect with and why it represents them. Finally, reflect on where children get their ideas from.

One of the most common questions a person gets asked when meeting someone for the first time is: *Where are you from?* It is a question that helps to establish a common ground for conversation, however, it is a question that can be quite hard to answer, depending on a person's history. So...

Where are you from?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

A person can be from a certain street, town, region, country, and each of these would influence and represent them differently. Moreover, as it has become common to live in a different place from where one was born, a person's place of birth may not mean much to them.

Another question to ponder: what and who influences your worldview? It could be family, friends, media, governments, Internet, literature. Throughout life, you pick up little bits and pieces from everywhere, making you who you are. So...

What and who influences your worldviews?

It is important to be open to different information and to be critical of who is sharing it and for what reasons. The sources have their specific reasons and goals they wish to achieve, for example, to raise support for an issue or to make a certain person popular. So, it is crucial to be aware of these possibly hidden reasons.

SELF-REFLECTION CASES

As you reflected on yourself, let's move on to teaching practice. The following three real cases are situations that may occur in your school. The aim of these cases is to provide a space for further reflection and inspirations, and not to provide direct answers. They are not step-by-step guides to dealing with difficult situations, as the cases may be very different in each context.

You can also discuss these cases with your colleagues and come up with possible reactions for your specific context.



1. You can't play with us

During a break, a teacher notices a small group of children having an argument. A few pupils refuse to play with another pupil because of their nationality. They say: “You are from that country, and we don't play with people from there. You are bad and dangerous!” The pupil tries to defend themselves and accuses the other pupils back. The tensions only escalate.

- What is your immediate reaction?
- How do you think a teacher should react? How could this conflict be resolved?
- How can a teacher prevent such a conflict from happening again? Should a teacher involve someone else (intercultural mediator from the Ministry, parent, other teacher)?
- How can a teacher address world conflicts that can affect pupils' interactions?
- Why do you think children bring up these arguments in the first place?

2. A boy who dresses up

A parent has discovered that their son has been allowed to wear a princess dress in the dress-up corner during school hours.

One day this parent storms into school, angry and demanding to see the responsible teacher. The parent screams at the teacher: “Are you trying to turn him gay? He’s a boy, not a girl!” The parent threatens to take the son out of school if the teacher doesn’t stop that kind of dressing-up.

- What is your immediate reaction?
- How do you think a teacher should react? What are the ways to diffuse the situation?
- Why was the parent upset? What were they worried about? What are they afraid of?
- What are the ways to resolve this conflict? Is there anything the teacher can say to reassure the parent?
- What are some ways to prevent this case from happening?
- How can a teacher best involve families/carers about this?

3. Gendered comments

A teacher keeps noticing how one of their colleagues repeatedly makes gendered comments to pupils. That colleague tells girls that they are cute or pretty and comments on their clothes: “Who is the little princess? You are so cute!”.

They also tell the boys that they are strong or cool and comment on their physical activities (how fast they run, how high they climb): “Look how strong you are!”.

- What is your immediate reaction?
- Why do you think the teacher makes such comments?
- Do you think these comments have an effect on the children? If so, what effect?
- What are some other ways that a teacher could interact and build relationships with pupils?

SETTING UP A CLASSROOM

This chapter provides suggestions and tips for designing an inclusive space within a classroom. These suggestions are by no means exhaustive, so remember to assess children and their needs, noticing what can support them, and reflecting on what they verbally or nonverbally require.

- 1.** Mix toys, images, colours and materials that are stereotypically associated with each sex within various areas of your classroom.
- 2.** Offer support to those who attempt to cross gender boundaries and play with toys, use materials and/or do activities that are not perceived to be for their sex.



- 3.** Be mindful of how you arrange the classroom's furniture, so that children can have access to various areas. Consider having a flexible and sensory seating available.
- 4.** Do not divide children into boys' and girls' groups, as it reinforces a gender binary. Instead you can form the groups based on other criteria, such as favourite food, birth month and so on.
- 5.** If you have a possibility to order specific furniture, take care of the needs of your students, hearing what they would prefer.
- 6.** Include visual aids such as multilingual posters, charts, and photos.
- 7.** If possible, have various books for the book corner that represent diverse children and their experiences.
- 8.** Provide enough equipment so that as many children as possible have access to play and activities.
- 9.** Encourage all children regardless of gender to help to tidy up after themselves.
- 10.** Studies show that sometimes boys can take up a lot of space with different actions: football play, chasing, and play fighting. This in turn pushes other children, most often girls, away from the play areas. Pay attention to how the children use the available space indoors and outdoors, and intervene when necessary.

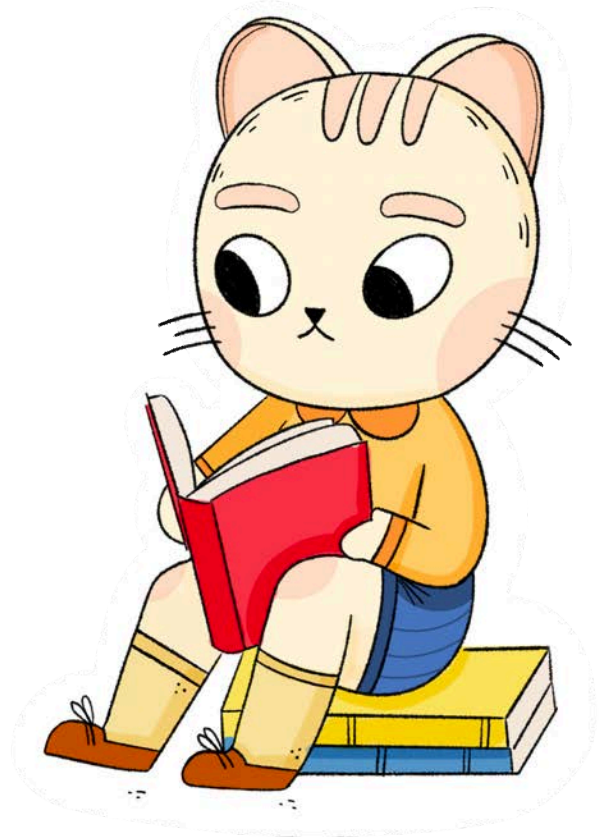
START WITH A BOOK

Children love stories, and children's books should be an integral part of a classroom at pre-school and primary school levels. Teachers often read books to children, as well as organise book corners or stands within their classrooms.

“A good story can put knowledge into context, engage students, and give them the desire to take charge of their own learning” (Brock, Dunifon and Nagel, 2016, p. 49).

Stories can help to introduce complicated concepts in creative, accessible and memorable ways often through great visuals and simple narrative.

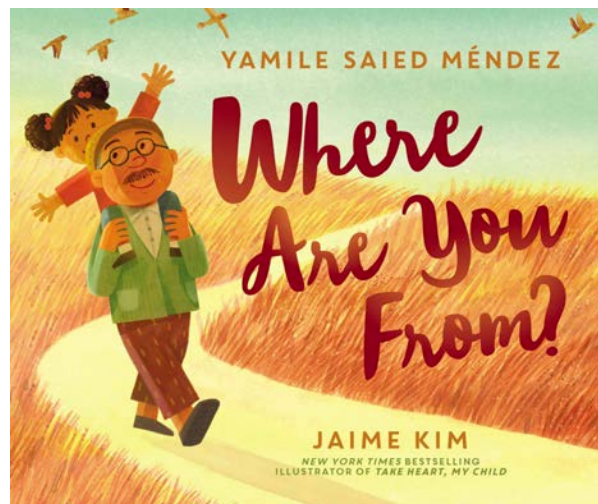
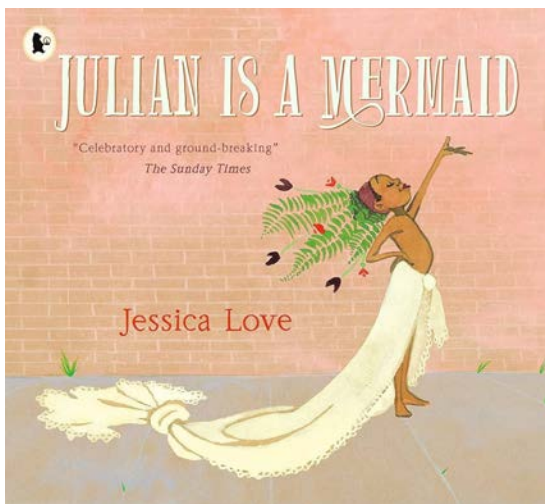
Children's books have been used across subject areas to facilitate learning and engage children with what could seem like a potentially challenging idea. Similar approaches have been employed related to topics of diversity, equity and inclusion.



Take a look at some of these books:

Julian is a Mermaid by Jessica Love

This book tells a story about a boy fascinated by beautiful mermaids that march at the annual Coney Island Mermaid Parade in New York, USA. Soon, the boy dresses up as a mermaid with the support of his grandmother, and together they join the parade. This is a simple tale about the freedom of self-expression, unbounded by gender stereotypes, and the need for carers to support it.



Where are you from? by Yamile Saied Méndez and Jaime Kim

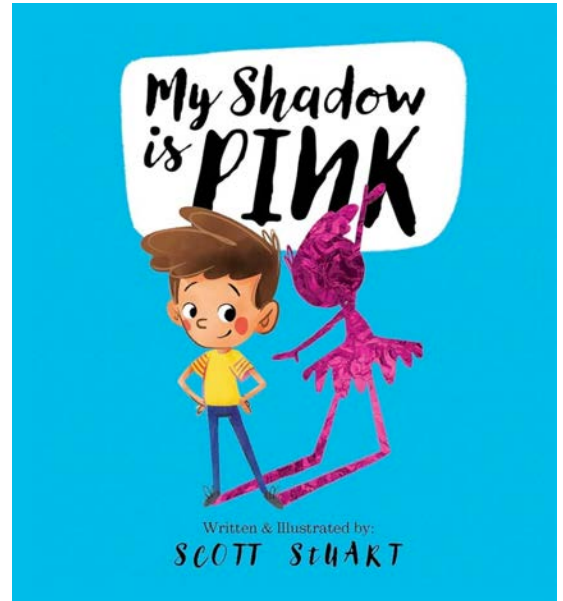
This book introduces us to a little girl who is being asked the title's question. She seeks the answer from her grandfather, who describes all the different and wonderful qualities of the place they are from. Finally, when the girl asks him to name a place, the grandfather points at his heart, saying: "You're from here, from my love and the love of all those before us".

As you see, books can help you to introduce and discuss the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion. The following case studies present how other Luxembourgish teachers have done so.

CASE ONE

My Shadow is Pink by Scott Stuart

The book tells a story of a boy with a pink shadow, who likes things that are “not for boys” and who wants to wear a dress on his first day of school. When entering the classroom, he notices that he stands out from the rest of the children, who have blue shadows. He rushes home and throws the dress on the floor. However, with the support of his father, who comes to the boy’s room with a dress on, the boy embraces his interests, identity, and shadow, learning that many others have pink shadows as well.



Teacher’s Voice:

“The whole work around the story took two weeks. Firstly, I told the story to the children and then I asked them to draw their favourite scene. This is a classic activity and it produced great results. Secondly, I asked the children to draw themselves with their shadows doing something that they like, using any colours they feel and sense.

It was interesting for me to see that the children used different colours than in the book, going beyond the binary of blue and pink. Moreover, some associated the colour of the shadow with their feelings, for example, there was one child who connected the red colour of the shadow with being angry”.

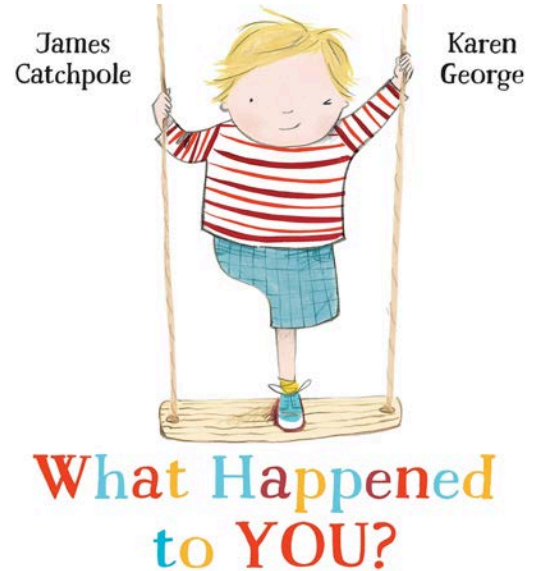
What colour is YOUR shadow?



CASE TWO

***What Happened to You?* by James Catchpole and Karen George**

A boy with one leg is playing at the playground. There, other children start asking: “What happened to you?”, trying to find out why he has only one leg. Their theories range from a shark attack to a leg simply falling off. After bombarding the boy with questions and not getting an answer, the children come to understand that it is not really important what happened, and instead join the boy in his play.

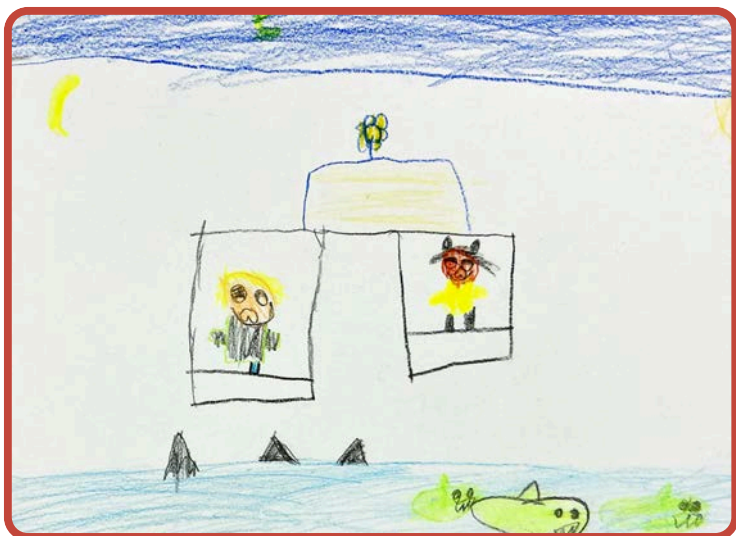
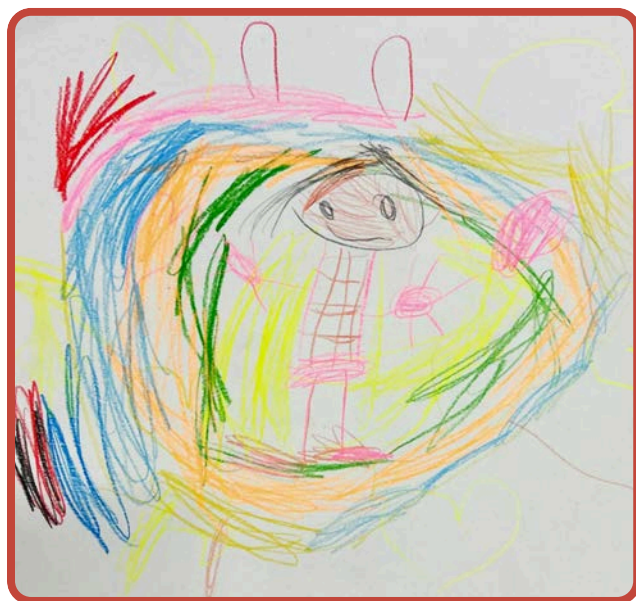
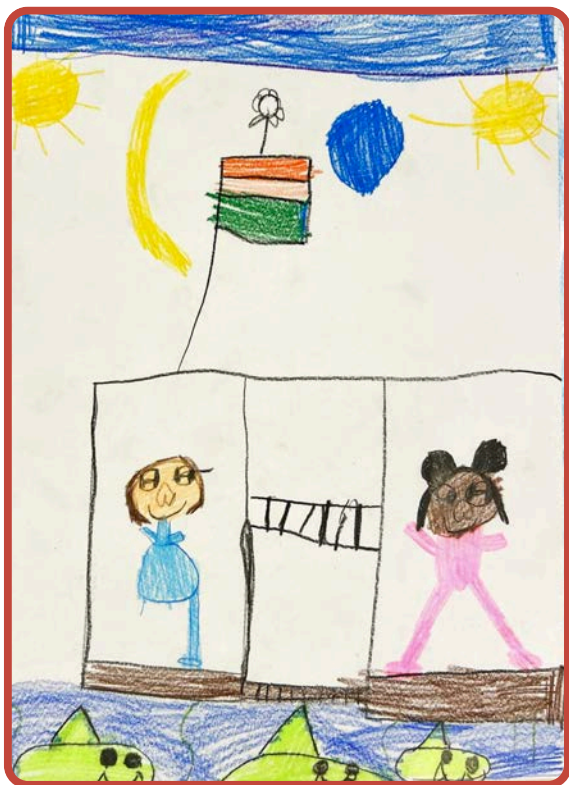


Teacher's Voice:

“I read the story to the children, and then I asked them to draw a picture that would illustrate the story. The children were interested in the playground adventures discussed in the story and focused on those in their drawings. In some cases the main character was not present and in others drawn with two legs”.

Comment:

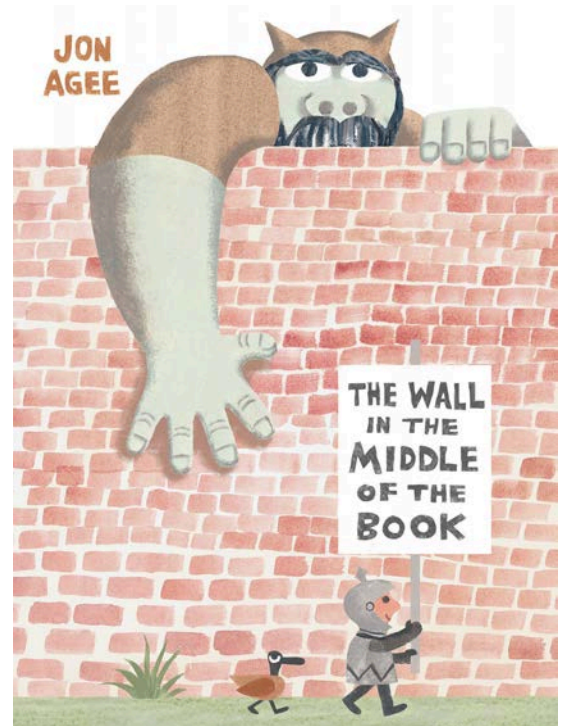
The children connect with the stories differently and might focus on the ideas, concepts or things that are different from what the teachers are aiming their focus at. This is not something wrong or something that needs to be changed. In this case, the drawings show how children engage with the story, but it also highlights the importance of going beyond the story, doing further activities and reflective discussion around a book and its message.



CASE THREE

The Wall in the Middle of the Book by Jon Agee

“There is a wall in the middle of the book”, says the knight. The knight proclaims his side as the safe one, because there is an ogre who will eat him on the other side. While the knight explains how great it is to have a wall, the left side gets flooded and the knight soon finds themselves drowning. The ogre leaps over the book, saves the knight, and brings him to the other side. The knight is scared to be on the other side, fearing the ogre will eat him. The ogre laughs at such a thought and invites the knight for a friendly tour around the other side of the book.



Teacher's Voice:

“We looked at the book together in a circle and then I discussed the topic with them: what do they think, what do they feel, and what did they understand. Afterwards, I asked children to pick their favourite page from the book and draw it on a blank sheet of paper. When they finish, they would tell me what they particularly liked about the book and the image that they copied, what was important and meaningful to them. These pictures together with the quotes from children were combined into a lapbook”.

Comment:

When working with a story, you can collect children's drawings, creations, and homework in the form of a lapbook. All you need is a paper folder to which inside you can glue various pictures, drawings, sketches, stories, visual artefacts in folded or straight manner. YouTube: [How to make a Lapbook - A Lapbook Tutorial for Home Educators](#)



CHOOSING A BOOK

How do you choose a book?

What are important elements of a story for you?

A good story on topics of diversity, equity and inclusion speaks to children, connecting these topics to their lives, experiences, and ideas about the world. It makes these abstract topics relevant to children, it presents them through a children's perspective. Select the book that creatively approaches the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion, showcasing why these matter, for example, books about living your authentic self, finding friends, or promoting fair opportunities.

As children's books are also a visual medium full of illustrations, pay attention to what they show: how the characters are dressed, what kind of activities or professions they do, what emotions they display, and what their surroundings are. Do the images reinforce, confirm, or challenge stereotypes?

Another important thing to consider is who tells the stories: who are the authors, what voices do they represent? Try to uplift the stories from marginalised voices, for example, indigenous people of various lands, immigrants, queer people and so on.

Remember, that it is not enough to simply introduce a story to children, hoping that they will accept and embrace the values and morals of the story. A good story does not immediately bring diversity, equity and inclusion to a classroom.

It is necessary to conduct follow-up activities:

1. To provide opportunities for children to further discuss with each other what is fair and not, and how they understand gender, race, and cultures;
2. To extend their play storylines that can come from the read story;
3. To take action against any form of discriminatory behaviour and support children who try to challenge stereotypes. Listen to what children are saying during play and encourage your class to discuss further.

Be intentional with all books, including general stories and textbooks. When choosing textbooks for math, science, literacy and so on, be mindful of who and what they represent. For example, in a book about the human body, are there different body types/shapes/skin colours represented? Does the art textbook feature examples from artists across genders and nationalities?

Here you can borrow books on these topics:



CID Fraen & Gender
14, rue Beck
L-1222 Luxembourg
Tel: +352 241095 1



SciTeach Center
Maison du Savoir, Atelier 4.550
2, avenue de l'Université
L-4365 Esch-sur-Alzette
Tel: +352 466644 9339

GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Language is not only a means of communication, it also represents our societies. Therefore, it is necessary to pay close attention to the language used and to ensure it represents and gives justice to human diversity.

The main challenges in the English language are the use of the masculine form by default, and the use of expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes and adhere to strict gender binary (Council of Europe, 2024).

The gender binary is mostly represented via pronouns - she and he. Masculine “he” is often used as a generic form, when we speak of someone whose gender we do not know: “the rabbit, he wanted to...”, “the child, he behaves...”, “he can use this like...”. Of course, the masculine pronoun simply cannot represent all the genders. Instead, we can use gender-neutral pronouns such as “one” or “they”, or omit the gender markers. “The rabbit, who wanted to...”, “the child, one that behaves...”, “they can use this like...”. Although using “he or she” is more inclusive than just “he”, it still reinforces the gender binary, claiming one can only be male or female, he or she.

The same applies to gendered professions. Instead of using a masculine or feminine form, it is possible to use a gender-neutral one. Say police officer instead of policewoman or policeman; flight attendant instead of steward or stewardess; cleaner instead of cleaning lady or cleaning man, and so on. Moreover, there is no need to refer to professions as “male” or “female”. A female tennis player is a tennis player. A male teacher is a teacher. When we use gendered adjectives, it can mean that there is a norm and we describe deviation from the norm. For example, a norm is football, and the deviation is female football - when in reality football is football, it is defined by the game rules and not by the gender of the players.

It is important to be mindful of the words that we use, as sometimes we reproduce them without acknowledging their history or hidden stereotypes. While in this chapter we specifically focused on gender-exclusive language, there are more ways in which language can exclude and discriminate against people based on their race, ethnicity, culture, abilities, age, and sexuality.

For more information, consult with the [Inclusive Language Guide](#) by Western University, Canada



INVOLVING PARENTS AND CARERS

Quite often the root of parents' anxiety towards diversity, equity and inclusion is the lack of understanding and familiarity with these topics. It is important, as a teacher and as a school, to be open and transparent about the work you do with children and to be prepared to hear and respond to concerns.

The main idea is to explain that promoting diversity, equity and inclusion means promoting the well-being of children, and fostering respect for each other. Moreover, it keeps them safe from bullying and harassment, and inspires them to express themselves without any fear. It is also worth pointing out that there are laws and curriculum that you as a teacher should follow, which emphasise democratic values.



WHAT CAN YOU SAY?



Various topics related to diversity are discussed with the children in class. The Luxembourg school law and the Luxembourg school programme stipulate that children should learn these skills at school.



In order for your child to feel secure in who they are and to become a responsible, respectful and empathetic person, it is important that they learn to accept all people regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, origin, religion, skin colour and any disabilities they may have. They should learn that every person is equally valuable.



We will discuss these topics in class in an age-appropriate and child-friendly way. For example, we will look at existing picture books together and talk about the stories, make drawings and present our favourite scenes from the book.

For more information and inspiration, feel free to go back to the “Why does it matter?” chapter at the beginning of this resource.

CONCLUSIONS

Children are capable of making decisions, interpreting the world around them, and learning and doing certain social practices of the communities to which they belong; they are not blank sheets of paper who passively absorb information or instruction. So, it is important to engage with them on the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion beyond simply telling what you consider to be right or wrong. It is important to observe their behavior, hear what they have to say, offer them alternatives, provide creative, inclusive and safe environments for them to explore, and to support them in self-reflecting. This resource provides inspiration for engaging with this topic and shows how it can be done with the help of children's books.

It is not an easy task to promote diversity, equity and inclusion, as it requires strength and confidence to go against existing stereotypes, generalisations and conventional ways of thinking. Negative attitudes from others, be they colleagues, parents/carers, the media or politicians, can also be difficult to face. However, promoting diversity, equity and inclusion is an important work that ensures children's physical and mental well-being, prepares them for the future, and builds up their confidence and self-expression. Let's face the challenge of promoting diversity, equity and inclusion at primary school levels!



MORE RESOURCES

1. Title (YouTube): [A class that turned around kids' assumptions of gender roles](#)

Description: When a real-life firefighter, surgeon, and fighter pilot drop in a classroom, the kids have their assumptions about gender roles turned around.

2. Title (YouTube): [Girl toys vs boy toys: the experiment - BBC Stories](#)

Description: The Experiment: are you sure you don't gender-stereotype children in the toys you choose for them?

3. Title (YouTube): [Let's talk about racism](#)

Description: This video explains why discrimination and racism are unfair, describing laws and individual responsibilities around racial discrimination.

4. Title (YouTube): [United against racism](#)

Description: We all can do something against racism. You too. Join UNESCO and leading personalities from all over the world in denouncing mounting racial discrimination.

5. Title (YouTube): [Racism. It stops with me – ask yourself the hard questions](#)

Description: No matter how challenging the conversation, we need to talk about racism and the causes of inequality. By taking a stand against racism, we can build a fair and equal society – for all.

6. Title (YouTube): Disability inclusion matters for all

Description: Persons with disabilities are more likely than others to experience adverse socioeconomic status, such as less education, poorer health, fewer employment opportunities, and higher poverty rates. To end poverty and boost shared prosperity, we must leave no one behind.

7. Title (Vimeo): Everyone's welcome (Karmarama - Cbeebies)

Description: Pairs of children discuss the differences between them.

8. Title (YouTube): Teach your children what they've taught you

Description: A film about adult's influence on children's attitude towards their peers with mental and physical disability.

9. Title (YouTube): How to treat a person with disabilities, according to people with disabilities

Description: We talk to people living with disabilities about the proper ways to treat someone with disabilities.

10. Title (YouTube): Drängen wir Kinder in Geschlechterrollen? Ein Experiment | Quarks (in German)

Description: Die Puppe fürs Mädchen, das Auto für den Jungen? Wie wichtig sind uns solche Zuordnungen – und wie früh drängen wir unsere Kinder damit in Geschlechterrollen? Reporterin Lisa Weitemeier hat für Quarks ein Experiment gemacht.

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Child's drawing as a part of Case one activity



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