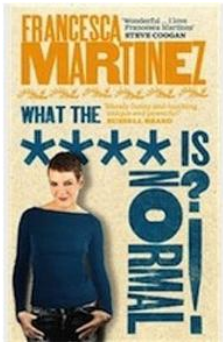




Challenging bullying and harassment of disabled people in class: a resource for teachers

'Disabled people all experience oppression as a result of the denial of our reality. If our reality is not reflected in the general culture, how can we assert rights? If we do not 'appear' as real people, with the need for love, affection, friendship and the right to a good quality of life, how can non-disabled people give any meaning to our lives?' Jenny Morris, Channel 4, Pride Against Prejudice 1991.

This resource was kindly written by UK Disability History Month Coordinator Richard Rieser and supported by the Anti-Bullying Alliance. It is designed to give teachers information about the history of bullying and harassment of disabled people and ideas/guidance about activities for the classroom.



Much of the media encourages young people to strive for a narrow and unrealistic 'perfect' look. This can lead to poor self-esteem, problems with body image and projection onto anyone who does not fit into this look. Francesca Martinez, disabled comedian and activist (with cerebral palsy) who was bullied in secondary school, says in her new book 'What the **** is Normal: "What do you do when you're labelled abnormal in a world obsessed with normality? In a world where wrinkles are practically illegal, going bald is cause for mental breakdown, and women over size ten are encouraged to shoot themselves, what the **** do you do if you're, gasp... disabled?"' Francesca, after a few years of low self-esteem, having been happy and included in primary school, finally realised she had the power to stop judging herself by society's unhealthy standards and create her own. So she did. This powerful new perspective changed her life forever. Valuing and respecting difference and challenging those who seek to diminish our humanity is a key to eradicating the prejudice and harassment that makes so many disabled people's lives a misery. We need to understand the roots of bigoted thinking.

Where do the ideas that lead to bullying and harassment of disabled people come from?

The lack of portrayal of disability in our society is not accidental. Western culture from Greek and Roman times, reinforced in Renaissance Europe, saw the "body beautiful" as an ideal. Those with physical or mental imperfections were seen to be receiving divine retribution, or expendable. The Bible accepts this but also offers pity towards disabled people as 'sinners'. Until very recently, popular culture has seen disabled people as objects of fear or fun. Such ideas are deeply embedded in myths, legends and classical literature. Today's media continues to reinforce the tendency to judge people by their appearance.



Current representations of disabled people in books, plays, films, TV, internet and the press draw on attitudes towards disabled people from the past, often fossilised in unquestioning 'common-sense', myths, literature, theatre, folklore, biography and history. Outdated and distorted ideas are continually recycled in these media and bolster negative attitudes. Here are some of the historical attitudes and responses to disability which have shaped views, still prevalent today in the UK and many cultures around the world.



Following the thinking of Plato and Aristotle, **the ancient Greeks** desired a population without blemish, they were the first Eugenicists. In Sparta disabled babies were left out on the mountain side to die. The Greek myth of Hephaestus (right) involved the other Gods making fun of him because he had a club foot. In **Rome** Julius Caesar disguised his epilepsy. Disabled gladiators were matched against wild animals for amusement. Disabled babies were thrown under chariots.



1480 to 1680 Witch hunts took place in Europe. Witches were often identified by either having a disabled child or being disabled themselves. Classic children's stories such as Hansel and Gretel were based on such ideas. The Church supported this scapegoating and wrote the Malleus Mallificarum, 'The Witches' Hammer',

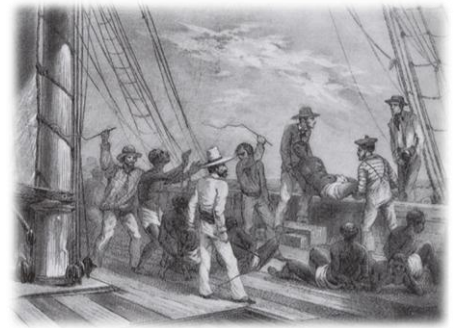
which linked disability with witchcraft. More than 8 million women were subsequently killed. Today, in nearly all children's stories about witches, they are shown as disabled.

Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism, said 'take the changeling child to the river and drown him', when speaking of disabled children. A recent inquiry into Victoria Climbié's death established that 30 out of 90 abuse cases involved the exorcism of disabled children.

As the **Enlightenment** dawned and science was substituted for superstition, things began to change but not always for the better. Writers and artists began to use disability as a metaphor for uselessness, evil or pity. Despite the Enlightenment, in 1781 the ship Zong sailed to Jamaica. Sick and disabled slaves were thrown overboard allowing the captain to claim insurance for the drowned slaves, which was a common practice.

Entertaining as figures of fun Disabled people have historically been figures of fun. Court jesters, such as Henry VIII's William Somner, were often disabled and dwarfs feature as freaks in many court pictures. In 18th century London, people visited 'Bedlam' (the Hospital of St Mary of Bethlehem) to laugh at the insane. Circuses and 'freak shows' continued the tradition. A 'freak show' is still in operation on Coney Island, USA. This curiosity/fear of the different confirms the non-disabled viewer in the security of his or her own 'normality'.

Industrial Revolution 1750-1850 The new production methods led to the rejection of more people in factories. This led to the 1834 Poor Act and the Workhouse which housed many disabled people. They began to be seen as a threat to be contained and locked away (1850 Asylum Act). Galton applied his cousin Darwin's thesis to human beings, leading to the New Eugenics. Disabled people were a threat to the 'gene pool'. This ignores history, where despite prejudice, disabled people have often come to the fore in all areas. Psychology stepped in with false measures of IQ. The scene was set for locking away the 'mentally deficient' for the whole of their lives [1913 Mental Deficiency Act] being classified as 'idiot', 'imbecile' and 'mentally defective'. The same impetus led to segregated schools. This all encouraged the idea that disabled people didn't belong.



1930s & 1940s Fascists throughout Europe, especially the Nazis in Germany, questioned the continuing existence of the burden of 'disabled people.' Why should honest working people put up with paying for the so called 'useless-eaters'? The result was the 'T4 programme' and the murder of more than 1 million disabled people across the German Empire. Disabled people were forced to wear the black triangle, a symbol originating from the concentration camps marking people as 'anti-social'.



1950s and 60s Small groups of disabled people, families and charities sought to improve their lives, from a position of pity and good works, not human rights. Leading to the eventual closure of long stay mental deficiency hospitals, when it was demonstrated people with learning difficulties could achieve, work and live independently. In the **1970s** a new worldwide movement campaigning for the human rights of disabled people was taking shape, following the example of the Civil Rights Movement. This was based on a '**social model**' perspective, where people were disabled by barriers in attitudes, environments and organisation, **not** their impairments. The **Disabled People's Movement** was born, later including people with learning difficulties and those with mental health issues. The rights we now defend are largely due to this Movement. This led to legislation and slowly changing attitudes. We now have the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008) and the Equalities Act (2010), both of which outlaw harassment and bullying on grounds of disability. However, much of the thinking that denies disabled people their humanity still exists.



Common stereotypes to be avoided in literature and the media

Literature and media are full of stereotypes of disabled people which come from the above history, reinforce negative attitudes and are continually recycled, reinforcing bullying and hate crime. Stereotypes are groups of attitudes which have little or no basis in reality and yet persist in cultures. They reduce the individuality and character of people to false social constructs. This leads to name-calling and violence, undercutting the humanity of the victims.

There are ten main stereotypes of disabled people:

1. **Pitiable and pathetic; sweet and innocent; a miracle cure:** Tiny Tim, Pollyanna, The Elephant Man
2. **Victim or an object of violence :** Wait Until Dark, In the Company of Men, Blanche in Whatever Happened to Baby Jane (applies particularly to Blind women)
3. **Sinister or evil:** Dr No, Richard III(Shakespeare), Mr Glass in Unbreakable, Treasure Island pirates
4. **Atmosphere / curios or exotica in 'freak shows', comics, horror movies and science fiction:** One armed man in The Fugitive, Freaks (1932), Phantom of the Opera, many horror films
5. **'Super-crip'/ triumph over tragedy/noble warrior:** The Men, Born 4th July, Daredevil
6. **Laughable or the butt of jokes:** Time Bandits, Mr Magoo, Something About Mary, Dumb & Dumber
7. **Having a chip on their shoulder/ aggressive avenger:** Ahab in Moby Dick, Claw in Dick Tracy, Hook
8. **A burden/ outcast:** Quasimodo in The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Mask, Nazi propaganda films
9. **Non-sexual or incapable of a worthwhile relationship:** Lady Chatterley, disabled adults viewed as children . Think of a film where a disabled woman has a healthy sexual relationship.
10. **Incapable of fully participating in everyday life:** The Lost Prince, Children of a Lesser God.

There have been some films that challenge these stereotypes, such as Shrek, Finding Nemo, Coming Home, Four Weddings and a Funeral, and more recently Rust and Bone or The Sessions. Disabled people want to be included without emphasis on our impairments, to be valued for who we are.

- For more detail on stereotypes go to [www.http://attitudes2disability.wordpress.com](http://attitudes2disability.wordpress.com)
- For more on Disabling Imagery go to http://worldofinclusion.com/res/disimg/40283_DEE_Text.pdf

How to challenge disabilist bullying in the classroom

Disabled People in the UK prefer to be known as disabled people. We have reclaimed the word. Under the 'social model' of disability we have different impairments or loss of function of our body or mind but we find other ways to do things. Barriers in the environment, organisation and negative attitudes disable us. In an inclusive school or social situation, barriers are removed or compensated for by various adjustments. *The class can identify the various barriers for people with different impairments and what adjustments can be made inside and outside the school.*

Language used to describe disability or disabled people can often be offensive and is rooted in a history of oppression. It overlaps with other oppressions like racism, sexism and homophobia.

Avoid	Use
(the) handicapped, (the) disabled	disabled people
afflicted by, suffers from, victim of	has [name of condition or impairment]
confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	wheelchair user
mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal, idiot, imbecile, feeble-minded, stupid	with a learning disability (singular) with learning disabilities (plural)
cripple, invalid	disabled person
able-bodied	non-disabled
Spastic	person with cerebral palsy
mental patient, insane, mad	person with a mental health condition, mental health system user
deaf and dumb; deaf mute	Deaf, user of British Sign Language (BSL), person with a hearing impairment
the blind	people with visual impairments; blind people; blind and partially sighted people

an epileptic, diabetic, depressive, and so on	person with epilepsy, diabetes, depression or someone who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression
midget, dwarf	someone with restricted growth or short stature
fits, spells, attacks	seizures
Mongol, Downs	person with learning difficulty

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication>

Challenging offensive language in class:

- Ask the class in groups to identify all the words associated with disabled people, to circle all those that are positive. & discuss the results.
- Teach the history of offensive words e.g. 'Idiot', so children know why to avoid using them.
- Do not use the words unless they are brought up by pupils.

Early Years & Primary Teachers need to promote an ethos where children feel able to talk about their lives and feelings and the class are encouraged to support one another. The effects of disablism, racism, sexism, homophobia and prejudice can be explained and discussed so the children develop empathy, are able to challenge discrimination and include and support those who may feel excluded, within and outside the classroom. We need to teach where discriminatory attitudes come from, historically and currently. Young children can be taught this by drawing on their great sense of fairness.

http://worldofinclusion.com/res/alleg/All_Equal_All_Different_Teachers_guide_Text_Only.doc

'Othering' is a process of excluding an identified person or group from one's normal social interaction because of some identifiable feature of the person's ethnicity, gender, disability or other features. One's own insecurities are projected onto others and it can increase at times of economic or social dislocation. It can start by unwanted comments and name calling, or jokes, then exclusion from social groups, followed by discrimination, violence and even death. These attitudes allow disability hate crimes to take place unchallenged, and give us a world where Fiona Pilkington killed herself and her disabled daughter, Francessca, after years of disabilist abuse which was ignored by police. A world where Gemma Hayter could be tortured and murdered by people she thought were her friends. A world where Kenneth Oakes could be regularly beaten until he died with 43 rib fractures. <http://www.channel4.com/news/frightening-a-first-hand-story-of-disability-hate-crime>

Discuss the effects of 'othering' within class and how we can prevent it occurring.

- Create a school culture that does not accept bullying. Respect, monitor and record all incidents
- Assemblies led by disabled people
- Include aspects of disability and disability equality throughout the curriculum
- Develop an understanding of oppression and its impact historically
- Develop an understanding of where disabilist bullying leads
- If an incident occurs stop the lesson to discuss it
- Fully involve pupils-peer mediators, bully busters, form and year councils and circles of friends
- Staff to model the behaviour they expect
- Share what you are doing with local parents and the community

There are many more activities to be found on www.worldofinclusion.com/resources and www.ukdisabilityhistorymonth.com For more information contact rlrieser@gmail.com UKDHM coordinator.

Don't forget this year's Anti-Bullying Week is focus on reducing the bullying of disabled children and young people in schools and colleges. Find out more on the Anti-Bullying Alliance website: www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk.

