Diego Bartolomeu, Key Stage 3 student and Pearson World Changer Awards runner-up

Race has always been a safe topic to talk about in our house. A lot of things have happened this past year that really ignited my passion for equality and inclusion. Firstly, my Mum showed me what sadly took place in America - the killing of George Floyd by a policeman. This was followed by demonstrations that took place all over the world such as the Black Lives Matter protests.

My brother and I are mixed race, we have a black father and white mother. Since that event, it got me thinking about my education and how much I really learnt about black history. Sadly, in primary we got taught very little, mostly about Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks (who are still very important people), but I am now questioning why I wasn’t taught about subjects like the colonisation of African countries, slavery and about more British activists and equality movements.

We learn about inventors, we learn about people who created things in the world and all of the great people who helped shape societies. But, how many of them were black? How many black people did you learn about at school?
There needs to be an inclusive curriculum, where every child, young and old, can learn about topics like Windrush, the origins of generations in Africa and some of the great historical achievements of people who are black, Asian and minority ethnicities (BAME).

I hope topics like this will give young people a chance to learn about more diverse history, but also to educate them about the issue of unconscious bias, and help eradicate racism, not just in the UK, but in the world!

**Time for change**

George Floyd’s death sparked a national debate over Britain’s history, especially black history. This is what compelled me to write my essay Black and British and kick start my thinking about the diversity of what we learn in history, and in education more broadly.

Kehinde Andrews, Professor of Black Studies at Birmingham City University, recently stated that “The recent spate of Black Lives Matter protests have recharged the discussion about racism and how to make meaningful change. Education has always been a site of resistance and there is a renewed focus on looking at the school curriculum; transforming the university; and even cleansing the public space of monuments to slave traders and colonisers.”

I am determined to play my part and do what I can to encourage national change and the creation of a reformed curriculum that includes more diversity, not just in history, but across all subjects.

**Taking action**

Inspired by events over 2020, I decided to write to my Principal and one of the history teachers and ask them if they thought it was a good idea to make a group that would explore a black curriculum at my school.

My school and the teachers were really supportive and enthusiastic. They really want to help and get involved. So, with their support, we set the group up and now myself and a selection of students are working together on ideas and lessons on specific topic areas like the British Civil Rights Movement and Africa before colonisation to incorporate into our school’s curriculum. I want us to start looking beyond history too and how more diversity can be built into all subjects at our school.
I also wrote to our local MP Kate Green, who is also the Shadow Secretary of State for Education, about introducing a new black curriculum into all state schools. She replied to say that she thinks it’s really important that the issues raised by the black curriculum campaign inform her party’s education policy and we may even be organising a video call with her so we can talk about the work in our school.

When I started this project I never in my mind thought I would be writing about something that is so close to home. But, I feel now is the time for young people of colour to speak out!

Unconscious bias, systematic racism, or indeed racism of any kind needs to be stamped out. Things need to change, I want every person, no matter what colour, gender, age, and ethnicity to all feel included in what they learn and in the world that we live in.

It was great to be a finalist in Pearson’s World Changer Awards. I feel like it has given me a platform to drive more change and help me to reach a wider reception. My advice to other children and young people who are passionate about something and want to make a difference is to speak out. If the door shuts on you, or you face obstacles, keep on trying and looking for opportunities – I certainly intend to keep trying!

Diego Bartolomeu was a finalist in Pearson’s World Changer Awards - read about his project in the Winners Showcase.

Take a look at Pearson’s Diversity and Inclusion in History webpages for more great content.