

Diversity & Inclusion *in History*

Case Study

2020

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1215

“We are striving to make a positive difference by diversifying our History curriculum, ensuring disability is represented and viewed positively.”

We spoke with Kate Wilson, Senior Director of Humanities at Outwood Grange Academies Trust along with her

two colleagues Leah Coin, Head of Humanities at Outwood Academy Bishopsgarth and Sam Bradley, Head of Humanities at Outwood Academy Hasland Hall for a conversation on their drive and passion for incorporating more disability history into their lessons and ensuring that all people in society have a voice within the curriculum.

In our own history education, lessons predominantly focused on learning about the white, middle upper class and male political history and whilst that's great and is still needed, we've also got a passion and a sense of responsibility to our students to look beyond the stereotypes and give advocacy to the different groups in society – the groups that our students in our communities are from. We've got to recognise that there are different people out there to ourselves.

When it comes to disability, societal attitudes towards people with a mental illness, a handicap or a disability have on many occasions been seen in a negative light. As teachers, we stand in an important position where we can make pupils better citizens and be more accepting. At Outwood Academy we are striving to make a positive difference by diversifying our History curriculum, ensuring disability is represented and viewed positively.

Challenging perceptions

The main focus for us is always engagement, if we can engage our students in the right way, they will understand more, enjoy more and engage more.

We have a high proportion of SEN children, those on educational health care plans and children with physical disabilities across our academies and

we feel it's really important that they're not only represented but feel like they're included in the curriculum, that they're having their voice heard and have respect from their peers as well.

For generations, people with disabilities have often been looked upon negatively. Much of the Key Stage 3 History curriculum we have at the moment looks at disability in a bad light, for example, we talk about the holocaust and the negative experiences of people with disabilities. That's not the message that we want to give our students, we don't want that to be their understanding. Now is the time for change!

Reviewing the curriculum

COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement, gave us the opportunity to step back and look at our curriculum as a whole and analyse how we can make it more inclusive.

For History, we're now working on a scheme of learning, 12 lessons where we look at attitudes towards disability across time where lesson one and two gives the big overview of what attitudes were in different time periods and how that might have changed which then moves into sections such as the industrial period, looking at the idea of exploitation vs entrepreneurs, looking at The Greatest Showman, the "freak shows", the "curiosity shows", were these individuals exploited?

We're also including more 'did you know slides' into existing units. As we've been researching, we've discovered some interesting facts. When we delved into medicine in Britain, for example, we discovered that during the Renaissance people that had red hair were considered to have a disability. Further back, women were also categorised as disabled because they weren't men! Subject matters like this raise awareness and encourage students to challenge their own perceptions of disability in society today.

In discussions with students recently, many were enraged by how people have been treated, they voiced their opinions, they were passionate! It made for a very interesting debate. Students were recognising that there's not just this class of people and that actually having a disability is something that affects everyone in our society.

Getting it right

When it comes to disability, so many teachers are worried that they will get it wrong. Use the wrong terminology, reference something in the wrong way, describe something that may be derogatory to someone that has that particular disability. We believe that if you are going to try to include diversity in your curriculum, talk to your students within that group. Tell them about what you are planning, what you will cover, the terms that will be used. Get their feedback as to how that would make them feel and take on board their thoughts and opinions on how they would do it differently.

History - creating a better society for the future

You get asked a lot as a history teacher “Well it’s all in the past, isn’t it?” Our answer is always no. History informs the world we are in now and as teachers, we’re best placed to help our young people gain a better understanding of the world they are living in, a better understanding than our generation and the generations before us. Maybe one day, our students along with their children and the children that succeed them, will bring a world of fantastic tolerance and support for everybody.

[Click here to find out more about diversity and inclusion in history.](#)