



‘Diversity and difference characterise the society in which children live. However, prejudice and discrimination are all too often features of human relationships. A respect for and an appreciation of human and cultural diversity can and should be promoted at every level of the primary school.’



SPHE Guidelines, Primary School Curriculum

With the diversity of new cultures in Ireland at present, very often the school can be the main place or even the only place where those cultures and languages mingle.

This provides a real opportunity for schools to create an ethos which is open, welcoming and supportive to all cultural and linguistic groups.



ISSUES AND IDEAS TO EXPLORE WITH YOUR CLASS

NAMES

Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will always hurt me!

Names are a centrally important part of our individual identity. They often reflect aspects of our language, our culture or our history. Names can also often be part of family history, for example when names are passed on through generations. The following activities suggest ways in which children's unique identity can be explored and celebrated, leading to respect for linguistic and cultural aspects of names.

- Children research their name either through asking parents or grandparents about where the names came from or by using the internet to find out any historical or cultural connections with that name. This can be carried out with both first names and family names.

When children have completed their research, give each child a blank card. Ask them to write their full name on the card. If they are usually known by a shortened version of their name or by a nickname, they should write that down as well. Then they should underline the name by which they prefer to be called.

Ask children to discuss with a partner:

- why they were given these names, who they were called after
- what they mean, eg African names often indicate the day a child is born or their place in the family; Irish names may refer to a family member, saint or legend
- the origin of their surname if they know it/what the family crest or motto stands for
- what it feels like to be called by a form of their name that they don't like.
- Make a class 'Name Wall' – each child writes their name inside a 'brick' template and then decorates the brick; each brick then forms part of the class 'Name Wall'. The idea is that the wall needs all the different bricks or component parts in order to be complete, just as each child is an integral part of the class.
- Choose a variety of names which suggest something about the person, eg Sarah Byrne (girl or woman), François Truffant (French person), Peter Baker (a person's profession

or that of their ancestors) and discuss. Allow the children to research more names.

- Discuss naming systems from other parts of the world (eg the Sikh naming system uses the personal name, then the religious name, then the family name/the Ashanti people of Ghana name children after the day of the week that they are born on). Are there different cultural aspects to the names of the children in the class?
- Children make name crests that reflect different aspects of their name. With younger children, this can be as simple as writing their own first name and designing their crest to show something unique about themselves. They can then do the same exercise with their family name and depict something in the crest about their family.
- Explore names in different scripts – children can write their names in another alphabetic script, perhaps guided by a child in the class who is literate in that script.
- If a child's name is difficult for the class to pronounce, ask them to help with it. You could play a game as a pronunciation exercise where you clap out the syllables for the child's name and the child shows you where the stressed syllable should be.
- Children introduce themselves and/or each other:
 - using an adjective that they feel best describes them: Busy Mary!
 - using a positive adjective beginning with the same initial: Marvellous Mary!
 - using an adjective that positively describes their
 - (i) physical appearance, (ii) personality
 - making up an acrostic name-poem, eg Merry, Artistic, Reliable, Interesting, Exciting: MARIE.
- 'More Immigrants Changing Their Names', said a headline in *Metro Éireann*, July/August, 2007. Brainstorm reasons why they might do so.
- Some schools change children's name into Irish. Lead a class debate about children's preferences on this matter.
- Pet-names are used as a term of endearment. Some pet-names can double as an insult, eg 'Baby', 'Shortie' etc. Invite children to share and discuss some pet-names or nick-names they call others or are called themselves.





THE MEMORY BOX

IDENTITY AND BELONGING

In a multi-ethnic classroom, all children should feel equal within the group. The following activity allows children an opportunity to see beyond physical similarities/differences:

- In groups of ten or more, and against the clock, ask the participants to subdivide themselves into different groups as many times as possible using whatever they want to use as division criteria (you might need to start them off with ideas such as left-handed/ right-handed, long hair/ short hair, etc).

A recorder is assigned to each group and records the divisions.

After a few minutes, announce to the groups that division should not be on the basis of anything physical. This requires the participants to move to a deeper level of thinking.

Discussion may centre on the types of divisions found, and whether there was surprise at the amounts of groups to which one can belong. It is important to stress that difference is the norm, can be good, interesting, fun, or it can lead to conflict.

- Children make the flags of the countries represented by the children in that room to display on the classroom door.
- Children make signs with simple phrases such as 'welcome' or 'hello' in different languages and display on the classroom door. Additionally, signs in different languages can be displayed around the room to show how the home languages of the children in the class are valued.
- Do class projects to explore the countries represented by the children in the class.

FRIENDSHIP

Many children (and indeed adults) think there are many things they are not good at. It is important that they are reminded that being friendly or loyal are important and valuable traits to have and that it is important also to accept and value oneself as a good friend – one's real value is who we are internally (rather than what we are good at). The role of the teacher is crucial, especially for newly arrived children, in helping to establish or promote friendships among children in the class and school.

Discussion points

The ultimate aim in the following discussion points is to extend beyond one's own talents and obvious traits and to value one's own abilities, self and person.

- Name three things you like about yourself and three things you're really good at. What do you think is the best thing about you? Do you think your friends would agree?
- What makes a good friend? Do you think you are a good friend?
- List the names of the children you sit next to/ beside in school. Would you classify all these children as your friends? Are you closer to some than others?
- Find the earliest photograph of you with a friend or a group of friends. Do you still know them? If not, can you find out about them from a parent or carer? Find out when and how you met.
- When and where did you meet your current special or closest friend(s)? Write a short paragraph describing the meeting. Describe the latest photograph taken of you with this friend or group of friends.
- Self-portraits: Using a mirror, draw a self-portrait or a portrait of a friend. Discuss feelings and have the portrait reflect this.
- Hand prints: Children paste a cut-out and decorated handprint in the centre of an A4 page, and surround it with drawings or cut-out pictures of things they are interested in and/or good at. Alternatively, a 'friendship tree' class display can be created, using the decorated and cut-out handprints as the leaves.
- Write a poem or verse about a friend or group of friends, real or imagined.





THE MEMORY BOX

DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM

- List one or two things about a person you admire and give reasons for your admiration. What might you ask if you met this person?
- Some people find it easier to communicate with friends through e-mail, letter, or by telephone. Maybe you write to a friend who has moved away or whom you met on holiday or at a care centre or on an outing or day trip? Maybe your class writes to a class in another school or country? Tell this penpal what you think makes you special as a friend and be sure to tell them what makes them special too!

Friendship Wall

Invite children to bring in photos of themselves and their friends. Create a 'Friendship Wall' where children list reasons why their friends make 'good friends'. Options may include: sharing a common interest, loyalty, good listener, non-judgemental etc.

Buddy System

A 'buddy system' or 'peer mentoring system' can enhance children's sense of responsibility for their fellow students. Older classes can be linked with younger classes and enjoy a series of joint lessons based on art, reading etc. If your school gets involved with Amnesty's Friendship Week, children can come together to make bead/thread bracelets.

- Amnesty Friendship Bracelets: these bracelets are made by the street children of Casa Alianza/Covenant House and Fairtrade co-operative workers in Guatemala. The bracelets are made by knotting strands of coloured embroidery thread together. The more threads you use the wider the bracelet will be. You can use two of each colour as if it were one thread. (The knotting starts at the left and works across to the right.) The method is always the same – two knots with each thread from left to right. www.amnesty.ie

Friendship Bench/Anti-Bullying in the Yard

Jenny Mosley suggests that keeping children active in the playground can help diminish bullying. Mosley also suggests making a 'friendship bench' or a 'friendship stop' in your schoolyard. All children can apply to be a

'Playground Helper' or a 'Playground Friend', wherein they list the characteristics they have that would help them in these roles. If/when children find they have nobody to play with in the yard, they can sit on the bench and the 'Playground Helper' or 'Playground Friend' can either play with the child, or find a game for them to join.

GLOBAL FRIENDS

Friendship is a concept children are passionate about as it relates directly to their day-to-day lives. The children's understanding of friendship can be used as a starting point for teaching Development Education. Children in classrooms around Ireland can relate to children in developing countries by becoming 'global friends' through their learning.

- A new INTO/Irish Aid publication 'An Introduction to Child Labour, Fairtrade and the Right to Education in Primary Schools' is available. It focuses on learning from the experiences of children in rural Nicaragua. The concept of 'Sharing our Lives' develops empathy by building on common themes in the lives of Irish and Nicaraguan children. The pack is suitable for all classes, junior infants to sixth. It is to be sent to primary schools around Ireland.
- Why not get involved with Fairtrade Fortnight, or become a Fairtrade school as a symbol of international friendship? Check out www.fairtrade.ie/ for tips and ideas to help the teacher and the children in the class explore the topic of Fairtrade. During Fairtrade Fortnight (February/March), children could sell Fairtrade chocolate, bananas, coffee or tea from stalls. Invite parent helpers from the school community.
- Explore Human Rights Education through Amnesty International Ireland. Amnesty has numerous resources to assist teachers develop awareness in the classroom around complex issues such as child labour, control of arms and children's rights. Amnesty encourages children to become active by sending letters on issues they feel strongly about. www.amnesty.ie

