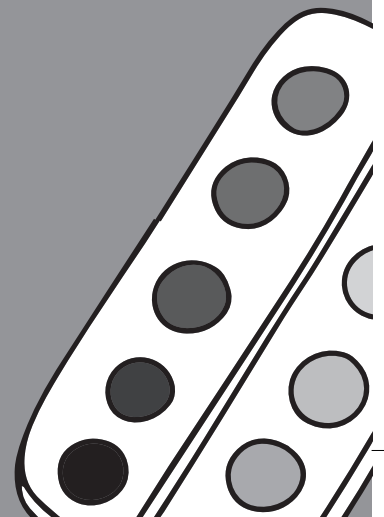# CHAPTER 1

WHY IS LANGUAGE IMPORTANT IN CREATING DIVERSE SCHOOLS?

This chapter covers:

- **Histories, controversies and trends in the language of diversity**
- **How to navigate the terminology of diversity and inclusion**
- **How to embed the terminology of diversity in your classroom.**

BAME AND PoC

Acronyms are standard fare in schools. When navigating the terminology of diversity and inclusion, terms associated with race and racial identity are awash with acronyms. Not everyone knows, or fully understands, the implications of the language we use around race, and, indeed, the very terminology can feel like a minefield.

BAME stands for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. At the point of writing, it is the most widely used acronym for ethnicity in the UK, used officially and unofficially as a catch-all for minority groups. Its UK predecessor was BME; however, it has fallen out of use due to the omission of 'Asian' as a category. BAME, whilst used heavily in the UK, has also faced criticism as it lumps together groups that are not a homogenised mass and does not explicitly include those of Gypsy, Roma, or Traveller heritage. Alongside this, the 'Minority Ethnic' label has raised concern as it diminishes the status of those whose race actually forms a global majority.

'No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind.'
Said, 1993: 433

Internationally, particularly in the US, the acronym 'PoC' is widely used, standing for People of Colour. As a term, it encompasses anyone who is not considered 'white'. It is a much older term than some might imagine, in usage as far back as the 18th century. A variation of PoC is BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour), used predominantly in the US again. It is a term that is gaining traction due to the efforts of The BIPOC Project, an organisation that seeks to undo 'Native invisibility, anti-Blackness, dismantle white supremacy and advance racial justice' (The BIPOC Project).

None of these terms comes without criticism. The important thing to note here is that there are widely accepted terms used in the UK and the US to define racial groups. As educators, it is a good idea to keep up with what terms are used, their main benefits and criticisms, and crucially, how and why terms change, are discarded or fall out of use. If you are not sure what someone wants to be called, just ask.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

The history and development of the term 'race' and 'racialisation' is far too huge a subject to do justice to in this section. For the teacher, it is imperative that we understand the difference between 'race' and 'ethnicity'. In sociological parlance, 'race' historically describes a set of biological markers; however, over time, the biological concept of race has been replaced with the idea of race as a social construct. Sociological treatises on the subject are fascinating, as is tracing the trajectory of 'race' as a defining feature. The history of 'race' as a concept can make for some uncomfortable reading – start with Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, go through the problematic Arthur De Gobineau, move on to Franz Boas and Ashley Montagu to get a sense of how the concept of 'race' has altered over time in anthropological circles – then read through Reni Edo Lodge and Adam Rutherford. It is a discourse that makes for uncomfortable reading at times, but embracing that discomfort is part of the process of learning.

'Ethnicity' is a term that is used to describe the cultural identity of groups of people. While 'race' has been seen as a fixed marker of identity in the past, 'ethnicity' is seen to encompass the culture, traditions and social identity of groups of people. It is seen as something learnable, less fixed, more mutable and inclusive of language and style of dress. It can be defined in sub-categories like ethno-linguistic (shared language), or ethno-religious (shared religion). Ethnic theory is predicated on race being a social construct and stems very much from post-Second World War sociological discourse.

For your classroom and your school, knowing the difference is essential. Teaching your students about the difference is equally valuable. Our

students have received notions of race, racial identity and ethnicity; in order to challenge their assumptions, particularly on the 'race as biological' argument, we need to know and be able to articulate the difference.

HINTS & TIPS

Teaching students about the language of diversity would make a useful sequence of learning in PSHE. Once you have a grasp of the language of diversity, ensure that your students have a good working knowledge of how language can define, erase, problematise, stigmatise and celebrate difference. Use images to elicit initial responses about how we label people, ask students to identify how difference is labelled in the playground and at home, provide mini-histories of terms with their advantages and disadvantages, and read articles about specific terms to show students how powerful language can be and how changing the way we describe people can lead to a more inclusive society.

DISABLED AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Terminology associated with disability has also changed over the years and is immeasurably less offensive than it was previously. Dr Douglas Baynton (1998), a renowned scholar of the history of disability, writes about the term 'handicapped' as originating from a game called 'Hand in Cap' and later on, a method of slowing down horses in a race by weighting them with stones. It is sometimes associated with begging (cap-in-hand); however, this is not generally thought of as an accurate etymological explanation for the term as linked to disability. Despite the fact that it is now widely considered offensive, it is still in use internationally, albeit unofficially.

Language around disability is nuanced and, like race and sexuality, is often self-determined. Some people prefer to use terms that place the person first (person with cerebral palsy, or person who uses a wheelchair) to show that

the disability is not their defining feature. The term for prejudice against people with disabilities can be either termed 'disablism' (discriminating against people with disabilities) or 'ableism' (actively discriminating towards people who are able-bodied).

Take some time to read the discussions about the language of disability online. The history of disability is fascinating and makes for some harrowing realisations about historical perceptions on bodies and their social value.

REFLECTION

How often do you challenge disablist language in school?

Increasingly, we are becoming aware of how language discriminates when it comes to disability, for example, do you group people together as '*the* disabled'? Do you say that an individual is '*suffering* from paralysis'? Do you describe a wheelchair user as '*confined*'?

It is easy to feel like you might get it wrong when it comes to language use around disability, but awareness of how language impacts on the identity and worth of a person with a disability can make a huge difference in creating an inclusive environment at school. If you have students with disabilities, and you are unsure of how to create a sense of inclusion in the language you use, ask the student what they would prefer.

LGBT(QIA)+

When describing sexuality, terminology is as varied as the full spectrum of sexuality itself. The terminology around sexuality is rapidly changing in a climate of wider social acceptance and celebration of non-heterosexual relationships and culture. 'Homosexual' was widely used as a pathological definition in psychology and is less common in usage than it was in the mid-20th century. This is a clear example of how language carries implications that

we do not fully understand in the moment, and it is only in hindsight that we recognise the problematic implications of defining people in a particular way. The acronym LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) began life as only LGB in the mid 1980s, when transvisibility was limited. Through the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the 'T' was added to encompass the Transgender community. Since then, emerging awareness of sexual identity has contributed to the expansion of letters in the acronym; it is worth knowing their significance to avoid erasing these identities completely. The '+' allows for an inclusivity, to take into account the vast spectrum of sexuality:

- Lesbian

- Gay

- Bisexual

- Transgender

- Queer/Questioning

- Intersex

- Asexual

- Non-binary

- Pansexual

HINTS & TIPS

If you want to challenge and support the language used in reference to diverse identities, it is worth doing some pre-reading. Knowing a brief definition of these terms is a starting point for understanding the identities of your students. The generation in our classrooms is more exposed to the language of sexuality than most of their teachers and may feel more at ease defining themselves using some of the terms above. A great starting point for understanding queer history is

Queer: A Graphic History by Meg-John Barker and Julia Scheele. Matthew Todd's *Pride* is a beautiful book that outlines gay history from the mid-20th century onwards. If you want to delve straight into LGBT issues in schools, then I would thoroughly recommend Shaun Dellenty's *Celebrating Difference: A Whole School Approach to LGBT+ Inclusion*.

NEURODIVERSE AND NEUROTYPICAL

It is pleasing to see that diversity of neurological processing in schools is being recognised. The catch-all term used is autism; however, it is important to note the diversity of experience within that term. The National Autism Society provides guidelines when choosing language about autism. It is more widely accepted to use Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), rather than Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as 'disorder' carries strongly negative connotations.

Another term gaining traction is 'neurodiverse'. This term has gained popularity as a celebration of difference. It goes hand in hand with the term 'neurotypical', for those who are not on the autism spectrum, without using the word 'normal', with its heavily judgemental connotations.

IDEAS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Neurotypical and neurodiverse are terms that students can explore. One of the best ways to do this is through literature and purposefully incorporating neurodiversity through books, either as class readers or as wider reading. The list below is a starting point:

- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Mark Haddon

- *How to Look for a Lost Dog*, Ann M. Martin

(Continued)

- *Mockingbird*, Kathryn Erskine

- *Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend*, Matthew Green

- *Marcelo in the Real World*, Francisco Stork.

Take a look at the terms used about neurodiversity with students before you start reading, and explore how language conveys thought. Mark Haddon is particularly masterful in omitting adjectives to convey the very factual process of his protagonist's mind. Going further, you could assess based on responses to questions such as: 'How does Haddon use language to explore his neurodiverse characters?' and link to assessment objectives on language analysis.

EQUALITY AND EQUITY

Knowing the difference between those terms is a brilliant starting point for teachers who wish to model diversity in the classroom. It is with this in mind that the individual teacher has to know the difference between equality and equity. The former teaches that everyone is the same. The latter acknowledges different starting points and asks society to create better stepping stones to successful futures.

CASE STUDY

At a school in South Oxfordshire, students were presented with a story demonstrating the difference between equity and equality. Their English teacher taught students the difference between the two words using a short story about two boys with different physical characteristics being able to complete the same manual labour job. One boy was not physically able to keep up through no fault of his own.

In the end, his companion recognised his need and provided him with the equipment he needed to be able to compete. In an assembly presented by the student council, the students themselves explained the importance of knowing the difference without being prompted. It was a powerful moment. It became part of their language and understanding of the world.

NOTE IT DOWN

Our own understanding of the language of diversity is crucial in building inclusive schools. This is a chance for us to reflect on our understanding of terminology.

	Reflection – how confident are you in this aim and why/why not?	Action – what actions can you commit to in order to better meet this aim?
I understand the variety of terms used to describe race and ethnicity in the UK and internationally.		
I know how to explain the history of terms related to LGBT status and their cultural significance.		
I can explain the variations in language associated with disability.		
I am able to explain and demonstrate the difference between equality and equity.		

(Continued)

I can challenge prejudiced language by teaching about its nuances.

I could teach a lesson on language and diversity if I was asked to.