

Mirrors and Windows: Diversity in the Curriculum

Why is diversity important in the curriculum?

- Scotland's curriculum refers to the totality of learning experiences. That means, the curriculum isn't restricted to which texts are taught and what happens in a classroom. It includes opportunities for personal achievement, interdisciplinary learning and the ethos and life of the learning setting.
- When diversity is lacking in the curriculum, perspectives are missing and learners might prefer to mask their diversity to "fit" in, internalising stereotypes about themselves that limit their potential and absorbing biases and prejudiced ideas about others. This can contribute to bullying behaviour and discrimination.
- When considering "diversity, it is worth keeping in mind the following features of diversity that include characteristics that are protected under the Equality Act 2010 as well as non-protected characteristics that are particularly relevant in Scottish education: linguistic; religious; ethnic/cultural/racial; gender/sex; sexual orientation, family; age; neurodiversity; disability; socioeconomic.

What are "Mirrors and Windows" in the curriculum?

- Dr Rudine Sims Bishop coined the term "Mirrors and Windows" to describe the importance of children seeing themselves in books (mirrors), otherwise they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in society. She also argues that books can also serve as "windows" to give readers a glimpse into the lives and experiences of others.
- The concept of Mirrors and Windows has become a useful practical approach to embed diversity and equalities in the curriculum. While Dr Bishop's essay focuses on multicultural literacy and books, the concept of Mirrors and Windows can extend to all aspects of the curriculum, such as the wider ethos and life in a learning setting, as outlined in the slide on the Curriculum as the totality of learning experiences.
- Mirrors and Windows have the potential to be included in every aspect of the curriculum and the totality of the learners' experiences: in posters, books, stories, media, role models, historical figures, the diversity of staff in the setting and more.
- Mirrors and Windows should be embedded naturally within the curriculum. Including diverse representation in an exceptional way can have unintended consequences for learners.
- **Mirrors** ensure that diverse audiences of learners can see themselves reflected in their learning, and see others like them.
- **Windows** provide learners with the opportunity to look through the curriculum and learn about the experiences of different groups of people, build empathy and understanding.

Beware of distorted Mirrors and Windows

- Some Mirrors and Windows in the curriculum can contain outdated representations and negative stereotypes. When diverse representation is provided but it could have a negative impact on learners' perceptions of themselves or others, these can be described as 'distorted Mirrors and Windows.'
- If those representations go unchallenged & learners are not encouraged to think critically about what might be wrong or missing in those representations, distorted mirrors and windows can be harmful for all learners.
- Diverse learners might internalise negative and limiting messages about themselves. Other learners might absorb biases and prejudiced notions about a diverse group of people. If they

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act upon those biases, they might discriminate and engage in harmful behaviours (whether conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional).

- To avoid this, it is best to include more, and a wider variety of, mirrors and windows. This can reduce the risk of tokenism, othering and stereotyping. Moreover, encouraging learners to think more critically about the representations they see can help address distorted mirrors and windows.

Where are the diverse Mirrors and Windows in your Curriculum?

- A learning walk of a setting can be considered to audit where the Mirrors and Windows already are in a curriculum or setting and how they might be strengthened.
- Where are the diverse Mirrors and Windows in your curriculum? Can learners see themselves reflected in what they are learning (Mirrors), and can they look out to wider society to learn about the experiences of others (Windows)?
- Any distorted Mirrors and Windows? How might these be addressed? Is it necessary to remove them, or can they be complemented with additional resources and critical thinking?
- Are there any features of diversity missing in your curriculum? Do you have Mirrors for all learners, and do you provide Windows to learn about all diverse characteristics?
- What could be strengthened? Where could Mirrors and Windows be added? What resources could be used to do this?

Further reading, resources and professional learning

- Scotland's Curriculum, The Refreshed Narrative: <https://scotlandscurriculum.scot/4/>
- Dr Rudine Simms Bishop's explaining the concept of Mirrors and Windows: <https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAu58SNSyc>
- Further reading and guidance on encouraging critical thinking about diversity can be found here: [A curriculum which reflects diversity – Promoting Race Equality and Anti-racist Education \(glowscotland.org.uk\)](http://glowscotland.org.uk) and [Literacy and English – Promoting Race Equality and Anti-racist Education \(glowscotland.org.uk\)](http://glowscotland.org.uk)
- Principles for an anti-racist curriculum: [Breaking the mould: Principles for an anti-racist curriculum | Resources | Education Scotland](http://education.scotland.gov.uk)
- Gender audit for early years environment: [Audit Your Environment | Zero Tolerance](http://education.scotland.gov.uk)
- Improving Gender Balance and Equalities resources: [Improving gender balance and equalities 3-18 | Resources | Education Scotland](http://education.scotland.gov.uk)
- CPD Pathway on lgbteducation.scot: [LGBT Inclusive Education | National Platform \(lgbteducation.scot\)](http://lgbteducation.scot)
- Disability-awareness in the classroom (pack for primary and secondary settings): [Toys Like me 2022 \(qmu.ac.uk\)](http://qmu.ac.uk)
- Resources for LGBT Inclusive Education on lgbteducation.scot: [Resources – LGBT Inclusive Education | National Platform \(lgbteducation.scot\)](http://lgbteducation.scot)
- LGBT Inclusive Education services and support for teachers: [Teachers - Time for Inclusive Education \(tie.scot\)](http://tie.scot)