



THE IMPORTANCE OF A REPRESENTATIVE AND DIVERSE CURRICULUM



In recognition of International Women's Day (IWD) 2023, Lionheart's Director of Curriculum, Alex Petrie reflects on how Lionheart have invested time into developing a curriculum that is representative of its learners, and how IWD has provided a focus in the Trust's wider Global Issues Curriculum for women's rights and challenging misogyny.

Who was your favourite teacher and why? ...

My favourite question in a series of challenging questions that we recently asked candidates interviewing for a high-level position in our trust. The post was not a 'student facing' role and the question was designed to provide insight into the candidates' views on education, culture and values. And it did the trick.

I watched furrowed interview faces melt away, replaced by warm smiles and fond memory-laden gazes. The panel listened, enchanted by tales about form tutors of days gone by who fought for the child versions of the impressive professionals in front of us; their teachers had helped shape their lives, their world views and acted as role models in various ways, they told us.

One candidate eloquently recalled his English teacher unpacking Orwell's *Animal Farm* and the quotation that stuck in his memory most will be familiar to many: 'All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others'

A rousing slogan for inclusivity. And for equity.

What struck me most was how candidates responded not only about the impact their teachers had on them but how their teachers had to carefully navigate the curricula taught and the narratives it reinforced in order that it spoke to the learners in the class.

I deliberately say 'navigate' because this is what educators did with curricula of the past. Teachers, when faced with a clear discord between curriculum content and/or ideology and the cohorts that it didn't represent,



skilfully pushed forward messages about equality of opportunity, equity and representation despite the lack of diversity in the curriculum.

The original levelling up, long before it was a thing.

At Lionheart we have been reflecting carefully on curriculum design and positive representation over many years. Most recently, the International Women's Day 2023 campaign theme of embracing equity has resonated.

Our trust's long-established vision sees us strive for academic excellence and holistic development so that every child has an equal opportunity to be successful in what they choose to do. And for us to get anywhere near equality of opportunity it is vitally important that we embrace equity.

To do this we drive forward a curriculum that is representative of our learners and shows the classroom as a mirror. Having autonomy to shape a trust-wide curriculum in order for us to level the playing field for our learners is a precious gift. Teachers implementing this curriculum shouldn't be challenged to navigate and interpret narrow, one dimensional resources and programmes of study. We must recognise the inequality that exists and has existed across society and use these precious opportunities to challenge- and change- the narrative.

We pledge to promote the stories of the marginalised, amplify unheard voices and switch lenses so that oppressed groups, those treated unequally because of an aspect of their identity, unrecognised or undervalued figures are explored, celebrated, discussed and debated as we drive forward a vision of a fully inclusive and accepting world.

Our gender equity focused curriculum is broad and includes:

- Strong female role models across every text taught at KS3 English
- A deliberate light shone consistently on the female experiences throughout KS3 History.
- Female scientists, artists and mathematicians studied and then adorning displays in classrooms and corridors
- Tutor time shared reading that promotes female voices and female experiences.

Central to this focus is our Global Issues curriculum which provides a platform to explore, inform and examine worldwide current affairs. We take the issues that matter to our young people and reframe topics with facts, debunking social media tattle and sensationalist approaches to allow time to discuss and debate. This culminates in a united show of social action such as silent vigils, penning letters of hope and speech writing.

In celebration of International Women's Day 2023 we are embracing equity through our Global Issues focus on Women's Rights.

With the rise of misogynistic hate speak advocated by the likes of social media personality Andrew Tate, the death of the young Iranian woman Mahsa Amini in custody of the so called 'morality police' and the harrowing status of Afghanistan's women and girls who are being denied an education, employment and freedom, it is more important than ever that damaging gender discrimination is studied in classrooms.

Delivered across our schools through personal development lessons during March, our teachers will shine light on these stories to embrace equity, remove barriers and promote true inclusion.

We'll continue to develop our curriculum to be a springboard for positive representation and ensure that we avoid the need for teachers to navigate outdated narratives reiterated in outdated curricula.

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