

Giving Psychology Away:

Cultivating Belonging in School for Pupils from Minoritised Ethnic backgrounds



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Sense of School Belonging



Belonging is a fundamental psychological need which is powerful, fundamental and an extremely pervasive motivation (Baumeister and Leary, 1995).

Belonging in school is defined as relating to others and feeling secure in this which in turn helps one to feel worth of love and respect (Osterman, 2000).

It is the extent to which one feels personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others, especially teachers and other adults in school environments (Goodenow and Grady, 1993).

Why School Belonging is important

Research into this area highlights that a sense of belonging at school is key to positive mental wellbeing and academic success.

Feeling a sense of belonging in school is related to better academic outcomes, engagement in learning and enhanced social emotional skills.

Schools play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging not only through peer relationships but through the school community, cultural values and policies (Osterman 2000).

School Belonging for pupils from minoritised groups:

Recent research suggests that cultural pluralism, inclusion, fitting in and having others from similar cultural, ethnic or linguistic background are positively associated with feelings of school belonging.

Cultural pluralism is celebrating difference, using the curriculum or school to make spaces culturally distinct and explicitly acknowledging diversity.





Key Factors that support Ethnic Belonging

Shared lived experience – this included sharing humour and similar lived experiences. It provides young people with a validating space where they could normalise their experience. This also functioned as a form of support and guidance.

Feeling valued by others – young people highlighted the need to feel heard, validated and understood. For their experiences to not be dismissed in relation to racial issues.

Being visible and sharing one's culture – having opportunities to share one's culture/heritage, raising awareness in school which generates feelings of pride and builds connection between other pupils.

Searching for Similarity through Ethnic Identity – young people spoke about a distinct sense of searching for others who are from a similar background to them, including staff who can be seen as role models providing support and guidance.

Research suggests that.... Representation matters:

- Young people pay attention to the ethnic composition of the staff and pupils at their school and how their experiences are represented in the curriculum.
- Young people need to relate with school texts in order to motivate them for learning.
- A need for representation in school staff is linked to providing guidance and a role model to aspire to.





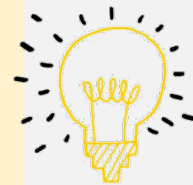
Research suggests that... Long lasting actions taken by school matter:

- Acknowledging racial inequality and holding space to discuss issues related to racism,
- Embedding anti-racism in policies and the school's ethos.
- Exposure to books and text that all young people can relate to and learn from different cultures.
- Student-led spaces specifically for celebrating, learning and discussing the experiences of people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.



Top Tips to Support Belonging in School for Children and Young People from Minoritised Ethnic Groups

1. How does your school **represent** the community you serve? Consider the texts available, authors, public figures and examples used. Are they Eurocentric?
2. Provide **safe spaces** to discuss and acknowledge cultural differences, racial inequality and current events that impact the school community.
3. Create spaces to **celebrate difference** so that individuals' heritage and cultural identity can be visible. For example, a calendar that celebrates all holidays and festivals.
4. Nurture a **school ethos** that works towards becoming anti-racist so that young people feel heard, validated and valued in their experiences. Are there clear pathways for pupils to confidently voice their experiences?
5. Seek **pupil voice** to contribute to the school values and ethos. A question that can be asked; "If you felt that you belonged here, what would you notice that was different about this school?"
6. Create opportunities for **student-led** spaces or clubs where young people can share similarities or experiences related to their cultural heritage or their own interests.
7. Build **authentic and meaningful relationships** between staff and pupils. For example, through finding out pupils' interests, sharing positive interactions and using humour.



Suggestions to support belonging in school directly from Young People:



- Opportunities to **discuss and draw attention to current events** that involve racial inequality.
- Holding a moment of remembrance in school for **George Floyd** or other figures who have suffered at the hands of racism.
- **Workshops** to educate students and staff about different cultural backgrounds.
- Having a **food festival** during Black History Month and ‘wear your own cultural clothes day’ .
- Multiple assemblies and **ongoing discussions** that address racial inequality.
- **Make learning more relatable** and applicable to real life. For example, instead of relying on classics that are harder to understand, use books that contain experiences that young people can directly relate to.
- Have an **anti-racism policy** that ‘comes down hard’ on bullying and discrimination.
- Opportunities to create **societies and clubs** that relate to Black, Asian and other ethnic communities, such as African Caribbean Society.
- Celebrate **diversity in learning**; learn about different cultures in history and different religions in religious education.

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