

## The Problematisation of Tolerance

The ToDay campaign is a primary school programme focused on developing the practice of tolerance, addressing and hopefully mitigating the fear and anger created by prejudice, ignorance and discrimination.

It is based on a vision of a future where everyone has space for their opinions, diversity and cultural identity are cultivated, and the very fabric of our global society holds strong.

The notion of tolerance is complex, as many people see tolerance as the need to put up with an opinion, practice or person they dislike. Despite a modern view that the tolerant person is passive - a non-judgemental relativist – we would argue the practice of tolerance is active. It is about how we behave when faced with difference, whether in identity, opinion, practice or belief.

Remember that tolerance isn't necessary if we are in agreement. That means dialogue, disagreement and how we handle it, is central to the concept of tolerance.

### The different elements of tolerance

We can practice tolerance in three different ways. Tolerance of people, tolerance of practices and tolerance of perspectives.

#### *Tolerance of people*

Part of our social contract is the idea that people should have the freedom to express their perspectives, opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation. We should therefore respect other's right to this freedom. Of course we are entitled to strongly disagree with their ideas and, if we find them objectionable or indefensible, it is our duty to present an opposing view and the arguments behind it (in so far as that opposing view is defensible itself).

#### *Tolerance of practices*

This has been described as according others the freedom to behave in a way that they choose, within the limits of most accepted principles of civilised behaviour. In our society being tolerant of practices does not entail accepting or supporting behaviour which is outside the bounds of the law – hate crime may be the result of beliefs and opinions but it is a crime against our laws. It might be easier to think of accepting or supporting behaviours which have a neutral or positive impact on society, rather than ones which have a negative influence. What matters here is that no one has the right to do the wrong thing.

#### *Tolerance of perspectives*

Tolerance does not mean that all ideas, opinions or perspectives are equally worthwhile, truthful or have equal merit. Many people will think that their ideas are better, or more true, than some others. What it means to be tolerant is to respect those ideas, but refute those with which you disagree, or find indefensible. To argue that some ideas are wrong or immoral doesn't make you intolerant. Without the disagreement aspect of tolerance, no person, idea or behaviour can be opposed.

Tolerance is about:

- developing an understanding of people, practices and perspectives;

- accepting the challenge of different points of view – to confront ideas, disprove them or having your thinking changed by them;
- standing up to intolerance, resisting retaliation and being resilient.

The practice of tolerance means to:

- Tolerate people in all circumstances, respecting their right to express themselves, even if you think their ideas are wrong;
- Actively applaud behaviour that is moral and consistent with the common good;
- Encourage ideas that are sound, and result in a positive benefit to society.

By embracing and believing in such ideas we build a better future.

At Learn2Think we have developed a programme for the International Day for Tolerance focused on teaching the importance of freedom, respect and rights in primary schools. It consists of thought-provoking and engaging lesson plans linked to the National Curriculum as well as whole-school activities supported by our partners which include The Citizenship Foundation, INTO Film, Fun Kids Radio and The Week Junior.

Freedom gives us the right to act, speak, or think as we want. Respect means allowing each other space for differing opinions, all the while standing up for what we believe and considering others in our actions. It is important to remember we are all both different and the same but it is our differences that make us unique and special, and that makes our country interesting. Rights protect us in living our lives according to our choices, and demand that we give those rights to others.

Intolerance comes from a place of ignorance, fear and anger. Anger is a natural response to intolerance but managing that anger and resisting retaliation can build individual character and helps break the cycle of intolerance.

In the face of hatred or meanness, doing nothing can be taken as acceptance. If someone is being intolerant, do something or say something. Support people suffering from intolerance – they can feel scared and alone. Remember that the point is not to get angry, the point is to be heard, and to be understood.

We are urging schools and parents to help the young people in their care to take part in our programme. It isn't possible to eliminate intolerance or meanness, but we can give the youngest members of our society tools that can take us further towards it. Teaching them to be curious about their differences, to understand the nature and impact of intolerant behaviour, to speak out confidently for their point of view, and to understand anger and how to control it. With these small steps, we can make a difference.