

PICTURE THIS: DEVELOPING RELATEDNESS AND RELATIONSHIPS

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Here, Richard explores the use of picture books to highlight an aspect of geographical understanding that can help pupils to develop self-esteem, empathy or mutual understanding and impact on their relationships and relatedness.

Schools should be safe spaces in which pupils are able to learn, grow and flourish. The space in a primary school can be understood in multi-faceted ways, indeed pupils' time in school: 'is both spatial – in physical space, social space and learning space – and environmental – in the built (constructed) environment, the socio-cultural (interpersonal) environment and the ethos (learning) environment' (Catling, 2005, p. 326).

This article is concerned with the provision of resources in the physical space, in terms of school and classroom libraries and book displays, and the interpersonal and learning environments that impact on relationships and relatedness. Catling identifies this as 'a social, cultural and political space for enacting, deepening and developing the meaning and interplay of people in place' (2005, p. 341). Pupils' personal geographies – the class and community in which they live, and others with whom they have connections – form a significant part of their identity. Valuing such connections is fundamental to supporting pupils' well-being.

Developing resources

Over the past decade, Janice Morris (from Bishop Grosseteste University) and I have published and subsequently expanded and redeveloped the *Family Diversities Reading Resource* (Morris and Woolley, 2007, 2017). Initially, it started out as a collection of high-quality picture books showing the diverse lived experiences of children within families. However, it also contains a selection of books that explore difference in a general sense, and books highlighting children's experiences of family life in diverse settings and locations. It is this final aspect that I am concerned with here, in terms of geographic location and interconnectedness.

Understanding children's spaces

Catling and Martin have argued for the co-construction of learning in geography, suggesting that children are to be viewed as: 'contributors to our shared knowledge and understanding of the world, rather than as recipients and "beneficiaries" of "hand-me-down" curricula... [Indeed, the children's] case is one of social justice, in which difference is encountered not as an "other" to be replaced by one dominant, powerful discourse, but to be brought into dialogue as a democratic partner in the mutual interplay of learning, in the process of evolution within and between the everyday knowledge of children and the disciplinary knowledge of subjects' (2011, pp. 14 & 13).

When drawing together over 150 picture books, our intention was for pupils to identify their own lived experience in the materials in their schools and classrooms, rather than always seeing 'traditional' images of families and homes and wondering why their own was different. As I have noted elsewhere (Woolley, 2010), one teacher with whom I spoke had not considered the families portrayed in the resources he used with his year 2 class. Thus, when I asked how many of his pupils lived with two parents of different gender, he answered 'none'. Yet, he was surprised that he had not considered whether his classroom resources reflected the real-life experiences of his pupils.

Utilising picture books

The following is a small selection of picture books reviewed in *Family Diversities Reading Resource* (Morris and Woolley, 2017). Each is used to highlight an aspect of geographical understanding that might help to develop self-esteem, empathy or mutual understanding with pupils.

Ali's Story (Maldonado, 2015)

This is the story of ten-year-old Ali's journey from Afghanistan. When the war escalates, his family decides that it is time to flee to a safer place. They head for Europe, but Ali's parents cannot complete the journey because they do not have passports. Ali continues to travel with his grandmother. Four years later Ali finally receives a telephone call telling him that his parents are safe. This real-life account of a refugee is told in Ali's own words, which puts the story on an accessible scale, and may be

useful for teachers and parents/carers to address news stories about refugees, or with pupils who have had a similar experience. It is based on a real-life testimony.

Do You Sing Twinkle?: A story about remarriage and new family (Levins, 2010)

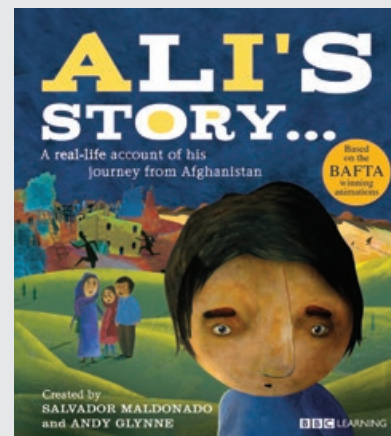
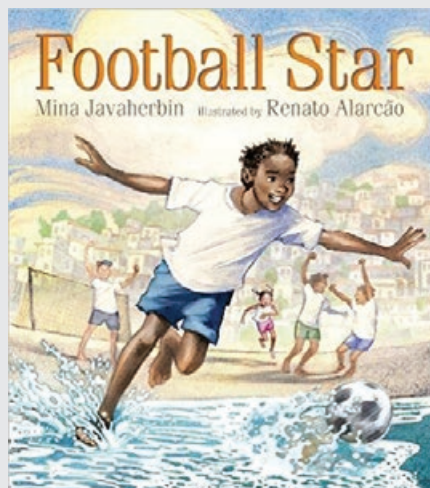
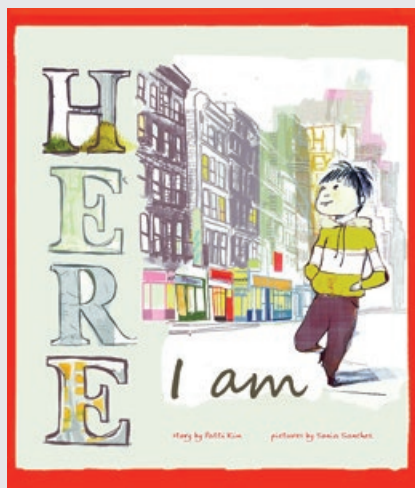
A boy and his brother have to make a hard choice when their mum finds a new partner and moves away. Instead of being able to spend half of each week with mum and half with dad, they now live with dad and visit mum, and their new step-sisters, on alternate weekends. Gradually, the boys' experience increasing unhappiness, and share this with each parent. Mum starts to make increased contact, and makes sure that they have time together. *Do You Sing Twinkle?* is useful because it stresses how hard parents have to work to support their children. The book includes notes to support parents in its use. The book focuses on the personal issues that arise when living in two locations, including at a distance from one parent.

Football Star (Javaherbin, 2014)

Paulo Marcelo Feliciano intends to be a football star. He lives in Brazil, and hopes that his achievements will mean that his mum does not have to work long hours in the future. After finishing work, Paulo goes to play football. Part way through the game a player is injured and Paulo votes to allow a girl (his little sister, Maria) to join in. Maria turns out to be a great success. This very engaging story focuses on the dreams of an ambitious boy and his hard work to reach his goal. It shows Paulo's relationships with his family and friends – particularly his support for Maria's abilities. This book presents optimism and ambition in difficult circumstances, in which a boy works hard to supplement his family income.

Here I Am (Kim, 2014)

This book shows a boy taking his first tentative steps in a new location. We see elements of his journey to his new home, his family, his anxiety and confusion, and the way in which he starts to make sense of his new world. When he loses a seed – carried from his previous home – it opens up a whole new world of experience for him. This book will be useful when considering the lives of those who have



A small selection of picture books reviewed in *Family Diversities Reading Resource*. With kind permission of the publishers.

to move to an unfamiliar place and the challenges they face. It encourages readers to see a change in location positively, by showing the boy growing in confidence and finding happiness in his new world.

Picnic in the Park (Griffiths and Pilgrim, 2007)

It is Jason's fifth birthday and he is to have a picnic party in the local park. He has invited all his friends and their families, who arrive with various food and gifts. The families represented are diverse and include people from different ethnic backgrounds, adoptive and foster families, a child using a wheelchair, children with one and two parents and a single person. The picnic turns out to be a celebration of the diversity of families while set in the shared space of a municipal park.

The Silence Seeker (Morley, 2009)

Joe has new neighbours. His mum explains that they are asylum seekers, but Joe mishears and thinks that they are 'silence seekers'. When he meets the new boy next door, Joe offers to take him to find some silence, but wherever they explore there is noise and busyness. The next day, the boy and his family have gone. Joe checks all the haunts that they visited together, but there is no sign of the other boy. Joe hopes that they have moved on to find the silence they sought. The book illustrates how families are sometimes displaced in search of peace (here, literal peace away

from a war zone) but one that is misheard and misunderstood (in a profound way) as peace and quiet.

Showing what we value

Books such as those discussed above provide opportunities for pupils to explore lives similar to, and lives that are very different from, their own. They offer a 'one step distant' technique for pupils to consider the experiences of others, which removes some of the immediacy of issues from one's own home situation. The inclusion of such books in school libraries reflects the make-up of our society, the issues that pupils frequently see in the news, and shows that such matters are considered important enough to be part of the school community. A failure to include this type of book suggests, by omission, that the issues are not important. By comparing and contrasting their lives with those portrayed in the stories, pupils can explore their own personal spaces of life experience, at home, in class and in the wider world.

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