

How I...

# Changing minds

**Lorna Jackson** is one of the driving forces behind the Education4Change programme, which aims to empower educators to explore issues of race and diversity.

Words: Laraine Clay

**AS the longest serving teacher and head teacher in the east London borough of Newham, Lorna Jackson has seen many changes to education and has an appetite for continuing change.**

So when George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were killed by police in America in 2020, Lorna's fellow head teachers voiced their support for her frustration that racism was still rife and that something had to be done through education.

In the wake of the worldwide Black Lives Matter protests that followed George Floyd's murder, a focus group of school leaders in Newham met that

July to discuss the way forward – and the Education4Change (E4C) programme was created.

"Covid and lockdown put a spotlight on discrimination, injustice and racism. I wanted to capture the moment when the eyes of the world are for once on racial inequity," says Lorna, who has taught in Newham for more than 40 years. She is head teacher at Maryland Primary in Stratford, a diversely populated school with children from 34 countries and speaking 40 languages.

"We know that if there is a will for change from leaders, it can happen. In August 2020, A-level students won their fight for justice and fairness in having their grades reviewed after the exam debacle after less than a week of protests. After many years of fighting for equality, the LGBT+ agenda has been legally recognised in the curriculum. I felt it was time for social justice and anti-racist education to be at the top of the agenda. This is how E4C began."

#### Spreading the word

Lorna is joined on the E4C team by Newham head teachers Lando Du Plooy and Joan Deslandes, and together they have devised the programme for school leaders, governors and pupils to tackle racism by starting in the classroom.

The programme includes resources for primary and secondary levels, the training of lead facilitators to help roll out the programme, and network

meetings for E4C ambassadors. Support is offered to senior leadership teams and the programme provides access to a curriculum and research platform of world-class academic resources.

E4C also suggests using short films, all featuring Black people and dating back to the 1800s, from the British Film Institute, which she says are good conversation starters for key stages 1, 2 and 3.

One example is *Jemima and Johnny* from 1965, as Lorna explains: "The learning objective [with this film] is to explore what friendship is between a little Black girl and a little white boy in Notting Hill in the 1960s during the rise of the National Front. There is the opportunity to begin to explore attitudes towards race and equality and consider if people are capable of change."

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Another example is a film of Martin Luther King's acceptance speech when he was presented with an honorary doctorate at Newcastle University in 1967, five months before he was assassinated in Memphis.

"He made the speech just before returning to America to make his famous 'I have a dream' speech. The interesting discussion that arises is for the audience to think about the world we live in today, and to think if we can change it for the better, using his speech. Consider why he made this speech in the UK? How does the speech make you feel, listening to it, nearly 60 years later?"

The long-term aim of E4C is to change mindsets within communities so that racism is challenged wherever it exists.

"It will equip staff with the skills to address issues around the existence and impact of racism, and help children and

young people develop their understanding of racism and unconscious bias within society," she says.

"We know this is having early success as schools have already established E4C ambassadors and are eagerly waiting for developments."

### Leading the way

Lorna was already widely known for her creative approach to teaching. She was one of the first head teachers to adopt the then-controversial Read Write Inc (RWI) phonics approach to reading when she joined Maryland Primary School in 2001 and was faced with a "dire" level of literacy among pupils.

"I asked the question: Why? Why couldn't the children read? Why couldn't they decode? The local inspectors said that our children were leaving school

'functionally illiterate'.

"My research led me to realise that the school's literacy hour was failing my pupils. In 2003, under scrutiny from the local authority, I abandoned the literacy hour as well as introducing a phonic programme immediately."

Maryland became a model school for RWI and has helped many other schools to improve their reading standards.

Now her pupils outperform other schools nationally in phonics screening and, as an international model school, it hosts visits from other countries from as far afield as Australia, South Africa, the Middle East and the USA and Canada.

Lorna can't help but note: "After the local authority wanted to smack us on the wrist for going against the grain, now the majority of schools teach RWI and Newham is one of the top-performing local authorities in the country."

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It was just this sort of drive for change that made Lorna go into teaching. Originally working at the Bank of England, she felt compelled to do something that would make a difference.

### Time to talk

"I decided to train to teach at Goldsmiths, University of London, where I found a love of teaching and research. One of my research projects was on multicultural education. In 1979, I came across an article [in the former NUT's *The Teacher* magazine] that stated there was racial bias in the curriculum and that conversation was key to addressing racism – 43 years later, we are still having this conversation."

In May this year, E4C surveyed colleagues in four schools on the use of language around race and discovered many of them found conversations on the subject difficult.

### Call for change

"Definitions are often unclear, and the knowledge of what may offend can cause immediate barriers to open conversations," Lorna explains. As a result of the survey she has written a racial literacy conversation kit, complete with a glossary of terms, that she hopes will support teachers to have those "courageous" conversations and use the right words comfortably.



Lorna Jackson: "As educators we believe it is our duty to tackle the issue of racism"

"It is about gaining understanding in order to support action to challenge racism," she says. "Racism causes lifelong trauma and stress that can have a devastating impact on self-esteem and confidence, ultimately affecting opportunity and life chances. As educators we believe it is our duty to tackle the issue

of racism in whatever way we can."

She added: "E4C is driven by the knowledge that change is needed, and that education will be key in helping communities realise that we can all do better. We do not need to change the curriculum, we need to change the culture."

## NEU FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING AN ANTI-RACIST APPROACH IN YOUR ORGANISATION



JOIN leaders across the country by adopting the NEU's Framework for developing an anti-racist approach. More than 1,500 educators have taken up the union's training in how to implement the framework at their school or college since it was launched following the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020.

Training can be tailored to the school or college and includes what it means to be anti-racist rather than simply being against racism,

acceptable language, and advice on how to produce an action plan. Topics include unconscious bias and micro-aggressions.

Danny Richards, head of school at Boulton Ark Academy, in Birmingham, said: "The framework provides a pathway for improvement and unwraps what is a very complicated topic, making it far easier to digest and work through."

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