



WA'QAAR MIRZA IS CEO OF SAFI IDEAS AND CREATOR OF ZAYN & ZAYNA'S LITTLE FARM.

# It's time to crack cultural stereotypes

*Wa'qaar Mirza explains why it's important to bring diversity into Early Years' settings*

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY IS a hot topic and for good reason. Teaching children to have cultural awareness from a very early age is the best way forward to crack those stereotypes and help prevent future classroom racism and bullying.

By engaging children in culturally responsive experiences we know that their awareness and inclusion of diverse cultures and beliefs increases. And you can never start too early.

Learning does begin at home, but unfortunately not all parents are aware or even know how to teach diversity. You don't know what you don't know after all. And with a gap in true diverse content in preschool television programming, and very little in the way of books and toys, parents are limited to the educational resources they have available in the home. And television is most often the most influential learning medium for this impressionable age. Preschoolers' screen exposure to diversity often comes in the forms of tokenistic animal species in varying colours, rather than authentic human characters of different racial, religious, sexual and other backgrounds. It's no surprise these young children have limited understanding of cultural unawareness when they start nursery.

So where does this leave Early Years' practitioners when many children reach their learning environments having never seen that cultural differences even exist? Thankfully we have the ability to make a difference. Here are a few suggestions on being more culturally inclusive:

**1** Use culturally rich stories, room displays and poems from around the world to bring awareness of cultural differences within your environment.

**2** Challenge those stereotypes. If a child unwittingly makes a racist comment for example, don't ignore it! Talk to the children about it and bring in positive messaging surrounding diversity and inclusivity.

**3** There are over 7,000 languages spoken around the world but only one language we can all understand - music. We hear the rhythm and feel the emotions and it's a great fun way to introduce multiple cultures and sounds to young children.

**4** Food is another opportunity to raise awareness on the positives multiple ethnicities bring. Learning about (and tasting) cuisines from around the world broadens minds and opens that cultural awareness dialogue.

**5** From the spire of your local church to the minaret at the mosque, places of worship are beautiful buildings that hold an abundance of culture and interest

inside. Most places of worship welcome visitors and open their doors for people to take a look and explore inside. This is a great opportunity to create an awareness and understanding of multiple religious groups.

**6** A fun way to teach children diversity is through arts and crafts. Try making a colourful Diwali Rangoli or have a go at creating Tibetan prayer flags. There are many crafts you can do introducing cultures from all over the world.

Many parents also need tools and techniques to give them the ability to teach and learn cultural diversity within the home, yet there is still a gaping hole in available children's educational content featuring a fair representation of multiculturalism, ethnicity, race and genders. At Safi Productions, when developing Zayn & Zayna's Little Farm we wanted to help fill this gap by creating a preschool content that offers a diverse range of human characters in real-world scenarios. We want to help young children identify with the diverse communities around them

through communication, creativity and confidence building, while delivering important and universal messaging around mindfulness, diversity and sustainability.

I feel that with educational programming along with nurseries and schools integrating diversity and inclusivity as an everyday norm, we can help make a difference in cultural awareness and education through those very important early years and beyond.

**Wa'qaar A Mirza is co-founder and global CEO of Safi Ideas. He is an accomplished British entrepreneur with over 30 years experience in direct response marketing strategy.**

