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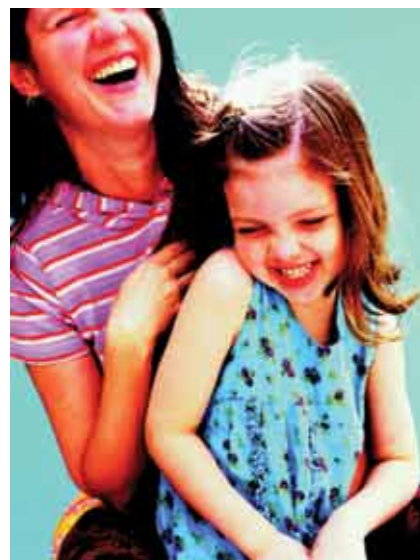
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THE IDEAS COLUMN

Using person centred thinking to engage and motivate children with SEN

Helen Sanderson and Antonia Kinman look at ways of celebrating the past, both at home and at school

The concepts of growing up and growing older can be hard to grasp for many children, and for children with a learning disability they can be especially difficult. A personal scrapbook is a great way of working with your child to map their history in a way that's meaningful to them, whilst helping them to think about who they are and what they want in life.

Special books

Carla has three children and each of them has a special book. This is a scrapbook which has a page for each birthday, with three or four photos depicting things like favourite presents, their party and blowing out the candles on their cake. There are a few pages in each book that describe and depict their first day at school, and sections for favourite holidays, friends and pets. The children also suggest their own themes for their books.

Annuals

Karina creates a family photo album for each year. They capture and celebrate the highlights of each child's year and the progress they have made. Her children love to get them out and compare what they were doing at the same time last year or the year before.

If you're doing this project at school, students could work on one page each month, using photos and graphics to illustrate an event, including who was there and the feelings they had at each event.

If you're doing this at home, you might want to try making an online book that can be shared with friends and family wherever they might be. There are loads of applications out there that can help you to do this.

Celebrating family histories

Keeping a connection between your family and its previous generations is as helpful as building bonds between the present day members of the family, and it can really contribute to the sense of self that experts say is crucial in withstanding social pressures to be something else.

Galleries

A photo gallery on a wall at home is a way of celebrating family members past and present and where we come from. You can find wall stickers online which are easy to apply and look gorgeous. You could write a few words about each person to go next to their picture, such as what you like about them, their achievements or even their "catchphrases".

Timelines

Liz found that whenever she showed her daughter, Elsa, pictures of herself when she was younger, Elsa would say "That's not you, mummy. That's another Liz." Her reaction was similar when she saw photos of her dad as a young man.

A family timeline can easily be created in school or at home with graphics or photos. The timeline can begin at any point, such as the meeting of parents or grandparents, and should run up to the present day. This is also an opportunity for students to think about the future, so it can be a good idea to end the timeline with hopes and dreams for each child and their family.

Forest of family trees

Family trees are fun to do and look really attractive. Templates are available free online or it's easy enough to make a tree trunk template and cut out leaves. You

can either use photos or ask pupils to draw their relatives' pictures on each leaf next to their name and dates. These look particularly good when you have a whole forest of family trees on the wall.

Miniature life histories

A miniature life history is a way of capturing and celebrating one person's history using objects which represent that person and the life they have lived. These objects are displayed in a box with different compartments in a way that makes sense to you. The one pictured here is particularly elaborate, but students could produce something equally meaningful by choosing six or eight objects that tell the story of someone in their family; it could be a parent, a grandparent or someone who has passed away.

Parents may need to help some children to think about this, so perhaps send some info about the project home with each child a week or two before you want to start making the miniature histories.



Once each student has chosen what should go into each box, they can either make objects, cut out images or choose items from a doll house catalogue before gluing them into the appropriate square.

Celebrating community histories

Whether you focus on local history or the history of the school or class, community histories are powerful because they combine the stories of lots of individuals and show how they interact with and relate to the wider group. Here are two ideas for school community history projects:

Quilting

Students don't need to be able to sew to create a quilt, as most of the work will be in decorating the squares, but you may need to be prepared to get the sewing machine out yourself to put all the squares together.

Use pieces of fabric of around 15cm square, or bigger, in whatever colours make sense for your project. You want your quilt to tell a story, so divide it into four sections, with each



section representing an important point in the particular history, ending with the present day. Ask each student to choose which point in the story they want to illustrate and, using felt, glue, paint and whatever other craft supplies are available, to decorate their square or squares.

Once they are all sewn together, you can hang your quilt in the classroom as a wall hanging.

Mosaics

Ceramic paints are easy to get hold of these days from any craft shop or online, and can transform plain white tiles into something really impressive. Give each student one or more tiles and ask them to decorate them to illustrate a part of the history. Some students may need support in thinking about what to paint, while others will have ideas of their own. When you have all the tiles together, use a strong adhesive to stick the tiles to a piece of ply-board and put it up on a wall for all to see. SEN

Further Information

Helen Sanderson is the expert advisor on person centred approaches to the Government's Valuing People Support Team and co-author of *Celebrating Families: simple, practical ways to enhance family life*.
www.celebratingfamilies.co.uk