

## book review



# Equality in Action: a way forward with Persona Dolls

By Greta Sandler

In the early 1980s I was a training officer in Lambeth and had to walk through Brixton on visits to day nurseries. During this time there was much disaffection between the people living in the area and the police. I walked among burning buildings and flying bottles.

The nurseries were set amongst this turmoil and when I visited I asked this question: “How do you help the children talk about what they have seen on their way to nursery?” The reply usually was, “We don’t. This is a safe haven and we can’t bring what’s going on outside in here.” Now, whatever you might think, whether you agree or disagree with the response to my question, how much easier it could have been if the staff had access to Persona Dolls and Persona Doll Training.

Equality in Action clearly demonstrates that a child’s mind is not a tabula rasa, that it is important to talk about fears, prejudices and misconceptions. Through anecdotal evidence, research findings and case studies a picture builds up of how Persona Dolls helps the educators and the children to understand the world around them in an anti-discriminatory way. The experience encourages them to face up to and feel confident about tackling many day-to-day problems, to empathise, confront and know how to deal with feeling and relationships. An anecdote on page 55 encapsulates just what Equality in Action and Persona Doll Training are about. The children were asked to write about their Persona Doll. Emma, aged 7 wrote, “When she spoke to us she made me think how I play with my friends and how I must look after their feelings.”

We can always learn from the experience of others. I do think that Chapter 6 which gives a brief history of the Persona Doll trainers and how they became involved in the work, can help those about to start on the anti-discriminatory road. Their histories are all different and enlightening. Training for equality is not easy. It takes time, patience and support from others. It cannot be done alone. But we also need to make a commitment to start to do it. As Eve Cook writes on page 113: “Children have a right to correct information about the world. And early years educators have a responsibility to value children’s cultures and communities and help them recognise unfairness and bias.

Equality in Action is a powerful and important book. It gives support and strategies to those working with children by not just saying, you must do this but also showing educators how to go about promoting equality. Persona Dolls and the associated training are the best things that have happened in the world of education for a very long time.