

## **Memories of an Experiment**

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The Channel 4 programme took me back to an anti-racist initiative that my English department took part in when I was in my first year of teaching. We were based in a London majority mono-cultural area where there were problems with racism. Our only Sikh boy was bullied and had his turban pulled off and kicked around the playground. We teachers wanted to address these problems.

The department decided to explore the extraordinary Eye of the Storm US experiment, where teacher Jane Elliott divides a class into those with blue eyes and those with brown. She discriminates in favour of the 'superior' blue-eyed children and this has a major impact on how the class behaves. The blue-eyed children are happy to be the oppressors. Then the brown-eyed children are the favoured ones and the tables turn. The children receive an important lesson in the power of prejudice and what racism feels like.

We started our own English department experiment using the idea of measuring pupils' head sizes and saying the bigger head sized children were superior. We began to see similar pupil reactions as the children in Jane Elliott's classroom. Then it all started going terribly wrong, when parents and the local MP complained. We were highlighted in university lectures and our school even ended up on the front page of the tabloids. "PIN-HEAD TEACHERS!" screamed one headline.

Now our class experiment all seems very brave, even if our actions now seem naïve. We acted without thinking of the wider impact. However, so many years on, I still feel it's important to try to fight racism and make things better for all our pupils. As we say in Judaism, we have to repair a damaged world.