



Dr Vasanti Jadva and Dr Sophie Zadeh
Centre for Family Research

“ We wanted to share our findings with young people and identify creative ways of engaging them. ”

Research

At the Centre for Family Research, Vasanti and Sophie are part of a team who conduct psychological research about modern families, including families where children are conceived through the use of in vitro fertilisation (IVF) or surrogacy, and those that are headed by same-sex male and female couples, and single men and women.

Target Group

Secondary school pupils.

Reasons to Engage

Vasanti and Sophie’s research has shown that children in modern families sometimes face bullying and a lack of understanding from their peers at school. Through engagement, they hoped to raise awareness of diversity in family life and address the misconceptions some people have about different family types.

Public Engagement Project

Plays drawing on study findings from the Centre for Family Research.

Project Objectives

- Educate and inform pupils about different types of families
- Show the experiences of parents and children within these families, and the issues they sometimes face
- Inspire understandings of family diversity through the medium of theatre

Planning and Process

Vasanti and Sophie first collaborated with twenty new writers from Central Saint Martins, London, who created a series of short plays inspired by their research.

Two plays, written by Michael O'Neill and Grace Davis, were chosen to be performed by Cambridge University students to a group of secondary school pupils.

Pupils' feedback illustrated that the plays were both entertaining and educational. The majority said that they had learned something new about different family types, and especially liked the humorous way in which the plays engaged with the topic of family diversity.

Focus groups conducted with the pupils detailed that the plays were well-received because they were realistic and relatable. Pupils gained an appreciation of the feelings of children raised in different families and gained confidence to discuss the complex issues raised by the plays.

“ The process has led to greater appreciation of non-academic methods of engaging the public. ”

The pupils' feedback suggested that plays are an effective medium for engaging young people in research on this topic.



Theatre plays and workshop

Key advice

“It is not always a straightforward process, you may face some hurdles along the way, but it is extremely rewarding and worthwhile.”

Outcomes

For Vasanti and Sophie

- Learnt how to communicate research to non-specialist audiences
- Improved transferable skills through working with different stakeholders
- Established theatre as a successful way to engage young audiences with their research

For target group

- Acquired an understanding of the experiences of parents and children in modern families
- Gained confidence to debate controversial topics
- Became inspired to pursue higher education