Analysing ethnic education policy-making in England and Wales

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Abstract

This discussion paper reviews recent historical literature concerning ethnic education policy-making. The social provision of education when examining the implications on ethnic minorities raises many issues and pose the following questions: Does the education system exclude sections of the population i.e. ethic minorities? Can cultural diversity be taught and promoted? The aim of the paper is to explore the implications these questions have had on black, Asian and other minority communities. Assimilationist, integrationist and multicultural education policies are analysed. By examining the recent history of ethnic minority education policies the objective is to make the reader think about some of the implications behind and concerning the teaching of ethnic educational issues concerning cultural diversity and institutionalised racism.

Ethnic education policy-making, 1965-1988

The Education of Immigrants (DES,1965 - Circular 7/65) (DES,1971) allows the reader an opportunity to explore ethnic identities with regard to education policy and practice. As the DES begin:

Some schools before 1960 had a cosmopolitan range of nationalities among their pupils but had found relatively little difficulty in absorbing and educating children of the earlier post-war European immigrants. In the 1960's however, the concentration and rapid build-up in the numbers of children arriving from Commonwealth countries and entering the schools at different ages and at all times throughout the school year began to create serious educational difficulties. (DES,1971:1)

The aim of the policy document seems to underline the significance of absorbing and assimilating Commonwealth children into the education system. It is interesting to note that 'educational difficulties' are highlighted as a problem generated by immigrant children rather than problems residing within the education system itself. The DES document goes further and actually lays the blame on ethnic families and communities for failures within the classroom.

For the West Indian child […] The environment is one in which marriage is not always considered important in providing a secure basis for raising children […] to join his mother from whom he may have been separated for several years […] the unknown father with whom his mother may be living, and perhaps, if very young, sent out to child-minders while his parents go out to work […] Asian mothers' tendency to live a withdrawn life and not to make outside contacts does not help […] Many [Asian parents] are shy at the thought of mixing with White parents with whom they have little or no contact out of school. (DES,1971:4-6)

It is West Indian and Asian stereotypes that are being reinforced and highlighted here rather than the inability of the education system to cope with the influx of immigrant children. West Indian and Asian children, as well as their parents, are seen as the cause of educational problems. Possible and sensible solutions seem to be missing from the education policy documents. The DES document concludes its summary with the following interesting recommendation:

The education service can make its best contribution to the country's future in this situation by helping each individual immigrant to become a citizen who can take his or her place in society, fully and properly equipped to accept responsibilities,

2

exercise rights and perform duties. (DES,1971:12)

The Education of Immigrants highlights the 'problems' of ethnic minorities; however, the question relating to whose responsibilities, rights and duties the education service is supposed to teach immigrant children raises interesting questions about the nature of the education system. Responsibilities refers to the majority ethnic population and how best to run an education system to promote majority rights and duties. Circular 7/65 also acknowledges the concern with the assimilation of immigrant pupils and shows anxieties about the responses of white parents to the concentration of immigrant children in schools. The system seems to be upholding English, white notions of nation and ethnic minorities have to be assimilated or integrated by education into the state and society generally. In this way minority education is undermined. From the minority perspective, Fitzherbert argues that education is vitally important for West Indian communities and children:

> School represents their means of access to full membership of the community. First, it is the place where they meet English children on equal terms; second, it is the place where they learn to understand and maybe accept English values. Third and most important, it is the place where they can acquire the qualifications and skills needed to compete on equal terms with English adults in the job market. (Fitzherbert, in Oakley, 1968:7-8)

Fitzherbert projects a positive image of education for minority communities and highlights the importance placed on education by black parents for their children. Meeting white children on equal terms and acquiring qualifications and skills for the workplace is vital. However, the 1962 *Commonwealth Immigrants Act* began the process of limiting the inflow specifically of black labour. With the reinforcement of ethnic minority stereotypes it would be harder for immigrant children to obtain qualifications and employment skills to compete in the job market.

The late 1960s witness educational expenditure falling for the first time since the end of the second world war in 1968 which increased social, political and economic pressures. Roy Jenkins introduces integration as a

3

general social policy into the political debate in 1966. This can seemingly apply also to policies at a national and local level during the 1970s. However, integrationist ideals did not seem to entail an ideological break with the past. The integrationist education policies of the 1970s highlight Marxist concepts of exploitation and alienation The aim was to bring immigrant children into the life of the school with minimal and conditional cultural diversity in schools. As Troyna and Williams argue:

> The political slogan was alienation [...] a concept used differentially in selected contexts but one which had an educational resonance linking it to notions of child-centredness and culturally relevant curricula. It also acted as a twin concept to 'underachievement'. In political terms they connected underachievement and allowed for the amelioration of the latter (underachievement) as a way of forestalling the former (rebellion). (Troyna and Williams,1986:22-23)

Why has underachievement constantly been important in both education policy and practice relating to ethnic minorities? Educational achievement (Cashmore and Troyna,1990) is the level a student reaches as measured by test scores or exam results. Black children have tended to score less in exams than their white and Asian counterparts. The education system itself offers an insight into why underachievement became such an important issue. Although the 1960s and 1970s witness comprehensive re-organisation to the secondary system of education, children were leaving school at 15 until 1973 and schools still maintained policies of selection and streaming. What would this mean to ethnic minority children who had limited access to education qualifications, such as O Level and CSE's? Would it be unrealistic to ask ethnic minorities to support an education system which denied them access to educational qualifications? Education underachievement highlights the problems that black children face within the education system. The official agenda during the 1960s and 1970s was framed in such a way that 'the problem' of black students and not the problems confronted by black students became the *rationale* for policy intervention. The aim as Troyna and Williams argue was

[…] to make the educational experience of Black students more palatable. Racism, in other words, […] was not challenged; neither was its profound and fundamental effect on the life chances of Black students brought into the debate […] The 3 Ss (saris, samosas and steel bands) interpretation of multiculturalism was advanced as the operational mode through which the 3 Rs (resistance, rejection and rebellion) would be explicable in terms of assimilationist imperatives. (Troyna and Williams,1986:22)

Assimilationist and integrationist education policies directed the problems away from the education system and toward the black child which meant greater alienation in the classroom and in society in general. These policies are illustrated by Harrison (1988) who examines the inner city London Borough of Hackney. He argued that educational attainment relates to the housing and local economy of the area, i.e. the child's environment. Hackney itself had one of the highest proportion of children from families originating from New Commonwealth families. Harrison (1988:287) examines two schools, one of them being Hackney Downs, which as he argues in 1978 when the author was in the field '[...] still achieved the best academic results in Hackney.' Nevertheless, truancy and vandalism in Hackney Downs was high, while teacher morale was very low. It seems that the educational circulars had not solved any of the education problems in Hackney. Harrison offers an important conclusion to his analysis of Hackney Schools:

[…] whatever the school does, it can never be the major educational influence in its pupils' lives. Most children spend the crucial early years at home. By the time those from poor homes start primary school, irreparable damage will have been done to their potential through poor nutrition, lack of stimulation and verbalisation, and emotional disturbance. The family is a more potent influence than the primary school, the street is more potent than secondary school, television is more potent than either level. The poor neighbourhood is itself the principle school for its children, its inhabitants are the chief instructors. It is a disastrous environment for learning or discipline. (Harrison, 1988:298)

It is important that Harrison highlighted the social and economic problems which concern children and their families within the urban as related to

5

education achievement for all inner city children. The problem did not lie with the ethnic child within the inner city, but the environment which surrounds the child. The author underlined the ways to attack the problems surrounding urban poverty and consequently education for inner city children. Policy has to address the problems of improving urban housing, the economy and education *together*. Unfortunately, with social problems and tensions increasing in urban ethnic minority communities during the 1970s, education policies were gradually forced to change.

During the 1970s, the general movement toward multiculturalism had started in Britain. Multiculturalism marks a move away from the education policies of assimilation and integration toward the concept of cultural diversity. According to Straker-Welds (1988:1) '[...] the Inner London Education Authority had first circulated its initial papers in 1977 on multi-ethnic education.' Inner city social disorder in the early 1980s, in areas such as: Brixton; Tottenham; Small Heath and Toxteth shed light on the need for urban policies which included ethnic minorities. The *Scarman Report* (1981) examined urban conditions and put forward recommendations for urban regeneration. Interestingly, Scarman refused at the time to acknowledge the existence of institutionalised racism. Institutionalised racism involves cultural and individual factors coming together in institutional environments which work for the benefit of the ethnic majority rather than the minority. When combating institutional racism, social gatekeepers and the public at large need to be re-educated and become ethnically aware (Rex, 1986). Twitchin and Demuth suggested back in 1981 that although (1981:179) '[…] the concept of institutional racism is a new idea to many people [...] [we] need to think about institutional pressures, particularly in the exercise of power over decision-making in the school system.' With regard to education policy, *Education for All* was the major education policy document on ethnic minorities during the 1980s. Troyna in Chivers (Ed) (1987) argue that the final Report took eight years to publish, changed its chairperson - Rampton to Swann - and had numerous changes of members on the committee because of disputes regarding the nature of the material being examined which only covered specific ethnic minorities. These difficulties highlight the controversial nature of the policy document. *Education for All*:

6

[…] reviewed in relation to schools the educational needs and attainment of children from ethnic minority groups taking accounts, as necessary, of factors outside the formal education system relevant to school performance, including influences, in early childhood and prospects for school leavers. (DES, 1985:vii)

The focus of *Education for All* was on internal and external problems concerning ethnic minority education. This fact indicates a small advance from the educational circulars of the 1960s and 1970s. The educational problems, contrary to Harrison's (1988) suggestions, were directed toward both the school and the child, not on the inter-city urban environment. The Report refers to West Indian children as

[…] underachieving in relation to their peers […There is] no single cause […] but rather a network of widely differing attitudes and expectations on the part of the teachers and the education system as a whole, and on the part of the West Indian child to have particular difficulties and face particular hurdles in achieving his or her full potential (DES, 1985:viii)

The terminology seems not to have changed from the 1960s and 1970s and West Indian children are still being associated with underachievement. The main difference with the previous decades is that the system is also partly blamed for the problem. Having said that, the focus of the problem still lies with the black child. The recommendation of the Swann Report, (1985:xii) 'views the task for education in meeting the needs of ethnic minority pupils and preparing all pupils, both ethnic majority and ethnic minority, for life in a society which is both multi-racial and culturally diverse'. This is a major change in terminology, as the education document distances itself from previous assimilationist and integrationist education policies. The education system is now supposedly preparing all children for a life in a culturally diverse society, which could be achieved with a more multicultural curriculum. Jones (1989) highlights the Development Programme for Race Equality within several Inner London Education Authority areas during the latter part of the 1980s. The programmes' aim as the author (1989:138) argues was one of race equality:

7

'The attempt was eminently justifiable in educational terms: it linked school-based learning to 'real-life' experience.' However, a combination of central and local political pressure and the right-wing press worked against these initiatives. Three years after the publication of an education report which attempted to promote cultural diversity within the education system of England and Wales, the 1988 Education Reform Act introduced the national curriculum of three core and seven foundation subjects which was designed to achieve a great deal more than simply improving educational standards. Allegedly, the national curriculum would broaden the mind and body and provide children with a firm moral and spiritual basis. But whose moral and spiritual basis was the national curriculum aimed for? Again the policy discourse seems to favour notions of white, British identity rather than also considering minority identities as part of the curriculum.

Moves toward greater cultural diversity, 1988-2001?

The late 1980s and 1990s highlight a more positive outlook with regard to ethnic minorities (Mac an Ghaill, 1988) (Foster, 1990) in education literature. Unfortunately, the old problems still existed. Barber (1997) has recently highlighted the problems surrounding Hackney Downs. By 1994 after inspection, Hackney Council decided to close the school down. Barber (1997:113-119) used Hackney Downs as an example of a school which has failed. The only ethnic minority who were mentioned in relation to the school concern achievement: '[...] the school's General Certificate of Secondary Education figures in 1995 showed that some of the best results were in Turkish, a subject in which the candidates *had received no teaching at all*.' Any mention of any ethnic majority seems to have disappeared from the analysis. The standard of teaching is heavily criticised in the final report. Barber argues:

> In the absence of the leadership qualities that Hackney Downs required it had simply imploded. The school's circumstances were challenging. Many of its pupils had suffered the double blow of disadvantaged home circumstances and several years - often from the start of primary schooling onwards - of poor, demotivating education based on a destructive mixture of low expectations and patronising sympathy. Drugs were and are, rife in the area. Inevitably this affects some of the

8

pupils and therefore the school. Some of the most difficult pupils in the school came from homes where the parents were addicts or dealers (Barber,1997:119)

The above paragraph has important negative connotations not just for Hackney Downs but for every school within the whole of the Inner London Borough of Hackney. Teachers, pupils and parents are all seen to be the causes of the educational problem. Drugs seem to be a real social problem within Hackney Borough. The solutions offered for Hackney Downs and 'failing schools' in general is firm management and improved methods which theoretically lead to good teaching. This constitutes again a significant movement away from Harrison's (1988) linkage of poor education with socio-economic factors and his related suggestions of improving housing, the local economy in order to eliminate urban poverty, so as to ultimately improve urban education. The culture of both the staffroom of Hackney Downs and Hackney Borough are seen as the real problems but the sociology of Hackney itself is not seen as the root cause of the problem and therefore a practical and realistic solution it seems cannot be attempted without these factors taken into account. Indeed, Hackney Downs was closed in 1996 and the 200 or so children who remained in the school were moved to another secondary school (Homerton School) within Hackney. O'Conner et al. (1999) highlight the negative effects of 'naming and shaming', the deterioration of school maintenance, the indifference, indecision and ineptness of the local education authority in relation to the school's closure.

A more general academic focus during the 1990s seems to be moving from underachievement and failing schools to effective schools and schools who are employing new methods within culturally diverse urban communities. The National Commission on Education (NCE) (1996:1) identified education underachievement as an 'acute problem' The Commission (1996: 5) claimed that 'schools are constantly blamed as a cause rather than a symptom of social and economic problems - the British media perennially run stories about crises in inner city school.' The NCE attempted to find out how effective schools in disadvantaged areas have become more successful. The NCE acknowledged and underlined the consequences of the 1988 Education Act namely:

9

- the delegation of funding and responsibilities have made schools more autonomous;

- funding depends mostly on number of pupils they can attract

- support from local government has eroded;

- parents are asked to exercise their consumer power;

- main source of data for schools provided by league tables. (NCE,1996:6)

The NCE examined inner city schools e.g. Columbia Primary School in Tower Hamlets, London and Burntwood Secondary Girls School in Wandsworth, London. In the case of Burntwood, for example, the NCE used the following criteria to define success:

- Clarity of Aims and Ethos of the school;

- Focusing on Learning and Achievement;

- High Expectations;

- Focus on quality;

- Collegiality. (NCE, 1996: 159-164)

The NCE focus on the following mechanisms of achievement:

- Leadership;

- Management;

- Communications;

- Monitoring;

- Participatory decision-making (involving the older students)

- Parental and community involvement. (NCE,1996:164-167)

Both schools examined within the NCE (1996) study have large ethnic minority communities and are mentioned in the analysis, although not directly in relation to the criteria of success and achievement in the schools. The only mention of Burntwood and ethnicity comes within the chapter abstract which describes the 'success of this multi-ethnic school' through it being heavy oversubscribed and its excellent academic record. The ethnic background in the school is mentioned in a statistical table. What happens to other inner city schools which

10

have minority students and are undersubscribed? Unfortunately, minority priorities seemed to have been lost within the new management terminology. Work carried out at Keele University in the Education Department (1994-96) continued to look for further urban education initiatives. The Centre for Successful Schools explored how schools could promote progress within Inner Cities. Five important points are summarised below:

- Management structures need to reflect the loose nature of collaboration and to place initiative formally with the schools involved;
- Clear measurable targets for the progress of urban-education initiatives are essential;
- Significant amounts of money are, in some cases, being spent relatively ineffectively;
- Small amounts of additional funding, spent well, can make a huge difference;
- The emphasis of urban-educational improvement is on secondary schools in spite of the fact that there is more to play for in primary education
  (Barber and Dann, 1996:76-84).

Management structures, targets, spending money efficiently and effectively and improving school environments are all very well. Yet, minority issues seem to have escaped the research. A change in focus away from urban secondary schools to primary schools might be necessary but it misses the point. The sector which needs improvement the most is still the secondary sector, highlighted in the research carried out in Hackney Downs. In this respect, there is hardly no mention in these studies of the wider social and economic problems concerning inner cities. Despite highlighting the problems of schooling within inner cities, the NCE (1996) and Barber and Dann (eds.) (1996) underline potential solutions which promote cultural diversity and generally promote effective schooling in a positive light. This contrasts with public opinion in the 1990s, generated by the national media who still seem to project a very negative image of all things educational, especially multi-cultural underachievement.

Conclusions

The introduction of this paper posed several questions relating to ethnicity and education policy-making. Does the education system exclude ethnic minorities? Let us look at the recent MacPherson Report into the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.[1] Recommendation 67 of the Report (The Guardian, 22/2/99:19) states: *That Consideration be given to amendment of the National Curriculum aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism, in order better to reflect the needs of a diverse society.* If we look back to the Swann Report (1985:xii) which asks for ' [...] education for all to meet the needs of all pupils for life in a society which is both multi-racial and culturally diverse [...]' , what has happened between 1985 and 1999? It seems little has changed, with the Swann Report calling for more cultural diversity which is underlined again in the recommendation above from the MacPherson Report. Within the MacPherson Report, the London Metropolitan Police force are being accused of institutionalised racism, a term originally coined by the black American activist Stokley Carmichael in the late 1960s. Carmichael (The Times, 22/2/99:3) defined institutionalised racism as: 'The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin'. Institutionalised racism applies to all institutes including the education system. What implications does this have for schools, universities and teachers? As Gillborn notes in his work with Caroline Gipps for OFSTED in 1996 that, ' [...] a decade's research, plus our own survey of new data from a range of LEAs, indicated that:

- the education system is still scarred by racism;
- significant inequalities of opportunity persist;
- in some areas the situation is getting worse, not better.
  (Gillborn, in Demaine, 1999:90)

The questions posed at the beginning of this paper which are answered in this conclusion tend to raise even more questions in relation to ethnicity and

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[1] Stephen Lawrence, a West Indian teenager, was murdered in Eltham, South London in April 1993. The subsequent inquiry into the murder criticised the police of institutionalised racism. In April 1999, Stephen Lawrence's parents sued the London Metropolitan Police for negligence and the five white English males, suspected of killing Stephen, who were acquitted at the

12

education policy. Are notions of English and Welsh identities still trying to be preserved ahead of ethnic minorities? What are the wider social, economic and political consequences of mass schooling? The post 1988 education system has created an entirely new system. Is it better or worse than the previous system? Where are the inner cities schools positioned in League Tables? Should they be compared and contrasted with schools with better resources and facilities? Where has the focus on ethnic minorities gone? It seems that assimilation, integrationist and the national curriculum have attempted to preserve white notions of nation and identity which alienate ethnic minority urban communities. This process has been defined by Grosvenor as racialisation whereby

> […] individuals are located as social subjects with a given fixed identity [...] racialised identities are due to [...] 'difference' from the collective national identity [and] have proved the rationale for the introduction of legislation to protect, limit regulate and control. (Grosvenor,1997:183)

The process of racialisation could witness the danger of a return to assimilation education policies. Gillborn (in Demaine (Ed), 1999:98) highlights the possibility of a return to the policies of Roy Jenkins in 1966 which focused on, '[...] equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance.' However, it seems that the current Labour government are threatening to heighten existing ethnic inequality. A new racism threatens a return to the past with increased ethnic surveillance, social control and exclusion. In this respect Gillborn raises the fact that on average minority youth do not start on an equal footing because of racism and social poverty. Education policies continue to adopt a seemingly deracialised approach which promotes racial inequality.

This raises the final question: Can cultural diversity be taught and promoted? From the *Education of Immigrants*, through the inner city riots of the 1980s and the publication of the *Scarman and Swann Reports*, considering the *national* in national curriculum and despite the more positive outlook of the 1990s, it seems there is still a long way to go. What does the future hold? The

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murder trial.

13

Prime Minister has recently begun a campaign to eliminate child poverty in twenty years, which is a movement toward to the urban analysis and possibilities that Harrison (1988) was examining over twenty years ago. The NCE (1996) especially highlight how urban schools have attempted to introduce a multi-racial curriculum alongside the national curriculum. May et al. (1999) argue that there is a need for global dialogue on multiculturalism. Multicultural education has been criticised for a simplistic and naïve view of wider social and cultural power relations in a postmodern world. Some authors go as far as suggesting that multiculturalism is not enough and antiracism is ultimately needed. In a more global environment we seem to need more co-operation, understanding and acceptance within the classroom (Cowie and Ruddock,1990) and lecture theatre of ethnic cultures (Klein,1993) (Kahin,1997) rather than being indifferent, afraid or institutionally racist of those around us. Parekh (Runnymede Trust, 2000:296-297) recommends that racism's should be addressed, disadvantage should be tackled and there must be a vigorous commitment concerning the systematic representation of ethnic minorities on public bodies. Cultural diversity is about recognition, acceptance and celebration of numerous identities. Without being politically correct or naive and it might take generations to achieve, the answer to this final question has to be yes and education, be it within a multicultural / antiracist curriculum, is a potential and possible way in which cultural diversity can and must be achieved.

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15

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17

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