POLICY AND PRACTICE IN MULTICULTURAL AND ANTI-RACIST EDUCATION

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A case study of a multi-ethnic comprehensive school

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Acknowledgements

Preface

In 1981 the ESRC Research Unit on Ethnic Relations, then based at the University of Aston and now the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations at the University of Warwick, established a research programme entitled 'Education and Ethnicity'. Its aim was to provide 'an account of the demands made on the education system by ethnic minorities and the ways in which the educational system has responded'. The first stage of this research programme concentrated on the development of policies on multicultural education in four Local Education Authorities (LEAs) (Rex, Troyna, and Naguib 1983). The research attempted to observe and reconstruct historically the process of policy making in the area of multicultural education and examine the complex political, ideological, and educational factors which influenced the process. It sought also to examine the role and function of such policy developments and to comment on their efficacy. One of the LEAs studied, in the centre of a large conurbation in the north of England, the research team named Milltown.

The second stage of the research programme aimed to examine the way in which LEA policies were received and implemented in schools, and whether or how they influenced teacher practice at 'the chalk face'. Barry Troyna and Wendy Ball, who conducted the initial work, decided to concentrate their efforts in Milltown LEA (see Troyna and Ball 1985). They first interviewed a sample of the LEA's headteachers, arguing that they would be key figures in the translation of policy into practice and that their responses to LEA policy would thus be of crucial importance. This survey revealed that the LEA's policy had made limited impact. Whilst most heads expressed an awareness of and support for the policy, few had made very much effort to translate it into action. Moreover, the schools that had made attempts were in general those with high proportions of ethnic minority students. This seemed to fly in the face of the LEA's commitment to foster multicultural education in all its schools. They found a similar pattern in their

subsequent postal survey of a sample of departmental and faculty heads in the LEA's secondary schools and sixth form colleges. This discrepancy between policy and practice in multicultural education led Troyna and Ball, in an article in the *Times Educational Supplement* (1983), to ask whether multicultural education policies were actually 'worth the paper they're written on' and to question their efficacy as change-agents.

The research which is described here forms part of this second stage of the 'Education and Ethnicity' programme. Following their interview and survey work, the members of the Education Team were interested in examining in more detail how schools and individual teachers responded to LEA policies on multicultural education, and what the effects of these policies actually were at school level. They wanted to find out more about what teachers were doing, rather than what they said they were doing, and so they decided to conduct a number of ethnographic studies in order to observe practice in schools from the inside. This book reports the first of these investigations. In 1984 contact was established with the newly appointed headteacher of a multi-ethnic secondary school in an inner city area of Milltown, which will be referred to here as Milltown High School. After fairly lengthy discussions access was negotiated for a member of the Education Team to work in the school over a two year period (September 1985 to July 1987).

The school was interesting for a number of reasons. First, the headteacher professed a strong commitment to the LEA's policy on multicultural and anti-racist education. Indeed, he had been appointed partly on the basis of his commitment to the philosophy and practice which the LEA wished to encourage in its schools. Second, the school had something of a history of engagement with the issue of multicultural education. In the late 1970s, well before the LEA formulated its policy, a school working party had been formed which spent three years examining the subject and its report espoused a strong commitment to multicultural education. In the early 1980s the school had been one of the first in the LEA to formulate an 'institutional policy on racism', and in its 1985–6 brochure for parents its commitment was made clear:

> Milltown High is a multiracial school. We are developing policies
> to promote equal opportunities and equal esteem for all our
> students, girls and boys, black and white. It is very important to
> help everyone in our school community understand the causes of
> racism and sexism in our society, and the part we can play in
> fighting against them.

Thus Milltown High was a favourable setting in which to investigate what a school committed to multicultural and anti-racist education was

doing in practice. The school also represents a 'critical case' in terms of the implementation of LEA policies. If we did not find policy implemented here, where staff professed a commitment, we would be unlikely to find it implemented elsewhere. The school was also interesting quite simply because it is a multi-ethnic school, and as was made woefully apparent by the publication of the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups, the Swann Report (1985), shortly before this research began, very little is actually known about what goes on in such schools. They have remained a neglected area in educational research which seeks to inform policy making.

The research that is described here (a more detailed account of the research is contained in Foster 1989) is, therefore, a case study of one multi-ethnic, inner city comprehensive school in Milltown, and focuses on the interpretation and implementation of policies on multicultural and anti-racist education. It examines the practices and procedures employed in the school and the ways in which the teachers have responded to the fact that the school is multi-ethnic in its intake and is serving a multi-ethnic society.

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Introduction: research questions and theoretical issues

In a report submitted to the Swann Committee describing the work of the Education Team at the Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations (Rex, Troyna, and Naguib 1983; see also Rex 1986a and 1986b) John Rex suggested that one way of approaching the study of educational policy and practice, in the area of race and ethnicity,[1] is to consider the extent to which they meet certain key principles to which most of those who operate the educational system would formally subscribe. First, equality of opportunity and second, the preparation of students for a non-racist, multicultural society. Rex went on to formulate a list of criteria against which policy and practice could usefully be examined. In conducting this study I adopted a similar approach. I sought to clarify the principles, as I saw them, of multicultural and anti-racist education and specify their implications for practice. My aim was to identify a model of multicultural and anti-racist education with which the reality of policy and practice at Milltown High School could be compared. This enabled me to establish my main research questions and clarify the values underpinning them. This is the subject of the first part of this chapter. The clarification of these principles also raised several theoretical questions which the work addresses and which I will discuss in the following part of the chapter.

The central principles of multicultural and anti-racist education

In my view there are two principles at the heart of multicultural and anti-racist education. First is equality of opportunity and second is a notion of how we might use education to work towards the realization of a non-racist society. It is around these two themes that I will focus my discussion.

Equal opportunites

The principle of equal opportunities has been at the heart of much

educational research, debate, and policy throughout this century (Silver 1973). However, the term is often used in different ways. Here I want to clarify its meaning and examine its importance to multicultural and anti-racist education.

In perhaps its weakest form equal opportunities in the field of education implies the elimination of laws or rules which bar the entry of particular groups or individuals to parts of the education system. In this sense equal opportunities has existed in Britain for some considerable time. However, during the early years of this century there were increasing demands that the principle be extended so that all children no matter what the economic resources of their family should enjoy equal chances of getting a secondary education, that is of going to grammar schools (Tawney 1931). Later, similar demands were made about access to higher education. In this stronger version society affords equal opportunities in education if children are not prevented by the economic situation of their family or by their gender, race, or ethnic group, from entering the component parts of the educational system. This view has emphasized the elimination of practices which limit the access of students from certain groups and has underpinned many of the major educational reforms of this century, such as the 1944 Education Act.

A third, more radical view of equal opportunities emerged in the post-war years. It became evident that students did not enter the educational system with equal resources and support. Many came from backgrounds which were educationally disadvantaged (Davie *et al.* 1972; Wedge and Prosser 1973) and so began the educational race from unequal positions. Thus, even if access to provision within the educational system was made more equal, educational outcomes would still diverge widely. According to this view, as Silver (1973) pointed out, 'equality of opportunity could only have meaning if those who began with unequal chances had unequal support from the educational system'. In other words for equality of opportunity to become a reality it was necessary to compensate those who started at a disadvantage by positively favouring them in the educational system. The aim of equal opportunities became, in Halsey's words, 'not ... the liberal one of equality of access but equality of outcome for the median member of each identifiable non-educationally defined group' (Halsey 1972: 9).

Behind these views is the essentially liberal, meritocratic principle that all individuals should enjoy equal chances of success and that those with similar ability and motivation should be able to achieve similar social positions and rewards. The aim, as Green (1988) points out, is essentially one of 'competitive equality of opportunity' in which individuals compete for desired social positions or opportunities which are allocated fairly to those most competent to perform or use them, and all enjoy an equal chance to prepare for competition. Such a system, it

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is argued, recognizes the inherent differences in the talents and abilities of individuals, and achieves a fair and just allocation of social positions and rewards. In addition it should ensure that the most talented are allocated to the 'functionally most important positions' (Davis and Moore 1945) which results in maximum efficiency and therefore ultimately benefits all in society.

Of course, this principle has been subject to considerable criticism. Michael Young (1958), in his satire *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, painted a bleak picture of a socially polarized society in which only the most able occupy the top positions in the social hierarchy. Others (see, for example, Schaar 1971) have pointed to the exaggerated inequality and inevitable elitism that they feel would result if the principle were fully applied. In such a society, it is maintained, advantages of genetic endowment would merely replace those of social background, thus substituting one form of injustice for another. It has also been argued that the principle of equal opportunities can in effect buttress an unjust status quo by providing a seemingly just rationale for social inequality (see Bowles and Gintis 1976). These criticisms have led some to argue that social justice requires equality in society rather than equal opportunities. Their aim has become not the achievement of equal social positions for those of equal ability, but the elimination of social hierarchies and inequalities: in short, an egalitarian society (see, for example, Halsey 1978).

In my view multicultural and anti-racist education does not necessarily require a commitment to equality in society (though some might argue that it does), but it certainly involves at least a commitment to work towards the more radical view of equal opportunities in education outlined above. This would be a situation in which all students would enjoy equal chances to maximize their educational potential. It would mean first that we should try to ensure that the education system is free from discriminatory practices which reduce the chances of educational success of certain students; and second that we should endeavour to provide all individuals with roughly similar educational resources across their school and non-school educational careers. This would mean providing additional resources in the educational system for those from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

However, there may be limitations on the extent to which equal opportunities in education can be achieved given the present organization of society. Their realization present enormous practical problems. Equalizing opportunities could, as Coleman (1973) pointed out, involve providing all students with the educational resources available to the most privileged, something he regarded as impossible. If not theoretically impossible this would be extremely difficult to do in practice. It would involve assessing the extent to which individuals or

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groups were educationally disadvantaged and devising schemes to allocate appropriate educational resources to them. The problems of defining and operationalizing the concept of educational disadvantage are enormous. Disadvantage is often defined in socio-economic terms, and indicators such as income level and housing facilities are used. Whilst there clearly are links, a lack of material resources may not always be synonymous with educational disadvantage. Cultural resources may be more important. The idea of cultural disadvantage raises a whole host of questions about which aspects of particular cultures disadvantage, and to what extent, but, perhaps most important, who is to decide on these issues. Further, the notion of cultural disadvantage, as Bernstein (1970) pointed out, can create the misleading and erroneous impression that the cultures of disadvantaged groups are inherently inferior. What form positive provision should take in order to be effective is also problematic. This issue was raised by research conducted in America in the 1960s (Coleman *et al.* 1969) which questioned the extent to which educational provision could actually compensate for disadvantages of social background.

Moreover, some critics have also pointed out that providing equal opportunities in education means that the differential influences of social background should be minimized and this may clash with other important values in society. Taken to its extreme it would involve the enforced removal of children from their families and their education in state-run nurseries and boarding schools (Lloyd-Thomas 1977; Coleman 1974) which clearly runs counter to the belief in the family as the primary agent of socialization and of parental responsibility for the child. Minimizing background differences also conflicts with the idea of cultural pluralism in a culturally diverse society. If cultural differences are to be accepted, or even fostered as some versions of multiculturalism and anti-racism imply, then it would seem to be undesirable to attempt to minimize background differences. This point raises one of the most serious dilemmas within multicultural and anti-racist education. To what extent should the aim be to ensure equal opportunities within an education system based on universalistic cultural forms and to what extent and in what ways should cultural diversity be respected and encouraged? The former requires the emphasis to be on the teaching of the skills, values, and norms of mainstream society and by implication the minimization of the influence of home background. The latter stresses the maintenance and teaching of the cultural forms of the child's home community.[2] In my view the former should have priority in the education system and the role of this system must be to give students as far as is possible equal opportunities in terms of the universalistic values of society. But having said this, the rights of individuals and families to cultural difference should be respected, and this will inevitably place

limitations on any programme designed to minimize the influence of social background.

Thus there are problems in achieving equal opportunities in education and we must accept that in practice programmes of positive provision may have to be limited, based on crude and inadequate criteria, and will be unable to identify and reach all those who are educationally disadvantaged. But, as Green (1988) points out, 'there is every reason to pursue a just goal which can (only) partially be fulfilled'.

How do these ideas relate to multicultural and anti-racist education? I have suggested that equal opportunity is an essential aspect of multicultural and anti-racist education. This would specifically require first, eliminating from the educational system any practices which are racist or which indirectly restrict the chances of success of members of a particular racial or ethnic group. It would also involve offering additional resources within the education system in order to compensate children who are educationally disadvantaged by virtue of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group.

It is important at the outset to clarify what I mean by racism. I intend to adopt a general use of the term which subsumes both belief and practice. I will use it to refer to practices which restrict the chances of success of individuals from a particular racial or ethnic group, *and* which are based on, or legitimized by, some form of belief that this racial or ethnic group is inherently morally, culturally, or intellectually inferior. Such beliefs could obviously be held by any individual in the education system. Teachers might, for example, regard students from a particular racial or ethnic group as inherently less intelligent or less academically able, or might view a particular group's culture or cultural practices generally as inferior.[3] These beliefs could be expressed openly or, of course, they might be kept private and unarticulated, existing only within the individual's personal consciousness. As much social behaviour is non-reflective even here the individual may be only partially aware of their existence.

More important though are the actions that may be based upon such ideas. If such views form the basis for inferior treatment of students from a particular racial or ethnic group then this would clearly be racism. How might this happen? It is possible that differential treatment could occur across the educational system, if, for example, the schools attended by ethnic minority students were allocated poorer resources on the basis of racist beliefs. Within schools as teachers are frequently in the role of evaluating and making decisions about the educational treatment of their students then it is clearly a possibility that teachers subscribing to racist beliefs might treat students from a particular racial or ethnic group less favourably. They might, for example, make overt

references to the inferiority of a certain culture in the classroom which might damage the self-esteem and thus the motivation of students belonging to that ethnic group. Teachers might also evaluate such students less highly in the academic status system of the classroom because of characteristics attributed to their racial or ethnic group. This might result in their inferior treatment in the classroom, which could involve giving them less attention than white students, less praise, less physical contact, or indeed, less of any of the personal and material resources that teachers have the power to distribute. When making more formal decisions about the distribution of opportunities within the school, for example about allocation to streams, bands, or sets, and examination entries, teachers could clearly make racist judgements. For example, if students from a certain racial or ethnic group are seen as inherently 'less able' and 'more disruptive' they might be allocated disproportionately to the lower bands or streams or to 'units for difficult pupils', where they are likely to receive inferior treatment. Teachers are also in the position to make decisions about what is included in the school curriculum. Those motivated by racist beliefs would be unlikely to include references to the cultural practices or history of a group they felt was inferior, or they might include derogatory references. This again might disadvantage students from this ethnic group as their educational motivation could be weakened.[4]

Racism might also affect ethnic minority teachers. Racism in the labour market has frequently been identified. It is possible that there are also discriminatory practices in appointments and promotion in the teaching profession.

There may also be practices in the education system which indirectly and unintentionally restrict the chances of success of students from a particular racial or ethnic group.[5] For example in the system as a whole it may be that the schools attended by students from a particular ethnic group are for some reason poorer or less effective than other schools (cf. Plowden Report 1967). Or it might be that such schools teach an inferior curriculum depriving students of access to important knowledge and skills. Such a criticism has been levelled, ironically, at some proponents of multicultural education (by, for example, Stone 1981). It has been suggested that the attempts of multiculturalists and others to foster the cultures of minority groups in the school curriculum serve to deprive the students of such groups of full access to mainstream culture and a curriculum which will permit them to compete on a par with indigenous students. I am not convinced that this is actually the case in schools which practise multicultural education. Such schools have generally attempted to enhance the academic performance of ethnic minority students by including reference to their lives and concerns in the curriculum, and thus, in theory, increasing student self-esteem and

motivation. However, if schools over-emphasized minority culture at the expense of mainstream culture then one can see that this might disadvantage ethnic minority students.

Examples of within-school practices that might indirectly disadvantage students from a particular racial or ethnic group might be disciplinary or uniform regulations which make no concessions to cultural or religious customs and which therefore in effect bar a certain ethnic group from entry, curriculum form and content which make no reference to the culture and history of a particular ethnic group in the school, school meals which take no account of the requirements of a different ethnic group, assemblies which pay no attention to the different religions of students attending the school, and communication with families which takes no account of language differences. Methods of assessment and evaluation which are culturally biased or inaccurate[6] and therefore result in unequal opportunities or inappropriate educational treatment would also be examples. Of course it could be argued that much assessment that occurs in working-class schools is 'culturally biased' in that teachers evaluate their students on the basis of their ability to display competence in the cultural forms of the dominant groups in our society (Bourdieu 1974), but my meaning of cultural bias is somewhat narrower than this. In a differentiated society there must inevitably be assessment criteria and these will ultimately derive from certain values and a conception of the qualities required to perform particular social roles or use particular opportunities. Thus some degree of cultural bias in the broad sense implied by Bourdieu is perhaps inevitable. What I mean by the term is when assessment or evaluation procedures include requirements to display qualities, skills, or knowledge which are irrelevant to the position or opportunity being competed for and which a certain racial or ethnic group would not normally have access to. One instance might be a test which assumed knowledge of cultural practices with which members of a particular ethnic group would not be familiar and which was irrelevant to the skills being tested. Another might be when details of culturally different family patterns or practices were used as information in making educational judgements. As evaluation is frequently based on conformity to norms of behaviour another instance of cultural bias might be unnecessary disciplinary rules which effectively made the cultural norms of a particular ethnic group deviant. It is important to emphasize here that I am not advocating assessment and evaluation practices that are biased in favour of ethnic minority students. What I am advocating is that these processes should be based on universalistic criteria which are the same for all students, and that every effort should be made to ensure that such criteria are always relevant and necessary and therefore do not indirectly discriminate against students of a particular ethnic group.

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Something else which might indirectly disadvantage might be a lack of specific school policies and practices to deal promptly and effectively with incidents of racism, racial abuse, and violence. As a recent Commission for Racial Equality report (CRE 1988) made clear, if students are not educated in an environment free from racial harassment and violence then they will not enjoy equal opportunites. A lack of knowledge amongst staff of the cultural backgrounds of their students so that they are unable to deal sensitively and effectively with them and their parents would also indirectly disadvantage. Similarly if teachers make no special efforts to communicate or consult with the parents of ethnic minority students then the students may be placed at a disadvantage given the language and cultural differences which frequently exist between minority parents and school.

Again it is also possible that the careers of ethnic minority teachers may be disadvantaged indirectly by practices within the educational system. As with procedures used to assess students it is possible that culturally biased and irrelevant criteria may be established for particular teaching posts, thus lessening minority teachers' chances of appointment and promotion. The methods used to attract applicants may also indirectly disadvantage. If, for example, posts were advertised by word of mouth and only became known to the friends of the existing teachers who of course were disproportionately white (Ranger 1988).

It is important to emphasize that inequality of educational outcome between racial or ethnic groups is not necessarily an indicator of racism or practices which disadvantage racial or ethnic groups within the education system.[7] It does not follow that if students from one ethnic group perform less well than those from another in some particular educational field that one or more of the practices described above is in operation. To establish this would require investigation of the actual processes involved. Inequalities of outcome are the result of many complex factors, some of which will relate to material and cultural disadvantages of home background. It is this aspect of equal opportunities that I want to turn to now.

As well as ensuring that the type of practices mentioned above do not occur equal opportunities would also involve, I have suggested, some element of compensation in the education system for the educational disadvantages suffered by children as a result of their membership of particular racial or ethnic groups. However, the problem with this idea is that it is very difficult to decide whether children from a particular racial or ethnic group are educationally disadvantaged, and if so in what way or to what extent. This makes it very difficult to specify ideally what positive provision for such groups should look like. In fact it is possible at present for LEAs to provide some additional provision through Section 11 of the 1966 Local Government Act to 'meet the

needs of Commonwealth immigrants' and their children, but these needs have rarely been clearly assessed or specified.

One might argue that particular racial and ethnic groups are economically disadvantaged (Smith 1977; Rex and Tomlinson 1979; Brown 1984), and therefore less able to provide adequate extra-school educational resources for their children. As a result, their children are likely to be educationally disadvantaged and additional educational resources should be allocated to them. But, whilst particular racial or ethnic groups may suffer higher levels of economic disadvantage as a result of racial discrimination, economic disadvantage is not confined to such groups. Thus it is difficult to see how positive provision specifically to racial or ethnic groups could be justified on this basis. More sensible would be a scheme to allocate positive provision to *all* those suffering from economic disadvantages, in other words positive provision on the basis of socio-economic class rather than racial or ethnic group.

There is perhaps only one clear way in which members of racial and ethnic groups are disadvantaged and therefore where positive provision directed specifically to them is justifiable. This is in the area of language. Commonsense would lead us to conclude that if a child's first and home language is not English, as is the case with many ethnic minority children, then he/she is likely to be at a disadvantage in an educational system in which English is the dominant language.[8] There is a case to be made here for additional provision for such students to enable them to develop English skills comparable to their white peers so that they are able to compete on equal terms. As Rex (Rex, Troyna, and Naguib 1983) pointed out this provision should aim to provide adequately for both first stage, i.e. the introduction to English as a second language, and second stage, i.e. English skills beyond the introductory stage, language instruction. Moreover, such additional provision should not, whilst providing needed language skills, disadvantage in other ways, as sometimes appears to happen when ethnic minority students are placed in special language units where they do not have access to a full school curriculum. Further, the aim should not be the elimination of the child's mother-tongue as this may damage self-esteem, and bi-lingualism is, for most children, a positive asset. Problems do arise, however, with the definition of 'first language other than English'. Clearly children who speak Vietnamese or Urdu as a first language would come under this heading, but do Afro/Caribbean children who speak creole at home? I would suggest that they do and that they may also have language disadvantages and needs (Trudgill 1975; Edwards 1979) which, of course, may be more of the second stage variety. Thus one might argue justifiably for a programme of positive provision to compensate students from particular racial or ethnic groups