Schools in Immigrant Societies: International perspectives from Research and Practice

Conference; Freie Universtiat Berlin. 13th-15th February 2008-02-06

Schools in Immigration Societies: What is happening in Britain?

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The history and development of education in the British multicultural society has to be understood within the context of political reactions to immigrant minorities over the past fifty years and the changes in the education system from a public good in a welfare state to a market –oriented competitive system in which testing and qualifications for employment dominate a state-controlled curriculum. The period in question is full of political, ideological and policy contradictions. On the one hand, compared to other European countries, Britain has been relatively successful in accommodating to racial, religious and cultural diversity, on the other hand, there is continued hostility to settled citizens from former colonial countries, merged with antagonisms to refugees and asylum seekers, and to economic migrants from both inside and outside Europe. Policies have encouraged labour migration and legislation against race discrimination, but supported immigration control legislation, The education system(s) (1) were expected to incorporate migrants and minorities, while lacking political support and policies which would have enabled all young people to understand their plural multicultural society, and a rhetoric of inclusion with diversity is currently at odds with a competitive school system which disadvantages and excludes many minority students. While the 1960s assumptions that immigrant minorities would assimilate, quickly gave way to notions of integration plus recognition of cultural diversity, by the 2000s ,especially after race riots in northern English towns in 2001, and the London bombings of 7th July 2005 (2) the whole notion of multiculturalism came under attack. There were suggestions that by recognising cultural diversity the country had been "sleepwalking into segregation" (Philips 2005), and that society had been fractured by the presence of racial and ethnic groups and the arrival of newer migrants. A major political reaction has been to focus on concepts of community cohesion and inclusion, (Commission of Integration and Cohesion 2007) with little recognition that the society had always been fractured along lines of social class, wealth, gender, geography, race and religion. Debate is considerably affected by fears of ' Muslim extremism'.

But the society continues to be a multicultural and immigration society, with legislation outlawing racial discrimination, most recently the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000, and in 2007 three equality bodies were merged into a Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR). Some 21% of the school student body at primary level and 18% at secondary level are officially described as 'minority ethnic origin', over half of all schools incorporate students from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, and schools and teachers, although not well-prepared for the task, struggle with the realities of teaching all young people, including minority settled citizens and newer arrivals. A 2006 Education Act requires all schools to promote inclusion and community cohesion

The 1960s to the 1980s

Education policy during this period was still largely based on a social democratic consensus that government should help create equal opportunities, and a comprehensive secondary school system gradually replaced selection at 11.(Tomlinson 2005 a). Schools responded pragmatically to the arrival of children from the Caribbean, the Indian sub-continent,(India, Pakistan, Bangladesh form 1973) from Africa and Hong-Kong, although white parents objected when schools took in 'too many' immigrants. Teaching English to non-English speakers, improving assessment for immigrant children, home-school contacts and teacher preparation were regarded as important but teachers were still influenced by racial beliefs derived from Empire and had lower expectations of working class and black children, many of whom were placed in 'special' schooling. By the 1970s and 1980s the settlement of minorities where labour was needed, discriminatory housing policies and 'White flight' had ensured spatial separation, and schools in inner cities and towns were labelled 'high immigrant. Populations now included Asians deported from East Africa, and Vietnamese 'boat people'. The presence of settlers bringing a variety of languages, religions and cultures, plus rioting by Black youth and demands for recognition by Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus were openly regarded as a threat to a British national identity. 'Mother Tongue' teaching became a contested political issue, with an influential committee arguing that children should not have to abandon their language and culture when they entered school (Bullock 1975). By 1977 central government had accepted that "our society is a multicultural and multiethnic one and the curriculum should reflect a sympathetic understanding of the different cultures and races that now make up the society" (DES 1977). Lord Swann's influential report (DES 1985) encouraged local authorities to produce policies and consider curriculum changes in all schools. The issue of the 'underachievement' of Black and Muslim children (as measured by school-leaving examinations) became a major focus for parental discontent. Most schools eventually responded positively to minority demands, - school uniforms including headscarves (hijab), and provision made for other faiths. During the 1980s a large literature advocating a multicultural curriculum deluged schools, with an equally large often Marxist- oriented literature arguing for an anti-racist curriculum. Much of this debate diverted attention from the conservative right who continued to assert that any change in a multicultural antiracist direction was political subversion and a threat to 'British' values (Palmer 1986).

The 1990s

The first Gulf War brought in refugees from Iraq and asylum seekers from civil wars in Sri Lanka, Somalia, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe and other places, to be joined after the collapse of the old Yugoslavia by Bosnians, Serbs, Croats, Albanians and Roma. In 1992 the UK Parliament signed up to the Single European Act with citizens of the 15 (now 27) member states of the EU notionally able to live and work in other European countries. The 1991 Census and a large-scale survey in the 1990s demonstrated the extent of ethnic segregation and the differences in life chances between minority groups (Modood et al 1997). Indian students , Asians from East Africa and the small numbers of Chinese were achieving well at school and entering higher education, young people from the Caribbean, Pakistan and Bangladesh were performing less well. The 1988 Education Reform Act and subsequent legislation introduced an education market, with parents

supposedly free to chose between a 'diversity' of schools ((3). Children were to be tested at 7,11,14 and 16, with newspapers putting publication of raw test scores into football-style league tables. Research quickly established that school choice was affected by social class and ethnicity, and racial and ethnic segregation in schooling increased. The content of the national curriculum was anglocentric, and subject to political interference, and religious worship in schools was to be 'largely Christian' although with some opt-out for other faiths. Discussion of race and culture became an "absent presence" (Apple 1999). In schools any overt activities described as multicultural or antiracist disappeared as did teacher training in the issues, funding for English language or any minority language teaching was reduced, and the government refused an inquiry into the racist murder of 18-year old College student Stephen Lawrence. Hostility to Islam had begun to radicalise some young Muslims who were prepared to move away from their parents moderate views and become 'anti-western' (Husain 2007)

New Labour 1997-2007

A New Labour government was elected in 1997, and race became a 'present presence' again. (Tomlinson 2005b, 2008) Prime Minister Blair asserted that his government was committed to education as a means to create a socially just society embracing 'all backgrounds, creeds and races' and to recognising the value of a multicultural society (Blair 1998). The government gave Muslims and other faiths the right to set up schools on a par with existing Anglican, Catholic and Jewish schools, (4) incorporated the Human Rights Act into legislation, and set up an inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson 1999).This resulted in an amended Race Relations Act in 2000, which required all public bodies, including schools, to produce and monitor race equality policies , although the schools inspectorate were not effective in monitoring the issues (Osler and Morrison 2000). In the 2001 census some 8% of the population, (4.5 million) identified themselves as ethnic minority citizens and analysts suggested that by 2010 the cities of Birmingham and Leicester would be majority-minority. Schools were encouraged to take the achievements and behaviour of minority young people more seriously, the introduction of ethnicity codes in a Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) making it possible for schools and authorities to know more precisely how all pupils were attaining year on year. A report in 2003 pointed out again the lower attainments of Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi students although implicitly blaming the students, parents and communities for any lower achievements. (DfES 2003). The national curriculum was subject to scrutiny, and much faith was placed in the introduction of citizenship education as a compulsory element in all schools from 2002. Teacher preparation included websites and resource packs but little face-to-face discussion of issues.

Government policy towards settled minorities and newer arrivals became more punitive after the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York in September 2001, and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, the London bombings in July 2005 and further attempted attacks. Policy was also affected by race riots in English northern towns in July 2001 between Whites an Asians, after which a Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community Cohesion was set up, with a Community Cohesion Team asked to report on the disorders (Cantle 2001). The Cantle report strongly influenced government views that Britain now consisted of

polarised communities living 'parallel lives' and duly recommended the promotion of community cohesion based on a greater sense of common citizenship. While Cantle was noting that schools could play a part in creating community cohesion the government was encouraging further separation by the creation of more faith schools (DfES 2001) Encouragement of 'choice' between an increasing diversity of secondary schools , which now included Academies – schools sponsored by business or faiths, selection by 'aptitude' for schools with a curriculum specialism, and intense competition for the remaing 164 grammar schools, was further separating students by social class and ethnicity. In 2004 a debate was sparked by the editor of the magazine *Prospect* attacking 'progressive liberals' for supporting diversity and multiculturalism and asserting that a society cannot support both diversity and solidarity. (Goodhart 2004) Politicians and the media from both left and right argued that Britain was becoming more polarised by race, faith and culture, despite the Queen making an impassioned plea for religious and cultural tolerance in her annual Christmas message in 2004! 'Multiculturalism' continued to be blamed for what were serious social problems as groups endeavoured to live together in a society fractured by poverty, increasing wealth disparities, wars abroad, terror attacks, religious bigotry from all faiths, and competition for good schools and employment, Criticism of Muslim failure to 'integrate' continued, with modes of dress, especially hijabs, niquabs and jilbads becoming a focus of assertion and criticism in and out of schools. In the absence of central or local government encouragement, and the requirements to concentrate on a narrow national curriculum, one teacher-researcher concluded that "we were implicitly teaching children that race is a forbidden subject" (Pearce. 2005). She also recorded that some Head teachers were reluctant to raise issues of race and culture in case their schools were perceived as being too liberal and lost pupils if other school choices were available. But various Commissions were set up to advise on integration and community cohesion, and a former head teacher was asked to lead a curriculum review into *Diversity and Citizenship* (Ajegbo 2007)

Contradictory policies continued to make it difficult for schools to operate in a multicultural society. The enlargement of the EU was bringing in more economic migrants, including by 2006 some 600,00 mainly young Polish people, universities were encouraged to recruit more international students, and although there were continued attempts to limit immigration flows on a selective basis, refugee and migrant children in schools brought a diversity of languages . Schools were expected to be inclusive and cohesive although funding for teaching English was reduced, as were welfare benefits for new immigrants, including children. While a further reorganisation of the national curriculum is to be put in place in September 2008, with teachers allowed more input, schools continue to focus on testing, examinations and their place in league tables, with issues of race and culture and migration largely unsupported or ignored by government. In a world more fractured than ever in terms of wealth and poverty, migration movements and ethnic and religious conflicts, political hostility or indifference to multiculturalism in and out of schools seems short-sighted.

In Britain policies and practices once described as multicultural or anti-racist, and adoption of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation, probably did help lay the foundations for a wider project of equality and justice. Political courage and leadership at central, local and school level are now needed to equip future

generations with skills and knowledge to live in their multicultural, intercultural, interdependent world.

Notes

(1) There are technically four education systems in Britain. After devolution in 1999 Wales took control of its own system separate from England. Scotland largely controlled its own system from 1945. as did Northern Ireland from 1947.

(2) On 7th July 2005, four young Muslim men, born and educated in England, blew themselves and 56 others up on three underground trains and a bus. Some 700 more were injured.

(3) After 1998 this diversity included private schools, grammar schools, Foundation schools, Voluntary Aided (religious) schools, Community schools, (all these schools encouraged to adopt a curriculum specialism), Academies sponsored by business or faith groups, Special schools for those with learning difficulties and disabilities, Pupil Referral Units, Learning Support Units, Extended Schools (open all day), and Trust schools (groups of schools able to form charitable Trusts).

(4) In 2006 faith based primary and secondary schools in receipt of state funding included some 4,646 Church of England schools, 28 Methodist, 2118 Catholic, 31 Jewish, 8 Muslim, 2 Sikh. I Hindu, I Greek Orthodox, 2 Seventh Day Adventist and I Humanist school.

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