Agenda

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Race on the Agenda

Racism In The Classroom?

An Alternative Inquiry Into Education in London

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Terminology

ROTA uses the term Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) to refer to all groups that are discriminated against, including (but not exclusively) people of African, Asian, Caribbean, European and Eastern European, Irish, Greek, Turkish, Jewish, Roma and South East Asian descent, as well as refugees and asylum seekers. In Agenda, the terms Black and minority ethnic (BME) and BAME are used throughout the publication by different contributors, in keeping with their own professional usage.

An alternative inquiry into education should open the books on racism

Dr Elizabeth Henry, Chief Executive, Race On The Agenda

When I argue that race is off the agenda – as I am often forced to do these days – I am referring to the fact that inequality is becoming more and more 'acceptable' in our society. As much as we're told 'we're all in it together', or that we're struggling equally (my emphasis), we know for a fact that wealth is unevenly concentrated among the 10% richest households, and is 100 times higher than the wealth of the poorest 10%.[1] We also know that social mobility, the opportunity to move out of poverty and into wealth, is similarly inflexible. Our very own Prime Minister admitted as much in the run-up to the elections when he said, "People are no more likely to escape the circumstances of their birth than they were 30 years ago."[2]

To complicate matters, inequality of wealth and social mobility is even more likely to be a lived experience for some people from certain Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, as are other non-economic indicators of social wellbeing including higher incarceration rates and lower educational attainment. Despite the persistence of inequality over the past five years, social attitudes about hardship are actually hardening.[3] In this environment of uncertainty, proponents of equality are finding their audiences diminishing.

Most disheartening about this state of affairs is the effect it is having on our young people and their ability to fulfil their potential. Unemployment, hovering around 20% for young people overall and 30% for young Black, Asian and minority ethnic people, and tuition fees are two of many issues that currently await young people after they finish school. But trouble is starting much earlier. Reforms are unleashing a vehement competitive drive between providers, companies, schools, parents and children, impacting everything from standards to democratic inclusion of parents and families.

Sadly, like the age-old 'wealth gap', the 'ethnic penalty' has been taxing many minority ethnic young people in the UK long before the most recent round of austerity set in. The starting point for much of this is attainment because of the influence it has on outcomes later in life.[4] When we look at attainment, we see differences in the grades achieved by young people from some Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. From this point, we can travel through time. In the future, we can see fewer opportunities to enter into higher education or the job market. In the past, we may see low expectations from teachers, exclusions, fewer opportunities for parental involvement or under-resourced schools. In this purview, racism is both a set of longer term outcomes and a clutch of everyday experiences. It doesn't always have to add up to have a lasting impact.

Currently, for all the progress made in London [5], and for some minority ethnic teachers and learners [6], education, and the spoils of good jobs waiting at the other end, continues to be a grab bag for far too many. The renewed competitive drive in education – between schools (to achieve outstanding school status and additional income), students (to achieve top marks and job market position), parents (to access school places for their children) and providers (to earn contracts and increase the flow of money in schools) – if viewed alongside historic trends of educational inequality, can exacerbate the negative outcomes of many Black, Asian, and minority ethnic people, and actually drive down quality of provision. Fears have been expressed that free schools, which receive government money, could sap resources from schools in the same area.[7] ROTA research has shown that those from communities that have faced the greatest educational inequalities in the past who want to set up free schools are facing, so far, inaccessible barriers to success. When monitored by ethnicity, competition for top results has direct effects on the way racism is challenged and tackled shifting the blame for poor attainment away from discrimination and in the direction of 'race' characteristics and family background.

Another layer of unevenness is, of course, the fact that most social goods and programmes without a clear economic imperative have become too expensive. We can no longer afford programmes like the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant or the Teacher Development Agency's teacher diversity training. Monitoring and research into experiences of racism in school are also harder to find, as evidenced by concerns raised by the Black Teachers' Conference about a lack of monitoring of racist incidents against Black teachers.[8] Even the compliance with the law, the Equality Act 2010, is taking a back seat to the school shake-up.

In November 2011, the Mayor's Education Inquiry was launched to examine key challenges for education in London and make recommendations for practical actions. The Inquiry, and the final report due in October 2012, is the Mayor's response to a need for improvement in London schools, within the context of wide reaching educational reforms being implemented by the Coalition Government. The Interim Report identifies the following as some of the features of state education in the Capital: "the need for growth and investment; raising aspiration; improving discipline and stretching children from all backgrounds; the discernable unevenness in London's education system – whether between London boroughs, between adjacent schools or by ethnicity or disadvantage."

Our motivation for undertaking an alternative inquiry into London education is to highlight the continuing impact of race inequality on education. We do this not to halt progress but to demonstrate, in the words of our members, that initiatives that overlook the experiences and outcomes of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people have the potential to make education more uneven across space, race and place.

At the end of the day, we must never confuse equality with homogeneity. Differences between

people are to be cherished and celebrated. What remains unacceptable are, however, the variable experiences of our young people in the education system. Children should have the same opportunities in school, no matter their background. We should also refuse to accept the depressing logic, often touted in hard times under the guise pragmatism, that we shouldn't strive for greatness or expect as much from our schools as we do from our children.

It is from this standpoint where an inquiry into London education has to begin and end.

1 Hills, J., et al. (2010). *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK: Report of the National Equality Panel.* London: CASE. Retrieved from sticerd.lse.ac.uk/case/_new/publications/NEP.asp

2 Cameron, D. (10 November 2009). Big society can fight poverty. Big government just fuels it. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from http://m.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/nov/10/big-society-government-poverty-inequality?cat=commentisfree&type=article

3 Park, A., Clery, E., Curtice, J. Phillips, M., and Utting, D. (2012). *British Social Attitudes 28: 2011 – 12 Edition.* NatCen Social Research. London: Sage.

4 In London, the percentage of pupils achieving 5 GCSEs grade A* to C is 61 percent, while for Black students it is 54 percent. Within these crude ethnic categories there is further diversity in educational outcomes. For example, 70 percent of Black Nigerian pupils achieve 5 GCSEs grade A* to C compared to only 31 percent for Black Congolese pupils. Department for Education. (2010). *GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England, 2010/11.* Retrieved from www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001057/index.shtml

5 GCSE results in London are above the national average. The proportion of schools that have been rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted is greater than the national average. Children on Free School Meals (FSMs) in the capital do better than elsewhere.

6 Teaching and Development Agency initiative has improved diversity in the teaching workforce. Aiming High, a Department for Education programme, has helped raise average attainment levels. See Tikly, L., Haynes, J., Caballero, C., Hill, J., Gillborn, D. (2006) *Evaluation of Aiming High: African Caribbean Achievement Project.* University of Bristol. Retrieved from https:///www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR801.pdf. The Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant has also seen some success.

7 Courtney, K. (30 May 2012). For-profit free schools would increase social and educational segregation. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/may/30/profit-free-schools-social-educational-segregation

8 National Union of Teachers. (2011). *Report of the Black Teachers' Conference 2011.* Retrieved from http://www.teachers.org.uk/node/15911

Repeat after Cornell West

Ryan Mahan, Project Officer, Race on the Agenda

In school, repetition is one of the oldest techniques in the learning process. As children, we are fed bites of information to chew on and then regurgitate onto exam papers or essays. While sometimes effective in the short-term, this method of learning can also have a contradictory impact, sticking to the mind but losing its meaning, context or substance.

The modern discourse in the UK on race and racism often suffers from this repetitive, runaway greenhouse effect. Look around, the social and media atmosphere is literally swimming in references to 'cultural difference' and racism. In the mainstream press alone, stereotyped images of 'muslim voters' or minority ethnic 'badmen'[1] are only matched in frequency by the relentless cataloguing of racism in every corner of British society – public transport (the infamous YouTube tram tirade), social media (Fabrice Muamba) and television (Midsomer Murders) are only some of the more recent vehicles for racist speech or stereotyping. What's more, the criminalisation of cultural difference is no longer bound by what we think of as racial or ethnic characteristics, e.g., skin colour, nationality, religion or language. In the middle of the financial crisis, stories of financial collapse, mass unemployment and Euro-zone failure have often been accompanied by exposés of benefit scroungers, lost youth and the 'culture of worklessness'.[2]

In an interesting twist, most of the stories with direct reference to racism are often deployed as tools to differentiate the 'mainstream British culture of tolerance' from social pariahs – stupidly racist individuals living on the margins, or completely outside, of society – instead of focusing on the impact on the target of the abuse (or the institutional factors contributing to this racist 'acting out'). The swarm around racism in football is illustrative of this point. Liam Stacey[3] – the fan who took to Twitter to racially abuse Fabrice Muamba – Luis Suárez and sections of football fans in Poland and Ukraine have been interchangeable pantomime villains, while well-known English players like John Terry escape relatively unscathed.[4] Each case highlights a general tendency to treat racism as an aberration or marginal – something that only outsiders do – and therefore an issue that requires little national soul-searching.

It is no wonder one young person I spoke to in compiling the articles for this issue pointed to a general fatigue with the concept of racism, discussed at length yet divorced from the reality of his everyday existence. Tellingly, it was only as he began discussing his experiences with fellow young people that the powerful reality of prejudice emanated forth in a drip of tears as he recalled the first time he experienced racism on the playground. Over-repetition of the term in this way can lead to a cheapening of the actual experiences of young people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

So what are we doing to challenge it? Bizarrely, racism as an explanatory and causal factor of disadvantage and exclusion, especially for young people, has been notably absent from policies of the Coalition Government and the Mayor of London. The recent integration strategy does not include one reference to race equality.[5] In fact, this omission has led to a national call, from the likes of Runnymede Trust and Voice for Change, for a nation-wide race equality strategy. Locally, the decision by the Mayor of London to rename the perennial 'London Schools and the Black Child' conference to 'London schools and our children' has its own swarm of controversy surrounding it, discussed in depth in the articles herein. Moreover, the 5 May elections did not ring in a change in Mayor or by implication, a shift in policy direction. Consequently, the Mayor's Education Inquiry, due to drop in October, continues under the direction of Tony Sewell and Munira Mirza, two stalwarts spearheading a shift away from race equality. For a general exposition of their ideas, one needs to look no further than the 2010 Prospect articles on 'Rethinking Race'.[6]

Youth culture

As this situation plays out in the background, young people in one of the most ethnically diverse and unequal cities in the world[7], London, continue to face a number of challenges. I will leave it to the forthcoming articles to underline the various challenges but will add a few comments on the environmental factors.

In the wake of the riots, racism has been officially excluded as a cause of the disorder[8], despite community organisations like Hackney CVS, identifying it as, at very least, a significant contributing factor.[9] Youth was, however, cited as a key factor.

The effect of this has resulted in calls for more disciplinary powers to tame young people in schools and more parenting programmes for parents…to tame young people more effectively. And we know impressions of bad behaviour are often associated with images of young black men. Exclusions continue to be a flash point – as does treatment of young minority ethnic men by police. Astonishing recent stop and search statistics show that 25,291 children aged between 10 and 17 were stopped in London last year, 25.95% of the entire number.[10] While many

segments of society retreat into the privacy of their homes, private schools and the private sector, young people in London, and their families, face more and more public scrutiny.

This criminalisation of young people, and other 'cultures', is reflected in the psyche of many young people who perceive that a hostile environment awaits them upon leaving school. During ROTA's 2012 roadshows on 'Race and racism in the 21st Century', the Deputy Young Mayor of Tower Hamlets[11] recalled the perception expressed by many Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) young people in the borough that they will have less opportunity to access higher education or employment, than their (white) peers.[12] According to her, this view was particularly prevalent among young BAME women in the borough.

Race in class: pedagogy of the converted?

From the standpoint of a race equality organisation, ROTA is conscious of its role in this debate. While the logic of racism treats 'race', 'religion' or other generalised characteristics as barriers that cannot be overcome, we argue that racism, in all its forms, is the barrier. The emphasis on 'many forms' is key, since we too can be guilty of stirring them into a mulch of attitudes, expectations, ideologies, actions, behaviours and policies.

Aggregating statistics of the performance of different groups from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children to Pakistani and Bangladeshi boys, and using their sum as proof of racism can distort the picture, as can reinforcing stereotypes of high performing 'model' minorities. While it has been well-documented that certain 'ethnic groups' perform less well nationally, the link between these inequalities of outcome and racism has been less concretely addressed. Monitoring by ethnicity and failing to address this component could lead some unsympathetic observers to the conclusion that different groups, from Bangladeshi boys to Somali girls, possess insurmountable, given 'cultural' differences. In terms of solutions, this can then lead to policy attempts to alter the behaviour of 'whole cultures', or model policies on the 'essential' characteristics of high achieving groups, instead of focusing on institutions, curriculum, school places, teacher training and societal change.

Secondly, by repeating scores of evidence detailing the stronger likelihood of failure for people from BAME backgrounds, do we ultimately do more harm than good? Parents, teachers and young people at our seminars have been quick to point out that racism should not be used as an excuse – so too are policymakers and politicians for that matter. In fact, in a period of austerity and Olympics, where individual triumph against all odds is extolled over the harsh reality of inequality, such talk is destined to rub some people wrong. The dignity in this response is just one of the many mechanisms used to challenge stereotypes from the ground up. Yet, it should be reinforced by measures that tackle racism in order to ensure every young person has access to the same standard of education and quality of life. Either way, there is a fear that the sermon is only reaching the converted and is in need of a serious rethink in approach.

What is to be done?

The articles in this edition of *Agenda* point to both challenges and ways forward for Black, Asian and minority ethnic young people in London. In many ways, they focus on the need to resist attempts to move away from race equality in education. The focus is largely on experiences of young people, parents, voluntary sector practitioners and communities to reset the table for future debate on how best to shape solutions. At their core, these articles approach racism and education, in all its complexity, in a straightforward manner. Repeat after Cornell West, race matters.

1 Alibhai-Brown, Y., & Henry, D.J., (22 November 2008. Young, black and British: The young men who refuse to bow to the stereotypes. *The Independent.* Retrieved from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/young-black-and-british-the-young-men-who-refuse-to-bow-to-the-stereotypes-1026040.html

2 For more on cultural explanations of unemployment, see Fletcher, D.R. (2007). *A culture of worklessness? Historical insights from the Manor and Park area of Sheffield.* Policy and politics. 35 (1), 65 – 85.

3 For background on the affair, and an example of the media shift from our right not to be abused to our right to stupidity, see Cohen, V. (2012, June 8). So what did the troll actually say? *The Guardian.* Retrieved from http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/apr/08/victoria-coren-liam-stacey-tweets

4 In the ultimate twist of irony, Terry was given reprieve from a typically swift punishment to participate in potential landmark moments of his career, Chelsea's Champions League final and the European Championships, while Rio Ferdinand was left out of the England team for 'footballing reasons'. Stacey received a jail sentence much like Emma West, who was caught on video racially abusing just about everyone on a Croydon Tram.

5 Department for Communities and Local Government. (2012). *Creating the conditions for integration.* Retrieved from www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/2092103.pdf

6 The articles deride multicultural policies, and not racism, as the ultimate culprit of disadvantage and inequality of outcomes amongst minority groups. They argue that 'race is no longer the significant disadvantage it is often portrayed to be'. Murza, M., Johns, L., Sewell, T., Singh, S., & Dyer, S. (2010, September 22). Rethinking Race. *Prospect.* Retrieved from www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/munira-mirza-multiculturalism-racism/

7 Doughty, S. (21 April 2012). London is most unequal city in Western world with gap between rich and poor widest since slavery. *Daily Mail.* Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1267778/London-unequal-city-Western-world-gap-rich-poor-widest-slavery.html#ixzz1UiU4nsf0

8 *Creating the conditions for integration*, 2012.

9 Harvey, P. (2011). *Reflecting on the August 2011 disturbances in Hackney: Community Perspectives.* Ipsos Mori in partnership with Hackney CVS. Retrieved from www.hcvs.org.uk/news/2011/hackney-disturbances-partnership-project/default.aspx

10 Townsend, M. (2012, April 28). Met police put pressure on author over play about stop and search tactics. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.guardian.co.uk/law/2012/apr/28/met-police-stop-search-tactics

11 The Deputy Young Mayor, Tasmina Khanum, was speaking at a partnership event with ROTA and the Osmani Trust.

12 82% of the school pupils in Tower Hamlets are said to be from non-white backgrounds. OCSI. (2011). *Numberhood*. [Iphone application]. Retrieved from www.numberhood.net. Additionally, over 35% of this population is of Bangladeshi origin, of whom only 8% come from single parent households. Tower Hamlets Council. (n.d.). *Ethnicity.* Retrieved from http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgsl/901-950/916_borough_statistics/ethnicity.aspx

Back to the basement:

racism and young people in London schools

SE1 United
(with words from Mohand Nour & Ryan Mahan)

SE1 United[1] meets weekly in the inner recesses of the Southbank Centre. The scores of young people wriggling the air and toeing the floor in syncopated rhythms down the corridor, preparing for the next battle against a neighbouring dance troupe, give the entire basement floor a sense of demonstrative irony. Above, the ceiling bends and the lights flicker under the weight of floors and floors of high art and modern dance, spaces where 'culture' is literally on display for the public to view and enjoy. Down below, however, nestled in a makeshift meeting room, the young people of SE1 United, along with their peers down the hall, generate enough intellectual and creative fire to light up the whole building. But, sadly, no one's watching.

We're here to talk about racism and education. Word around the policy campfire is that racism is no longer a major issue in the classroom. Our session fills a gap in the GLA's ongoing Education Inquiry. Thanks to the panel, we now know what education experts and head teachers, the providers of education, think. It's time we heard from its supposed beneficiaries: young people in London. It also drops right in the middle of a pretty bleak time for youth, one recalling the summer of '77 when punk rock erupted amidst unemployment, riots and mass consumerism.

First things first, a roll call: Jubilant, Timi, Lawrence, Shaun, Emmanuel, Leroy, Jesse, Chris, Jacob, Mohand, Ryan, Munira, Kamsy, Shounde and Deborah.

Then, a debate:

> "There's no way no one in this room hasn't heard of racism. You hear it on the news all the time. After a while, you become, what's the word, desensitised to it. When I hear a new case, ah racism, unless someone dies, you know what I mean, I'm thinking, ok, just whatever," says Jubilant, a young man who, as we learn later, is an aspiring teacher.

> "It is very played out," he finishes.

Timi, another colleague in the group, is quick to respond:

> "Explain why Black people don't do so well in education and white people do. Explain that. Explain why they go into year 7 with the grades and they leave year 11 less smart than they were when they entered."

"I don't know, a lot of Black children in my class, they would misbehave a lot," says Jubilant.

The two quickly underline the ongoing debate over minority ethnic achievement gaps in UK education. At its simplest, statistical performance breakdowns by ethnicity routinely show that fewer young people from certain Black, Asian, minority ethnic or white working class backgrounds, achieve good educational outcomes when compared with their white peers. While nuances of these statistics draw a more complex picture than an impromptu debate will allow, there is a larger truth to Jubilant and Timi's positions. Current policy trends, like the Education Inquiry's interim report, tend to rely on behavioural or cultural explanations for the difference in outcomes. Not all ethnic groups fail, according to this line of argumentation, since some Indian and Chinese pupils, among others, have achieved relative educational success. The implication here is that because the figures vary wildly within and between ethnic groups, racism is not a predominant causal factor. In this light, race, far from disappearing, has replaced racism, and other signifiers for unfairness and injustice, as the focal point in our 'post-racial society'.

On the other side of the coin, critics say this type of approach can act "as a convenient narrative for silencing other groups who try to make claims of institutional racism and racial discrimination."[2] Timi alludes to figures that explode assumptions about cultural aptitude where, for example, the performance of Black Caribbean boys is noted to decline between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.[3] In other words, for Timi and many others at SE1 United, racism still lingers, spectrally, in the way figures are used, and as we will soon find out, manifestly, in schools.

Negative expectations and behaviour

Behaviour is one such space where the struggle between institutional and cultural explanations plays out. It is a site policymakers like Michael Gove are targeting with stacks of reform papers across the land, like leaflet wanted posters dropping from aid planes. But to many of the young people at SE1 United, behaviour is a much more complicated issue. It is not a simple reflection of poor self-discipline, 'pure criminality' or absent parents. For starters, some adults in schools carry with them certain racial and gendered stereotypes – after all, the line between school and society is malleable – that view certain actions by certain young people, Black and male in particular, as disruptive.

Timi puts it succinctly:

> "Imagine if before you got here, you've got everybody's name and one person's says, 'he's a killer, rapist, drug abuser'. Before you get in here, you've already made your assumptions. They've made their profile about the young people already."

Shounde, another SE1 United alum, provides a firsthand account:

> "What I noticed is, I used to get punished a lot more than other kids. As soon as I said a word, they would send me out the class. But other kids would get warnings. I remember I was with my Dad one time and my Dad heard it from the other table, like my teacher discussing me with another parent. I was like 'oh my days'."

It is in this context that the wisdom of some Black advocates urging minority ethnic students to keep their heads down and their skin thick can best be understood. Kamsy, despite experiencing racism, applied this technique with his mother's guidance:

> "Anytime I used to go class, I would have to focus on what the teacher was saying. No matter what's going on around me, I would always have to focus on the teacher. So no matter what the teacher would say to me, I would take it on board."

Yet, this type of resilience is easier said than accomplished in challenging learning environments. Munira, who now works in a school, points to instances where, despite the emphasis on superdiversity and interculturalism, some young people are still boxed in 'racial' categories, especially when it comes to behaviour and aptitude.

> "What I see in the classroom is that quite a bit. There's a group of four boys and they muck around. But so does everyone else. But the teacher's eyes are here. Because, like, physically they are kind of marked out. Meanwhile, one guy is over there stapling himself and she's not even noticing."

Stereotyping in the form of negative attention can have immediate and long-term effects on young people. Around the table, most agree that once singled out, behavioural issues can descend into self-fulfilling spirals, ending in exclusions and other knock-on effects once they leave school. Furthermore, little has been done to assess the long-term material and psychological impact on those students, like Kamsy, who silently resisted these types of 'singling out'.

The important question is how to interrupt this cycle. Disruptive classrooms affect everyone, not just the students and teachers at the centre. For most at SE1 United, it's about demonstrating care and building a relationship with all of their students.

Timi, Jubilant and Shounde all provide examples of teachers openly exclaiming, "At the end of the day, I still get paid."

> "It's just the relationship between the teachers and student," says Shounde. "There was teachers that, when I look at my timetable, and I'm like 'alright, I've got this teacher', I would fully behave myself.

Black attitude and aptitude

Similar to these perceptions of misbehaviour, expectations of Black aptitude are also closely linked with race expectations. They range from teachers failing to demand more from ethnic minority students – essentially leaving them alone due to 'cultural respect' – to careers guidance advising young people to be 'pragmatic' about their future. On this subject, Jubilant begins to rethink his position:

> "When it comes to Black kids, I don't think they (teachers) recognise that they're smart. So I think they put them in the bottom set. When you're placed in the bottom set, you're not going to do as well as if you were placed in a higher set. It's hard for people to get recognition, especially Black people sometimes."

For individual students, instances of underperformance are sometimes assumed to be the norm. As Lawrence says:

> "When I was going to school, nothing could really change from my generation and the generation before that. For example, if you weren't good in English but you were good in Maths, they would generalise the fact that you weren't good in English and every other class you did you would still be in the bottom form."

The cumulative effect of such practices impacts both on opportunities to succeed and self-perceptions later in life. They also begin much earlier than secondary school. The group pulses with exasperation as stories are traded about teachers dividing classes up mid-session, occupying some Black pupils with paint and paper, while the rest of the class continues with the lesson.

Then Timi recalls an experience with one of his teachers:

> "My teacher said to me, 'Timi, uh, I was thinking you was about to sell Big Issue when you're older'. I'm thinking, 'Them guys that sell Big Issue, they gettin' it in, selling magazines, two pounds'. You getting me? I'm proper thinking I can sell Big Issue."

Homogeneity and diversity

Cultural reproduction, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, refers to the transmission of inequality through the education system along ethnic and class lines. According to Munira, "The educational system is biased towards a certain culture – white middle class values."

Family position, social status and physical location, amongst other factors, still impact on the educational opportunities and, ultimately, life chances of pupils.

Like Timi says:

> "I don't understand how you can have an institution that educates but not everyone gets out from it what they're supposed to get."

Diversity, in this light, is viewed by many of the young people at SE1 United as a great strength, and not an insurmountable challenge. Experiences of both diversity and homogeneity amongst student body and school staff are especially pertinent given worries about further segregation triggered by

free schools and academies. With America as a mirror case, Charter Schools, which represent an attempt to improve the education of young Black and minority ethnic pupils, show that both student body and staff are homogenising, in different directions.[4] In London, superdiversity, instead of the melting pot paradigm, could look more like two-tiered supersegregation. The experiences of the young people at SE1 United corroborate this continued homogeneity among school staff.

As Emmanuel says:

> "From secondary school, all my teachers were white. The white students had a better connection with white teachers. Me, coming to college now, there's like a mix now, yeah… If you feel comfortable and able to engage, through that you can get better grades."

"When was the last time you saw a Black male in a primary school?" questions Jubilant.

The room, generally abuzz, falls silent. Then Timi finishes:

> "When I was going to school, I couldn't see no role models. I'm not saying every white person in the class sees a white teacher and says 'ah, yeah, she's smart, I can be like her'. But I'm talking, the people that used to come in that were from my background were all helpers, dinner ladies, cleaners, janitors. And I'm young. And subconsciously you're seeing all these things thinking 'look at these jobs that he's doing'. You don't know that it's building something in your mind but you're not seeing it. I'm not saying get like one Black teacher and one white teacher in every class, but a little bit of balance. When I used to have Black teachers in my lessons and that, it was always for stuff like RE. Why?"

Parents and role models

Despite many less than positive experiences with teachers, SE1's young people are quick to demonstrate empathy towards the constraints and demands of the role. They also identify positive examples of strong role models at home.

> "Don't you always think, yeah, that it always starts from home," says Kamsy. "I realised, yeah, that the way my mum used to work with me at home, I used to go to school and used to think to myself, 'alright fair enough, my mum sent me to school, so the first person I've gotta respect is every single teacher that I come in contact with'."

But for others, outside forces play a key role in determining the amount of parental engagement available to them.

Continuing their conversation, Timi and Jubilant trade stories of family experiences.

"When it's parents evening and that, my mum and dad never showed up," says Timi.

Jubilant, surprised, asks why.

"Cause they were working," Timi says.

Alongside work demands, Lawrence says some Black, Asian and minority ethnic parents face additional challenges:

> "Because my parents didn't experience school in the country it was kind of hard for them to complain to the teachers if they thought you were being mistreated, and also because of the culture as well, a lot of them didn't think it was right to complain to the teachers because they thought the teacher knew best."

Class and race

At the end of the day, the vast amount of contrasting variables, experiences and environmental studies can be overwhelming. Take gender for example. According to Munira, "Statistics show girls routinely overachieve in education."

But such educational advantages do not always translate into employment, expectations of women, positions of influence or comparable wages later in life.

When faced with such complexity, many want to shift the focus from race to class, specifically white working class boys. The current focus on white working class boys, while necessary since figures show achievement for white working class boys is routinely low, omits the all-important focus on power and differentiation. Such studies, instead of competing with, should complement ethnic minority discourses. At present, they appear eerily similar to a type of 'ethnic warfare', pitting white working class against minority ethnic groups.

Curiously, curriculum in schools does not get too much coverage amongst the group. Rather, the social forces within, and outside, the school environment are most felt and articulated.

Jubilant and Timi, who started off the discussion on opposing sides, reach a common ground. Jubilant brings it right back to the level of experience.

> "The first time I encountered racism, innit, I was about 5 years old, innit. It's getting me upset, man…I was 5. These kids, mixed race as well though, innit. They kept saying, 'I'm a Black guy, I'm a Black guy'. I never understood it. You know when you're getting bullied you don't realise, you're just laughing with it.
>
> I said, 'Why, what did I do? I didn't do anything to them'. I didn't even know what racism was. It was only when I got into secondary school when I realised. I said, 'They're being unfair'."

With Jubilant visibly upset, Timi offers comfort, "I feel your pain though."

"That's why I don't like to be racist to people. That's why I always question things. I don't like that. You can see how it still hurts me," Jubilant responds.

Debra and Leroy, the elders in the group, share his pain too. Debra recounts coming home and scrubbing herself with Vim to wash off the dirt (her skin colour). Leroy recalls his experiences of racism in Jamaica for his lighter complexion.

"Listening to you now," says Leroy, "I'm hearing the same things Debra and I went through 30 years ago."

"That's what's coming out of this today, that nothing's changed," Debra says.

Even the fact that, despite the odds, young people are still persevering, out of sight, here in the basement of the Southbank Centre, and all over London.

But who's watching?

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1 SE1 United is a youth forum based in Waterloo, set up in 2003 for young people aged 10 – 21 years old. Retrieved from http://www.se1united.org.uk/index.html

2 Hing, J. (2012, June 21). Asian Americans Respond to Pew: We're Not Your Model Minority. *Colorlines*. Retrieved from http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/06/pew_asian_american_study.html

3 Cassen, R., & Kingdon, G. (2007). *Tackling low educational achievement*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York.

4 Kleinfield, N.R. (2012, May 11). 'Why Don't We Have Any White Kids?'. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/13/education/at-explore-charter-school-a-portrait-of-segregated-education.html?pagewanted=all

Education and Black middle class parents: racism exists regardless of class

Dr Nicola Rollock, Lecturer, University of Birmingham

In 2009, Channel 4 aired a series of programmes exploring the concept of race and its meaning in today's society. One of those programmes featured Jane Elliott, a retired white school teacher from America carrying out, here in Britain, what is often billed as a controversial social experiment called 'Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes'.[1] In it, Elliott divides a group of volunteers into a brown-eyed group (i.e., mainly people of colour) and a blue-eyed group (white people) and, during a series of exercises, proceeds to subjugate and disparage members in the latter group while treating members of the former more favourably. The aim is to introduce members of the blue-eyed group to the power and pervasiveness of racism in contemporary society.

When such findings are viewed in the light of the continuing low national statistics on Black students' educational attainment, and the fact that over half of newly qualified teachers view their training as merely 'satisfactory' or 'poor' in preparing them to teach learners from minority ethnic backgrounds, this speaks strongly to the need for urgent action in this area.

In one part of the exercise, a white woman (Terry) engages in what can only be described as a tense argumentative exchange with two Black people (Pearl and Marvin). Terry denies that stop and search is a problem solely for young Black people, as Pearl is suggesting, and accuses her of wanting to be a victim. Marvin later interjects and explains the pressures on him as a Black man to conform and the need to 'play the game' in order to survive in British society. He details how he has made a conscious decision not to collect his daughter from her school in an affluent, rural area of England because of the possibility that she will be treated differently if people see that her dad is Black (he is mixed race and the mother of his daughter is white). On hearing this, Terry launches into a defensive and irate rebuttal, arguing that race and racism are irrelevant to Marvin's account since her ex-husband also conforms by dressing smartly when picking up their daughter from school despite preferring to wear more casual clothing:

> "He would not turn up looking like a scruff bag with long hair, bad clothes, bad breath, unwashed, bad shoes..." [Marvin has long shoulder length locks]

When I show the clip to students, especially teacher trainees (most of whom are white), it provokes considerable heated debate, gasps of amazement, embarrassed laughter and, in particular, awed disbelief that Terry is, in fact, a schoolteacher. How can a teacher express such dismissive views about race? How can a schoolteacher be so disparaging about racism? Surely the programme was made years ago? Was it *really* recorded in the UK?

Yet I doubt Terry's reactions will come as a surprise to many of the parents involved in a study I carried out with colleagues at the Institute of Education[2] about education and the Black middle classes. We were interested in exploring parents' experiences of the education system and how they successfully navigated their children through it. We were also interested in the role of race and social class in shaping their experiences. We found that many parents had to work hard to have their needs and those of their children met.

For example, one mother told us how her son, keen to improve his mock exam results, went to his tutor to ask for advice and guidance and was told, "You got a pass. What more do you want? We weren't expecting you to get a pass." A father recounted how his son, though he had been to drama school and excelled in drama, had been given a non-speaking part in the school play because as he was informed by the headteacher, "We've got to give the other children a chance." Or there is the example of another mother who told of how her son was best friends with a Chinese

boy in primary school. Both boys were top of the class in maths until a new teacher started at the school and reassigned everyone to new ability sets. The mother found out (because her son came home upset) that despite being the same maths level, her son was moved down to a lower group while the Chinese pupil remained in the top set.

These examples of parents' experiences with schools are important for several reasons. First, they challenge the prevalent stereotype of the Black pupil who is disinterested in education and failing academically. That these are students who are keen to progress is all the more profound bearing in mind that in each of the examples the student is Black and male, a demographic who are traditionally positioned as being at the delinquent fringes of educational failure. Second, these examples also provide an alternative to the tired discourse of the Black parent who is disinterested and not involved in their child's education. While the actual extent or nature of engagement varied, we found that the majority of our participants were involved in their children's school through activities such as school governing and helping out at events, or by instigating meetings with teachers about their child's progress and lending support to other parents.

Finally, the examples shed light on the expectations and views held by teachers about the educational capabilities of Black students. Parents in our study reported countless examples of disinterest, lack of motivation and commitment, on the part of teachers, to taking the schooling of their children seriously. When such findings are viewed in the light of the continuing low national statistics on Black students' educational attainment[3], and the fact that over half of newly qualified teachers view their training as merely 'satisfactory' or 'poor' in preparing them to teach learners from minority ethnic backgrounds[4], this speaks strongly to the need for urgent action in this area.

The project received criticism in some quarters for daring to suggest that there is a Black middle class. To do so, I argue, misses a fundamental point of the research. To find that *even those* Black families categorised *in government terms* as 'middle class'[5] continue to experience setbacks in the form of low expectations from schools indicates that policy debates that merely focus on eradicating poverty in the drive to improve social mobility will have but a limited effect. As we found, racism exists irrespective of social class.

1 Russell, D. (Director). (2009, October 29). Blue Eyes, Brown Eyes [Television series episode]. In N. Curwin (Producer), *The Event: How Racist Are You?* London: Channel 4. Retrieved from http://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-event-how-racist-are-you

2 For report summary, see Vincent, C., Rollock, N., Ball, S. & Gillborn, D. (2011). *The Educational Strategies of the Black Middle Classes – Project Summary.* London: Institute of Education. Retrieved from www.ioe.ac.uk/research/32261.html

3 In 2009/10, 49.3% of Black students (i.e. Black Caribbean, Black African, those from Other Black backgrounds) achieved five or more GCSEs or equivalent A* to C grade including maths and English. The national average was 55.1%.

4 The Training and Development Agency carries out an annual survey of newly qualified teachers' experiences of their training. In 2011, 48% of primary trainees viewed their training as 'good' or 'very good' in preparing them to teach learners from minority ethnic backgrounds. The figure for those who had received secondary training was 47%. Training and Development Agency for Schools. (2011). *Results of the newly qualified teacher survey 2011.* London: TDA. Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/nqt%20survey%20results%202011.pdf

5 We spoke to 62 Black Caribbean heritage parents at the highest end of the government's occupational classification scale, in professional or managerial occupations. Though recognising their occupation positioned them as 'professional', many of the parents we spoke with were uncomfortable or hesitant to self-define as 'middle class'. The parents live mainly in London and the south-east, but we also included parents from elsewhere across England.

Locals weigh in on race and racism in London schools

Barbara Nea reports from Hackney, Haringey, Tower Hamlets and Islington

Between November 2011 and March 2012, ROTA held the 'Shaping the future: race and racism in the 21st century' seminar series. Planned to follow the retrial into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, the seminars aimed to bring communities together with the statutory sector to review progress against racism in London since 1993.

Given the wider climate of cuts, austerity and policy reforms, it was not originally the intention for the seminars to focus solely on education. However, as an area where some of the most fundamental inequalities manifest, it was identified by all our local partners as in need of urgent attention. This article reports on the discussions among the 300-plus participants in 'Shaping the future', highlighting continued community concern over educational inequality and other deficiencies in the capital's school system.

The denial of racism

While progress has been made since Stephen Lawrence's murder in 1993, Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities still face unequal outcomes in many key areas of life. Despite this, many politicians, civil servants, social commentators and others are claiming that we now live in a 'post-racial society', where race and racism no longer have a significant impact on people's life chances.

Many examples of this shift away from a focus on race equality in education policy were given throughout 'Shaping the future'. Most obvious was Boris Johnson's removal of 'Black' from the title of the biennial 'London Schools and the Black Child' conference on 10 November 2011. Concerns were also expressed across the boroughs about the mainstreaming of specific funding for BAME pupils and teachers. Decisions to withdraw the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant and redirect Teaching Development Agency funds intended to diversify the teaching workforce were the most referenced examples. Participants also pointed to the watering down of teaching standards that once required teachers to demonstrate skill in addressing inequalities in the classroom and in teaching in multicultural environments.

For many, this shift in policy amounted to a denial of racism in education. How this denial played out on a societal scale, where mainstream society feared to talk about, and take ownership for, racism was a major point of discussion. Yet, the need to move beyond this was considered critical to achieving race equality and there was much discussion about how this could be achieved.

At the House of Lords launch event, Dr Nicola Rollock argued that "we can't rely on notions of empathy or notions of compassion...(and) we can't rely on legislation". Her recommendation was to open up a conversation with mainstream society, attaching race equality onto "other forms of equality that are more palatable", finding points of "interest conversion" and emphasising how race equality serves the interests of mainstream society.

What is racism?

Racism is far more complex than the black and white issue it once was in the UK. In London, school populations are now considered 'superdiverse'. The educational experience of different BAME young people varies widely and requires a sophisticated response. For example, the racism experienced by African Caribbean boys who are at greatest risk of educational exclusion is very different from the less obvious but highly impactful experience of Chinese youth who generally have greater educational success but which does not translate into labour market outcomes.

The overlaps between disadvantages caused by racism and those caused by classism complicate the responses required. In London, BAME communities are over-represented in disadvantaged socio-economic groups. However, the assumption we see in public policymaking that programmes that tackle poverty will address the disadvantages faced by London's BAME communities is problematic. There's lots of evidence that shows when socio-economic factors are considered, such as employment status and family structure, there are still unexplained differences in educational outcomes across different ethnic groups.[1] Also young people from wealthier BAME families still face disadvantages in education due to racism and not classism. Policy, such as that which introduced the pupil premium at the expense of the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant and other school funds will not ensure education equality for BAME pupils.

'Shaping the future' voiced overwhelming consensus that race, distinct from class, has a unique impact on the life chances of London's BAME communities.

[1] See Hills, J., et al. (2010). *An anatomy of economic inequality in the UK: Report of National Equality Panel.* Government Equality Office. Retrieved from http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/CASEreport60.pdf

Emerging forms of racism

The seminars also explored new dimensions of racism. Serious questions were raised about implicit, indirect and institutional forms of racism evident in policy reform and neglect of inner London schools.

For example, does the way in which inner London boroughs are experiencing the most negative impacts of national policy reforms and spending cuts indicate national public bodies are institutionally racist? With two-thirds of London's school populations made up of BAME pupils, is there something more sinister than sheer short-sightedness in national government's failure to address the 10,000 shortfall of school places through proportionate capital funding?

There was also worry as to whether we were beginning to see a re-emergence of more overt forms of racism, with the racist comments of footballers John Terry and Luis Suarez in late 2011 emerging in many discussions. Participants reported a sense that copycat incidents were on the increase in their local communities.

Some of the educational priorities that need to be addressed

More specifically relating to education in London, participants identified a number of significant educational priorities.

BAME people are under-represented in the capital's schools as classroom teachers, senior managers and on bodies that oversee education. At the Hackney seminar, we noted that there are no Black people on the Learning Trust board. Participants began planning work to enable BAME parents to have greater influence over schools.

Education as a space that allows "developing knowledge of self and heritage" is denied to BAME young people in many of London's state schools. To make matters worse, community responses such as supplementary schools are being disproportionately hit through public spending cuts.

Access to quality education services, particularly in deprived inner London wards where BAME young people make up greatest proportions, was a major cause for concern. Risks that quality of education will deteriorate in the face of public spending cuts and strategies to address this were also considered.

Teachers' negative expectations of and lack of rapport with Black pupils, in particular African Caribbean boys, were also discussed at length. As a solution, many suggested for teachers, and schools more generally, to be empowered through their training to teach all pupils.

> "One example, a survey done amongst teachers trained in universities or colleges since the 1970s, suggests that over 65% do not feel able to construct and deliver a curriculum that meets this agenda of confronting racism."
>
> Professor Gus John, Gus John Consultancy (House of Lords launch seminar)

Youth opportunity and aspiration

The impact of poor educational experiences combined with a lack of youth opportunity was linked to the disengagement of some young Londoners from education.

"One example, a survey done amongst teachers trained in universities or colleges since the 1970s, suggests that over 65% do not feel able to construct and deliver a curriculum that meets this agenda of confronting racism."

Many highlighted the challenge in inspiring young people when the context in which they are being educated is one of reduced access to higher and further education, increased tuition fees and high youth unemployment – particularly for Black people – against a backdrop of a popular culture of immediate gratification and the push/pull of gang fidelity. The opportunities being offered to young BAME Londoners through government's youth employment initiatives, if at all, were considered at best, uninspiring and at worst, exploitative. Good practice examples, however, were identified. In Islington, for example, 3,200 now vote for the Youth Council and seven out of eight of the Young Councillors are BAME.

While not discussed in detail, the 2011 riots and potential for future riots were not far from people's minds. The explanation that the riots were an expression of 'sheer criminality' was rarely present; the riots were seen as a symptom of a society where educational opportunity and wealth is very unequally distributed and largely along ethnic lines in inner London.

> "Show them that they can make positive contributions to society, that they have financial gains for themselves and for others, remind them of the long history of Black and ethnic minority civil rights campaigners and most importantly, let them know that we love them and want them to succeed because I don't think they think we do." Hackney seminar

A revived race equality movement

As an overarching solution to many of the challenges posed, many participants suggested reviving the grassroots race equality movement. Of the many ideas put forward, those which achieved the greatest consensus included:

- A movement with more space for young people that is more aware and responsive to their lived experiences. Younger participants spoke of the need for youth-led spaces where consciousness can be raised about race equality and responses developed.
- A movement that goes beyond seeking to influence public institutions, refocusing on self-determination to overcome the racial 'glass ceiling' and building resilience to racism at community as well as individual levels.
- A movement that reaches out to those that do not typically engage. At the House of Lords seminar, grassroots examples were given where former BNP supporters and racist offenders turned around their lives to now play key roles in local race equality activity.

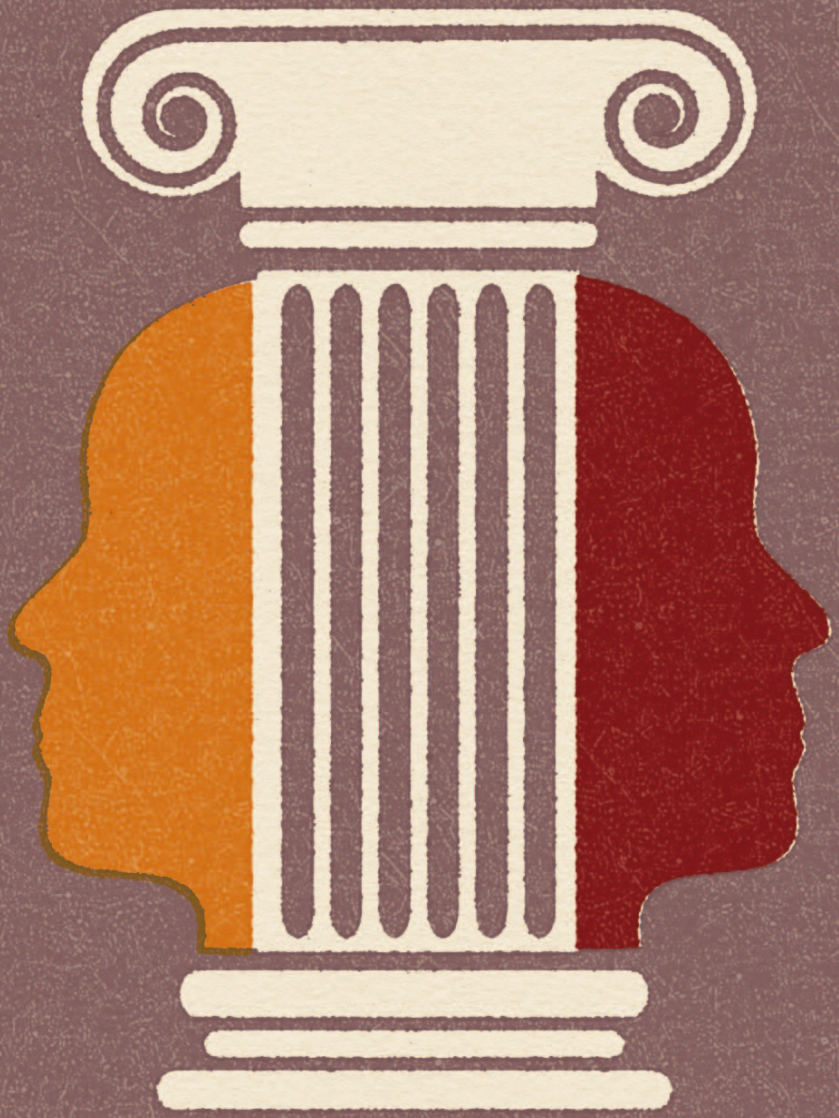
> "I have been working in this field for about three years and I think there is a very big gap between the elders in the community and what's going on with the young people. And this is down to communication. What are we as leaders saying to young people and how do we get them involved? There is a lot of academic terminology that is being used that is not actually being reflected back to our young people and our community members and the people we are representing. Last year, over the summer with the standing up against the fees and the riots, we should have been talking to the young people more. Young people need to be supported more to engage."
>
> Whitney Illes, Vice-Chair of Equanomics and Founder of No Sex without Love (House of Lords seminar)

While our seminars lamented the lack of real progress towards racial justice in education, they were exciting in their expression of revived interest and commitment to the agenda.

Many old alliances were rekindled, while bringing fresh blood to the sector. Just three months on they've already led to some concrete action on the ground.

While the seminars were melancholy in their articulation of a long list of persistent and emerging inequalities, they were creative in the solutions they posed in response to each. We at ROTA are already planning and looking forward to further developing many of these solutions with partners and participants of 'Shaping the future'.

Watch out for our 2012/13 'Shaping the future' education seminar series



Classical civilisations,

the London Inquiry and the continued ambiguity about race

Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Senior Research & Policy Analyst, Education, Runnymede Trust

On 10th November 2011 the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, announced the launch of the Mayor's Education Inquiry, aiming to identify and explore some of the challenges currently experienced by primary and secondary schools in London. An interim report outlining some of the key areas of concern regarding London schools was launched in February and included a call for evidence inviting responses to a list of 17 questions posed by members of the Inquiry panel.[1] On 12th November the Mayor of London participated in the GLA-run 'London schools and our children' conference, an annual event previously organised by Diane Abbott MP under the title 'London Schools and the Black Child'. Tony Sewell, Chair of the Education Inquiry, spoke at the event, announcing the establishment of the Inquiry to parents and educators in attendance.

While divergent in their aims, both the Inquiry and the November conference share an ambiguous relationship to race. Consider first the confusion created with

the revised title of the 'London Schools' conference, despite Black and minority ethnic pupils continuing to be its clear focal point.[2] While not setting out to exclusively explore the educational experiences of Black and minority ethnic pupils, the interim report of the Education Inquiry omits much of the differences and experiences that constitute the diversity of London. It is this implicit ambiguity about addressing race within both the Inquiry and educational reform that is the subject of this piece.

An exploration of education within London is certainly welcome and, by virtue of the myriad of areas of concerns raised within the Inquiry interim report, clearly necessary. For example, the report notes that the rate at which the population is growing in London suggests that an additional 70,000 school places will be needed over the next four years. These constraints are already being felt at individual borough level, particularly at the primary school stage. Similarly, almost four in ten children educated in London schools fail to achieve 5 GCSE grade A*-Cs, including English and Maths; whilst generally pupils in London do increasingly better as they get older than those throughout England, the attainment gap remains large amongst those from particular minority ethnic groups and those eligible for free school meals compared to those who are not.

Among other important issues, the report emphasises the necessity of learning from areas of good practice. The good exam results achieved by African Caribbean boys educated in schools in Hackney is one such example. It also raises other useful areas such as the need for good, practical careers advice, which should, in turn, reduce the numbers of young people considered NEET (not in education, employment or training). It also notes that London has key areas of cultural and historical interest which schools in the city should make more use of, particularly in order to bring young people beyond their local environments. Focusing on the contribution of diverse groups to their local areas and histories are areas we argue can only strengthen the curriculum taught to children of all ethnic groups.

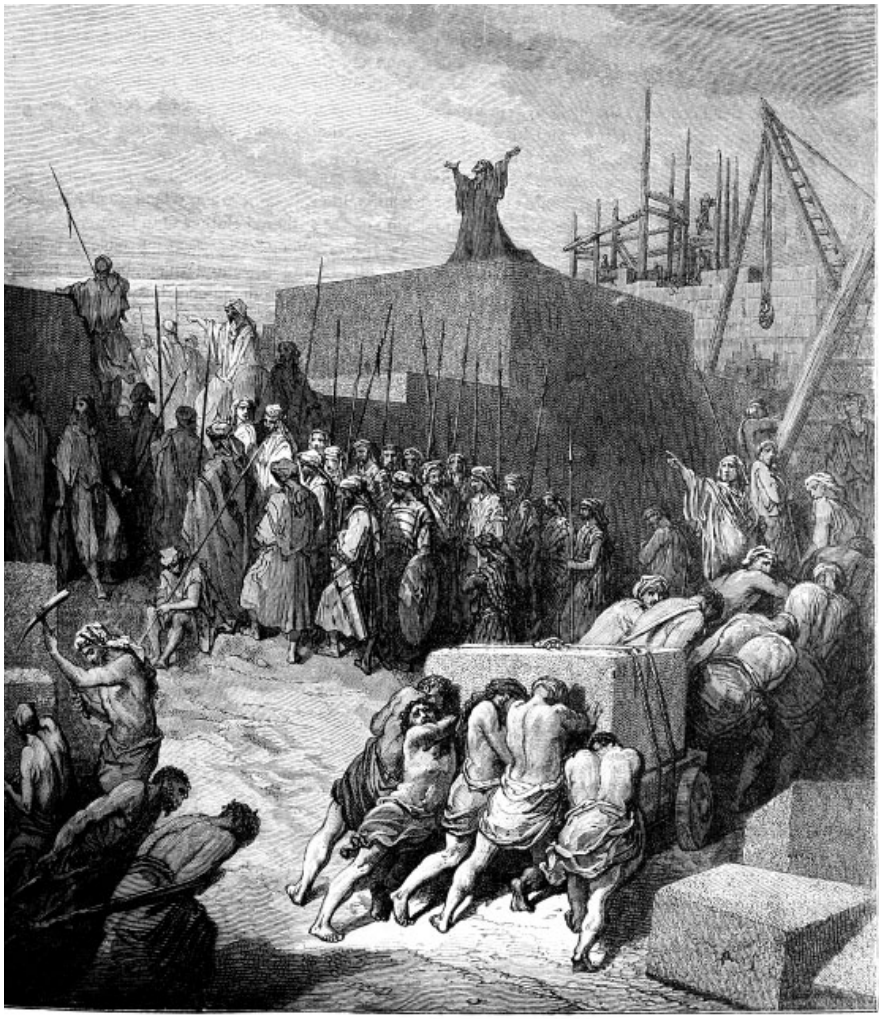
What remains of concern, however, are some of the themes thrown up by the issues highlighted in the Inquiry's consultation document. These suggest that the real issue rests with what is being taught in London schools, despite the fact that London schools and pupils perform better educationally within the current curriculum than their counterparts across England. The Inquiry report also reveals a desire amongst the Inquiry panel to improve achievement by searching for solutions that would enable greater freedom, be this at the level of the curriculum or in the way that schools are run. Improved achievement is a good and important aim, certainly, but are free schools, the return to 'traditional knowledge' and the addressing of 'cultural attitudes' among parents and families the way to fulfil these objectives for minority ethnic families?

Another issue of concern is the interim report's ambiguity about the ethnic and cultural make-up of London's schools. While it makes mention of the diversity of those resident in the city, it fails to focus on what constitutes this diversity. Is this diversity cultural, religious, ethnic? And even more interestingly, given the work that the London Mayor conducts through his Refugee and Migrant Strategy, there is no mention at all about pupils, or indeed teachers, of refugee, asylum seeking or migrant backgrounds. There is, however, some discussion about high pupil turnover in London schools and the potential contribution of this to 'classroom chaos', without a specific discussion as to who these pupils are that join schools at various times of the year. The report also omits to mention those children of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds attending London schools; yet these pupils routinely experience the lowest rates of achievement, even when compared with White British boys on free school meals.[3] It is this silence about the nature of those being educated within London schools that is of concern. How can strategies designed to support these pupils, and those who teach them, be at all effective if it is never made explicit who they are?

If we look at some of the potential solutions suggested as ways of helping children in London to succeed, then the necessity of reflecting how these might impact on minority ethnic children is of great importance. Free schools, a key aspect of educational reform promoted by the current Government, is mooted as a way of addressing not only the clear shortage of school places across London, but also as a means of providing educators with tools to open up the school curriculum. In 2008 Runnymede explored the limitations of increasing 'choice' for parents of Black and minority ethnic children, noting that this often exposed particular children and families to the schools and residential areas abandoned by parents exercising choice to the

best of their ability.[4] Indeed, the Inquiry report itself notes that there are schools within London which are 'ethnically homogeneous'[5], and as our 2008 report highlighted, the 'homogeneity' of such schools is often exacerbated by the element of choice which leaves poorer families of some minority ethnic group backgrounds behind in those schools seen as less desirable.[6] Providing parents and interest groups with the opportunity to set up the schools of their choice may do little to alleviate this issue.

We know also that the issue of free schools courts controversy which goes beyond the issue of choice, including the extent to which interest groups and those setting up schools can influence both the curriculum taught and terms and conditions of employment for the teachers employed in these schools. However, there is another pertinent difference here and one which also reveals some of the problems inherent in not assessing the impact of policy change on minority ethnic groups. Initial research by ROTA has suggested that increasing numbers of minority ethnic parent groups and those currently running popular supplementary schools have found it difficult to have their free school applications accepted. Indeed, they note that recent Freedom of Information requests made to the Department for Education have remained unanswered due to the high 'resource' implications which would result were they to be processed. The London Inquiry report does note the work of supplementary schools in the capital and suggests mainstream schools work more closely with them. However, the success of these schools in their attempts to broaden their reach and scope within the communities they serve has been slight. This does raise the question as to the type of groups and organisations that may have been in mind when initial plans for this policy initiative were proposed by the Government. Free schools run by minority ethnic parents and supplementary school owners must surely have been part of that blueprint.



There is a raft of other areas which any inquiry into London schools must include if it is to reflect the true diversity of those educated and employed within them. Reference is made within the interim report to ensuring teachers have the tools with which to stretch their pupils and go beyond any expectations they may have of pupils. This is of huge importance with regards to minority ethnic pupil achievement. But there is no mention of the need to increase the numbers of minority ethnic teachers employed within London's schools, which given the focus on the employment opportunities available within the city is surprising.[7] Also, wishing to look explicitly at the link between poverty and attainment within the Inquiry without acknowledging the 'ethnic penalty' that may impact upon some minority ethnic achievement is problematic. Expressing instead worries about the 'family and cultural expectations' that may prevent Black pupils from pursuing science subjects as a way of looking at why some rather than other minority ethnic pupils achieve is not helpful.

It appears that in the rush to promote 'traditional knowledge', 'ritual' and 'structure' and reinforce the importance of new qualifications such as the English Baccalaureate (despite potential problems with the latter[8]) as solutions to raising standards in London, the Inquiry, and indeed the current Government educational reforms which it reflects, seeks to create a mainstream educational environment that emulates that found within the selective and independent sector. Should minority ethnic pupils learn Latin and Greek? Yes, of course. Will Latin, Homer's *Odyssey* and formal dining improve the educational experiences of White working class boys, Black Caribbean or Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children? Only if the answer to underachievement is to make everyone middle class and ignore the processes which create inequality.

1 Greater London Authority. (2012). *The Mayor's Education Inquiry First Report: London Context and Call for Evidence.* Retrieved from http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/young-people/education-training/mayors-education-inquiry. A final report is due in October 2012.

2 Though the 'London schools and our children' conference organisers noted that MP Diane Abbot's decision to remove herself from the event precipitated the change in title of the conference, one could have been forgiven for thinking that the event was an exploration of the educational experiences of all children within London, given the final title used to promote it.

3 White British, Black Caribbean and mixed white and Black Caribbean boys eligible for FSM are among those experiencing some of the lowest GCSE rates (5+ A*-Cs, including English & Maths) and are highlighted as such within the Inquiry report, at 26%, 33.2% and 30.8% respectively of all boys in their respective ethnic groups. Irish Traveller and Gypsy/Roma FSM boys are, however, much less likely to gain these qualifications at 11.8% and 5.3% respectively.

4 Weekes-Bernard, D. (2008). *School Choice and Ethnic Segregation: Educational Decision Making among Black and Minority Ethnic Parents*. London: Runnymede Trust. Retrieved from http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/SchoolChoiceFINAL.pdf

5 Research has also shown that there are pockets within London where schools have particularly high populations of children from a very small number of minority ethnic backgrounds. A website set up by the Centre for Market & Public Organisation at Bristol University provides more detailed analysis of the ethnic group make-up of schools across the UK – see Burgess, S., Greaves, E., & Speight, S. (n.d). *Measuring Diversity.* http://www.measuringdiversity.org.uk/

6 Johnston, R., Burgess, S., Harris, R., & Wilson, D. (2008). *'Sleep-Walking Towards Segregation'? The Changing Ethnic Composition of English schools, 1997-2003 – an Entry Cohort Analysis.* Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 33(1), 73-90.

7 The removal of TDA targets to recruit minority ethnic teachers, and indeed the uncertainty as to how this will fall within the remit of the Secretary of State for Education, will not assist the issue of minority ethnic teacher underemployment.

8 David Gillborn has noted the way that the Ebacc works against Black Caribbean pupils as they are less likely to be entered either at subject level or indeed at the requisite grade level for that required for the Ebacc. Gillborn, D. (2011, June 12). There's no black in the baccalaureate. *The Guardian.* Retrieved from http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/12/black-pupils-held-back-baccalaureate-race. Current figures suggest that whilst 21.6% of all pupils were entered for the Ebacc in 2011, itself a low figure, only 13% of Black Caribbean pupils were entered and just 7.6% achieved it.

Where now the Big Society: some reflections

Karl Murray, Head of Employment and Research, Black Training & Enterprise Group (BTEG)

So, there we have it; the 'Summer Riots' (as it has been dubbed) was a result of young people not being "listened to"! In the aftermath of the summer of 2011 we have heard from the great and good about the causes and what the uprisings represent. You name them; they were all out in force. Our courts are full with some of the accused still going through the system. Despite the many 'published' reports and books written since the riots, we are perhaps still no nearer understanding what really went on. One of the more frequently cited explanations has been the absence of parental control. A youth worker, during an interview on television remarked, "We can't make them see what's right from wrong as they have to come to that themselves." No one, it seemed, had any control. This sentiment fed into the tabloid's frenzy of characterising young people as 'feral', implying an 'out of control' situation and one that is a consequence of the high number of single parents – and of course statistics show that African and Caribbeans have proportionately a higher rate of single parent household, which therefore, explains the high rate of anomie amongst this community!

Work with parents and families has shown that despite the obvious disadvantage of raising a child as a single parent, it does not follow that all single parents raise uncontrollable children. In many instances, they have fought very hard to ensure that their children do not fall into such behaviour because they know just how hard it can be. However, as one parent who phoned LBC remarked, "How can children who are having children themselves raise those children with any respect and manners?" This suggests that it is perhaps not so much about single parents per se but more specifically about teenage parents.

Certainly it came across as though parents had no control, which then became a case of them failing to set proper and clear boundaries of right and wrong and between themselves and their children – and behaving more like friends than as an adult within the parent-child relationship. As some parents in a recent study I conducted said, state intervention has tied their hands in how they can parent their child.[1] Many pointed to concerns over the Human Rights Act and their fear of being charged with child abuse if they strike their child. They spoke as well about the ease with which local authorities can take away their children for no other reason than a belief that the parents are not raising their children according to a particular parenting method – what some referred to as a movement away from 'tough love' to 'rewarding bad behaviour'. Accordingly, little control can be exerted as these children/young people have neither fear nor respect for adults or people in authority other than within their own sub-cultural enclaves (the hierarchical structures of gangs becomes attractive, for they provide a structure and shape to their existence that some feel they are not getting elsewhere in their lives).

Where do we go from here?

When the last embers of the chaos have been extinguished much more will be written and debated. My suspicion is that the issues to be addressed will be found to have their roots in policies instituted decades ago and which have set the context for the wanton individualism, consumerism and abrogation for any sense of responsibility to wider society or empathy with members of diverse communities and/or society much more broadly. It is no coincidence that the meltdown of the financial system of the West has its roots in the greed of bankers and the banking system, which somehow came to be legitimated and protected. This uncritical acceptance as 'greed is good' in market terms has come back to haunt us all at a number of levels. To my mind, this new realism we see is but another way of describing greed. We should not be surprised when we see the practical consequences of this policy being played out before our eyes on the streets and in the inner city areas, where class, poverty and race intersect so sharply.

What I believed we witnessed over the summer of 2011 was just a foretaste of what might come if and when the majority of young people (and others not so young) – the majority of whom were young Black men – all decide enough is enough. What we saw in the disturbances was a wake-up call to us all. It presents an opportunity for us to lance the boil composed of a series of complex and intersecting dynamics. The optimist in me believes it may well prove a blessing in disguise – but only if we take the time to listen and weigh up what sort of society we truly want to see. Where now the Big Society?

1 Murray, K. (2010). *Understanding the support needs of BAME families with vulnerable young boys.* London: BTEG. Murray, K. (2011). *Raising aspirations: supporting and strengthening BAME families.* London: BTEG. Retrieved from http://www.bteg.co.uk/index.php/Publications-Downloads/Tackling-Race-Inequalities/Research/BTEG-Research-Report/Download.html & http://www.bteg.co.uk/index.php/Downloads/BTEG-Reports/Raising-aspirations-March-conference-report/Download.html

ROTA Research

ROTA has a long tradition of in-house research into educational inequality. In this section, ROTA volunteers and researchers highlight initial findings from some of our ongoing work on free schools, primary education and ESOL.

Free schools

Emma Rees
Manuel Casertano

The British Free Schools initiative has been lauded as an opportunity for parents and communities to come together to tackle shortcomings of the education system through using government resources to establish the schools they want for their children. Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, in his speech at the 'London schools and our children' conference (formerly the 'London Schools and the Black Child' conference) encouraged BAME parents to use the initiative as an opportunity to address educational inequality.

Yet, ROTA's Free Schools Monitoring Project is finding that those free school proposers in London from communities that have faced the greatest educational inequalities in the past, are facing, so far, barriers to success. In our study, we are assessing the level of engagement of BAME communities in the application process and the extent to which equality and inclusion is considered and implemented by all free schools. Throughout our study, we have met with private education providers and have identified approximately 200 successful and unsuccessful free school proposers.

Given some controversial findings from US Charter Schools and Swedish Free Schools (on which the British Free School project is modelled), we hope to shed some light on the impacts and opportunities that free schools present for reducing educational disadvantage among BAME pupils. There is concern that the Department for Education (DfE) might not be actively facilitating the inclusion of traditionally disadvantaged BAME communities. Late 2011 and early 2012 surveys of free school proposers illustrate how the application process is still not clear to many. What is more, some lamented inconsistency in the application support from the DfE and the New Schools Network, criticising the quality of feedback from the DfE. Encouragingly, others have praised the diverse range of services offered. However, some respondents, even successful Free School proposers, demonstrate a limited knowledge of the Equality Act 2010 and its Public Sector Equality Duty requirements, which is a cause for concern given the multitude of issues exposed in this edition of *Agenda.*

Please look out for our final report in the upcoming months

Race inequality and primary education

Billy Wong

In 1997, minority ethnic groups represented 12% of primary school pupils in England. In 2011, just over a quarter (27%) of the 4 million primary school pupils in England are from minority ethnic backgrounds. In a recent pilot project by ROTA, which reviews existing studies on the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) children in English primary schools, we found a dearth of literature. Yet, using national statistics, important differences and patterns of inequalities are already emerging among primary school children.

Pupils from particular ethnic groups, namely British Chinese and British Indian, are already achieving higher grades, as a proportion of the population, than average at Key Stages 1 and 2 (which is consistent with GCSE and A-level statistics). However, outcomes are poorer in maths, science, reading and writing for those British students from Black Caribbean, Black African, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and (particularly) Gypsy/Roma backgrounds.

Although pupils on free school meals (FSM) continue to experience poorer educational outcomes than non-FSM pupils, such variations are only significant *within* but not *across* ethnic groups. For example, 89.2% of British Chinese and 82.2% of British Pakistani Key Stage 1 non-FSM pupils achieved the expected grades (Level 2 or above) for science in 2010. Among FSM pupils, this figure falls to 88.7% for British Chinese and 75.1% for British Pakistani pupils. In this case, British Chinese pupils on FSM are still more likely to achieve the expected grades than British Pakistani pupils, regardless of FSM or non-FSM status.

While research has suggested that family background is highly influential in shaping children's education, there is also evidence that pupils from particular ethnic/racial backgrounds, such as Black or Asian, can be negatively stereotyped by teachers as 'disruptive', 'dangerous' and 'mysterious', which often results in lower expectations (and subsequently, lower actual attainment among some of these stereotyped pupils).

Although there is little research on the actual experiences of minority ethnic pupils in primary schools, we can still infer, from national statistics on achievement and existing studies in secondary education, that there are racial inequities at the level of primary education – inequalities which have been documented more frequently among older children.

ESOL

Eleanor Stokes

Intercultural education in London extends beyond the school-age learning environment. ROTA research conducted in 2011 identified that newly arrived communities have an urgent need to access education and language services, opportunities for which were seen to be reducing because of withdrawal of funding for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). Since the report, there have been several welcome changes and revisions to ESOL funding, which to some extent safeguard learners so that those most at risk of losing fee remission status may still remain eligible.

The Government recently announced that ESOL students on 'inactive' benefits will continue to be eligible for free lessons until 2013. This extension is good news for the majority of learners. The allocation of a further £10 million in 2012 to further education colleges and training providers in areas facing significant integration challenges is similarly welcome.[1] However, people on working tax credit, low income workers and failed asylum seekers are still largely unsupported – and there remains the question of what will happen after 2013. It is essential to continue reviewing provision for ESOL as future funding cannot be considered secure. This consideration is reflected in the Action for ESOL Manifesto, which puts a clear case for 'persistent and sustained funding' and urges a statutory entitlement to ESOL for all those who need English language education.[2]

As well as the learners mentioned, a statutory entitlement would need to include people who have come to the UK to take up work whose position at the moment is not set to change. The responsibility for providing English language training and meeting the full costs for this group of learners is down to the employer – few of whom it appears are able or willing to pay. At the moment, provision for learners in this situation is not being adequately addressed. The response to an information request on ESOL funding in February 2012 made it clear that 'the Government will not fund ESOL where it is delivered in the workplace'.[3] Any focus on enhancing access to ESOL picked up by the Mayor's Education Inquiry, particularly through after-school clubs and supplementary education – and through any other initiatives which seek to tackle underachievement of particular minority ethnic groups – should be welcomed. This applies to people of all ages. However, I strongly believe that any such strategies which the Inquiry seeks to develop should be informed by evidence on existing provision, that is, how it is being delivered and by whom, and how effective it is in meeting the needs of learners. The importance of listening to learners, in order to counter assumptions about the kind of provision they require, is also emphasised in the Action for ESOL Manifesto. A key question which I would ask the Inquiry to consider is whether those most in need, such as newly arrived migrants and refugees and women with children under the age of seven, are able to access ESOL services and what type of provision is offered.

Our research with voluntary organisations working in an educational capacity with BAME communities throughout London revealed an urgent need for support in recognition of the work they do in providing additional language classes, helping to raise BAME school attainment levels and strengthening home-school links. High priority should be directed towards gathering information on ESOL and its operation at a local level, so that the most effective and efficient models of delivery can be identified. These may include new or alternative approaches. However, without a firm commitment to funded research, the opportunity to explore innovation in teaching and learning may be limited.

Optimistically, it is good to see that in 2012, a number of organisations are engaged in gathering information for the GLA on ESOL provision, including looking at different models and approaches such as those adopted by after-school and community clubs, and supplementary schools. This is an encouraging sign that future policy will continue to draw upon the direct experience and knowledge of providers and learners, and gives a positive signal to ESOL providers that they will get the support they request.

Finally, ROTA's research found that people from smaller or less well-established supplementary schools or community groups reported that dialogue with local authorities and funders was not as productive as it could be. One of the challenges for those working with disadvantaged, isolated or excluded learners was in demonstrating the positive effect of their work in raising educational attainment and, that 'even where evidence was provided, it was thought to be in danger of being ignored.' It is important that the Educational Inquiry, which is concerned with tackling underachievement, encourages better dialogue with smaller providers, through active engagement and consultation at all levels.

1 Hayes, J. (29 February 2012). Announcement of additional £10 million funding for FE institutions to provide ESOL for learners not in, or currently actively seeking employment, who are unable to afford course fees. London: Hansard. Retrieved from http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wms/?id=2012-02-29a.31WS.1

2 Action for ESOL. (2012). *The ESOL Manifesto: A statement of our beliefs and values.* Retrieved from http://actionforesol.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/ESOL-manifesto-leaflet-v4b-online.pdf

3 BIS. (22 February 2012). Response to FOI request on ESOL funding.

Race on the Agenda (ROTA) is a social policy research organisation that focuses on issues impacting on Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities. As a BAME-led organisation, all ROTA's work is based on the principle that those with direct experience of inequality should be central to solutions to address it. Our work is actively informed by the lived experiences of BAME communities and their organisations.

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