

## Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

There is little doubt amongst educationalists that for children to thrive, to be happy and to learn effectively they must first of all feel safe, confident in their abilities and have a strong sense of identity. In order for children to learn who they are they must also have an understanding of others. Learning about other people and learning to respect beliefs, cultures and ideas that are different from one's own can be seen as the first steps in combating racist behaviour and racist attitudes. There is little research in the UK about boys and racism; this is primarily due to the fact that although boys and girls may need to be taught differently at times in order to address and meet their learning needs, in this instance boys and girls are equally likely to behave in the same way. The discussion here therefore applies equally to both boys and girls.

Stephen Lawrence was an 18-year-old sixth form student who was stabbed to death in Eltham, south London, on the night of April 22, 1993. It soon became clear that the murder was motivated by racism. This murder is perhaps the most famous racially motivated murder in the UK. As a result many schools used this as a catalyst to explore anti-racist behaviour in greater depth following advice from the MacPherson Report (1999).

The racist murder of Stephen Lawrence was not unique - the Institute of Race Relations has documented 24 racially-motivated murders in Britain since 1991. Controversy still surrounds many of these killings and the inadequacies of subsequent police operations, but it is the Stephen Lawrence case which has caught the public eye and the media's attention.

This is because the police failed to bring successful charges against five youths, Jamie and Neil Acourt, Gary Dobson, David Norris and Luke Knight, who were widely viewed as the prime suspects in the murder (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/1999/feb/23/lawrence.ukcrime9>).

'Racism' in general terms consists of conduct or words or practices which advantage or disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. In its more subtle form it is as damaging as in its overt form (MacPherson Report, 1999).

In society, racism takes many forms and while education cannot provide the complete answer, there are a number of significant contributions that can be made from an educational perspective through the:

- formal and informal curriculum;
- performance and educational attainment of all pupils;
- pastoral development of all pupils;
- positive engagement of parents and the wider community;
- implementation of effective employment practices.

Racist comments have no place in a classroom even in the course of legitimate debate on religious and racial issues. It should also be borne in mind that a racist incident can occur between members of the same broad ethnic category. It is important that incidents such as these are tackled in order to emphasize that the school does not tolerate racism in any form.

The National Curriculum for schools in the UK recognizes that respect for one another is important if children are to learn effectively alongside one another. It states that:

"Education is a route to equality of opportunity for all, a healthy and just democracy, a productive economy, and sustainable development. Education should reflect the enduring values that contribute to these ends. These include valuing ourselves, our families and other relationships, the wider groups to which we belong, the diversity in our society and

the environment in which we live. Education should also reaffirm our commitment to the virtues of truth, justice, honesty, trust and a sense of duty." (QCA, 1999, p.10)

Further to this a statement of values was produced which incorporates values linked to the self, relationships, society and the environment. Within these statements are references to understanding one another. Schools and teachers can have confidence that there is general agreement in society upon these values, and teaching/school ethos is generally based on these values, those relating specifically to respect and others have been selected and produced below:

### **The self**

We value ourselves as unique human beings capable of spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical growth and development.

On the basis of these values, we should:

- develop an understanding of our own characters, strengths and weaknesses;
- develop self-respect and self-discipline;
- clarify the meaning and purpose in our lives and decide, on the basis of this, how we believe that our lives should be lived;
- take responsibility, within our capabilities, for our own lives.

### **Relationships**

We value others for themselves, not only for what they have or what they can do for us. We value relationships as fundamental to the development and fulfilment of ourselves and others, and to the good of the community.

On the basis of these values, we should:

- respect others, including children;
- care for others and exercise goodwill in our dealings with them;
- show others they are valued;
- earn loyalty, trust and confidence;
- work cooperatively with others;
- respect the privacy and property of others;
- resolve disputes peacefully.

### **Society**

We value truth, freedom, justice, human rights, the rule of law and collective effort for the common good. In particular, we value families as sources of love and support for all their members, and as the basis of a society in which people care for others.

On the basis of these values, we should:

- understand and carry out our responsibilities as citizens;
- refuse to support values or actions that may be harmful to individuals or communities;
- respect religious and cultural diversity;
- promote opportunities for all;
- make truth, integrity, honesty and goodwill priorities in public and private life. (QCA, 1999, p147)

An attitude perceived in many all white schools in the past has been that there is 'No Problem Here' these schools have seen themselves as unaffected by ethnic diversity (Gaine, 1988; 1995; 2005). Racism cannot just be an issue for schools with large

numbers of visible minorities; it is an issue for all (Hyland, 2007). The Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 broadened the responsibilities of schools and other public authorities. They are now charged with a 'general duty':

- to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination;
- to promote equality of opportunity;
- to promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

According to Hyland (2007), the same sorts of problems apply to gender. The curriculum, the way it is taught and the way boys and girls learn should be taken into consideration. We should recognize the preferences and needs of boys and girls and prepare both for a modern life in society.

Cultural development is pivotal in understanding self and others. Children create their understanding of the world within a series of cultural frameworks: family, class, school and wider society. Eade states that the influences on cultural development can be seen as:

- Internal to the child, such as low levels of self-esteem or self-belief;
- External to the child such as bullying and racism or a lack of understanding of, or hostility to, cultural traditions, either outside, or sadly within, school (Eade, 2006, p.52)

Cultural development helps children to experience and understand where they belong, their identity and the differences between themselves and other people. They need to be provided with opportunities to compare and contrast other cultures with their own. This involves knowing about and exercising critical judgment about the familiar and the strange, it involves reaching beyond their own boundaries of experience and developing a greater sense of the cultural world in which they live.

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