

Steps for Promoting Race Equality in Education
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Removing the Barriers to Race Equality in Education

Ten points to think and talk about

Robin Richardson

Summary

1. This talk at today's conference lists ten topics that we need to think and talk about if barriers to race equality in education are to be removed. In summary the ten points are:

1. The definition of race equality
2. A sense of history
3. Equality is not enough
4. Institutional racism
5. Islamophobia
6. Curriculum
7. Training
8. Engaging with the *Daily Wail*
9. Monitoring, data and statistics
10. Social and political context

How to define race equality

2. The phrase is used in two separate ways. They are closely connected, of course, but it's often necessary to be conscious which is being used at any one time:

- race equality as measurable outcome
- race equality as moral value or principle.

3. The following definition is proposed of race equality as measurable outcome:

Race equality in education is being achieved when gaps between the achievements and life-chances of learners from different communities are closing.¹

4. Five points are immediately worth commenting on:

- The definition is so phrased that the achievement of race equality can be measured.
- The definition does not assume that 'achieving equality' is the same as 'raising attainment and achievement'. The latter is a necessary means towards the former, most certainly. But it is not sufficient. It can happen – and indeed *has* happened – that raising achievement can be accompanied by greater, not less, measurable inequality.

- The emphasis on outcome is entirely explicit. In the Race Relations Amendment Act (RRAA), however, and in guidance about it issued to schools, references to equality of outcome seem sometimes to be obscured by references to equality of opportunity. The latter is a non-negotiable, fundamental principle. But it is the former, equality of outcome, which we should be aiming for.
- It's important to remember the difference between outputs and outcomes – more race equality policies (outputs) are absolutely not the same as greater race equality (outcomes). The point is wholly obvious. But it's worth mentioning and emphasising since otherwise energy can be misdirected – it's all too easy to expend energy on producing policies and related processes rather than on actually closing gaps.
- The definition does not use the term 'racial group'. It will be argued later in these notes that the term 'racial' in current legislation and discourse is broadly unhelpful, and can even be part of the problem rather than the solution. Also, it will be argued that 'equality' is not a sufficient value in itself and cannot be achieved unless accompanied and complemented by two other values.

A sense of history

5. We meet today at what looks like a special time in history. Less than a fortnight ago the consultation period around a remarkable document closed, *Aiming High*. In a range of ways, *Aiming High* was and is extremely promising and has been widely welcomed as the best thing of its kind that the DfES and the DfES's predecessors have ever issued. The individual civil servants and ministers behind it compel our admiration – we admire their insights and their determination, and also the intricate negotiating skills they have no doubt had to deploy in decision-making processes behind the scenes.
6. Also this year has seen the launch of two substantial websites by central government – *Respect for All* from the QCA and *EMA Online* from the DfES. Further, the RRAA appears to be having a big impact on awareness and the climate of opinion in schools and local authorities.
7. **But!** 'The past,' said William Faulkner once, 'isn't dead and gone. It isn't even past.' We meet today with a sense of history, not with naïve expectation that all the bad old days have passed away. Consider, for example, the history which is evoked by the following sequence of dates and quotations:
 - 1969: 'Children of West Indian parents, the largest of all the immigrant groups, have been a source of bafflement, embarrassment and despair in the education system... They have often presented problems which the average teacher is not equipped to understand, let alone overcome.' (*Colour and Citizenship*, E J B Rose et al.)²
 - 1971 'The school system fails to accommodate the new Black generation of British children, and the education system is a powerful way to deny the Black child self-empowerment and identity.' (Bernard Coard, *How the West Indian child is made educationally sub-normal in the British education system.*)³

- 1981 ‘West Indian children as a group are failing in our education system.’ (Rampton Report)⁴
- 1999 ‘In many LEAs there is uncertainty which verges on helplessness about what are effective strategies to improvement of some groups. There is, for instance, a worrying ignorance, generally, about how to raise the attainment of Black Caribbean boys.’ (Ofsted, *Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils*.)⁵
- 2002 [Why do only 17 percent of African-Caribbean boys in Birmingham get five A–C grades?... Why are so many African-Caribbean young males in prison?] ‘Some of the reasons I hear from the children and they are saying “Teachers do not care about us”. There are low teacher expectations of pupils in schools, definitely.’ (Education and Skills Select Committee.)⁶
- 2003 ‘It is clear that, if left to chance, African Caribbean pupils will continue to be failed by the system and to be vulnerable to involvement in the youth and criminal justice system. (Department of Education and Skills.)⁷
8. Or consider the history of so-called ethnic monitoring in education. In 1977 a government select committee recommended that statistics on West Indian [sic] pupils, students and teachers should be collected and analysed. The government accepted the recommendation but four years later the Rampton Report observed that ‘little progress has been made in implementing this decision’.⁸ Rampton expanded the recommendation to refer to all pupils; to include higher and further education; and to include data on attainment. It **strongly urged** (emphasis in the original⁹) that it should be implemented without delay.
9. Rampton envisaged that implementing the recommendation should be preceded by consultation with, amongst others, ‘local authority associations, the teacher unions and the Society of Education Officers’. It looked like, and proved indeed to be, a recipe for spectacular inertia and inaction. It was another 21 years before *Aiming High* provided reliable national statistics cross-tabulating attainment and ethnicity.¹⁰
10. Or consider curriculum guidance. The two websites mentioned above are impressive. But it was 15 years ago, in August 1988, that the then secretary of state for education (Kenneth Baker) instructed that such guidance should be provided.

Equality is not enough

11. The concept of race equality is useful for giving us a preliminary definition of something that can be measured. In certain other respects, however, it is profoundly unhelpful. For one thing, the term ‘race’ is inadequate. For another, so is the term ‘equality’. In combination, as in discourse flowing from the RRAA, the two terms can be part of the problem not the solution – they are amongst the barriers that have to be removed.
12. This sounds, certainly, paradoxical. How can race equality be a barrier to race equality?!
13. ‘Equality’ is not only an approach to measurement but also a shorthand way of referring to the moral principle that all human beings are of equal value. The stories and experiences of all should be recognised and the dignity of all should be respected. Equal opportunities and access should be provided, with a view to moving towards increasing equality of outcome. But equality is not an absolute value – it is not sufficient on its own.

It must be accompanied and qualified by two other values. If it is not so accompanied it cannot in fact be achieved.

14. First, equality must be qualified by recognition of diversity. It is as unjust to treat people similarly when in relevant respects they are different as it is to treat them differently when in relevant respects they are similar. This is particularly obvious in matters relating to gender and disability – it is unjust to treat women as if in all respects their life-experiences, needs and interests are the same as those of men, and vice versa, and it is unjust not to make reasonable adjustments and accommodations to take account of the needs of people with disabilities.
15. In the fields of inter-ethnic and inter-cultural relationships, it is analogously unjust to be colour-blind or difference-blind, for not all people have the same narratives, life-experiences, perceptions and frames of reference, nor – even more significantly – the same or similar social locations and situations within unequal power relations. Most government departments (though not yet the DfES) have recently adopted the semantic device of using a pair of terms – diversity and equality – in official documents, a usage that was pioneered in local government and in the private sector. Pragmatic reasons for adopting it are provided by the EU Employment Directive, mandatory throughout the EU from December 2003. It is most regrettable that the government did not, however, permit or encourage the CRE to refer explicitly to diversity in the various codes and guidelines produced in connection with the RRAA.
16. A third essential concept in this context is that of social cohesion. Just as neither equality nor diversity is a sufficient moral value in itself, so also both need to be complemented and qualified by notions of cohesion and belonging. A democracy such as Britain needs not only to uphold the values of equality and diversity but also to be held together by shared imagery, symbols and stories, such that everyone has an intuitive feel that they have aspects of their identity in common with millions of others. A shared sense of belonging involves a shared sense of being nurtured and valued by the wider community, a shared sense of being a somebody rather than a nobody, and a shared involvement in the project of making and maintaining a common life.
17. This is not the same as claiming that Britishness is of long standing, or that British stories and symbols are static and non-negotiable. The reality is that the balance between equality, diversity and cohesion has always been a contest and that settlements have always been provisional. Britain has always contained competing perceptions, narratives and interests. There have been disagreements and negotiations related to class, gender, language, religion, region and nation. British identity and self-understanding are continually being negotiated and re-defined and issues of national identity will become more salient in the future, with the mutually reinforcing pressures of globalisation, European integration, devolution from Westminster and Whitehall, migration, and increased social and moral pluralism.
18. These notes on political philosophy may seem rather abstract, a far cry from the practical everyday life of the schools or local authorities represented at today's conference. In reality, however, they are what schools and classrooms are all about, all the time. They are the story of every teacher's professional life. How to hold a balance between treating children equally (and in that sense, all the same) while also recognising the unique identity, experiences and life-stories of each, and of the communities to which they belong, and at the same time striving to maintain a sense of a common stake in the well-

being of the school community and the classroom community – this is the job of every teacher. The three go together like, in that famous traditional metaphor, the three legs of a three-legged stool. Take any one of them away and you have lost the use of the other two as well.

19. Schools and local authorities are required to create race equality policies and schemes. If these are not also explicitly about diversity and cohesion they will fail even to promote equality.
20. Oh come on, someone may say: the term ‘equality’ *implies* ‘diversity’ and ‘shared belonging’ and it’s just pedantic nit-picking to insist that the latter terms should be used explicitly in addition. Well, maybe. But the 26 years it took to implement the 1977 Select Committee recommendation on monitoring are a reminder that there is enormous inertia throughout the education system, as are the 34 years it took the government to propose acting on African Caribbean achievement. In situations of inertia, human beings tend to look only at what their gaze is explicitly directed to, and to do only what is explicitly required.
21. A more accurate and focused term than inertia in the current context is institutional racism.

Institutional racism

22. ‘We told Macpherson and Macpherson told the world.’ The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report was certainly a landmark. Contrast it with ‘We told Rampton, Rampton told the world and Rampton was immediately sacked’. It is unfortunate, however, that relatively few people in the education system have actually read, let alone engaged with, what Macpherson actually said. All they know is Macpherson’s definition (‘collective failure ... professional and appropriate service ...’). But the definition does not make adequate sense unless one has read and indeed studied the lengthy discussion which precedes it, and out of which it emerges.
23. Three points are striking in Macpherson’s discussion that are not adequately captured by quotations of his concluding definition:
 - The central importance of occupational culture – the norms, assumptions, mental images, expectations, etc, that constitute so-called common sense. Such norms are powerfully influential through silences and absences (what people *don’t* talk and think about) as well as explicit.
 - The argument that ‘uncritical’ is a more fitting word in this context than ‘unconscious’, ‘unintentional’ or ‘unwitting’ – it is not that teachers (or whoever) are unconscious or unwitting in what they do and don’t do, but that they are uncritical.
 - Public bodies do far more than ‘provide services’ – what they do is distribute resources, and in doing so they either redress or perpetuate inequalities in wider society.
24. In the week that the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report was published, the major teacher unions all denounced it, using much the same words and defensiveness that they had

brought to bear 20 years earlier against Rampton. To the government's credit it did not this time completely back off and *Aiming High* acknowledges that the concept of institutional racism is valuable. The next stage is for everyone to read chapter 6 of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report and apply it to occupational culture in schools and local authorities, and in the DfES itself. There are huge implications for the inservice training programmes that, according to *Aiming High*, the government is proposing to fund.

25. *Aiming High* has an impressive focus on the issues raised by the history sketched with the quotations above. It remains to be seen, however, whether the inertia documented since 1969 is now at long last to be tackled. Unfortunately, *Aiming High* does not have a similar concern for other groups. It simply says that 'in developing guidance [about raising African Caribbean attainment] we will use examples from the experience of African Caribbean pupils to highlight ways in which schools can focus on and cater for *any* [emphasis added] groups about whom they have a concern.' No, this will not do. Certainly there are some crucial similarities and commonalities in how the education system impacts on different communities. But there are also some crucial differences. To ignore these differences would involve ignoring also, in many instances, the realities of Islamophobia.

Islamophobia

26. One big problem with the term 'race equality', as mentioned above, is that it uses the term equality without complementing it with two other values. The other big problem is that it uncritically uses the term race.
27. As is well known, there is a single human race and terms such as 'racial group' and 'race relations' are therefore always in danger of being misleading, particularly when they are enshrined in legislation. The term race does, however, invaluablely allude to racism. But what is racism?
28. At the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) held in South Africa in 2001, it was agreed that the term 'racism' is a shorthand way of referring to a set of realities that cannot be adequately named with a single word. The full phrase that the WCAR adopted was 'racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance'. An alternative way of shortening the full phrase is to use the plural term 'racisms'. The plural term is ugly but it stresses that there are several key distinctions which must be recognised and worked with.
29. Racism takes different forms according to who the victims are and what their characteristics are believed to be. For example, anti-Black racism is different from anti-Asian racism, and both are different from anti-Muslim racism, also known as Islamophobia. Also anti-Irish racism must be recognised, and anti-Jewish racism and anti-Gypsy racism. Latterly, there has emerged in Britain, and indeed throughout western Europe, a set of phenomena known as anti-refugee racism or xeno-racism.
30. A distinction therefore needs to be drawn between the biological strand in each racism and the cultural strand. Both of these are virtually always present, but in different combinations at different times and in different places. The biological strand uses physical features of supposed difference, particularly skin colour and facial features, to recognise 'the other'. The cultural strand refers to differences of religion, language and way of life. Both strands involve believing that certain differences amongst human beings

are fixed as well as significant, can justify unjust distributions of power and resources, and can determine who is and who is not a full or real member of the national society.

31. The distinction is sometimes said to be between 'colour racism' and 'cultural racism', or between North-South racism and West-East racism. Such phrases have their uses, but obscure the reality that physical and cultural markers are usually combined. Since 11 September, issues of culture and religion have become even more salient than they were before. There has been an increase in attacks on people wearing religious dress or symbols, for example, and an increase in acts of desecration of places of worship.
32. This is all by way of saying that Islamophobia is a major barrier to race equality as defined in paragraph 3 above. (The definition spoke of communities, note, not so-called racial groups.) But also, our inability or unwillingness to use appropriate concepts and language is a barrier. The term 'race equality' is not sufficient and it must be added to, as stressed above. In 2001/02 a number of individuals and organisations¹¹ urged the Commission for Racial Equality to refer to religion and culture, not just to so-called race, in the guidance it was about to produce on implementing the RRAA. But for whatever reason (institutional Islamophobia? – it certainly looked like it), the CRE refused.

The national curriculum

33. Recently, two substantial websites have been up and running about multicultural and antiracist dimensions in the national curriculum – Respect for All created by QCA and EMA Online created by the DfES. Both are to be welcomed. It would be exceedingly unkind, but not totally unfair, to observe that in places they come close to what used to be caricatured as the '3 S's' approach to curriculum planning. They are much more to do with cultural differences rather than with political and ideological differences. They say little about commonalities and similarities. There's very little on British identities. And there's next to nothing about racism.
34. The two websites are a great step forward. Both, however, need substantial improvement.

Training

35. The commitment to training in *Aiming High* is to be warmly welcomed. The training needs to be centrally about institutional racism and about the three values outlined above – equality, diversity, cohesion. It must not in the slightest way be based on the shallow and banal guidance about racism awareness training published earlier this year by the Home Office.¹²
36. *Aiming High* envisages that much of the training will be about EAL issues. Fair enough. But it will be crucial to take on board NALDIC's statement about this:

The conceptualisation of EAL should not be solely oriented to language learning. While this dimension is clearly of central importance, there are cognitive and socio-cultural dimensions to the language learning process: language learning is not only about communicating - it is embedded in culture and integral to the development of identity ... A reciprocal and mutually supportive relationship is ... implied between what a pupil brings to the learning situation (language and culture, for example) and

what needs to be learned in the school context. EAL is thus concerned with the whole child and not only with English language learning.¹³

Engaging with the Daily Wail

37. The fine proposals and aspirations in *Aiming High* will not be achieved if the government is overly concerned with what the press will say. In certain sections of the press there are high levels of anti-refugee racism and there is ignorant rejection of the concept of institutional racism. More generally, there is a climate of moaning and groaning – ‘daily wailing’ – and a celebration of the phenomenon known as Irritable Male Syndrome.
38. We need the government to take a lead. But also, the government needs help in this from ourselves.

Notes on statistics and measurement

39. Let’s cheer, as mentioned and stressed above, the individuals and processes behind *Aiming High*. There were decades of inertia to fight against. With regard to statistics, however, we cannot yet give more than two cheers. There are some problems with the *Aiming High* approach to statistical data that need to be dealt with at the earliest possible opportunity:
- It is excellent that the categories of ‘Caribbean’ and ‘African’ are used separately. Up until now in education, we have had to use Youth Cohort Study statistics to have a sense of the national picture. These did not make the elementary distinction between Caribbean and African and they therefore permitted ministers and civil servants to give misleading accounts of the overall situation. However, the DfES is apparently toying with the outrageous idea of ceasing to use the distinction immediately after introducing it!¹⁴
 - It is surprising, even indeed extraordinary, that the data published in *Aiming High* includes no breakdown by gender.
 - There is no acknowledgement that the category ‘Pakistani’ refers to a range of communities, not to a single community. There is substantial evidence from local authorities outside London that children of Kashmiri heritage are being failed by the education system very substantially, and that this issue needs to be addressed directly and urgently. It cannot be conceptualised, as *Aiming High* apparently seems to think, as something to do with ‘bilingual pupils’.
 - There is insufficient acknowledgement that the term ‘African’ refers to such a disparate range of communities that it is useless for measurement purposes. Nor is it acknowledged that this is an issue in London much more than elsewhere.¹⁵

The wider policy context

40. If the DfES is serious about issues of equality and diversity it must commission high-quality and independent research, to be widely disseminated, on the impact of government policies and initiatives since 1988.¹⁶ The research will explore the claim that

measures intended to benefit all pupils have in fact had differential impacts, and have widened inequalities of opportunity and outcome. Issues requiring attention include:

- **Education has become increasingly a market.** Research in other countries demonstrates that a major result of this approach to organising educational provision is that there is increased segregation, in any one urban area, along lines of class, ‘race’, ethnicity and culture. It appears that this is also happening in Britain. The playing field, to borrow a well-known metaphor, is increasingly unlevel. In some areas, African-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and refugee children are disproportionately educated in schools that have lower levels of resourcing, because of their falling numbers, and which are less able to attract the best-qualified staff. Such schools were often once non-selective secondary modern schools, in name or in effect, and have a long history of being at a competitive disadvantage.
 - **League tables.** ‘The key question in education,’ it has been said, ‘used to be, “What can a school do for its pupils?” Now, the key question is, “What can pupils do for their school?”’ A pupil commented to researchers recently: ‘... They want us to do well in this so their league tables are all right. They don’t seem to care about what we want to do for ourselves. Just seem to care about us on the league table.’ Research has shown that this disadvantages black students and those for whom English is an additional language and that part of the problem is that schools use racist stereotypes and assumptions when trying to predict who is and who is not likely to enhance the school’s reputation through the league tables. The tiering of GCSE exams means that students sitting the same subject are entered for different examination papers, each with a restricted range of possible grades. For students entered on the lowest tier the best they can usually attain is a grade C – though the situation is even worse in mathematics, where the bottom tier has an upper limit of grade D.
 - **The policy of targeting failing schools,** together with derogatory media campaigns, is in many cases a classic example of blaming the victim. Several hundred schools have been placed under special measures since 1993, and about 70 per cent of these have been attended largely by black, Asian and refugee pupils. If naming and shaming them led to their being ‘turned round’, then the pupils may well have benefited. (Though it is not self-evident that the process was to their advantage, or that the same advantage could not have been attained for them more cost-effectively by other means. In this respect, as in so many others, research is needed to study the impact, including the unintended impact, of trends, decisions and policies.) But the naming and shaming of schools with large proportions of black, Asian and refugee pupils arguably leads to further scapegoating and stigmatisation and to further white flight and segregation.
41. If and when such research finds that the impact of recent trends, measures and policies has been negative for many black, Asian (particularly Pakistani and Bangladeshi), Irish and refugee pupils, the government will be unable to say that it was not warned. Ever since Kenneth Baker’s Education Reform Bill of 1987, there have been warnings from academics and campaigners that the reforms would work to the disadvantage of certain communities. Nor will the government be able to say that it has never received authoritative advice. The Rampton and Swann reports in the early 1980s laid out clearly what the government needed to do, and not do.

42. One problem is that there has never been a forum in which academics, campaigners and government officials could sit down together and review what is happening, and likely to happen. A potential forum was set up in England in 1996 on the day the report *Recent Research on the Achievements of Ethnic Minority Pupils* was published. by Ofsted. But it was short-lived and under-resourced; arrangements for appointment to it were not clear; it was not allowed to play the role of watchdog or critic; its agenda papers were not publicly available; its deliberations were not reported; and it was in due course wound up without publicity or protest.
43. Nevertheless, a forum reminiscent of that group is needed, but without its structural weaknesses. Its members would include government officials, academics, practitioners and representatives of non-governmental organisations and its purpose would be to review developments in education which have an impact on issues of race equality and cultural diversity. Such a body might have at least some independent funding, so that it would not be dependent solely on the government. Some of its meetings would be in public, and would take the form of hearings, and its agenda papers and minutes would be publicly available, both in print and on a website. It would be a national body, but could have regional or local branches.
44. The Ofsted inspection system needs to be publicly accountable in relation to issues of race equality and cultural diversity. The forum mentioned above would consider reports on individual schools and local authorities, and thematic reports about national situations. It would discuss and comment on the criteria and methodology used by inspectors, and ways in which the findings of reports could be widely disseminated.

¹ Adapted slightly from *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, Profile Books 2000, paragraph 11.3, page 143.

² E J B Rose et al, *Colour and Citizenship: a report on British Race Relations*, Oxford University Press 1969, page 281.

³ Published by New Beacon Books. The sub-title as 'The scandal of the black child in schools in Britain'. The quotation is from *Black British Literature* (2000) by Cesar and Sharon Meraz at www.cwrl.utexas.edu

⁴ Page 70 and passim.

⁵ Page 8, paragraph 22, of *Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils*, Ofsted 1999.

⁶ Hansard for 17 September 2002. The person giving evidence was Sandra Oliver, Birmingham Partnership for Change.

⁷ Paragraph 3.17 of *Aiming High*.

⁸ *West Indian Children in Our Schools* (The Rampton Report), 1982, paragraph 1 on page 66.

⁹ See paragraph 6 on pages 66/67.

¹⁰ Charts 1 and 3, respectively at paragraph 1.2 and 1.6.

¹¹ See for example *Changing Race Relations* issued by the Uniting Britain Trust. Thousands of copies were distributed. There's a copy in the Islamophobia section at www.runnymedetrust.org/meb.

¹² *Training in racism awareness and cultural diversity*, Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, February 2003.

¹³ From NALDIC's submission to the DfES about *Aiming High*, published on their website.

¹⁴ See paragraph 3.15. However, there are indications (not yet published) that the DfES is re-thinking on this point.

¹⁵ In January 2001 about 85 per cent of all African Heritage primary pupils were in London or the South East.

¹⁶ The notes and recommendations that follow are based closely on Chapter 11 of *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*.