

# Equalities in Education

– memories, endings and what next, autumn 2018



The year 2018 is an eerily apposite year to be recalling equality issues in British history and society, and in British systems and institutions of education.

One hundred years since the Representation of the People Act 1918, and ninety since the Equal Franchise Act 1928. Seventy since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 and the symbolic birthday of multi-ethnic Britain, that same year, with the arrival of SS Windrush.

Fifty since the assassination of Martin Luther King and since Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood speech in 1968.

Thirty since the Human Rights Act and the infamous Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, and since the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (FETO) came into force in Northern Ireland, making it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of religious affiliation and/or political opinion. FETO was later amended and expanded to include other strands of equality too, and in this way it helped lay the foundations for the Equality Act 2010 in the United Kingdom as a whole.

And now in 2018 there is the demise, after 36 years, of a precious resource and reference point for equalities in education, the journal Race Equality Teaching (RET). It is no longer financially viable.

RET was founded by Trentham Books in 1982 as Multicultural Teaching, and acquired its new name in 2002. Since 2010 it has frequently been concerned with all the strands named in legislation, not with race equality alone. Since 2014 it has been an imprint of the UCL Institute of Education Press. Its last ever issue, after 101 previous issues, appeared in June 2018. All issues since 2002 are available at <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/ioep/ret>

The writers and readers of RET over the years included teachers, lecturers, researchers activists, campaigners, parents, community leaders, inspectors, government officials. Most were based in the UK but throughout its 36 years the journal had a strong international dimension as well. Over 1000 articles were published and these included research reports, think pieces, case studies of good practice, personal reminiscences and musings, snatches of autobiography, and topical commentary.

As a chronicle and commentator, the journal operated against a political, legal and educational context that included the Swann Report and the Education Reform Act in the 1980s, and the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry in the 1990s. From 2000 the national and international context included urban disorders; war and terrorism; new developments in equalities legislation; financial crisis and austerity; the diminishing influence of local education authorities, and of their support and advisory services; and President Trump; and BREXIT, and all that.

The context has not gone away. On the contrary, it is more pressing and oppressive than ever. There continues to be a need for a forum such as RET, but widened to include all strands of equality in education. New ways of financing such a venture, however, need to be found.

What may replace RET? The outlook is at present unclear. A first step, though, is to take stock by reviewing and remembering, and paying tribute to, the past. The last issue of RET, accordingly, took the form of a souvenir. In addition to two general articles about the journal's history and concerns it contained about 50 short extracts or quotations from the previous 36 years.

### Continuity and change

The most obvious change to take place in the history of Race Equality Teaching happened almost exactly at the halfway mark. Eighteen years had passed and eighteen (it turned out, though no one knew this at the time, of course) were ahead. The change was to do with the journal's name from Multicultural Teaching to Race Equality Teaching.

The change announced not only something new and fresh, though, but also something continuous and constant – the T in MCT was retained in RET. The

journal was still concerned essentially with T, teaching, and therefore with learning, and with the content of both the taught and the hidden curriculum in schools, and with practical pedagogy and relations and attitudes between pupils and teachers. The concern with T over the decades was vividly seen in articles partially reprinted in the last issue by, amongst others, Dawn Gill, Shahid Ashrif, Berenice Miles, Jane Lane, Gus John, Maurice Coles and Farzana Khan.

The shift from MC to RE ('multicultural' to 'race equality') was not a shift from one topic to another. Rather, it was a shift in the lens that the journal brought to bear on its continuously essential subject-matter. The core point in this shift was once famously expressed by Sivanandan, the great race relations theorist who died aged 94 on 2018. 'Just to learn about other peoples' cultures,' Sivanandan said, 'is not to learn about the racism of one's own. To learn about the racism of one's own culture, on the other hand, is to approach other cultures objectively.' This was emphasised in MCT/RET over the years by many contributors quoted in this last edition, including Gerry Davis, Babette Brown, Sivanandan himself and Arthur Ivatts.

The journal was conceived, planned and launched in the early 1980s, and was the product of conversations and exchanges between John Eggleston, at that time a professor of education at the University of Keele, and Gillian Klein, at that time a librarian employed by the Inner London Education Authority. Each had distinctive in-depth expertise and experience in the field of educational publishing, and both had huge energy and commitment in the field of multicultural and antiracist education. With John's administrative support, Gillian was the journal's founding editor. The enterprise on which they were embarking was not, it's important to remember, in all respects promising, for it contained not only opportunities and unmet needs but also a number of risks and constraints.

Opportunities in the early days included the policy framework provided by the Race Relations Act 1976; the high-profile interim report (the Rampton Report) of a government committee which stated that structural racism was a major problem in schools and society, and indicated that major redistributions of resources were accordingly required; and the wider remit of English Language services all over the country as they became reorganised and professionalised, and relocated as sources of specialist expertise within mainstream schools. There was clearly a need to set up a forum for constructive and collegial deliberation about aims and principles, and for the sharing of relevant research and good practice.

Threats to the journal came from the fact that the field was hugely controversial and stressful, and from the increasing influence exercised by New Right thinktanks on national government and on certain newspapers. The New Right was not only opposed to multicultural education, and correspondingly keen to

promote instead what came later to be known as so-called British values, but also desired major changes in the way education was organised, inspected, funded and controlled. These changes would cause much disruption and turbulence, particularly in England, and would diminish the size and purchasing power of the journal's market.

Nevertheless, the journal founded by Eggleston and Klein flourished for 36 years through the changes and chances of social, educational and political affairs. It was a remarkable achievement. The founders were supported and encouraged by very many other people, and in its turn gave intellectual nourishment and moral support to others, as the last edition recalled and emphasised. But it could not have flourished without the unswerving energy and commitment of its two founders.

Sadly, John Eggleston died when the journal was only half way through its lifetime. Since his death in 2001, the journal was carried forward through inevitable trials and tribulations by Gillian Klein on her own. The last edition was a souvenir tribute not only to the journal itself but also to the person who cared for it, cherished it, kept the show on the road, kept the show fresh and new, year in year out, Gillian.

Other hates, more allies

In *South Pacific* by Richard Rodgers (1902–1979) and Oscar Hammerstein (1905–1960) there is a famous angry song about a function of much 'T' (see above), teaching:

You've got to be taught to hate and fear  
You've got to be taught from year to year  
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear  
You've got to be carefully taught

You've got to be taught to be afraid  
Of people whose eyes are oddly made  
And people whose skin is a different shade  
You've got to be carefully taught

It's now some 70 years since that song was first performed. It still captures crisply and curtly well, however, the context in which Race Equality Teaching was founded some thirty years later, and which was also the context in which in 2018 it went to bed for the very last time.

There are several important points worth commenting on. For example, the song recalls that hatred of the Other is often or virtually always mixed with fear and phobia. The Other is dangerous, threatening, it hates you. The song recalls further that the markers of otherness are thought to be physical and therefore unalterable – ‘they’ can be recognised by, for example, the shade of their skin or the make of their eyes. And it stresses that the teaching of racism is undertaken essentially by a society’s culture and climate of public opinion, not by individuals.

Racism based around physical features is often known as colour racism, and it was with colour racism that MCT/RET was first concerned. But as the 1980s developed it became increasingly clear that physical markers of perceived difference are not the only ones, and in some forms of bigotry they are not the principal ones either. Cultural and religious markers are significant too. The journal needed therefore to be centrally concerned with forms of racism and bigotry such as antisemitism, Islamophobia and anti-Traveller hostility, not with colour racism alone.

Momentum for the broader focus was provided by three reports from the Runnymede Trust – A Very Light Sleeper about antisemitism (1994), Islamophobia, a challenge for us all (1997) and The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, commonly known as the Parekh report (2000). The Parekh report also increased pressure to harmonise Britain’s many different equality laws and regulations and in due course the Equality Act 2010 received royal assent.

The new legislative framework put race and ethnicity on the same legal footing as age, disability, gender, marriage, maternity, religion and sexual orientation. Racism was to be tackled in much the same mix of ways, it followed, as ageism, rejection of disabled people, misogyny, religious intolerance and enmity, and homophobia and transphobia. The campaign for race equality therefore acquired new allies, and new obligations to work cooperatively and supportively with others.

In the field of education this coming together of the different equality strands was valuably brokered and encouraged by a series of national conferences organised and funded in England by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF: later, after the 2010 election, the Department for Education).

There were subsequently special issues of RET sharing information about, and exploring the similarities between, the new legislation's various strands.

### Top-down and grassroots

Throughout MCT/RET's 36 years there was concern not only with governmental leadership on the one hand but also with small-scale pioneering on the other. Regarding top-down developments the journal sometimes cheered and praised but at other times jeered and lamented. In its first few years it cheered (by and large) the Swann report but was profoundly dissatisfied with the government bill heralding the Education Reform Act of 1988. Later it cheered the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report, the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2010.

Top-down measures are essential for re-directing, securing and protecting budget-lines, and for providing legitimacy and a unifying framework. Also, they establish groundrules and criteria for dealing with uncertainties and controversies, and with apathy and foot-dragging. But, though necessary, they are not sufficient. They need to be complemented, rooted, informed and inspired by the actions of individuals and small groups at street-level, so to speak, and they need to foster commitment in minds and hearts.

'Typically,' observed someone at a national conference in 2006, 'we think about training in terms of skills, knowledge and understanding.' She continued:

But whenever there's training which involves the element of race, it has to be more than that. It has to engage hearts and minds, it has to force us to contemplate our humanity. It's actually got to make us think about love and care and concern and kindness. We've got to come to a position collectively, where we agree that guilt and blame have no place at the dining table of shared responsibility.

People of all ethnicities and histories must be present at what this speaker called the dining table of shared responsibility. In the field of education the company at the table has to include not only professional educators but also parents, and children and young people. This was a recurring emphasis throughout Race Equality Teaching's long history. It was beautifully crystallised in, for example, an article entitled 'For All Our Ridwanas' by Teresa Clark (1993). A teacher

describes a teenage pupil, Ridwana, who comes one day to talk to her at the end of a lesson:

I listened in sorrow, but also with a degree of awe, for I felt that she spoke for so many of our students. And I asked her to come and see me after school and to allow me to tape what she was saying. And she came and she talked with the same sad and articulate power and I listened again and recorded her and she has said that I may transcribe (and anonymize) her tape and then use it with staff. For I am sure that staff have no sense of the power and powerlessness, frustration and ambition, that moves her. And she can tell them better than I, but I can provide the space for them to listen. 'Growing up is something you don't want to do. It's something that's wrong with your life. I feel like I'm not being used. They're always putting me to one side', she ended. Depressing words ... But I shall take Ridwana's tape with me and I shall use it, for all our Ridwanas.

## Concerns

'We have to listen,' wrote Michael Rosen in early 2017, 'to people's concerns about women.' He continued:

When the decision was made to let them into the workplace no one thought through the impact it would have in our towns and villages, what impact it would have on public services. Some schools have 50 per cent girls in them. That's bound to have an effect. And women have their own way of talking. They need to learn how to talk like the rest of us. Meanwhile it's those on the lowest rung who are hit the hardest. Women undercut wages. They turn up in droves and down go the wages. I think we need a grown-up conversation about this. Let's stop accusing people of sexism and address real concerns. I'm not anti-women. I've got a wife, and she's a woman, how could I be against women? What I'm saying is if the Labour Party is going to survive we have to listen to what people are saying about women.<sup>i</sup>

Anyone remotely familiar with Rosen's frequently and consistently expressed views on social, cultural and political affairs over the years will readily recognise what he is getting at. They will readily see, that is to say, that he is being satirical. And they will see further that his essential target is not how men talk about women but about how politicians and journalists talk about what they (mis)call immigration.

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The voice in the satire appears in the first instance to be that of a Joe Bloggs, a man in the street or on the Clapham omnibus, a regular guy, an unreconstructed, unashamed, unaware Andy Capp figure. It's only when you get

to the end that it becomes clear the real target is an opinion-leader in a left-liberal political party, not just a follower or ordinary voter. He is someone who almost certainly considers himself to be more enlightened and progressive than others, but who in fact is unable even to listen to and understand himself, let alone anyone else. A satirist's art lies in lulling the audience into a sense of self-righteousness and then, but only then, in driving its message tersely home. The persona in the satire says he wants to listen to people's concerns, but shows he is in fact not capable of listening, only of attributing to others his own thoughtless prejudices.

Of course, Rosen is not suggesting that concerns should not be listened to. Rather his implied argument is that political leaders should have a deeper insight than in fact they have into concerns amongst their followers and potential followers. Otherwise they will merely reflect and reinforce the kind of binary us/them thinking which he is mocking. The features of such thinking are always at least latent at times of personal and social stress, and all too often viciously present, unless conscious efforts are made to guard against them. Us/them narratives are common in discourse about gender, which is Rosen's apparent focus here, and about race, ethnicity, nationality and immigration, which is his real focus.

Real or perceived differences of 'race', ethnicity and nationality can certainly contribute to stress in human affairs, but they are seldom if ever the sole cause of stress. Twenty years ago the Runnymede commission on the future of multi-ethnic Britain, chaired by Lord Parekh, acknowledged that ethnic diversity can be a significant cause of stress in the modern world. It mentioned also, however, several further causes and emphasised that these are equally or more significant. Reference in this connection was made to neoliberalism, globalisation, communications technology, changing relationships between women and men and between the generations, increasing inequality and precarity, the emergence on the world stage of powerful non-state actors, and the collapse of institutions that hitherto over a long period of time had been a bulwark against anxiety and anomie. In their millions people in western societies affected by such sources of stress recently expressed their sense of abandonment by voting for populist causes in elections and referendums,



including the Brexit referendum in Britain and the presidential election in the United States.

### Us/them narratives and the rule of law

One of the hallmarks of us/them thinking is the belief that 'our' values are different from, and superior to, those of 'them'. In different words, 'we' are the good guys, 'they' are the bad. Contradicting simplistic binary thinking of this kind, Alexander Solzhenitsyn famously commented:

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being... Even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains an unuprooted small corner of evil.

Binary oppositions between us and them, and between good and evil, have been particularly evident in the responses of Western countries to terrorist attacks over the last 20 years. Thus in the wake of the 7/7 attacks in Britain in summer 2005, the Home Office proclaimed that respect for the rule of law is a distinctively British value which people in other countries and cultures are not likely to have, particularly if they are Muslim.

Following media hysteria a few years later relating to fake news about an alleged Muslim plot to take control of certain schools in Birmingham,<sup>iii</sup> the Department for Education in England announced that respect for the rule of law should be taught in all schools, and it required Ofsted to monitor compliance. However, the Department and Ofsted have not consistently conducted themselves with respect for due process and the rule of law, and have thus been unreliable guides and instructors. They have compounded their disgraceful behaviour in the Birmingham case by showing contempt for the requirements of the public-sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2010.

The development of the Equality Act 2010 had all-party support throughout the legislative process during which it moved towards royal assent. And, as mentioned above, the legislative process was well supported by the Department for Education. But very shortly after royal assent there was a general election and a new government took over. The education system in England fell into the

hands of ministers and special advisers (spads) who not only ignored their duty to have due regard for equality but also pushed through a series of changes that were likely to increase inequality.

Michael Rosen's satire was directed at the Labour Party. If the next administration is led by Labour an early priority will be to renew its commitment to the requirements of the Equality Act. It is unlikely to be elected, however, if it fails to convince larger number of voters than hitherto that it understands not only their expressed concerns but also their real ones.

A priority for equality organisations and lobbies, it follows, is to put coordinated pressure on the next government to pledge its commitment to the rule of law, and therefore to the Equality Act. A coalition of lobbies representing the different protected characteristics in the Equality Act needs to be joined by campaigns around poverty and deprivation, and therefore social class. Also in the lobby, in the post-Trump and post-Brexit world, there needs to be determination to protect democracy and human rights. 'Oppression,' remarked the Lord Chief Justice in 1999, quoted in an article in Race Equality Teaching about antisemitism, 'does not stand on the doorstep with a toothbrush moustache and a swastika armband. It creeps up insidiously, step by step, and all of a sudden the unfortunate citizen realises it [democracy] has gone.'

The United States has elected Donald Trump to be its president. The 'will of the British people', it is claimed, is to turn their back on Europe. There is a similar mood in many other European countries. More generally there's currently a resurgence of far-right nationalism, xenophobia and tribalism throughout the Western world, egged on by the vast majority of mass-circulation newspapers.

What reasons are there in the face of all this to believe it's reasonable, not a mere fancy, to hope and strive for a better world?

Each person has their own mix of reasons to hope. Among their reasons there is likely to be the realisation that there are more of us than, on bad days, we are prone to think. Only 26 percent of eligible voters in the US voted for Mr Trump. Only 52 per cent of the people who voted in the Brexit referendum voted Leave, and they constituted only 36 per cent of the total electorate. It is dishonest nonsense to claim the referendum result expressed something that can be described as the will of the British people. It is in addition inaccurate to claim

they were motivated solely or principally by xenophobia, as distinct from more generalised concerns relating to social, economic and cultural change.<sup>iv</sup>

It's not at all out of the question, therefore, that a critical mass is emerging that will heed those words of a speaker at a national conference on race equality in education in 2006. We must, she said, 'contemplate our humanity' and must 'think about love and care and concern and kindness. We've got to come to a position collectively where we agree that guilt and blame have no place at the dining table of shared responsibility.'

And it is not at all out of the question that, at that vast table, there will be people whose minds and hearts were in part formed and nourished, directly or indirectly, by the chronicle known as Race Equality Teaching, 1982–2018.

Robin Richardson, associate editor of Race Equality Teaching from 2010 onwards.

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1 Michael Rosen in a blogpost dated 12 January 2017, <http://michaelrosenblog.blogspot.co.uk/>

2 Full information in Countering Extremism in British Schools? the truth about the Birmingham Trojan Horse affair by John Holmwood and Therese O'Toole, Policy Press 2017.

3 See, for example, chapter 9 of The Enemy Within – a tale of Muslim Britain by Sayeeda Warsi, Allen Lane 2017. Research published by the Chatham House Royal Institute of International Affairs in January 2018 shows that anti-Muslim hostility is particularly virulent and common amongst people who feel 'left behind' (<https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/what-do-europeans-think-about-muslim-immigration>).