Paper 26: Messages from research

This paper

This paper is a shortened version of the official summary of The Search for tolerance: challenging and changing racist attitudes and behaviour among young people by Gerard Lemos, published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in March 2005.

The research

The research looked at five projects:

1. Show Racism the Red Card, Stafford
Centred on using professional footballers as anti-racist role models, the project is accompanied by educational resources and complements the PSHE/Citizenship curriculum. In Stafford it is delivered into schools on a 'negotiated access' basis. The research activity was focused in one school, using 'assisted surveys'.

2. You, Me and Us, Peterborough
A programme of activities and workshops, again designed to complement the PHSE/Citizenship curriculum. The initiative has comprehensive coverage in Peterborough's schools and seeks to raise awareness, reduce racism and challenge intolerance. Three schools were encompassed in the case study, again using an 'assisted survey' technique.

3. Diversity Awareness Programme, London Probation Service
This is an intensive and sustained modular programme working on a one-to-one basis with white offenders who have either committed a racially motivated offence or whose behaviour indicates entrenched racist attitudes. This case study comprised in-depth interviews with two young offenders who had taken part.

4. Street Life, Tower Hamlets
This project was a workshop exploring race and racism that formed part of Tower Hamlets' 'Summer University', a voluntary and informal education service offering free learning activities in the long school break. A participatory approach was developed for the research, involving 10 young people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and structured interview techniques.

5. Jubilee Football Tournament, Rochdale
This was a social housing sector initiative intended to build and strengthen relationships between white and Asian young people living in close proximity to each other but in a context where tensions were more evident than familiarity or friendship. The research comprised facilitated group discussions with young people from the respective communities. About 70 young people were involved.

Attitudes and influences

In two of the case study projects (*Show Racism the Red Card, Stafford*, and *You, Me and Us, Peterborough*), substantial numbers of young people were involved – over 550 11- and 12-year-olds in total. In these areas, young people were invited to share their understanding of racism and their perceptions of how others and they themselves viewed different groups of people.

In both locations, nearly all young people understood that being nasty to someone because they were different was wrong, yet most thought some groups of people were disliked because of their race/ethnicity. A sizeable minority in each acknowledged that they disliked particular communities themselves, and around a quarter thought there were too many people from different communities living in England.

Dislike of people from different groups was more marked in the locality with a more multi-ethnic population; within that locality, it was more marked in the case study schools with more multi-ethnic local catchments.

Whilst most of the young people involved in school-based case studies reported no negative feelings towards different communities, a significant minority did express dislike of other groups. Boys were more likely to do so than girls. Young people participating in the projects in multicultural areas and schools were also more likely to express such views.

Refugees and asylum-seekers were prominent amongst groups identified as being 'disliked'. They were perceived as receiving preferential treatment and were sometimes connected to perceived security threats. Other groups identified were other newly arrived communities, for example 'Portuguese'. 'Asians', 'Muslims', 'black people', 'Afghanistanis', 'Iraqis' and 'white English'/'white British' were also specifically mentioned.

The influences on these ideas appeared to be friends and family, local events and circumstances, personal experiences, and media reporting of local, national and international matters. Resulting perceptions, coming from an intermingling of these sources, were often confused.

Feelings of dislike applied to – and were held by – the range of different groups represented across Britain and in the relevant locality. In both localities Asian groups were commonly cited as the targets of dislike, as were refugees and asylum seekers. In Peterborough, the newly arrived Portuguese community was also frequently mentioned by those expressing dislike.

Analysis of the reasons for 'dislike' revealed the following themes:

Security fears/terrorism
"Afghans – Because they hijack planes and kill people."
"People in Iraq … did horrible non-forgiveable actions!"
Dislike of difference
"Coloured people … are different from us."
"ASIANS… are different."

Too many incomers
"Pakistan … are invading our country."
"Asylum seekers – there's too many of them."

Preferential treatment
"Pakistanis, Muslims, Indians, Iraqis – because they do nothing at all for our country and get free housing, food and they have their own country."
"Refugees … they get more than us."

Perceived hostility
"England – because they swear at you."
"Portuguese – because [of] their bad behaviour [and] looking starily."

These ideas had been influenced by various intermingling factors, and often revealed misunderstanding and confusion. Some young people made little distinction between Pakistani people in their own community and Muslim terrorists reportedly from Afghanistan or elsewhere. The events of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had undoubtedly played a part; young people's attitudes had been influenced not just by events themselves but also by the surrounding media coverage and discourse. Well-publicised local circumstances and events also played their part, as did the views of family and friends, and direct personal experience.

Young people generally understood racism as consisting of 'bad thoughts and worse behaviour'. Whilst a sizeable proportion of those surveyed held negative attitudes about some people from different ethnic groups, the vast majority of young people indicated that they felt that unequal or unfair treatment was wrong, suggesting an element of paradox or denial.

The features of successful projects

The projects investigated had a variety of specific objectives and were based in different settings with a range of target audiences. Two were general and school-based, one was a part of a voluntary and informal learning initiative, one was a neighbourhood-based football project, and one an intensive one-to-one intervention with young offenders.

The more generalised school-based projects were assessed positively by the young people and appeared to have been successful in reinforcing the belief that racist bullying and name-calling was wrong. Over 60 per cent of young people in one locality and over 40 per cent in the second reported that the project had made them think or feel differently. Most of the remainder reported no change because they were already aware of, and opposed to, racism. However, a small proportion in each area reported a persistence of their previous negative attitudes:

> "I still felt the same because I don't think it's right to blow up the World Trade Center and have chemical weapons."

> "[My behaviour has not changed] because I don't care."

In contrast, the project working intensively with racially motivated offenders did appear to have some success in achieving a positive influence on deeply entrenched negative attitudes and behaviour.

The evidence of the case studies suggests that important factors in successful interventions designed to change racist attitudes and behaviour in young people are:

- ❑ well-defined objectives (which may extend beyond challenging racist attitudes and behaviour)

- ❑ a clear structure

- ❑ a range of activities, presenters and facilitators

- ❑ sustained activities over a period of time – one-off activities make much less impact

- ❑ encouraging reflection on personal attitudes and experiences, and enquiry into local events and circumstances

- ❑ learning through doing and experiencing, not just listening and talking

❑   seeking to change attitudes and behaviour for the future.

Where next? – objectives of a new approach

The research uncovered some worrying indicators about the relationship between proximity and tolerance. Although not set up to investigate this set of questions, it was notable that the attitudes of young people attending schools in multicultural areas revealed less not more tolerance.

Similarly, one of the projects investigated was specifically concerned with brokering tensions between the young people in neighbouring communities who attended the same schools. This poses some uncomfortable questions – not least to school communities – and certainly indicates that proximity in itself can not be assumed to contribute to current policy goals.

Drawing on the views expressed by young people, the researchers concluded that a successful programme to challenge racism and promote community cohesion requires a sustained educational initiative to:

❑   strengthen everyone's sense of identity

❑   identify, challenge and uproot prejudiced attitudes and behaviour

❑   give insight and empathy into the identity and experiences of others

❑   create an understanding of difference

❑   establish common ground and shared values and interest

❑   encourage and build friendships across divisions which would create long-term mutual obligations.

Projects benefited from well-defined objectives, a clear structure, a range of inputs, sustained activities over a period of time, and a focus on encouraging reflection on personal attitudes and experiences. The researchers concluded that if current policy aspirations to combat racial and religious prejudice and to build social capital between communities are to be met, a sustained educational initiative is required.

Fuller information at http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/0135.asp