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Network 04. Inclusive Education. Session 04 SES 08 B Special Education and Globalisation: Continuities and Contrasts Across the Developed World

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Special Education and minority ethnic young people in England: a continuing issue

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In countries that have developed special educational provision, whether in segregated settings, or 'included' in mainstream, racial, ethnic and immigrant minorities continue to be disproportionately represented. Race, minority status and social class continue to play a significant role in the segregation of students in special schools, or included but separated in mainstream schools via special units, lower sets, streams and tracks. The disproportionate numbers of students from racial and ethnic origins in the expanding categories of special education or candidates for alternative forms of education, has, since the development of public education systems, been analysed by some policy makers and academics as problems of natural incapacities and social and cultural deficiencies, and by others as responses to threats to social order and economic priorities. Over the past fifty years large and small scale research in the USA, Canada, Australia and European countries have long indicated that that minority students are more likely to be over represented in categories of learning disability, mild mental retardation, and emotional and behavioural disturbance. The students are also more likely to be living in poor, deprived areas and attend schools struggling with poorer resources.

In England a history of responses to the children of the poor, has long indicated that any benevolent humanitarian agenda has mostly masked an agenda of social and economic control. The 1597 Poor Law Act allowed "vagrant and delinquent children, of whom the City [of London] is desirous to be unburdened" to be sent to the American colonies. Workhouse schools aimed to eliminate what was considered a hereditary tendency for children to become criminal or poor and were concerned to "remove the threat of social pauperism at the least possible expense to the propertied classes" (Hurt 1988). The undesirables in the lower classes were regarded by Victorian England as danger to the "British race", with women who produced illegitimate children especially contributing to the "degeneracy of the race" (RCCCFM. 1908). Lower class women, especially if black, single parents or teenage mothers, have continued to be regarded as likely to produce children with poor educational achievements and possible delinquency. The inhabitants of British colonies were mainly regarded as naturally inferior, both intellectually and culturally. They were not regarded as a social problem until families migrated from former colonies to the metropolitan country and their children began attending schools designed for white majorities.

In European countries and the USA eugenic and 'race hygiene' movements took hold. In the USA, Terman was a major exponent of the thesis that black, Spanish, Mexican, and Indian children exhibited "racial dullness". "Their dullness appears to be racial ... the whole question of mental differences will have to be taken up anew ... children of this group should be segregated in special classes" (Terman 1916). Yerkes, a President of the Eugenics Society, helped develop 'intelligence' tests for the American army which apparently indicated a high rate of mental retardation among the black soldiers (see Appendix 2). In 1923, Brigham asserted in a study of American intelligence that Nordic immigrants into the USA had 'genuine intellectual superiority' over southern European migrants and black and other minority groups (Brigham 1923). In 1969, Jensen (a student of England's Cyril Burt who falsified his research on studies of twins) claimed that no studies showed that the intellectual abilities of black and white children could be equalised (Jensen 1969) and was still claiming this in interviews in 1999. In 1994 Herrnstein and Murray produced elaborate evidence to demonstrate to demonstrate racial and ethnic differences in cognitive ability

(Herrnstein and Murray 1994) and in the resulting debates fifty-four professors signed a letter in the New York Times supporting the arguments in the book. One of the signatories was Roy Plomin, currently a Professor at Kings College London, who is still working to demonstrate the superiority of heritability over environmental influence (Asbury and Plomin 2014). Eysenck, a previous London University professor and a student of Jensen, had suggested in 1971 that black Americans and also the Irish, were intellectually inferior owing to ‘crimes committed against their ancestors’ but sadly concluded that only the abolition of the proletariat, black and white, would solve problems of lower attainments (Eysenck 1971:150).

Minority Placements in England

From the late 1960s the Department of Education took tentative steps towards collecting information on numbers of ‘immigrant’ children in special schools, using categories of West Indian, Indian and Pakistani. This showed that the Caribbean children were four times over represented in referrals for ‘educational subnormality’. Further information on placement and ‘over-representation’ came from local authorities and small scale research studies (Tomlinson 1981,1982). From 2002 a Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) collected information on every student 5-16 regarding their school placements, attainments, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background. Using this data it was possible to analyse any disproportionate placement in categories of special educational need (SEN) taking account of ethnicity, poverty, gender and age (Strand and Lindsey 2009). Strand later updated the analysis using PLASC and a longitudinal study of young people (Strand 2012). By this time there were 19 official categories of ethnicity and 12 non-statutory categories of special educational need (see Appendix 1). Over the years, attainment ‘gaps’ between white and minority students in mainstream education and placement in lower levels of schooling, have continued to be of political concern, with Black communities objecting to the placements of their children and taking action via supplementary schooling and community action. In special education the analysis of large scale quantitative data appears to come to the same conclusions which qualitative studies have shown for years – that black Caribbean and mixed white and black students, especially boys, are three times more likely to be identified as having moderate learning difficulties and four times more likely to be in the category of behavioural, social and emotional difficulty than other groups.

ESN, EBD and Exclusion

The large number of ‘immigrant’, especially black children, admitted to schools for the educationally subnormal was first noted in the 1960s by the Inner London Education Authority. An ILEA survey reported that ‘misplacement’ was four times more likely for immigrant children. Bernard Coard produced his book *How the West Indian Child is made educationally Sub-normal in the British School System* (Coard 1971) and in 1973 the Department for Education and Science sent a memo to all local authorities noting the West Indian children were four times over-represented in ESN schools and recommended improved intelligence tests and teacher observations. Margaret Thatcher, then Education Secretary, blamed badly structured family life as a cause of lower achievements. Tomlinson (1981) found that school headteachers used referral criteria that closely corresponded to the ‘problems’ they identified concerning black children – that they were likely to be educationally slow, behaviourally troublesome, have disorganised families and low socio-economic backgrounds – a catalogue of explanations that has persisted over the years. Schools for the ‘maladjusted’ then renamed as Emotionally and Behaviourally Disturbed (EBD), later changed to schools for the Behaviourally, Emotionally and Socially Difficulties (BESD). Then Guidance Units, Pupil Referral Units and other forms of alternative education became places for the relegation of minority, especially black students, in the 1980s and 1990s. Schools were also adopting the permissible tactics of straight exclusion from mainstream schooling. By the 1990s, researchers were noting that despite assertion and activity organised around anti-racist and equal opportunity movements, there had been no collective voices concerning special education. Troyna and Vincent pointed out that special education remained de-politicised and regarded as an individual problem to be dealt with in paternal ways, relying on “ideologies of expertism” (Troyna and Vincent 1996).

Expansion via Markets

By the early 1990s, a competitive market in schooling had been established in England, with schools competing with each other for desirable students, policed by a new inspectorate and with league tables of school examination results published in the media. Some 91% of students were in comprehensive schools, with competition for the remaining 164 grammar schools skewing intakes in some areas. The 7% of students in private schools providing 26% taking final examinations at 18. Around 3% of students age 5-16 had what were now Statements of Special Educational Need for more severe disability, and some 18% of all students regarded by their schools as having various learning and behavioural problems. Comprehensive schools could select 10% of students on 'aptitude' and suspend or exclude young people they regarded as problematic. One irony was that schools which took excluded or difficult students would then be regarded as 'failing' schools if, in consequence, their test results were lower. By 2000 the government was worried by increased demands from middle class and aspirant parents for resources for those of their children who had difficulty in competing in schools. This fuelled an expensive 'SEN industry' (Tomlinson 2012).

The out-going Labour government in 2010 identified around 900,000 students, out of some 7 million, placed by schools in School Action categories. This number increased under the new Coalition government, and nearly a million 16-18 year olds were identified as NEETS (not in education, employment or training). From 2014 Statements were to be discontinued and children identified as in more severe need would receive an Education, Health and Care Plan, with the age of leaving education to rise to 18 by 2015. The new government issued a paper promising radical reform in all schools, with a whole section of the paper devoted to the behaviour of poor white working class and black students and their likely low attainments (DfE 2010).

Continuing Issues

The Department for Education and academic researchers were now provided with data documenting school achievements, age, ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status. But there was no comparable data yet on post-16 students. Strand and his colleagues undertook a study of the disproportionate representation of students in the various categories of SEN, calculating the odds ratios of falling into the categories before and after adjusting for age, gender, ethnicity and disadvantage (Strand and Lindsay 2009). They described some categories as judgmental – those which Tomlinson (1982) had described as non-normative categories – where judgements of professionals were crucial, and again found a disproportionate representation of black boys in the mild learning difficulty and behaviourally disturbed categories. Strand used data from a longitudinal study of young people in England to analyse a black-white achievement gap indicating that Black Caribbean students are the only ethnic group making less progress than white British students and that socio-economic status cannot account for the gap (Strand 2012). Explanations revolved around family background, school context and teacher attitude and neighbourhood deprivation. Black students were more likely to be placed in lower examinations groups and more likely to be excluded from school or assigned to BESD schooling. Strand was concerned to point out black African students were not 'over-represented'. These students are likely to be more recent migrants from now developed school systems in Nigeria and Ghana.

A recent issue has been a resurgence of debate on the contribution of genetic inheritance to low cognitive ability, reinforced by developments in neuro-science and behavioural genetics. There is some evidence that hereditarian views are influencing politicians in England. An advisor to former education secretary Michael Gove presented his Minister with a 237 page paper on "Some thought on education and political priorities" (Cummings 2013) which contained a section reviving the century old debate on the relative contribution of genes and environment to school performance. He quoted Terman and Jensen, but his argument depended heavily on the work of Roy Plomin and his colleagues, whose work in the psychometric tradition carrying out studies of twins, has claimed the overwhelming importance of genetic influence in educational attainment. Plomin has claimed that children with special educational needs must be offered an education which "takes account of their genes and their particular learning profile" (Asbury and Plomin 2014:114) and has also predicted that genotyping of DNA variants will eventually allow all children to "have a Learning

Chip, a reliable genetic predictor of the heritable differences between children in terms of their cognitive ability and academic achievement.” (Asbury and Plomin 2014:20). Cummings also introduced Plomin to Michael Gove.

Currently however, explanations for the disproportionate representation of migrant, and minority students in the expanding categories of special education, in lower school groupings, and in school exclusions, are still firmly related to student, family, community, and cultural deficiencies. The assertions that poverty does not explain black over-representation should not be surprising, as middle class black families are also viewed negatively by teachers. Black Caribbean students have especially been penalised over the years by negative stereotyping and treatment to the point where it is a civil rights issue rather than a genetic issue!

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Appendix 1: Categories of Ethnicity and SEN

Ethnic Codes (DfE 2011)

White British, White Irish, Other White Groups, mixed White and Black African. Mixed White and Black Caribbean, mixed White and Asian, other mixed background, Traveller Irish, Roma, Indian, Pakistani, any other Asian, Black African, Black Caribbean, Black Other, Chinese, other ethnic group, unclassified.

SEN categories (DfE 2011)

No SEN, MLD (mild learning difficulty) BESD (behavioural, emotional and social difficulty) SLCD (speech, language and communication needs) SPLD (specific learning difficulty) Other difficulty or disability, PD (physical disability, SLED (severe learning difficulty, HI (hearing impaired) VI (visually impaired, PMLD (profound and multiple learning difficulty) MS (multisensory impairment).

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Appendix 2: Extract from the American Army Alpha Test 1916

Form D.10 Why should you not give money to beggars on the street? Because:

- a. it breaks up families
- b. it makes it hard for the beggar to get work
- c. it takes away the work of organised charities
- d. it encourages living off others

Form E.1 If a man gets tired of his work

- a. he should throw it up
- b. keep at it till the work is done
- c. run away and loaf
- d. make someone else do it

Form C.4 If a man knew he would die in two weeks, he should:

- a. blow in all his money
- b. make his will and straighten out his accounts
- c. go dig his grave
- d. start out on a sight-seeing trip

Form D.6 If the grocer should give you too much money in making change, what is the thing to do?

- a. take the money and hurry out
- b. tell him of his mistake
- c. buy some candy with it
- d. give it to the next poor man you meet

Robert M. Yerkes Memoirs
National Academy of Sciences. Washington D.C.