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Teachers as symbols of societal power: what cultural icon are we?

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Any consideration of the nature and effectiveness of learning must include an analysis of who provides the teaching. In particular, the transmission of culture cannot be considered purely as something that is defined in formal curriculum terms: it is not composed only of what is taught, and the way that it is taught – though it clearly does include these elements – but is also crucially affected by who does the teaching. The hidden curriculum of the staffing of our schools conveys important messages about the culture that we wish to transmit. In an age when the notion of culture is becoming increasingly plural and diverse, we need to ensure that the teaching force – in both schools and in higher education institutions – reflects the composition of our society.

In this paper I will particularly focus on issues of ethnicity, and ethnic representation in the staff-room and in the other professions that work with children and young people. I will be arguing for the importance of ensuring that we have a substantial representation of black, Asian, Muslim and other groups in our teaching force, and in the workforce of youth workers, social pedagogues, etc.. But the same arguments will apply to other diversities in our society – different sexualities, those with disabilities, different social classes. The evidence is that in most European teaching forces the teaching workforce in schools is almost exclusively white, middle-class, heterosexual. Particularly in primary education it is also largely female (apart from in school leadership positions). I will argue that such a teaching force will inevitably – whatever its intentions and ambitions – portray a narrow view of cultural diversity to pupils, and will thus contribute to the reinforcement of racism and xenophobia (and homophobia, Islamophobia, prejudice against those with disabilities, prejudice against working class values, etc.). The same process is true in the universities and higher education institutions that train these professionals – they are almost exclusively drawn from a narrow, white stratum of society.

Why the teaching force should be representative

Why does it matter if the teaching profession reflects the ethnic composition of society? Why should the teaching profession be more representative of the ethnic minorities in European societies? We do not expect all professional (or any other workforce groups) to represent the ethnicities in the population. We have anti-discriminatory laws and policies on recruitment, training places and appointments, which should of course be upheld and enforced: but if this is done, and the teaching profession then has a smaller proportion of teachers from the ethnic minorities – does it matter?

There are several arguments that suggest it is important. Most of these arise from some particular characteristics of the nature of education, and of the way we organise learning in our schools.

- Learning is a formative activity conducted through a variety of processes; *who* conducts this process in an important part of the process.
- Learning is a social process and the people who take on the role of teacher play a critical part in determining the social relationships within which learning occurs. They are put very prominently in a position of authority, trust and power. Designating

a person as a teacher is not undertaken lightly by any society, and important messages – to society and parents, and above all to children - are conveyed in deciding who shall be given the accolade of teacher.

- Learning is undertaken by all children/young people. Many of our other social provisions are episodic and accidental. We do not all use the health service, for example, and the use that most of us make of it tends to be transitory and intermittent. We do not expect to experience a health service in our lives in the same way that we experience educational provision.
- Learning is conducted over a long period of time. Disregarding notions of life-long learning, it is a process that most European societies require all their young people to undergo for a period of at least eleven years.

Making sure that the teaching force is simply 'representative' could be seen as simple tokenism - making sure that there are enough black faces around. But these four characteristics of education make it very important whom we entrust to teach. Having a more representative proportion of teachers is critical because of the character, ubiquity, pervasiveness, duration and importance of teaching as a social activity. There are three specific reasons why we need more teachers from the ethnic minorities.

Firstly, teachers as members of a profession must have the capacity to reflect the full spectrum of cultural and social traditions and systems in their collective professional practice. Each individual teacher brings to her or his work a set of cultural norms and expectations. Good teachers are reflective and self-critically aware of this, but none of us can recognise all the culturally and socially determined mores that we carry. It is important that the teaching profession as a whole can match the range of cultural and social varieties that our society contains. We have a diverse population, with a very wide range of cultures, customs, languages, faiths and beliefs. Our educational system needs to be delivered by teams of professionals who can match that range, in their explicit practice and in their subconscious behaviour and attitudes. Both the formal and the hidden curriculum need to be managed and delivered in a way that reflects the varieties of social practice in our society, and this in turn demands that the teaching profession is drawn fully and explicitly from the whole range of cultures and ethnicities in our society. With such a range of teachers, we can aspire towards delivering an education that has the subtlety and the nuance to make each individual feel that her or his cultural set is acknowledged and valued, thus empowering her or him as a learner. Without such a range of teachers, this cannot even be an aspiration.

Secondly, racism and xenophobia – individual, institutional and otherwise – continue to be major issues in contemporary society. Racism in schools needs to be very explicitly and forcefully challenged – partly because this is the moment in the development of personal value systems when it can be challenged and stopped, and secondly because of its effects on both minority communities and the majority community. Minorities will be disempowered and disenfranchised as learners, with all the social and economic wastage that this implies. The majority groups will develop attitudes of intolerance and an inability to value diversity. Tackling discriminatory behaviour is important in classrooms and schools, but racism is not always explicit and obvious - or even intentional. Racism is very properly an important concern for all teachers, but some of the subtleties of racist practice and behaviour may be more obvious, or more capable of recognition, by teachers who have themselves some direct experience of having suffered from racist behaviours.

Teachers from the majority community, however well intentioned, trained and experienced they are in anti-racist work, will still be unaware of and unable to identify and analyse much of the xenophobia, chauvinism and racism in society.

Thirdly, our ethnic minorities are generally poorly represented in positions of power, authority and prestige in our society. We clearly need more police officers, social workers, accountants, politicians, senior civil servants, captains of industry (and so on) from the ethnic minorities. But teachers are a particular and special category: they are the one face of civil society that every child will meet, every working day, through the whole of their formal education. It is therefore particularly critical that this 'face' of civil power be seen, visibly and explicitly, to represent all of our society. This is where such inclusiveness is essential. The presence of teachers drawn from all the ethnic groups of our society (and equally, from all the ranges of disability, from all the sexualities, from all social classes) will mean that firstly, all pupils – white majority just as much as ethnic minority – will recognise that members of the minorities have as much power and prestige as any other citizen, and secondly, that pupils who themselves come from the ethnic minorities will recognise that they too can and should aspire to excellence, esteem and authority.

What is not being argued here is that we need 'black' teachers in order to teach 'black' children. There is an argument put forward, which I reject explicitly, that somehow only ethnic minority teachers can properly handle minority ethnic pupils. This is sometimes put in behaviour management terms – 'unruly inner city children' [racist subtext: black children} can best be handled ['contained'] by teachers drawn from the same community. It can also be put in terms of necessary aspirational role models – we need minority ethnic teachers to demonstrate to minority ethnic pupils that they can achieve educational success. Both of these arguments do two things: they problematise the presence of diversity in our societies, so that 'they' become a difficulty for 'us' that 'we' must solve; and they trivialise and ghettoise minority ethnic teachers, so that they are taken on purely on account of their origin, so that they can 'deal with' (either by containment or by giving role models) to these 'problem' children.

How representative is the current teaching force of ethnic minorities?

It appears to be almost impossible to answer this question precisely for any state in Europe. The International Labour Office commissioned a working paper *The Recruitment of Educational Personnel* (Brandt and Rymenans, 2000) which makes some passing references to the situation: noting that classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse worldwide, they asked their members to respond to a questionnaire: 'the response was scant: either most countries do not regard this issue as significant … or they do not take special measures to deal with the perceived barriers' (p 32). The ILO perspective was that the need was for minority ethnic staff who could teach refugee or immigrant students in their mother tongue, and are themselves from the minority population. The USA is seen as having made particular efforts, but there appears to be an assumption that the need for a greater proportion of minority ethnic teachers is in order to teach minority ethnic children

More is known about the situation in the UK (more specifically, England and Wales). Here we know that the 2001 Census has found that 9.1% of the population of England categorised themselves as being of minority ethnic origin other than White (White British, White Irish White other): 2.9% said that they were Black or of mixed Black and

White origin (which category allows respondents to categorise themselves as Black British, Black African, Black Caribbean and Black other), and 5.4% categorised themselves as of Asian origin (meaning particularly from the south Asian subcontinent – Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi or mixed Asian and White), and 0.7% were categorised as Other. Several points are of note in the UK context. Firstly, people in these categories are not termed 'immigrants': many have been settled in the UK from the 1950s onwards, and many are third or fourth generation (there has been some black settlement in Britain since at least the 1600s). Many speak only English, sometimes with strong English regional accents. They participate in political and social life as do other citizens, and have a variety of different formal statuses. There is a high and increasing level of inter-ethnic partnership and marriage, and the number of children of mixed ethnic origin is rising very sharply. This situation is in distinct contrast to several other European nations.

This population is, despite its long history in the country, relatively young, and there are consequently a higher proportion of minority ethnic pupils in schools. The 2002 school census conducted by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) shows a minority ethnic population of statutory school age of 12.9%.

There have been concerns for many years at the low numbers of people from the ethnic minorities who are entering the teaching profession. Statistics have not been collected nationally on the numbers and distribution of ethnic minority teachers (Mahony and Hextall, 2000, p 110, reporting conversations with the CRE and the DfEE). A joint regional conference of the Teacher Training Agency and the Commission for Racial Equality in 1998 promised that ethnic minority data would be collected (TTA/CRE, 1998, p 6), but this has not been done.

A recent study conducted by the Institute for Policy Studies in Education has now calculated that only 2.4% of the teaching population in England is of minority ethnic background (Ross *et al*., 2003). This amounts to about 9,000 teachers in all, and is based on a variety of surveys of fractions and samples of the teaching profession.

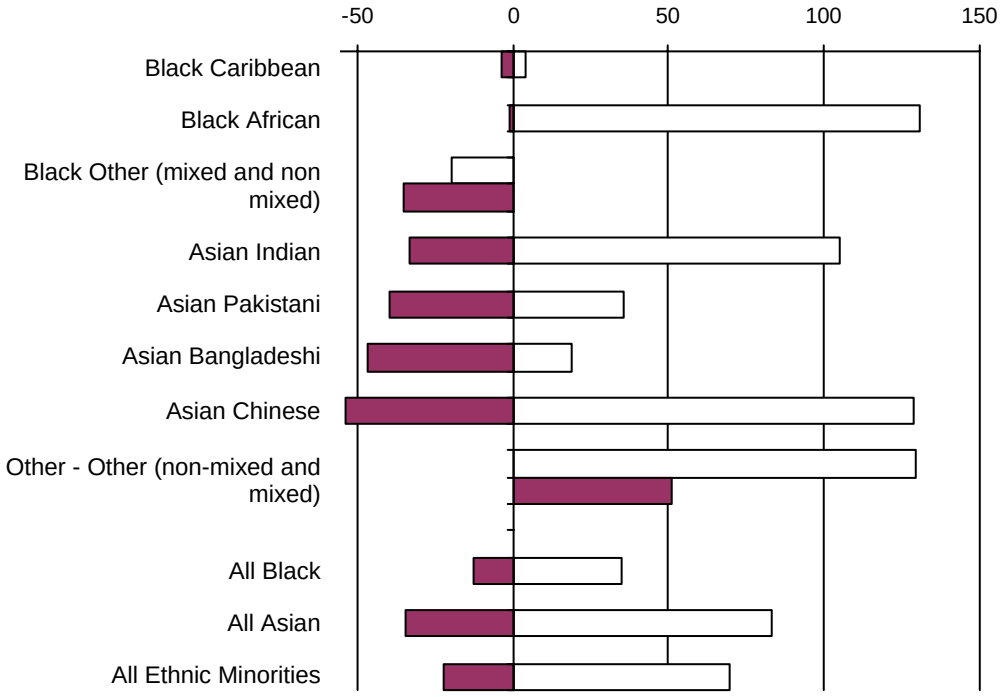
The Teacher Training Authority is making nation-wide attempts to recruit more teachers from the minority communities, but it is noticeable that there are wide variations in the proportions attracted to different institutions. In 2000, only 6% of primary student teachers, and 7.5% of secondary student teachers, were from ethnic minority backgrounds: the TTA's target is for 9% of recruits to be from such backgrounds by 2005-6. This should be compared with the 15% of all (home) undergraduates who are from ethnic minority backgrounds. There is a higher participation of ethnic minorities in higher education than the white population, confirming the conception of minority ethnic underachievement as mythical (Osler, 1998, p 19): some ethnic minority pupils can achieve relatively higher standards that their White counterparts. However, this current analysis does not take account of *which* higher education institutions were admitting these students: it may well be that many of the ethnic minority students in higher education are concentrated in the less prestigious institutions. This level of participation is not matched in participation in Initial Teacher Education courses. The overall under-representation of the ethnic minority population is about 70% of what might be expected. However, participation by ethnic minority students is not evenly distributed between the minority groups.

Table 1 shows the degree of over- or under-representation that a particular ethnic group has in higher education/Initial Teacher Education, based on the variance in participation

rate from the representation rate in the population of HE-going age. The dark bands show university enrolment, the light band ITE enrolment. Note that for almost every ethnic minority group, a higher proportion than might be anticipated is enrolled in HE fulltime courses. Conversely, they are nearly all under-represented in Initial Teacher Education courses.

Table 1 Percentage divergence in University entrance and in Teacher Training entrance rates from the distribution of ethnic minorities in the population (2000)

Light band: University degree entrants 2000 Dark band: Teacher Training entrants 2000



Sources: TTA Performance Indicators 2001; UCAS admission data 2000; Population data for 15 – 24 year olds based on QLFS data (as analysed by Schuman, ONS, 1999)

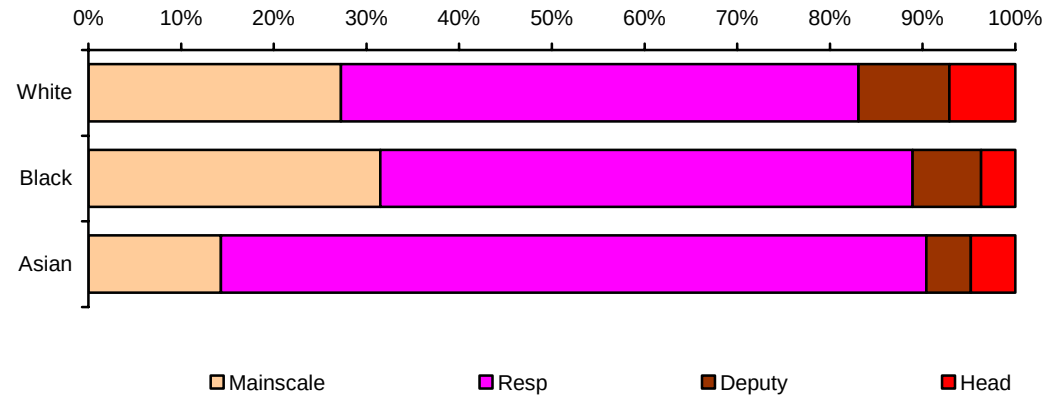
Note of explanation: If the proportion of any ethnic minority group that entered either University or Teacher Training was the same proportion as that group is found in the population as a whole, then the representation would be zero in the diagram. If a higher proportion enters than expected, then a positive percentage is shown - twice as many as expected would be 100%. Conversely, if a lower percentage enters, then a negative figure is shown.

It is also of concern that ethnic minority teachers, who remain hard to attract into the profession, say that they are less likely to stay in teaching. One of the reasons that teachers may leave the profession is lack of opportunities for promotion and progression, or a feeling that promotion would not be possible (see examples of this in Osler, 1997 and - at a much earlier time - Ranger, 1988).

We analysed our data to see how ethnic minority teachers were represented in the various stages of career development that are open to teachers. It is clear that there are a preponderance of teachers from the ethnic minorities on the main-scale grades. Disparity

is also found at the higher levels of responsibility. But many ethnic minority teachers are relatively recently qualified. It could be argued that this is why there is the promotion disparity, and that when these teachers have acquired more experience, they too will be promoted to more responsible posts. To test this hypothesis, the following analyses select only those teachers who have had substantial experience since qualification, excluding the more recently qualified teachers and also teachers who have had more that twenty-five years experience (because of the age profile, these will be almost exclusively White).

Table 2 Pattern of positions in school hierarchy held by teachers who qualified between 1976 and 1986



Source: IPSE survey of teachers in 22 LEAs, 2000 - 2001

7.1% of all White teachers are Headteachers compared with only 3.7% of Black and 4.8% of Asian teachers. This parallels the situation discovered by Ranger in the early 1980s (1988).

It is most unlikely that there is such a substantial difference in the rate of applications between White and ethnic minority candidates for these posts that it would explain the differences noted above. The conclusion has to be that, taken as a whole, the appointment process in a proportion of these schools works in such a way that Black and Asian teachers are significantly less likely to assume positions of authority than White teachers. This outcome arises despite the fact that all educational authorities concerned have Equal Opportunity policies that require their schools to manage appointments in a non-discriminatory manner. Although there may be no conscious policy on the part of governing bodies to operate in a discriminatory way, the outcome that can be observed by aggregating all their individual acts of appointment must suggest that we are observing institutional racism in the career development process. It must be emphasised that institutional racism does not mean that conscious or deliberate acts of racism are necessarily taking place, but that the systems operate in such a way that the outcomes are discriminatory.

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