

BRIG Position Paper: Education for a superdiverse city.

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BRIG Entry "1960s 'Teaching English to Immigrants' "

Birmingham was one of the first authorities to set up specific service for the newly arrived immigrant children and adults. A department for the teaching of English as a Second Language (DTESL) was set up in 1960."

"By 1968 there were 52 fulltime and some part time peripatetic teachers teaching some 2000 children in withdrawal classes, with another 250 children in language centres. The Association of Teachers of Pupils from Overseas (ATEPO) was established in the West Midlands."

Response from D.E.E.P. including eye witness account working in the Department from 1968 - 1982, comment on education and equality in U.K. and Birmingham in a sociological study, 1979

Colonial Immigrants in a British City, Rex and Tomlinson 1979. Chapter 6: "Black immigrants, schools and the class structure."

The "traditional preoccupation of the sociology of education in Britainwith the selection of children with different occupational or class backgrounds for certain types of schooling."

This includes the "relative chances of non-manual and manual workers' children getting into and staying in state grammar schools". The added complication of the availability of fee-paying schools is added to a situation leading to "a passport" to prestigious education and career paths with the possibility of class mobility.

In this scenario what is the position of "black immigrants" and the class system in education?" If they have sufficient money "there is no political obstacle to entry to the super-privileged positions." This is not the case for most "Asian and West Indian immigrants": will they "be pressed into the lowest destiny of all in the disadvantaged urban school"?

Birmingham moved against selection setting up a system of consortia in the early seventies and "by 1976 only 7 voluntary aided grammar schools remained". (p 175). he largest concentration of pupils of "New Commonwealth" origin was in four consortia, two of which were in Handsworth.

Birmingham "pioneered one response to the presence of the children of immigrants by setting up the TESL department. Rex states "the department does not offer any services specifically for West Indian children unless they have severe language problems." He quotes the Birmingham post reporting a claim by the education committee saying "Birmingham is quite consciously and deliberately pouring money into immigrant areas". (p.184). However Rex then states that apart from setting up the DTESL "Birmingham's response to the increasing numbers of immigrant and black children born in the city has

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been minimal. The education department has preferred to regard black minority children simply as disadvantaged."

From 1967 heads could only admit children who had been registered at one of two offices.

Rex notes the address by Bernard Coard on "How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System." He mentions a letter from the DES in 1973 confirming 4 times as many West Indian Children in ESN schools together with "unclear procedures for classifying children" as such. At the time of writing he says "the DES has not commissioned any major study of possible low achievement...."

(By 1985 two reports had appeared: the Rampton (1979) and Swann (1985) Reports. They set up an ongoing debate which still has to be settled concerning the role of Racism in underachievement.)

R.D. (Bob) Chapman Head and founder of the DTESL. Response to Paper from the Birmingham Association of the National Union of Teachers: a "slow learners" questionnaire.

He considers the figures shown "to be subjective assessments concerning numbers of children considered to be slow learners (i.e. in any sense other than that of speaking English as a second language or dialect.) He says that many teachers in the DTESL "have expressed concern that children have been assessed as E.S.N. or slow learners because of lack of intelligence, rather than language difficulty. This seems to be the case. some feel, particularly with West Indian children." He mentions a teacher working in one of the city's secondary ESN schools saying "while she feels that the few Asians at the school are justifiably there, she has reservations over some admissions of West Indian children."

Bob Chapman felt DTESL staff feel they have gained from being involved rather than having formal training initially. Many have taught abroad and others have attended courses (one such at Aston University gave accreditation in TESL). The department meets weekly (at Stainsby Avenue, Hockley then) and members are able to talk to experts within and outside the department. Teachers working in Birmingham schools attend courses put on at the Language Centre including courses put on for probation teachers annually. They are well attended.

A personal account of working in the DTESL 1968-1982

I joined the DTESL in 1968. I worked at the Sparkhill Centre, one of the 3 secondary reception centres where pupils came for up to 3 terms before being transferred to a school near their home. After 2-3 years I became a peripatetic teacher of ESL in primary and secondary schools including in and around Bordesley and Handsworth. in 1972 I was appointed as one of 5 senior members of department with the task of providing help for teachers working in multicultural Birmingham. This involved setting up a resource centre, available to teachers in Birmingham schools. Two teachers joined me to form the Multicultural Resource Unit (MRU), Kuldip Singh Rai and Lance Dunkley.

Rex points out that both nationally and locally children from the former Commonwealth to schools in Britain are characterised as "disadvantaged". That could include not being able to speak English fluently, or to skin colour. As a consequence many were placed in special education provision or ESN schools. in short what has been set up, including in Birmingham, has not been according to in-depth consideration of educational needs with a worked out plan, but placing children into the existing provision already known to be

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disadvantageous to particular groups. There had been a focus on poor educational performance by White working class boys in the years leading up to the admission of children of migrants from the New Commonwealth, judged to be "disadvantaged" in a variety of ways. This included not being able to speak English and having a different skin colour. The term used by Rex in provision was set up as a "panic" measure. The debate on reasons one reason many believed to contribute to "disadvantage" was racism. This was later to be hotly contested later in the lead up to the Rampton and Swann Reports (1979 and 1985) where Lord Swann and Education Secretary Keith Joseph were among those who were in denial the existence of Racism as a key factor. Members of the Swann Committee hotly contested this. Carlton Duncan as a member of both committees testifies to this elsewhere in D.E.E.P's submission.

In 1973 H.E.R. Townsend, the leader at the National Foundation for Educational Research (N.F.E.R.), then considered at the forefront of responding to education appropriate to the demographic changes occurring in the U.K. A project sponsored by the Schools' Council "Need and innovation in Multi-racial Education" (report appended) was held in conjunction with the Birmingham Association of the National Union of Teachers (BANUT) who were active in holding meetings and conferences and set up panels on multicultural and anti-racist issues. In 1970 they devoted their annual Easter Conference to looking at Multicultural Education. These conferences were attended by the the Chief Education Officer to Birmingham together with a number of senior inspectors. One of the speakers was A. Sivanandan, a leading figure in the antiracist movement in Britain as Director of the Institute of Race Relations (IRR) and editor of their publication "Race and Class". One of the inspectors, a Mr Heelas, discussed with him what he was going to say. That evening sat with a group of us, then considered "young" teachers and told us that he was told not to include certain parts as he intended. Needless to say he didn't comply.

Carlton was one of a number of distinguished speakers who came to address staff in the DTESL. He was then Deputy Head Teacher at Sydney Stringer School in Coventry. This gives an indication of the wider scope of the D.T.E.S.L. than the name implies. Professor Stuart Hall, Director of Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was another progressive speaker. In 1982-3 when I had a year's secondment at the London University Institute of Education as it was then for an M.A. degree "Education in Urban Areas". I used materials including from "The Empire Strikes Back" and John Rex's studies of Sparkbrook and Handsworth referred to above.

Birmingham Association of the National Union of Teachers set up panels and called meetings on multicultural and anti-racist education. As a delegate on Birmingham's Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education I assisted in the production of a Handbook for Religious Education. This included sections on major faiths in Birmingham with a controversial section on "non-religious stances for living", including Humanism and Communism. In 1978 I received a letter from John Crawford, then CEO for education in Birmingham to lead a working party to "develop material for the R.E. Handbook concerning Christianity and West Indian pupils". Roswith Gerloff, a noted authority on Black Churches and Theology was involved and the result was published in a supplement to the existing handbook in 1982.

The DTESL I would describe as lively and inspiring with many experienced teachers from a very wide range of backgrounds. Discussions were at a high level consequently. The Association of Teachers of English to Pupils from Overseas (ATEPO) was set up in Birmingham in 1965 along with other local bodies across the U.K. They later came together to form the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME). However

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Birmingham members felt they wanted to retain independence and the organisation changed its name to the Society for the Advancement of Multicultural Education (SAME). It produced regular magazines, "Contact" and "Brumic", from 1977. These were produced and printed at the Language Centre where a printer was acquired. No computers available for this, just Letraset and plenty of ink! Members of the DTESL wrote articles on a range of subjects. Adwowa Fowa (Graecia Tewiah) from Ghana contributed articles on Akan Stools and on Kente Cloth and Adinkra Printed garments, and the symbolism inherent in their design. Jean D'Costa, an acclaimed writer of children's books gave us a book list of Caribbean children's literature. I began to get an understanding of language in the Caribbean and attitudes to Creole. Her first writing was in English, then she used Creole for dialogue and eventually used it more extensively. It drew considerable debate both in the Caribbean and here in Britain concerning the use of patois in schools. Brumic was designed for children by Carole Underwood, a teacher in Birmingham who was appointed as an officer in the CRE. A poetry competition was run where the winner was to go to the BBC studio then at Pebble Mill. Amber Lone, a pupil at a primary school, who won went on to be a writer and obtain a Master's Degree and had several plays produced at Birmingham Repertory Theatre.

Later Professor John Figueroa, then working on Third World Studies at the Open University visited schools in Birmingham and Sandwell with us talking to staff in English Departments about works by Caribbean authors he knew personally, including his own prose and poetry. Kuldip Rai began to develop a language development course along with some secondary schools where children would be taught to understand language before starting to learn a specific language. The idea that learning can only take place through English is a complete nonsense yet there continues to be an insistence that English and only English is allowable. Schools in Europe operate with a totally different understanding. I found teaching young people in secondary school that some from Pakistan and Mirpur varied in their ability to use English to learn. Some I found to understand maths and science since they had learned and understood concepts in their first language. Transference to English was not a problem for them.

We worked with local shops and voluntary organisations giving opportunities to contact communities. This included the Harriet Tubman Bookshop in Handsworth which had a huge range of material across the curriculum. Bert Bate, Manager of the Book Room in the Centre of Birmingham, took a group of us to the Black Book Fair in London regularly and would purchase books we recommended to take back to the shop. This gave us the opportunity to select authentic material and meet authors and other distinguished people.

We began to set up a data base where teachers and others could search for books and materials on a topic and then print off a list of appropriate works. This was before the World Wide Web was available. Children were stimulated using computers to enter data on books.