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MULTICULTURAL FICTIONS

by

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Introduction

What I have attempted to survey, in the following pages, are elements of the discourse of multiculturalism. The links between these elements are neither obvious, nor part of a logical progression although each element does, to some extent, assume its relationship to its next stage, unproblematically, in its implied reader. From the generalities of National social policy addressing local policy, from educational theories addressing curricula change in schools to teachers, classes and sets of texts. The universalised application of aims that ultimately have the classroom at their core.

Trying to consciously disrupt this process I have found difficult, but necessary. Working from the apex of the triangle down through an ever expanding area to the subject or audience at the base can limit analysis to being critical of the links already provided by the terms of debate. As a teacher in the East End of London in a multiracial school it was easy to acknowledge that yes, you, your classroom, your relationships were being addressed but it was impossible to relate the terms in which multiculturalism was and is being formulated to the circumstances of the classroom situation.

As a preliminary to further work I wanted to establish who was speaking what to me as a teacher and what was being assumed about the ultimate recipients, the students themselves.

I have, thus, tried to make each element of the multicultural debate problematic not just in terms of its relationship to other elements but also the internal contradictory nature of the aims of each part. The dissertation, therefore, does not flow through State Policy, educational theory, educational interventions to texts, nor is it intended that it should.

What I am questioning is the curious silence about, avoidance of, or inadequacy in, addressing Racism. The conflicts and contradictions that are absent that lead to the following absurd dialogue:

Schools: We're all equal here.

Black Students: We KNOW we are second-class citizens, in housing, employment and education.

Schools: Oh, dear Negative self-image. We must order books with Blacks in them.

Black Students: Can't we talk about the Immigration Laws or the National Front?

Schools: No, that's politics. We'll arrange some Asian and West Indian Cultural Evenings.

It may sound contradictory to say that what unifies is what is absent but I have tried to address this silence. The refusal to acknowledge the effects of an institutionalised racist society means that multiculturalism is limited to plastering over cracks. I hope the concluding section on language begins to formulate the basis for an analysis of all the questions that this paper raises but hasn't answered.

1.

MULTICULTURALISM IN ITS CONTEXT

1. Multiculturalism and the State

The era of the educational expansion and curricula innovation of the sixties and early seventies has been replaced by an atmosphere of retrenchment and defensiveness. The Labour Government's 'Green Paper' on Education regretted the neglect of 'the building blocks of education' and appealed for a concentration on 'the basic skills of literacy and numeracy'. Methods of National Assessment are being investigated by the A.P.U. and are seen by teachers as potentially threatening to their autonomy and 'professionalism'. Both major political parties agree on the need for educational economic restraint.

Resource constraints were not always taken into account during the period of rapid development of the curriculum and in teaching methods that occurred in the last decade; they must be borne in mind in any proposals for the future.

(Green Paper, 1.18.)

However, an aspect of the curriculum that is regarded as a source of growth and innovation by the State, Educational Institutions, teachers' organisations and teachers themselves is the concept of multiculturalism.

A motivating force behind this need for change is educating for a more democratic society.

Unequivocally the commitment is to all. Just as there must be no second-class citizens, so there must be no second-class educational opportunities.

(I.L.E.A. '77)

The need for multicultural education is not merely regarded as an ideal but seen as practically necessary in constructing the society of the future.

Ours is now a multiracial and multicultural country, and one in which traditional social patterns are breaking down..... Our educational system is adapting to these changes. The comprehensive school reflects the need to educate our people for a different sort of society, in which the talents and abilities of our people in all spheres need to be developed and respected; the education appropriate to our Imperial past cannot meet the requirements of modern Britain.

(Green Paper, 1.10-1.11.)

2.

The reference back to 'our Imperial past' situates the need for change in the historical context of a 'natural' and evolutionary development and implies an inevitable progression where 'traditional social patterns breaking down' disguises the antagonism, conflict and contradiction present in this process.

An essential component of the multicultural curriculum is presented as being a reflection of 'our need to know about and understand other countries'. Present and future society is seen as being 'complex' and 'interdependent' where many of Britain's problems require international solutions.

A relationship is made between complex, international but inter-dependent economic and political problems and policy through social policies, here specifically educational, to the classroom. Schools should

.....tackle with sustained enthusiasm the problems of children from other cultures or speaking other languages and make a microcosm of a happy and co-operative world. (Foreword)

The principal mechanism in this logic is reflective; that a classroom can be a microcosm of society. But it is also causative; that the creation of 'happy and co-operative classrooms' will have an effect on the wider society, aiding, in fact, the creation of a 'happy and co-operative' world.

This portrayed relationship between schools and State policy needs to be made problematic for a number of reasons.

The 'Green Paper' and the I.L.E.A. Report are official documents voicing the interests of the State, its institutions and that of its representatives. These interests are presented as being identical to those of its citizens. A consensus is assumed of interests, problems and solutions. One of the linguistic methods by which this shared identification of interests is secured is the continual use of 'our' and 'we'.¹

Inherent contradictions and conflicting interests, economic, political and social within and between racial, sexual or class groupings are contained by, and subsumed under, an apparent unity of interests. The philosophy is essentially pluralist, ignoring inequalities or an institutionalised differentiation of interests. Apparent unity means that the social construction of inequality cannot be raised for questioning and investigation. For example, increasingly rigid Immigration Laws specifically designed

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to limit Black entry to Britain are not in the interests of the Black community. But these laws, as other instances of Institutionalised Racism, such as Police harassment, inequalities in Housing and Employment etc., actually construct certain racial groups as more equal than others. These institutional 'actualities' belie the shared 'National Interest' that the 'Green Paper' addresses.

Within this context of the wider implications of social, political and economic Racial policy it becomes ludicrous to assume that schools can counteract, and eventually eradicate, that complex phenomenon Racism. The document implicitly accepts that increased knowledge, that schools as institutions can convey, can educate for a different type of society without regard to any structural changes in the present social formation.

Predominantly, in the multicultural debate, all issues whether economic, e.g. the over-representation of Black youth in unemployment statistics or of a socio-political nature concerning equality of opportunity or the development of varying talents and abilities, become centrally focussed around Black educational failure.

....There is some evidence that disproportionate numbers of people from ethnic minority groups are low achievers in terms of educational standards, have low expectations and aspirations, and lack confidence in the education system which itself appears not fully to take advantage of the vitality and richness to be derived from a multicultural society.

(I.L.E.A., '77)

The 'problem' is thus pre-defined as being that of the ethnic minorities themselves.

Support for the multicultural approach is wide. From the D.E.S. and the I.L.E.A. to teachers' organisations such as the National Association for the Teachers of English (N.A.T.E.) and the National Association for Multiracial Education (N.A.M.E.) to regional groups such as All London Teachers Against Racism and Facism (A.L.T.A.R.F.). With the exception of a recent draft discussion document, produced by the latter organisation, which is addressed at a later stage, there is little debate about what is understood by the concept, multiculturalism. It appears to be generally accepted within debate as a 'good' and necessary educational approach. But, before proceeding to an analysis of what this concept is, it is necessary to examine the variety of terminology between these educational bodies and present in the documents they produce. Multicultural, multi-ethnic and multiracial are frequently used as

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interchangeable descriptions and lead to gross generalisations and a lack of cultural differentiation.

A non-controversial definition could describe Race as referring to

...a group that is socially defined on the basis of physical criteria. A similar concept, often confused with race, is ethnic group which too is socially defined, but on the basis of cultural criteria. Because cultural differences often accompany physical differences, there is a strong tendency to lump physical and cultural differences under the term 'race'.

(Jones, '72, p117)

Within this definition belief in the superiority of one's own ethnic group would be ethnocentrism.

However, what this definition lacks, and what is frequently absent in the educational usages of these terms, is any concept of hierarchy, either between or within racial and ethnic communities. The interchangeable nature of these terms within educational debates is indicative of assumptions of cultural autonomy. First, an indigenous cultural autonomy is assumed present into which other cultures can be integrated, ignoring any class or gender differences, in favour of a National homogeneity. Generalisations are then made, in the same manner about Carribean and Asian cultures.

There is, therefore, no concept of dominant and subordinate national cultural differentiation, either indigenous or migrant, and an absence of the recognition of the existence of racism as it relates to the possession of control, authority, influence over other groups, and forms of resistance.

The logic of multiculturalism is deceptively simple. A multiracial, multi-ethnic society should reflect or represent cultural diversity in its schools.

This is, of course, an absurd view of culture, a nationalist one. It lumps the 'values' and the 'assumptions' of working class culture, the ideas and interests that come out of the working class British, together with those that emerge from Britain's imperial history and high cultural artefacts.

(Dhondy, '78)

5.

It is not the opinions of racial and ethnic minorities that is voiced through multiculturalism. Nor are official documents or educational theories about the multicultural curricula addressed to them directly. Rather, racial and ethnic minorities are the object of discussion, predefined as constituting 'the problem'. The audience is the white middle-class group of educationalists that have to contain/deal with the 'problem'.

I wish to illustrate these general terms of reference more specifically by referring closely to a publication 'Positive Image, Towards a Multiracial Curriculum' by Robert Jeffcoate. This book is a recent ('79) publication and has been widely reviewed. 'Issues', a twice-termly paper produced by N.A.M.E. acknowledges that this book will be widely read and used by student teachers, teachers on in-service training courses and displayed in Teachers' Centres.

The book stems from work completed for the Schools' Council project on Multiracial Education which has not yet been published because of its controversial nature. It examines general theoretical issues as well as focussing upon the curriculum changes within one discipline, English.

It is interesting also because Robert Jeffcoate writes not just from the point of view of an educational theorist but also as a practising teacher. The multiracial curriculum he describes is the one implemented in his department in a school in the West Midlands.

1. See J. Donald Green Paper: Noise of Crisis in Screen Education, Spring '79, No.30, pp 13-49 for an exploration of the relationship between the linguistic and the institutional.
2. Multiculturalism from Theory to Practice.

Robert Jeffcoate argues for a combination of three justifications for the multiracial curriculum.

..... racial minorities are entitled to expect that their cultures will be prominently and positively represented in the school curriculum.

(Jeffcoate, '79 p. 26)

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He approves that, in the United States, this notion is enshrined in Federal and State Legislation and comments

.....in this country, perhaps because the debate about race has been confounded with the debate about immigration, it has yet to secure a firm purchase.

(p.26)

The next justification,

.... rests on the traditional view that one of the school's tasks is to present its pupils with an accurate picture of the society, and world, in which they are growing up; unquestionably other races and cultures are important elements in this picture.

(p.26)

And finally,

.....a curriculum which is multiracial involves pupils in more stimulating, interesting and challenging learning experiences than one which

The author rejects the justification for a multiracial curriculum

.....premised on the assumption that British Society suffers from an endemic malaise, racism, which has acquired the status of a cultural norm and moulds children's attitudes.

(p.26)

Robert Jeffcoate dismisses this mode of thought as 'pathological' and 'tendentious' and liable to result in 'heavily authoritarian' teaching.

There are many problems here. First, racial or ethnic minority groups have no autonomous control over any part of the multiracial curriculum, or, consequently, how their cultures are to be 'prominently and positively' represented in the school curricula. Indeed, Robert Jeffcoate does not find it necessary, in his book, to consult the views, opinions or publications of the various black community groups engaged with educational issues.

To feel that debates about race are 'confounded' with debates about immigration is to ignore their structural and historical inter-relationship. The economic and political forms of exploitation and dominance of Imperialism used 'race' as a mechanism. Now, in the late seventies, a different form of colonialism is being experienced within the 'Mother Country' of that colonial system. The nature of the relationship has changed, specific to the two historical moments but race is still 'the issue'. For example, White immigration, in the 'commonsense'

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parameters of immigration as 'issue' has become disregarded as the immigration policies of successive governments are designed to prevent non-whites from entering Britain. It is quite clear who the 'them' refers to when 'we don't want any more of them' is spoken. In effect the word 'immigrant' has become synonymous with 'Black'. It is not, therefore, merely that the issues of race and immigration have become confounded with each other but that Immigration Laws and the consensus over the presentation of this whole area of debate is, profoundly, racist.

Robert Jeffcoate does not acknowledge how institutionalised racism, whether the above or in housing, employment or in education can, and does, effect the curriculum of a school and the attitudes of pupils. To objectify, as a curriculum aim, the promotion of racial self-respect and inter-racial understanding Robert Jeffcoate feels would threaten the autonomy of pupils, arguing that it is for them to determine what they should be. Isolating the individual ignores the collective struggle to gain racial respect that has to be fought and won. To adopt a positive anti-racist stance Robert Jeffcoate defines as authoritarian, whilst he, he states, is 'a child-centred progressivist'. (1)

Robert Jeffcoate parallels the position of minority race children with that of working-class children in relation to the culture of the school which, being synonymous with the culture of the dominant middle-class, is likely to disparage the language, expectations and behaviour that the working-class child brings to the school. (2) Minority race children, he argues, are liable to be in an even more acute position. The purpose of the multiracial curriculum is to 'rectify these omissions, imbalances and inequities'.

That representatives of these minority communities should be involved in this process is rejected by Robert Jeffcoate in the most ethnocentric manner. He feels it 'extremely unlikely' that the mode of rectification would be 'entirely acceptable' to representatives of racial minorities because

They will not share the school's view that all children have an inalienable right to choose their own career and determine their own beliefs, values and ways of life.

(p.38)

To support what is, in fact, a totally unsubstantiated generalisation, Robert Jeffcoate cites the attendance of Muslim children at Quran schools, to learn the tenets of Islam, as an example of an

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'uncritical' educational experience. An experience placed in opposition to attendance at a British school which is described as being not

.....learning facts of items of faith but on being creative and critical, on forming their own opinions and making their own decisions. (p.38)

The implications in this sort of comparison are deeply disturbing. First, the author is assuming, through the use of generalities, that the teaching of minority race or ethnic group cultures from within these cultures are experienced as a process of indoctrination. The example he uses is specifically religious, a particular system of beliefs and practices that are a part of cultural experience, not its whole. There is a distinct 'them and us' division, in which the 'reader' is assumed to be one of 'us', that ignores the maintenance of articles of faith in all religions, including those of indigenous groups cf., Judaic, Roman Catholic, C. of E. etc. Though not equating two similar types of experience he affirms the British school as embodying 'Freedom of Choice for the individual', and by inference that representatives of racial and ethnic minority groups will not agree with this principle.

The school is then in Robert Jeffcoate's view, an institution that can isolate the individual from being a member of a social group and give priority to individual experience. This ignores social, political and economic determinations on the school as institution and the class, gender or racial positions of the subjects within that institution. The processes which constitute the power to determine success or failure cannot, therefore, be accounted for in this philosophy other than at the level of individual success or failure. Excluded also, from examination, are the processes of the construction of subject identities and distinctive class, gendered or racial forms at a cultural and symbolic level as well as at an economic and structural level.

As an educational theorist and teacher, Robert Jeffcoate maintains a peculiarly contradictory position between acknowledging that,

The school's duty is to ensure that its philosophy, policies, curricula and so on are such as to enable and accommodate as many choices as are feasible.....

and recognising the need to qualify 'feasible' by adding

The bounds of feasibility will be marked out by the values the school believes will be integral to its own culture, to its concept of the good life.....pushing its pupils in certain directions rather than others..... (p.39)

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In practical terms, these 'certain directions' involve discussions over material designated 'suitable' or 'unsuitable' for use in a classroom. Within the context of a multiracial curriculum Robert Jeffcoate cites misrepresentation of cultures and races as grounds for the exclusion of texts from school use. He gives two examples of History books. The first 'The Illustrated Book about Africa' is condemned for misinformation about the Mau Mau movement in Kenya, and overtly celebrating Imperialist superiority. Contrasted with this is Longman's 'Discovering Africa's Past' by Basil Davidson. Robert Jeffcoate places the latter in a position of extreme opposition to the former, quoting a passage concerning the same period of Kenyan history. This account places the Mau Mau movement in the context of the strong opposition of White settlers to Kenyan Independence. These two text books are condemned by Robert Jeffcoate as being equally biased without acknowledging the effect of his own point of view on the relationship between the two representations of events. Indeed, the reader is expected to assume a natural neutrality in the exercise of his decisions. The educational purpose of engaging 'children with an accurate picture of the world, both its past and its present' escapes analysis as a critical perspective. Questions concerning how 'accurate' is to be defined and 'bias' detected are left to the exercise of professional judgement.

In summarising the aims of 'Positive Image' it would seem that the cornerstone of Robert Jeffcoate's theory and practice is the optimistic belief that the multiracial classroom

.....can become a place where pride in race is affirmed, and where inter-racial friendship and understanding are celebrated. (p.122)

Almost identical to the desire of the Green Paper for 'a microcosm of a happy and co-operative world'. Being dismissive towards 'all the tensions and animosities, all the negative and divisive outside pressures' leads Robert Jeffcoate to a naive and simplistic methodology. Perhaps this cover of the book is an effective metaphor for the argument between its covers. What is being suggested is that the complexities of racism can be reduced to a simple binary principal. That, like photographic images, negative images of Blacks, whether self-images or images held by Whites, can be reversed through prominent and positive representation. This

representation is to be embedded in a multiracial curriculum which will have effectivity in isolation from the 'outside world'. Where

.....the kind of racial slurs...traded in the playground (are) not traded in the classroom.

(p.63)

1. I refer more closely to 'Progressivism' as a teaching approach in a later section, Educational Interventions. Here its significance lies in its use as the only alternative to authoritarianism.
2. The similarity between certain approaches to multiculturalism and deprivation theories applied to working class children is explored further in Educational Interventions.
3. Educational Interventions

It is important to see multiculturalism as an educational philosophy and practice in relation to other teaching approaches and strategies. Debate about a multi-racial curriculum has proceeded in ways rooted in previous debates concerning working-class educational failure. Theories of deficiency and deprivation that led to the creation of Educational Priority Areas, channelling increased resources to inner-city, working-class schools, is a form of 'positive discrimination'. This is also to be found in the Race Relations Act, 1976, obliging local authorities to take positive action to promote equal opportunities. In relation to education,

The Act quite specifically permits positive discrimination policies in education in favour of ethnic groups. (I.L.E.A., '77).

It is a form of 'social engineering'. Education is seen as having a central role forging a new egalitarian society. In the sixties the intention was to eliminate the reproduction of class inequities.

Multiculturalism is grafted on to this approach as a way of promoting tolerance between social groups and, thereby, producing a society that displays an equilibrium among races as well as between the classes. The school is seen as having a crucial role, therefore, in containing the effects of racism and the resulting sense of resentment.

Deprivation theories place the cause of failure in the child rather than in the education system itself. All causative factors have the failing pupil at their centre. The urban environment, poor living conditions, a family structure regarded as inadequate etc. The schools' role is one of compensation; compensating for all these inadequacies seen as present in the student. For example, linguistic deprivation theories of the working-class child applied also to the Black Child whose language becomes regarded as not adequate for learning processes. Increased resources are required for remedial provision. Essentially, the argument is for a more intense application rather than a structurally different form of an education system.

Enthusiasm for multiculturalism also comes from teachers who support 'progressive' approaches to teaching methods. Arguing for increased resources, progressive ideologies additionally state the need for curriculum innovation. Stressed is the importance of relevance in order to capture the interest of reluctant students, hoping that this will encourage, in them, more positive attitudes towards school. At the core of the progressive approach are questions of discipline and control. That the curriculum should be child-centred, rather than imposed, relevant to the students' 'actual' and expected way of life. Robert Jeffcoate summarises the debate in terms of whether the function of the school is to transmit or transform culture. Transmissionist approaches he sees as attempting to pass on to the next generation a cultural heritage defined by criteria of intellectual excellence. But the progressive transformationist pedagogy would imply the emergence of a new common culture which critically evaluates the 'cultural heritage'.

Progressivism has had a particularly influential effect on the teaching of English. Themes and projects, related to student 'experience' on topics such as 'Adventure', 'Friends and Enemies', 'Journeys', and 'Survival', have been introduced to provoke student interest, and educational publishers produce anthologies thematically organised. It is very easy to graft onto this approach a theme such as 'Minorities'. Emphasis, in child-centred progressivism lies heavily on forms of individual, creative expression, even where working in groups is

encouraged because, paramount, as Robert Jeffcoate states, is the preservation of freedom of choice for the individual. Group work is seen as a method for sharing what is still regarded as individual forms of expression, talking, listening, reading, writing; the construction of the social subject is not examined. This is reinforced in the examination syllabi where even Mode 3 C.S.E's require an individualised, creative response. In relation to 'problems' of discipline and control, progressivism still resorts to concepts of individual failure. Having provided an 'interesting and stimulating' curriculum, any student lack of a positive response is still their failure. Progressivism does not adequately engage with school 'counter-cultures' with forms of collective resistance.

Pressure for a multiracial curriculum frequently stems from fears of resistance and indiscipline from Black students (though the introduction of material representing minority ethnic cultures can, and often does, cause rebellion among indigenous students). Present recommendations from various London Boroughs for the introduction of disruptive units to be attached to schools is cited as proof for the need for multiracial curricula as it appears that these units would deal with a disproportionately high number of Black students. Curricula innovation in this framework can be regarded as a form of social control.

The cuts in spending on education have particularly affected schools in run-down working-class areas - areas where the majority of Black children are to be found. These we know are the schools that already face difficulties such as lack of resources, a high turnover of teachers, poor buildings, inadequate classrooms and an overly high teacher-pupil ratio. Even with the best intentions, such schools have little hope of catering sympathetically for the needs of their Black pupils. Forced to teach large groups under these conditions the task of the teacher inevitably becomes one of control and discipline rather than education. (O.W.A.A.D., '79)

Linked to questions of 'relevance', multiculturalism is supported by teachers who feel that a positive sense of one's cultural and social identity will encourage students to tackle learning difficulties with more confidence and, hence with more likelihood of success. The work of Bernard Coard has been of influence in this pedagogic approach. He analysed ('75) the tendency for children who have poor cultural knowledge to reject their ethnic identity and that children who do reject the cultural identity are seen by their teachers as behavioural problems in the classroom.

It is this strand in educational theory that has led to much work searching for a 'Positive Image'. Literary and media representations are held to be of particular influence. However, there are two problematic tendencies in this concept of reversal of images. First the failure/problem, the negative self-image, is still centred in the individual student and second, the process is seen as reflective rather than a series of re-presentations and the construction of social identities is not addressed.

The 'discourse' of multiculturalism is situated within an increasingly racist social, economic and political climate. It is centrally part of 'Blacks are a social problem'. This correlation characterises immigration Laws, most re-presentations of Black situations in the media and predominates in social thinking and attitudes as well. This 'social problem' equation dominates the present historical and social context and multiculturalism, in being concerned to 'deal with the problem' shares the same determinations as the Immigration Laws to prevent an increase in the 'social problem'. They are both aspects of the same debate, that of 'Race'. The discourse of multiculturalism should, therefore, be viewed as a sub-discourse of the wider discourse of Race and Race Relations.

It is necessary to ask; who are the socially constituted speakers and initiators of the social practice of the discourse? Clearly, they are not the ethnic minorities themselves but the representatives of dominant social forces to whom 'Blacks' are a problem. Concrete political and economic conditions and contradictions that face both Black and White alike are not addressed but are contained within and deflected by the concept of multiculturalism.

If the State, the educational authorities and inspectors of schools are serious about what they say, it will mean that teachers will have to examine what working-class values and culture are, and begin to feed into the curriculum the primary facts of working-class life - the struggle against the ownership of wealth and distribution of wealth in a capitalist society. If I, as a teacher, want to represent black culture, black values, histories, assumptions, life styles of people I am paid to school, I am determined to start from the fact that young blacks fight the police, they refuse dirty jobs, their forms of cultural gathering always brings them into conflict with the rulers of this society, their very music, professed philosophies and life styles, contain in them an antagonism to school and to society as it is.

(Dhondy, '78)

Donovan has to be fostered with a White family when his mother returns to the West Indies to nurse her sick father. Donovan's father is presented as being unable to cope alone, necessitating his son being placed in the care of the Chapman family. The 'problem' which forms the focus for the plot is that Donovan won't talk, to anyone, from the time of his arrival.

The Chapman's are presented as efficient, capable and caring. Though carefully portrayed as 'non-racist' this attitude is paternalistic and at times very patronising. Mr. Mrs. Chapman are opposed to two characters displaying racist attitudes; Mrs. Parsons, a next door neighbour and Mr. Henry, a school teacher. Throughout the novel it is the Chapman's who defend 'the Black viewpoint' in their own terms. Neither Donovan or his father, are ever seen to defend themselves.

Justification for the 'rights' of the Croft's to receive help, when in trouble, is voiced by Mrs. Chapman.

"The father's paying for his keep. But even if he wasn't, they've lived here for twelve years, and Donovan was born here. So really he's as British as you and I".

Mrs Parsons looked offended.

"Besides, his parents pay rates and taxes just like us, so they're entitled to some of the benefits when they need them".

(Ashley, '76 p. 12)

This attempt to improve Race Relations emphasises integration as assimilation, to negate the fact of a black skin. 'They are just like us really' is evinced as proof of Black humanity.

Mrs. Parsons is presented throughout as an eccentric, extreme in her style of dress, speech and manner. A character created as not 'normal' as 'unreasonable' isolates her racist attitudes as extreme and unreasonable. Even her cat is sickeningly given the name 'Higger' to emphasise the extraordinary nature of her racism. Consequently, when Mrs. Parsons voices accusations of 'uncivilised' and 'Bleeding the country dry' and 'acting as if they own the place' she is dismissed as a 'small minded bigot'. Her complaints do not deserve of an adequate answer within the terms of the text because her behaviour, generally, puts her beyond the norm of reasonable people. Mrs. Parsons is ultimately disowned, outcast, with the comment

"You make me ashamed to be White,... .. bloody ashamed".
(p.157)

Thus racism is constructed not as arising within a context of specific historical and material conditions but as a psychological abnormality.

The 'they' of Mrs. Parsons' vehemence has no voice of its own. The paternalistic and, ultimately, patriarchal defence of 'those who cannot take care of themselves adequately' parallels the Imperialistic relationship of 'Mother Country' to colonies.

When racism is practised by a representative of authority, Mr. Henry, Keith and Donovan's form teacher, the incident is serious enough for male intervention. Being hit and called a 'stupid Black idiot' warrants a visit by Mr. Chapman to the school. Shouting over a garden fence is the domain of the female characters, but across a Headmaster's desk, the province of the male. Racism from a figure of authority is not open to the attack seen as appropriate for a neighbour. Mr. Harper's position is not open to question, authority must be maintained. Mr. Chapman asserts that

"We won't do much good by getting a teacher into trouble. But I want your word, Mr. Roper, that nothing of the sort will ever happen again".

(p. 107)

The question of the racist abuse of authority is suppressed by the word of the ultimate authority within the school and the status quo is re-established.

Racism is therefore constructed as an exception. Mr. Roper is as eccentric a character as teacher, as Mrs. Parsons as neighbour. The incidents of racism are isolated exceptions to the normal progression of events. Racial prejudice appears as abnormal mental aberrations of individuals, institutionalised racism is absent. The individualisation and isolation of racism as 'incidents' are presented as being resolvable at the level of the individual. Social conflict and contradictions are suppressed. The 'real enemy' is presented as being ignorance. Mrs. Parsons' 'small mind', Mr. Roper being unaware of the fact that Donovan can't talk. An ignorance capable of being eradicated by additional knowledge.

The two Black characters, Donovan and his father, are constructed as socially incompetent. Their inadequacies are represented as deserving of the 'readers' sympathy, appealing to a wider sense of paternalism. Donovan and his father are 'a problem' to the Social Services originated by the return home of Mrs. Croft. Upon arrival at the Chapman's, Donovan refuses to get out of the car, causing consternation to Mrs. Chapman and the Social Worker.

Mr. Croft forgets to pack him any pyjamas. Donovan causes Keith to argue and subsequently fight with his friends because Donovan needs so much of Keith's attention to take care of him. Having been hit, Donovan runs away from school resulting in a complete disruption of the time-table as classes are organised into groups to search for him. He inadvertently breaks Keith's favourite toy, disappoints and eventually exasperates everyone who attempts to encourage him to talk. Throughout, Donovan is represented as deprived, emotionally deprived of the love of his parents and, therefore, pathetic.

The moist channels of undried tears on Donovan's cheeks were swelled by two large tear drops. Welling up from the sad depths of his eyes they trickled down to his jaw and wet the front of his tee-shirt.

(p.84)

He wished he could die. During those long days in the flat, pining for his mother, waiting for his father, he had felt so much alone and unwanted that his confidence in other people - even those he loved - had been slowly eaten away, as acid eats away at an ailing battery.

(p.88)

The only relationship that Donovan establishes is with a guinea pig. Both become images of utter helplessness. Donovan is frequently found crouched in corners in fear, like an animal and is fed and tended, behaving 'obediently' with automatic responses like a domesticated pet.

Mr. Croft is also described as a victim, a victim of circumstances always out of his control. On the occasion of a carefully planned and prepared visit to Donovan, it is Mr. Croft who spoils the occasion. He is late due to a non-starting car and heavy traffic and the dinner dries up in the oven. Unable to re-establish a relationship with his son, Mr. Croft is also described in animalistic terms.

During the meal, Mr. Croft watched his son like a hawk. He almost devoured him, watching for a sign, listening for a sound, creating an atmosphere at the table about as relaxed as that at a formal banquet at Buckingham Palace.

(p. 161)

All positive efforts at helping Donovan are initiated by the Chapmans in opposition to Mr. Croft's helpless inability to be close to his son. It is in response to an accident to Keith that Donovan finally speaks. At the end of the book it is Keith who has finally penetrated Donovan's disillusion.

The heartache,

.....went when he did things with Keith, when Keith wanted him to be around, when Keith talked to him and said good things. Then Donovan began to feel alive again, a part of the world.

(p. 183)

But, this relationship is one of dependence, Donovan dependent upon Keith as Mr. Croft is dependent upon the Chapmans for initiating meetings with his son, the Social Services for fostering him.

Robert Jeffcoate provides a specific context for this book. It is present in his first year course on the theme of Home and School to present a 'positive image' of Black people to the pupils in his class. But in the context of this particular pedagogy what is being taught? That there is a passive dependence of Black upon White. The absence of a Black voice in the text emphasises the isolation of the Croft family in the White world of the story and their position as objects of charitable pity and patronage.

Robert Jeffcoate feels strongly that books should not be used to 'change childrens' attitudes' and emphasises that it is for them 'to determine what to make of the books they read'. This attitude is premised upon the isolation of the classroom; the establishment of 'classroom culture' separated from 'outside' tensions and social forces. Determinations upon the attitudes students bring to the books they read in the classroom are ignored as are the reconstructions of dominant ideological relationships within the texts themselves. Racist stereotypes within texts have effectivity only because they relate to the social, economic and political processes whereby ideological representations become and remain dominant. We should not, as teachers, feel that we can separate the construction of 'reader' from the ideological construction of the text, or, from the specific and determinate ways that we use texts within an educational context.

2. Language

The language of the dominated group becomes inaudible; just as physical attributes, gestures and mannerisms go unseen. At a certain stage of its development, the language of a dominated group is unheard.

(Boone, '79)

The official discourse of multiculturalism is predominantly the White middle-class 'speaking' about ethnic and racial minorities. The voice of opposition is effectively silenced in favour of the 'National Interest' or 'our common humanity'. Reproduced in the teaching practice of the classroom, as the microcosm of the 'happy and co-operative world', struggle over which group's interest is to define the 'common interest', is negated. The 'child-centred', 'progressive' pedagogy of Robert Jeffcoate operates within limits defined by his White, male, middle-class liberalism though this is presented as a neutral and balanced perspective for decision making. A mechanism that constructs an apparent unity of interests is the use of 'standard' language forms which subordinate, or contain, inherent contradictions through a limitation of available meanings.

The work of Voloshinov takes language activity as a social activity and sees a language system in relation to this social activity, not as formally separate from it. In his insistence on the active creation of meanings, meaning becomes, necessarily, a social action dependent upon a social relationship. Rather than 'expressing' an individual consciousness, Voloshinov argues that language is that consciousness, taking shape and being materially in signs but created by organised groups in the process of their social interaction. Voloshinov equates ideology and signs by stressing that whenever a sign is present so is ideology.

The socially constituted speakers and initiators of the social practice of the discourse of multiculturalism are not the ethnic and racial minorities themselves. In the construction of this discourse the shared language of the socially constituted group, the language that embodies its social practices excludes the language and alternative set of meanings of subordinated groups, the subjects of the discourse.

However, Voloshinov does not see a language sign as an equivalent or relection of an object or quality that it expresses: it is not fixed in this way. The relation between the formal element and the meaning, obviously, has to have an effective nucleus of meaning in order to be understood. But, as this relation between the formal element and the meaning develops from social activity, from continuing social relationships, this nucleus of meaning will, in practice, be a variable range according to the variety of situations in which it is used. It is this variable quality that Voloshinov refers to as 'multi-accentuality' that militates against an unquestioned acceptance of fixed meanings, of correct or

'proper' interpretations, and allows for an examination of struggles over meanings between dominant and subordinate groups.

Much work on non-indigenous dialect usage by racial and ethnic groups has followed that of William Labov in attempting to establish the credentials of dialect; to insist upon its effectivity for communication and to counter accusations of 'poor speech' reflective of 'poor ability'. This emphasis, necessary to counter linguistic falacies, has had an unfortunate consequence in the concentration upon language as a system separate from its social activity and the construction of meanings.

Viv Edwards ('79) painstakingly describes the grammar, morphology and syntax of what she refers to as West Indian Creole. Though she does acknowledge that there is more than one form of Creole, Creole as a language system is compared with standard English as a language system and differences in structure demonstrated. Having established Creole as an effective medium of communication and learning Viv Edwards then investigates how the use of Creole can/does interfere with the acquisition of standard English, implicitly placing Creole as a deviation from the 'norm'. The argument then moves into the realm of attitudes. Expectations that West Indians speak English, even if defined as a 'lazy' or 'poor quality' form of it, means that it is not felt necessary for teachers to have a knowledge of the structure of Creole, in order to teach standard English, as it would be regarded if Creole had the status of a separate language.

It is at this level of attitudes towards West Indian dialects that the argument is weakest. Concentration on an impersonal system neglects the process of the changing nature of words and forms. Language becomes purely convention. The synchronic is prioritized over the history of a language; the latter becoming purely a matter of grammatical or syntactical influences rather than a process of struggle over meaning between differing groups in hierarchical relationship to each other. In Viv Edwards' analysis the social, political and economic systems of slavery and colonisation have consequences for language at the level of structure only; as an instance of linguistic diversity.

The extent of linguistic diversity in the early days can be illustrated by a description of Jamaica in the mid eighteenth century. There were speakers of Creole 'Negro English' who had been settled on the island for sometime; newly imported Black slaves speaking various African languages; 'coloured' freedmen and poor whites who would have spoken a variety of English nearer to standard English; recently arrived indentured servants speaking regional dialects of English; planters and merchants who spoke English with a 'Jamaican accent', and finally, expatriates speaking upper class English. Obviously the situation varied from island to island but it gives some indication of the influences at work.

(Edwards, '79 p. 19)

The relationship of power and control between these various groups remains unexplored and unrelated to forms of imposition, oppression and resistance in language. In the same way the language of multiculturalism calls upon the identification of a plurality of interests that are structurally unequal, politically, socially and economically. It becomes necessary to extend from Voloshinov's analysis to explore the active construction of meanings within and between dominant and subordinate groups. It is not enough to counter accusations of inadequacy in forms of non-standard English with affirmations of dialect linguistic efficiency. What needs to be approached is how these superior/inferior attitudes are inscribed in and through the social relationships between dominant groups, whose language has become the 'norm' or standard from against which other forms are measured, and the oppressed groups using these latter forms.

A concrete example of this would be the way that White British authors (Ashley '76), (Kilner '79) represent the dialogue of Jamaican characters in terms of absences from standard English; the dropping of word endings etc., that bears no relation to the way Jamaican children would either write or speak their own dialect. Frequently, these representations appear ridiculous and are nonsense to Jamaican dialect speakers, and all other children, but it does have the effect of reinforcing the 'superiority' of the standard English used in the rest of the narrative.

However, just to argue as Viv Edwards does that these attitudes of superiority towards standard forms can be accounted for through lack of knowledge is not satisfactory either. Clearly, there is a demonstrable ignorance but to assume that increased familiarity with dialect forms, by White teachers, educationalists, and I include White authors of children's fiction, will change racist attitudes and consequently racist social

relationships is naive.

....it has become historically evident that a new linguistic-cultural problematic is shaped when oppressed groups find themselves under the necessity of speaking not only (or only partly) their own language but the language of another dominating group. (Boone, '79)

This accords with Frantz Fanon's ('65) analysis of the cultural development of formerly colonised groups, which moves from an unqualified assimilation of European forms through a search backward to the discovering of old legends and pre-colonial memory towards a culture which is revolutionary in form and registers present struggles. It is within the first category that we can place the pressure for the recognition of multiculturalism by the Examination Boards. (T.E.S. 13/10/78). 'O' level English syllabi it is argued should reflect the nature of multi-ethnic, multiracial Britain by the inclusion of works by established West Indian and Asian authors. But established means works regarded as 'literary' within the norms of the dominant British literary tradition, its forms and values; the writing of the authors of Fanon's first phase. Having assimilated British literary conventions it is easy for these authors to be assimilated, in turn, within the dominant literary tradition.

Various cultural forms are encompassed in Fanon's second phase, for example, the Rastafarian Movement and the search for and recognition of African 'roots' present in the U.S. the Caribbean and Britain.

Whilst agreeing with the framework of Frantz Fanon's cultural analysis it is also necessary to add that I do not share his evolutionary perspective of these phases as sequential. In Britain, in the present conjuncture it is useful to see all three elements present in tension with each other. The task of analysis that Bruce Boone sees as being necessary is to provide an adequate account of the oppositional content of the language of an oppressed group, which he describes as a 'coded' language and then tracing the historical stages by which such oppressed groups become able to speak their own language without disguise.

The fiction of Farrukh Dhondy reconstructs a tension between dominant forms and oppositional struggle. His most recent collection of short stories 'Come to Mecca' ('78) has been awarded the Collins/Fontana Book Award for Multi-ethnic Britain and as such is placed within mainstream publishing. Using the bleak landscape of racial conflict and

confrontation in London the stories question the relationship of Black youth to social institutions; to the Police, the National Front, Socialist organisations and to the Educational system. A struggle over meanings, a linguistic, political struggle is a recurrent theme.

"About your sweatshops, your factories, Nu Look".
Shahid looked puzzled so Betty said, "We call them sweatshops because the labour is sweated labour".
She was anxious to explain.
"When I sweat I always take a bath, not like English people".
"You've got me wrong. The factories are filthy and dingy, all of this area".
"My cousin's factory is very clean", I said.
"You must be joking", Betty said, "I've seen some of them".
"He never jokes with ladies", Shahid said.

(Dhondy, '78 p. 18)

When she talked to us she said "Bengalis", but when she made speeches she said "Asians". (p. 23)

"The poem is too much of a slogan; to be poetry it has to have the sound, not of propaganda but of, well, how shall I put it, of truth". (p. 39)

"And no blue and green tights I want all the girls to wear flesh coloured tights".
"Whose flesh, miss?" Lorraine asked. (p. 67)

This struggle over whose definition of terms is central and in each story the struggle over meanings is related to the hierarchisation of social relationships.

The language of these groups now develops as an expression of political practice and, on the site of each individual within the group, fights out a battle against the dominating group linguistically as much as politically. (Boone, '79)

Using dialect to exclude the teacher is an experience of which teacher in multiracial schools must be aware. But its significance as a form of resistance and its oppositional nature remains unacknowledged. Robert Jeffcoate quotes the use of Creole as a 'secret code' when one of his pupils writes on the classroom board, 'Sir is nosey about Black people's language' (p.81). But he does not recognise this statement as part of a political and linguistic struggle in which his relationship to power and authority is inscribed within his own use of standard forms.

It is important that we recognise that language is not just the site of inter-racial linguistic, political struggle but registers the struggle of all oppressed groups. Bruce Boone, from whom I have quoted extensively is concerned with an analysis of Gay language and its relationship to the literary tradition in the United States. In Britain, multi-cultural research does not subject standard English forms to the same sort of scrutiny that is applied to Creole. It is merely accepted unquestioningly as the yardstick against which deviation is measured, whether sympathetically or critically. Thus, meanings, actually limited within relationships of power and control, appear to appeal to a wide, shared commonsense; 'the National Interest', 'our common humanity'. The present struggle around the available meanings of 'work' can provide a concrete example.

In Learning to Labour (Willis, '78) the working class, White 'lads' develop distinct ways of talking and acting. They reject 'jobs', defined in the dominant, middle-class terms of the school as qualifications and knowledge.

For 'the lads' all jobs mean labour: there is no particular importance in the choosing of site for its giving.

(Willis, '78 p. 101)

The struggle over meanings is active, crucial to the development of the counter-school culture under investigation. But political linguistic struggle is not limited to class or racial position. Sex and gender determinations articulate with class, patriarchal and racial relations in the ideological and economic subordination of women within processes of production.

Consideration of this wider context means that standard linguistic forms and their commonsense construction of an apparent unity can no longer be taken for granted as an unquestioned norm. We need to create a framework for trying to analyse to what extent, when repressed languages are heard, they are distorted or reshaped by dominant modes in an active social relationship of struggle. The terms of multiculturalism negate this recognition of active struggle and resistance in favour of a passive integrationism.

Writing that focusses upon the linguistic as political, Fanon's revolutionary, fighting culture is produced and distributed outside of the formal publishing system. (1) Bogle L'Ouverture Publications L.T.D. held a policy committed to the publication of writing stemming from the

experience of 'struggle and resistance against the fascists' attacks on us in this society'. These forms of cultural opposition cannot merely be incorporated into a pluralist multiculturalism. What is needed is a form of analysis which

.....explains languages as the praxis of a social group, the outcome of a historically situated, materially located group interaction. It will be an analysis that supplements and specifies Voloshinov's.

(Boone, '79)

(1) See Appendix B.

Bourgeois Blacks: the American Way?

The portrayal of Blacks in fiction as a social problem, as culturally deficient and deprived, as 'poor Blacks' has been the subject of much critical analysis in the U.S.

(MacCann and Woodward '77)

From the work available in paperback children's editions in England it is apparent that there is a move away from the representation of the 'poor Black' from a broken home, living in an atmosphere of crime, desolation and neglect to the representation of Black middle-class families.

Merely to portray Blacks as middle-class, as opposed to living in poverty, could be said to be a form of 'cultural conformity', a more sophisticated bourgeois 'tokenism'. However, I do wish, briefly, to refer to three of these books to contrast with most mainstream British publications and to illustrate the presence, in the former, of a concern with the political in institutional and structural relationships.

The plot of 'The Basketball Game', Julius Lester ('77) is primarily concerned with adolescent male sexuality within a relationship between a teenage Black boy and teenage White girl. Their relationship is not isolated from the social context in which it occurs, a context concerned with the experience of segregation and White violence.

Allen's father, a minister, Rev. Anderson makes a self-conscious decision to buy a house in a White middle-class area. Having moved, the response of all the White neighbours is to erect 'For Sale' signs, seeing a Black incursion into the neighbourhood as a threat to property values. Though, as Rev. Anderson acknowledges

Much as I paid for this house, ain't no way they
gon' tell me a White person would've had to pay
that much.

(Lester, '77 p. 20)

Julius Lester consciously reverses dominant images, defining White in relation to Black, for example. He makes explicit structural relationships of power, not only at an institutional level but also at the point of the 'personal' relationship and refuses the individualised solution to wider social contradictions.

'The Friends' by Rosa Guy ('77) is about a relationship between two teenage girls. Set in Harlem, Edith is coping with her family after the death of her mother and subsequent disappearance of her father. Edith becomes 'protector' of Phyllisia, who newly arrived from the West Indies faces resentment at school. Through this relationship Phyllisia has to face the mythology she has weaved of her own and her father's middle-class ideologies.

An incident with a racist teacher contrasts sharply with the incident in 'Donovan Croft'. It is neither excused nor suppressed, as it is in the latter and is met not with passive acceptance but active resistance. A Harlem revolt clearly establishes the nature of the relationship between the Black community and the Police and it is this wider, institutional nexus of relationships that makes it impossible for Edith to approach the forces of 'law and order' when her father disappears. A fear that is substantiated when the Police shoot Edith's brother Randy.

'Nobody's Family is Going to Change' by Louise Fitzhugh ('78) won the Children's Rights Workshop Other Award in 1976, the year following 'Donovan Croft'. This book is important because it not only encompasses notions of Black struggle but also a collective resistance on the part of adolescents against forms of parental domination. Perhaps its most unique aspect, however, is the book's exploration of the patriarchal relationship between father and daughter and a questioning of the roles of sister, daughter, wife and mother, through Dana's increasing awareness of the Women's Liberation Movement.

The increasing literary and media presence of the American Black and her/his position within American society is influencing Blacks in Britain in ways that I can only speculate about at present but intend to research further. In terms of their use within the classroom it is important that these books do not represent racism as instances of individual aberration, or capable of individual resolution, but as an ideology that informs and structures social, political and economic relationships.

BRITISH RESOURCES

Multiracial Bookshops and Publishers

Black Ink Collective
1 Gresham Road,
Brixton,
London SW9

Bogle L'Ouverture
5a Chignell Place,
London W.13.

Books from India,
69 Great Russell Street,
London WC1B 3BQ

Centreprise,
136/138 Kingsland High Street,
London E.8.

Harriet Tubman Books,
27/29 Grove Lane,
Handsworth,
Birmingham B21

Independent Publishing Co.,
38 Kennington Lane,
London SE11 4SL

New Beacon Books,
26 Stroud Green Road,
London N4 3EN

The English Centre,
Ebury Teachers' Centre,
Sutherland Street,
London SW1

Journals and Bulletins

New Equals: Commission for Racial Equality
Eliot House,
10/12 Allington Street,
London SW1E 5EH

Education Journal: C.R.E.

New Community: C.R.E.

New Approaches to Multiracial Education: N.A.M.E.
58 Colingbourne Road,
London W.12.

Issues in Race and Education: N.A.M.E.

Race: Institute of Race Relations
249/279 Pentonville Road,
London N.1.

Race Today: Race Today Collective
7½ Shakespeare Road,
London SE2½ OPT.

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Alternative Publications:

Available from: Black Ink Collective

- 'Black Ink' (plays, prose and poetry)
- 'The School Leaver' by Michael McMillan
- 'Wasted Woman, Friends and Lovers'
(plays, prose and poetry).

Bogle L'Ouverture

- 'Ammunition' Sam Greenlee
- 'At School Today' Accabre Huntley
- 'Dread Beat and Blood' Linton Kwesi Johnson
- 'Blood in the Streets' Cecil Rajendra
- 'The New Carribean Man' P.D. Sharma

I.L.E.A. English Centre

- 'Small Accidents' Sabir Bandali
- 'Jamaica Child' Errol O'Connor
- 'Jealousy' Steve Drummond
- 'My Life' Mohammed Elbaja
- 'In the Melting Pot' Chelsea Herbert