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Thomas, Paul and Henri, Tom

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# **Changing Directions: young people and effective work against racism**

Paul Thomas (University of Huddersfield) and Tom Henri (Goldsmith's College)

## **Abstract**

*This article explores effective approaches against racism in work with young people, and the relevance of new policy agendas in the UK. Since the 2001 disturbances, the UK has controversially prioritised 'Community Cohesion, with the accusation that this new direction represents the 'death of multiculturalism'. Drawing on empirical evidence from a project established to work with the racist views of white children in Leeds, and from youth work in Oldham, it explores how such work positively disrupts the public realm and re-thinks the previous framework of 'anti-racism'. It is suggested that anti-racist educational policies and practice have created a moral code which young people can either subscribe to or be punished by and that by failing to engage within a framework of inclusion and openness with young people who express racist views, educationalists risk alienating them from a positive recasting of those views. The article argues that the failure of past policies as one form of multiculturalism has promoted the alienation of those most in need of intervention regarding racism, and that 'Community Cohesion', as actually practiced at ground level, can offer a productive way forward to engage with racism within more intersectional understandings of youth identity and its formation.*

## **Introduction**

The Inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson, 1999) proved to be a highly significant point in the long campaign against racial violence and inequality within British society. The forensic examination of the racist murder in south-east

London of a young Black teenager by a number of White young men, the wider context of racial violence and significant ethnic inequality locally and nationally, and the 'institutional racism' of the Police Force that failed to effectively investigate the murder have all had a deep impact on British politics and society, such as through the significant strengthening of the Race Relations Act in 2000. These developments might have suggested a re-energising of 'anti-racism' within educational work with young people in the UK, but there has instead been an ongoing and profound questioning of the assumptions and priorities of such anti-racist work. In parallel, Community Cohesion (Cantle, 2001) has emerged as the new priority for 'race relations' (Solomos, 2003), with this new policy direction explicitly concerned with the experiences, attitudes and identity of young people in Britain's apparently ethnically-segregated towns and cities. At the same time, 'Multiculturalism' has been apparently rejected through its tagging as being responsible for Britain 'sleep-walking to segregation' (Phillips, 2005) and leaving Britain 'soft on terrorism' (Prins and Salisbury, 2008). What do such debates and developments mean for policy approaches towards racism and young people in the UK? Are both multiculturalism and a commitment to opposing racism really 'dead' (Kundnani, 2002) in the wake of this emerging policy of Community Cohesion, or does Cohesion actually encapsulate the best intentions of anti-racism and multiculturalism policy approaches within a new framework of language and approach?

This article uses case study evidence and experiences from the north of England to explore the meaning and reality on the ground of this new policy direction, and to discuss educational approaches that, whilst explicitly stepping away from the language and priorities of previous 'anti-racist' work, are actually, we argue, having

more positive and meaningful impacts on the attitudes and behaviour of young White people. Explicitly, the article suggests that the highly-contested policy direction of Community Cohesion (Cantle, 2005; Alexander, 2004) can offer positive ways forward here, enabling the possibility of a 'critical multiculturalist' (May, 1999) practice with young people that combines the direct contact and sharing familiar from previous modes of multiculturalism with clear commitments to oppose all forms of prejudice and discrimination through the framework of the emerging intersectional 'human rights' agenda (McGhee, 2006). Here, 'Intersectional' can be understood as an approach to issues of identity that questions the reality of fixed and inherently essentialised single identities for individuals in modern, multicultural society, and which instead prioritises understandings of multiple identities whereby ethnicity, gender, class and other social forces can all interact in various ways on individual experience and identity.

In this way, the article argues against the continuation of the assumptions and approaches of past 'Anti-Racist' work with young people, but rejects the idea that changes in educational practice represent the 'death of multiculturalism' (Kundnani, 2002), or the end of concern with opposing racism. It argues instead in favour of approaches to work with young people that make effective anti-racist practice and outcomes integral to its overall vision of the 'good life' for all young people within the framework of Community Cohesion. Here, we are taking as read (one of the clear signs of progress of the last twenty years) that all those working with young people are, and should be assumed to be, committed to equality for **all** young people in Britain, and engagement with any barriers of prejudice, discrimination or lack of opportunity in the way of this. The question then is how such prejudice and

discrimination can be effectively overcome in work with young people. This is the concern of the article.

The article also argues that, too often, well-meaning anti-racist educational approaches have failed to understand and address the complex and contingent factors involved in much of the 'racism' of White young people (Back, 1996) and how differential 'racisms' (Hall, 1992) have often been deployed against particular ethnic minority groups in specific places and times. South Asian Muslim communities have been a particular focus for such popular and political racism in modern Britain, particularly post 9/11 (Kundhani, 2002), with this being just one example of the significantly differentiated experiences of Britain's various non-white ethnic minority communities, with geographical location, and pre-existing levels of 'human capital' also being highly relevant to the economic and educational experiences of specific communities (Modood et al, 1997). These marginalised Pakistani and Bangladeshi-origin communities in the north of England are often living side-by-side with marginalised White working class communities, both having been left behind by developments in Britain's neo-liberal, post-industrial economy (Byrne, 1999), and it is this reality that provides the context for the case study evidence discussed here.

This is addressed through discussion of case study evidence from a crime prevention project on a large public Housing Estate in Leeds, a large (post) industrial city in the north of England, that found itself engaging with racist attitudes and behaviour as a priority issue, supported by empirical evidence from work with youth workers from across the West Yorkshire area (CRE, 1999; Thomas, 2002), and more recent evidence on what impact Community Cohesion is actually having on work with young people in the ethnically segregated and tense town of Oldham, Greater Manchester, scene of one of the 2001 urban disturbances that provoked the move

towards Community Cohesion (Thomas, 2006; 2007). Prior to the discussion of the case study evidence, the article firstly reviews the wider and ongoing debate about the 'problem with anti-racism'. In doing this, the authors would highlight the fact that both have been actively engaged in anti-racist work within past professional practice with young people, as well as in the development of anti-racist educational materials, and had personal involvements in anti-racist campaigning work. This means that the discussions below represent a personal reflection on the assumptions and priorities of own practice with young people, as well as an analysis of the past effectiveness and future relevance of these policy approaches.

### **The 'problem with anti-racism'**

The emergence of 'anti-racism' as a general focus for UK social policy, and as a specific priority within educational practice can be traced to the 1981 disturbances and their aftermath (Solomos, 2003) with the recognition of the reality of structural racial discrimination, and the need to challenge attitudes and behaviour upholding it. In terms of work with young people, the critique here was that previous approaches of 'multiculturalism' had both failed to recognise the reality of racial inequality for ethnic minority young people or engage effectively with the attitudes of many White young people (Chauhan, 1990). This led to enhanced programmes of anti-racist educational activity in schools and youth work settings, the approach and content of which was often developed through fierce and locally/professionally-situated professional discussions (Williams, 1988). The advances stemming from such initiatives have been significant and permanent, and do not need to be justified here – this article rejects the idea that Britain is now much ethnically divided or more 'racist' compared to thirty years ago as profoundly mistaken.

However, the approach of anti-racism within education has arguably had limitations and unintended consequences. Much of these have stemmed from anti-racism's 'moral code' (Back, 1996), whereby those young people not prepared to display the behaviour or attitudes deemed to be anti-racist have been judged to be 'racist', with a clear focus on rules and sanctions. Clearly, racial harassment and violence are serious and ongoing social realities; the question here is whether anti-racism enabled young people to reflect on their behaviour and attitudes and change, or simply 'judged them'. Evidence from empirical studies into Greenwich, south-east London, the site of Stephen Lawrence's murder, was that too often White working class young people had been alienated by anti-racism, feeling that they and their communities had been negatively (and unfairly) judged, leading to resentment and a 'White backlash' (Hewitt, 2005). Often, these negative outcomes stemmed from clumsy and unreflexive implementations by educational bodies and practitioners at the local level, the most graphic illustration of which was the murder in a Manchester High School of a Bangladeshi -origin pupil by a White fellow pupil, something judged by the independent Inquiry Panel to have stemmed directly from the mis-handling of anti-racist policy implementation (Macdonald, 1989). Allied to this was the clear lack of confidence many educational practitioners felt in attempting to implement anti-racism, given the inflexible and simplistic (Bhavnani, 2001) focus on power differentials and implementation of rules that were central to 'anti-racism', as many youth workers and teachers actually understood them. In an action research study (CRE, 1999; Thomas, 2002) of youth workers working with White young people in West Yorkshire, the main reactions to anti-racism were avoidance, with workers not wanting to engage in such fraught issues, and a lack of confidence, with White professionals clearly feeling that ethnic minority colleagues should be seen as the

'experts', the only ones capable of either working with ethnic minority young people or engaging clearly with White young people around 'race'. We accept that these negative outcomes are not representative of all experiences, and were certainly not the intentions of those designing and implementing strategies (which included the authors). However, there is significant empirical evidence from the past 15 /20 years to support these assertions, and they are supported by the case study material from Leeds below, which also suggests more positive ways forward.

### **Case Study evidence**

Interest in this area stems from experience of managing youth crime prevention initiatives on predominantly White areas of low-income social housing in Leeds. During this period, there was increased reporting of racial hostility and racist victimisation in the vicinity. Hemmerman et al (2007) identified one of the drivers for this racial hostility as White resentment of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) access to social housing, and so essentially competitive. The report also identified how excessive mono-ethnic bonding social capital, along with poorly-developed forms of bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000), enabled the enforcement of hostility and maintained an atmosphere of fear and intimidation (Hemmerman, Law, Simms and Sirriyeh, 2007). The victims of racist violence identified much overt aggressive racism from children and young people (Hemmerman et al, 2007). It therefore identified the need to work with children and young people who were involved with racist activities in then locality.

It emerged from the initial discussions with the young people that they were aware from school, the police, youth workers and other welfare professionals that expressing racist views was deemed to inappropriate or wrong. However, further



exploration of the issues with the young people led to an understanding that these children did hold essentially racist views, often based on fear, jealousy and perceived unfair preferential treatment. Despite the fact that through a range of institutions these children had experienced anti-racist practice and policies, they still held racist views and were involved in racist hostility. Many young people were able to identify the discrepancy between their views and feelings towards race and racism and the views they were meant to express as part of the orthodoxy of anti-racism. As Back (1996) argues, anti-racist policies and practice have created a moral code which young people can either subscribe to or be punished by. To many of the young people involved in the project, anti-racism was an ideological perspective that they could not engage with, and consequently, did not engage with them. Many young people reported being alienated from discussion and exploration of issues of race, racism and identity as they were aware that their views did not sit well within the framework of anti-racism and therefore excluded from opportunities to consider the relevance and appropriateness of these views within the public realm.

This experience mirrored the data gathered some years earlier in South-east London (Hewitt, 2005) that anti-racism was provoking a negative 'backlash' amongst White working class young people, rather than having positive impacts. Whilst acknowledging that race equality measures have always provoked some sort of 'backlash' (Law, 1996), there is clear evidence that the assumptions and content of anti-racist educational approaches, as understood and practiced at ground level, have often unintentionally led to negative reactions from the target group of White (and often working class) young people. Such findings suggest the concept of 'racial threat' (Solomos, 2003), whereby economically-marginalised and 'socially-excluded'

(Byrne, 1999) White communities feel that public policy is privileging increasingly large and assertive non-white groups.

The resulting concern of the Leeds project was that by failing to address the issue of racism within a framework of inclusion, agencies risked further alienating these young people, increasing the likelihood of their further involvement with racist hostility and racist victimisation.

The project had identified a cohort of young people with a need for intervention regarding racism; however, the existing framework of anti-racist policies had promoted the alienation of this group. This then questions the effectiveness of existing anti-racist practices, if it does not engage those who express racist views, then there is a limited role to play in reducing racist violence. Rattansi (1992) argues that the traditional anti-racist approach is based on the principle that people who express or act on racist views are behaving systematically and in an uncontradictory manner. The experience of running the project was that this was not so and that the young people involved had a range of processes and ideologies in which to construct hierarchies of racial groups. For example, young people would express very different concerns and preconceptions about people of African-Caribbean descent than they would of people of South Asian heritage, suggesting differential racisms, with a (partial) privileging of *some* ethnic minority cultures (Hall, 1992; Back, 1996).

Traditional anti-racist policy has focused on preventing the racist from acting (Law, 2007), including banning or punishing them (Hewitt, 1996). The experience from the work with young people who hold racist views is that this is not sufficient to effectively challenge those views. The young people did not respond positively to legislative and punitive responses to their expression of racism. In order to identify

the young people involved in racist violence, we asked local service providers such as the youth service, police, housing department and schools who they believed to be involved. Our initial communication with young people seemed to correlate with the professional's assumptions about the young people's attitudes towards race and racism. The young people predominantly knew that it was not socially acceptable to recast their views in front of welfare professionals as this would likely lead to punitive action. For the project, this meant we had to create an atmosphere of openness in order to allow the young people to express their views without fear of chastisement. This set up an ethical and ideological dilemma between the traditional approach to anti-racism and our goals, which were to allow the exploration of prejudicial attitudes towards race and ethnicity.

With the knowledge that traditional anti-racist approaches have had a limited or indeed negative impact with White young people who hold and express racist views (Back, 1996, Hewitt 1996), the project developed a new framework for working with racism based on a range of guiding principles. This included enabling the development of bridging social capital. Although the concept of social capital is problematic, Cattle (2005) states that the concept of bridging social capital can be useful in promoting community cohesion through the development of cross-cultural understanding, reciprocity and trust. Therefore, one of the aims of the project was to build trust and tolerance with young people from other communities and other ethnic groups. The young people involved with the project were from mono-ethnic estates, attended mono-ethnic school and had mono-ethnic friendship groups. From discussion with the young people, it became apparent, that much of their concerns with race were due to ignorance and a lack of meaningful cross-cultural contact. In order to address this, the project forged links with youth projects in areas of Leeds

that could be considered ethnically diverse. The projects then explored these agency relationships in order to provide joint activities. In designing these joint activities we deliberately avoided activities that would reinforce competition, such as inter-project sports events. As detailed above, Hemmerman et al (2007) had identified perceived competition as a driver for racist hostility, the project was mindful to not to develop joint activities that would reinforce the ideology of racial competition. Rather, the project design focused on activities that promoted co-operation and collaboration, the activities were effectively goal-oriented but relied on the young people working together to achieve. Brown (1995) presents a range of evidence of the role of contact between groups in reducing prejudice. For inter-group contact to be successful in reducing prejudice, the contact activity has to satisfy several conditions. Two of these conditions are that the contact is of equal status and that the contact involves co-operative activities. In order to meet these conditions, the venue for the joint activities was often outside of either groups' locality or place where either group had any sense of ownership. An example of this type of equal-status, co-operative activity was designing and building a raft to get the young people from one side of a lake to the other. Brown (1995) also states that the duration, frequency and acquaintance potential of the inter-group contact plays a significant role in reducing prejudice. With this in mind, it was the project's experience that some of the most successful outcomes were observed while taking two or more groups away for several days at a time on residential excursions. Again, the focus of these interventions was to develop collaboration and co-operation between the ethnically distinct groups as with the raft-building example above. The advantage with residential excursions was that it provided the framework for high acquaintance potential (Cook, cited in Brown 1995). By allowing

the two groups to live together for a period of days at a neutral venue provided the opportunity for the groups to discover previously unknown similarities between each other.

For the young people involved, a significant barrier to participation in these joint activities was their raised anxiety in response to their fear of difference. In order to address this, the project had to create and implement a policy shift in order to allow the open exploration of young people's fears, anxieties and concerns. As previously noted, the current policy and legislative framework in the UK is geared towards controlling behaviour and not conducive to the exploration of the underlying values that contribute to racist behaviour (Cantle, 2005, Hewitt, 2005). This could be seen as an unintended consequence of well-meaning policy and practice, however, this created an ethical dilemma for the staff at the project; how do you enable the open discussion of fears and anxiety about race within a policy framework which is punitive towards such expression of racial hostility? With regards to this question, the work of the project and this article cannot provide a complete answer as this an area for further research and development. That said, the staff team developed some effective methods for promoting the open discussion of the fear of difference. For example, reframing concerns about racial stereotypes using a variation of Jane Elliot's famous lesson in discrimination based on eye colour (Peters, 1971). Another method was to create opportunities to allow the young people to test reality about what were concerns built on myth and stereotype.

Cantle (2005) describes the principles of community cohesion programmes as having a common vision and sense of belonging, valuing diversity and promoting cross-cultural contact. In order to promote the idea of a common vision, the project used the context of the English national football team. For many of the young

people, this was an area of public life where they could identify a common agenda that crossed cultural and ethnic divides. The project used the concept of the national team to promote the idea of a multi-ethnic team working together to achieve a common objective within a framework of a national identity. A particularly effective tool was the “Show Racism the Red Card” education pack (Soyei, 2005). This consisted of a range of audiovisual resources to explore issues of diversity, racism and patriotism. For example, showing the young people video footage of racial abuse of English football players by Spanish supporters and then asking the young people to state how they would respond if they were in the England team or management. This created a useful catalyst for the discussion of common values, common citizenship and a common sense of belonging to the nation state. This method of intervention certainly enabled some positive outcomes in terms of the young people expressing their positive consideration of the Black and White players working together towards a common national objective. However, there was also an element of reframing prejudice along nationalist lines. Using the specific example cited above, some young people defined the Spanish as the subordinate other. This was a challenge for the project, as the goal was to reduce prejudice along racial divides not promote prejudice along national divides, and required some careful management. The other criticism of this approach was that it did not engage young women as effectively as young men. The project assumed that this was due to gender-bias in the socialisation and cultural transmission of sport.

### **Discussion: Community Cohesion as a way forward?**

The case study evidence from Leeds discussed above provides graphic and empirical support for previous studies (CRE, 1999; Hewitt, 2005) that have questioned the effectiveness and impact of anti-racism in the UK, particularly in the

ways it was often understood and practised in the educational settings of schools and youth work. We argue that the case study also provides evidence to support emerging academic critiques of how policy and practice can be profitably altered to have more positive impacts on the attitudes, values and behaviour of White young people (Thomas, 2006; 2007; McGhee, 2006). Specifically, the positive direction taken by the case study mirrors developments in youth work practice in other areas in the name of the new policy direction of 'Community Cohesion', and the aims and content of this Community Cohesion practice challenge the empirical evidence –free attacks on Cohesion (Burnett, 2004; Flint and Robinson, 2008).

The 2001 urban disturbances and the associated emergence of Community Cohesion as the new priority has clearly been a watershed for 'race relations' policy (Solomos, 2003). Arguably, these disturbances provided the opportunity for government to take new directions that had already been mapped out in principle (CFMEB, 2000). The Community Cohesion reports (Cantle, 2001; Denham, 2001; Ritchie, 2001; Clarke, 2001) and their associated discourse (see for instance, Cantle, 2005) contain a clear critique of past policy approaches and map out new directions (Home Office 2003; 2005; 2007; DCLG, 2007). The fundamental issue from this perspective is ethnic segregation, and the distrust, conflict and 'parallel lives' that flow from it. The focus on physical ethnic segregation is highly contested, particularly the implicit suggestion that it is getting worse, when much of the empirical data suggests a more optimistic long-term picture of ethnic segregation slowly breaking down, and so called 'white flight' being more about the inevitable drift of older and more prosperous communities towards suburban and rural areas (Finney and Simpson, 2009). Nevertheless, ethnic segregation is significant in many of Britain's

towns and cities, and especially so in the ex-industrial areas witnessing disturbances in 2001. Here, the emergence of Community Cohesion may well represent a more overt acknowledgement and frustration with this than has been evident in the past. It is suggested here that whilst past policy approaches, especially the post-1981 priorities of anti-racism and equal opportunities, did **not** cause this segregation (racism did that), they accepted and deepened it through their concern with the needs of, and equality for, each separate ethnic group rather than focussing on common needs, identities and values. Consistently with wider New Labour social policy approaches (Giddens, 1998; Byrne, 1999; Levitas, 2005), Cohesion takes a communitarian approach in believing that government alone cannot create cohesion and cross-ethnic solidarity, and that it must create the conditions whereby individual and communities use their agency (Etzioni, 1995; Greener, 2002) to overcome it, so forging wider, common identities alongside existing ethnic, separate ones. For structuralist critics (Kundnani, 2002; Alexander, 2004) this focus on the possibility of agency exposes a naivety within social policy. Much academic discourse around Community Cohesion has been overtly negative, portraying it as a lurch back towards the coercive assimilationism of the 1960s, where the post-war ethnic minority immigrants invited by the British state and industrial employers to come from the Caribbean and South Asia to fill labour shortages were expected to leave their own languages, customs and traditions behind, and 'become English', even though the response when these non-white immigrants tried to fit in to British housing and social life was often blatant and unchecked racism (Solomos, 2003). In one sense, this is understandable, as the rise of Cohesion initially represented a clear decision to no longer use the terms 'multiculturalism' or 'anti-racism', and latterly has been accompanied by overt attacks on multiculturalism by key anti-racist and liberal



figures, with it being blamed for Britain 'sleep-walking to segregation' (Phillips, 2005), and for undermining the solidarity necessary for the welfare state (Goodhart, 2004). This has given the green light to right of centre politicians and think-tanks to join the assault, with multiculturalism accused of leaving Britain as a 'soft target' for terrorists (Prins and Salisbury, 2008). As a result, critics have portrayed Community Cohesion as the 'death of multiculturalism' (Kundnani, 2002), and as a vacuous, meaningless cover for a drift away from anti-racist commitment (Flint and Robinson, 2008).

This might suggest a worrying drift away from concern with anti-racism and social justice within work with young people, but this forthright condemnation of Community Cohesion is almost entirely evidence-free in relation to how Community Cohesion is actually being understood and practised on the ground. It is our contention that the positive direction taken by the Leeds project in the case study discussed above actually represents the key themes of Community Cohesion in its focus on direct contact across ethnic divides and in its emphasis on dialogue with young people rather than moralistic 'blame'. This contention is supported by larger-scale case-study evidence from Oldham, Greater Manchester, scene of one the 2001 disturbances that 'tipped' government towards a focus on Cohesion. Space does not allow a detailed discussion of this investigation into how Youth Workers and their agencies actually understood and practised Community Cohesion, with a fuller discussion available elsewhere (Thomas, 2006; 2007), but the study established that Cohesion had a substantial impact on the assumptions and priorities of Youth Work practice with young people in Oldham and that, rather than representing a retreat from concern with racism, it incorporated that focus within new work approaches and language that stressed commonality and contact between young people of all ethnic and social backgrounds.

The study established all the previous downsides of 'anti-racism' discussed in general terms above. No work had previously taken place to bring ethnically segregated areas together, with youth workers working with young people of their 'own' ethnic background. Workers reported a clear lack of clarity and confidence about the meaning and practice of 'anti-racism' with White young people, so mirroring national evidence (CRE, 1999; Hewitt, 2005), and delivered it as a rigid, non-negotiable programme that young people could either subscribe to or opt out of. Contrastingly, in the post-2001 Community Cohesion era, youth workers in Oldham were clear, positive and enthusiastic about the meaning and practice of Community Cohesion. This was because they accepted the key critique of ethnic segregation and overcoming it as the route to changing the attitudes, values and behaviour of prejudiced young people. As a result, post-2001 youth work practice in Oldham has made cross-ethnic contact between young people the central theme of all its practice. This has included link-ups between youth centres and projects to jointly carry out trips and programmes in the same way as that developed by the Leeds case study project. Imaginative approaches have been developed, such as whole town youth events that overtly engage young people in positive events such as the Muslim Eid festival, and an annual residential for representatives from all High Schools in the borough, where working intensively together in ethnically-mixed teams is the focus. That fact that these events and link-ups also prioritise the breaking down of 'territory' barriers between young people of the same ethnic background, and on integrating young people with physical and learning disabilities demonstrates the holistic approach and the common, inclusive youth and locality identities that they are trying to develop. Awareness of the potential for racism and racial conflict is integral to the planning, but 'race' identities are not the only forms of

identity being worked with (Gunaratnam, 2003), suggesting that this practice has the potential to develop a form of 'critical multiculturalism' (May, 1999) that works with notions of 'race' and anti-racism, but does not reify ethnicity or essentialise ethnic identities in the way that both anti-racism and multiculturalism have done in the past (Bhavnani, 2001). Here, professional practice with young people is working with 'intersectional' understandings of the realities and possibilities of youth identities, something that mirrors the guiding principles of the New Labour government's overarching 'human rights' framework for their approaches to citizenship and identity (McGhee, 2006). Not all this direct contact work in Oldham is successful, as some of it is superficial, but that reflects generic problems with the training and employment conditions of youth workers (Moore, 2005).

For a minority of ethnic minority-origin youth workers, the move away from the language and priorities of anti-racism is a backwards step, and given the continued reality of racial discrimination and violence in the town, this is understandable. However, it is clear from this Oldham evidence (Thomas, 2006;2007), and the earlier case study discussion from Leeds , that this direct-contact youth work being promoted in the name of Community Cohesion is **not** assimilationism or a denial of the reality of racism or the need to engage with it. Instead, existing and distinct ethnic and geographical identities and provision are taken as a given. Instead, this new youth practice focuses on bringing young people together in carefully-planned and controlled conditions that enables them to have positive interactions and dialogue with young people of different backgrounds without their own identity or needs being questioned or threatened. This means that preliminary work with young people in their distinct ethnic, geographical and cultural settings is a crucial part of the process. Therefore, instead of assimilationism, this represents a transversal

politics of 'rooting and shifting' (Yuval-Davis, 1997), whereby young people can positively engage with 'others' and so re-think their assumptions and values precisely because their own identities are not at risk or being overtly focussed on – 'race' is being addressed by not addressing it. This Community Cohesion youth work practice also addresses the conditions of 'contact theory' (Hewstone et al, 2007; Brown, 1995), which focuses on how to break down the extreme mutual distrust and fear stemming from situations of ethnic segregation and conflict, such as in the north of Ireland. Here, prejudices can only be successfully overcome if 'contact' is sustained over time, is well-organised, is done in groups to avoid the 'he's all right but the others..' syndrome, and that existing identities do not feel under overt threat or criticism. We argue that the case study evidence presented above from both Leeds and Oldham meets many of these conditions, and so suggests a much more positive potential for Community Cohesion policy approaches than that suggested by some academic critics.

## **Conclusion**

For some (Back et al, 2002), the current New Labour government in the UK has been 'looking both ways' on 'race' and anti-racism, taking positive steps forward on institutional racism in the wake of the Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson, 1999), but then rejecting 'multiculturalism' (Phillips, 2005) and moving towards assimilationism through Community Cohesion. We reject this interpretation, and have drawn on empirical evidence from professional practice with young people in the north of England to suggest that work with White young people who often hold prejudiced, racist views is actually developing in positive directions. This case study evidence from Leeds and Oldham supports many of the critiques about the shortcomings and unintended problems of much 'anti-racist' educational work (CRE, 1999; Hewitt,

2005), highlighting a 'backlash' and refusal to subscribe to the 'moral code' (Back, 1996) of anti-racist orthodoxy. Alongside this has been a lack of confidence and self-belief from youth workers in relation to the efficacy of the approaches taken (Thomas, 2002). The case study evidence discussed in detail from Leeds, and summarised from Oldham (Thomas, 2006; 2007) discusses new and more profitable directions for work with such White young people. These new approaches focus on direct, meaningful contact amongst young people of different ethnic and social backgrounds within carefully planned and controlled programmes of work, so addressing the key principles of 'contact theory' (Brown, 1995; Hewstone et al, 2007). These work approaches accept the key Community Cohesion critique (Cantle, 2001; 2005) of the need to overcome the reality and psychological effects of physical and cultural ethnic segregation, and how previous 'race relations' (Solomos, 2003) policies have inadvertently re-enforced this segregation. The reality of this new practice with White young people, such as in the Leeds case study, is work focussed on shared experiences, experiential education and laying the grounds for the possible recognition of commonality across ethnic backgrounds. Clearly, the barriers created by structural racism are large, and the challenges remain significant – any progress through such new work approaches will be slow and incremental. However, such work approaches feel to be making progress through working positively with White, often profoundly socially excluded (Byrne, 1999), young people, rather than working against them through moralistic and counter effective judgements.

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