CULTURAL ISSUES AND GIFTED AND TALENTED PUPILS

Definitions

Culture is a disputed term and notoriously difficult to define but in the social sciences the concept usually contains the idea of culture as being that in human society which is socially rather than biologically transmitted. Such a definition draws into itself a wide diversity of phenomena transmitted through social interaction including language, clothing preferences, customs, history, religion, musical and artistic tastes, patterns of settlement, of social organisation, of behaviour, value systems, priorities, motivations and aspirations. It also points to a variety of interconnections between people, of points of production and transmission of culture. Cultural influences on school age children include their family, the economic or occupational groups of the adults in that family, faith community, neighbourhood, racial or ethnic identification, language gender group, peer group, school and the media. All of these factors, and the interplay between them, affect the individual young person's self-understanding. They are also likely to affect the understanding that others have of them, the way they relate to them and the decisions made for them.

In last few decades there has been much interest in the UK in the 'multicultural' classroom, by which is understood the classroom where pupils come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. The focus of this briefing will be upon the influence that identification with (or perceived membership of) these ethnic categories can have upon the experience and achievement of more able children and young people in our schools, not forgetting, however, that ethnicity is but one thread in a complex web of influences and ideas that effect young people's self-understanding. The demographic profiles of our schools are so various, and so fast changing that it will not be possible to address all the issues that teachers are working with. Rather, the briefing will aim to set out some of the debates and raise some of the questions that professionals might like to consider in relation to their school context.

Researchers and theorists in this field have taken a number of different and occasionally conflicting positions. There is an inevitable tension between the acceptance of an ethno-cultural categorisation of the school population as a means to investigate differential attainment and opportunities, and the rejection of the type of cultural essentialism that labels children according to given cultural stereotypes. In addition there is occasionally perceived to be a tension between gifted and talented education (viewed by some critics as selective) and the inclusive principles of the raising ethnic minority achievement agenda. With the kind of society we want our children to live in at issue the discussion can become politically charged. There are also other sensitivities of a more personal nature involved in a debate that touches upon young people's self-understanding, their sense of identity, self-worth and belonging.

In this briefing the reader will be guided towards further reading, research and reports around cultural issues. Most of these texts will have been generated by studies of the English experience but some draw on the long tradition of North American scholarship in this field. It begins by drawing attention to the inequalities in achievement between different ethnic groups within the English education system and then proceeds to consider some of the cultural factors that might help to explain these disparities. The briefing ends with recommendations and practical examples of strategies that have been employed to support the education of children from minority cultures in English schools.

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Attainment and statistics

Inequalities in attainment

An increasingly large proportion of English education takes place in multi-cultural classrooms with pupils and teachers coming from a variety of linguistic, ethnic, religious and social backgrounds. The minority ethnic population in English primary schools (of compulsory school age) had reached 19.3% in 2005 and in secondary schools 15.3% (DfES SFR 42/2005). Sources of information on levels of educational attainment of the different groupings within this population include the Youth Cohort Study (YCS), the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), all of which give a national picture, as well as local reports and papers published in local (education) authorities. Data presented in these national and local reports suggests comparative inequalities in the attainment and achievement levels of ethnic groups. Indian, Chinese, Irish and Mixed White and Asian heritage pupils, for example, consistently achieve above the national average across Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 and are more likely to gain five A* to C GCSE grades while all minority ethnic groups within the Black category, pupils of Mixed White and Black Caribbean heritage, Bangladeshi and Pakistani students and Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage pupils perform consistently below the national average (DfES RTP-05).

Among the inequalities recorded in the national tables some figures stand out. Pupils of Chinese heritage score significantly higher than any other ethnic group across all key stages, for example 90% achieved or exceeded the expected level at Key Stage 2, compared to 75 per cent nationally, in 2004. Chinese pupils also made the most progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 with a value added measure of 1026.0 compared to 987.9 across all maintained pupils. Figures for Black Caribbean students record a steady drop in attainment levels across the key stages with, in 2003, significant percentages reaching expected levels of attainment in Key Stage 1 (78% in reading, 74% in writing and 84% in maths) to the merely 33% with five or more A* to C grade GCSEs at Key Stage 4. In 2004 some improvement was recorded with 41.7% achieving five plus A* to C grades though this was still significantly below the national figure of 54.9%. Among the ethnic minorities the Gypsy/Roma and Traveller children of Irish Heritage are of the most concern scoring consistently low across the key stages with only a third of the former and a quarter of the latter achieving the expected level in Key Stage 2 English and Maths in 2004 compared to at least three quarters of all pupils on average.

Socio-economic factors

The different attainment levels could partly be attributed to the different social class profiles of the ethnic groups. The well-known close correlation between educational attainment and social class was re-stated in 2003 by the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit when it was reported that, in 2000, 70% of children of people in managerial and professional occupations achieved five A* - C GCSE grades compared with fewer than 30% of children whose parents were in unskilled manual occupations. For the Pakistani heritage students, to take but one of the ethnic groupings, the regional difference in educational attainment is noticeable with lower numbers of students applying for university places from those in parts of the country where the Pakistani community has a lower socio-economic profile (West Midlands, Humber, Yorkshire) than from other regions where the profile is higher (London, South East). Socio-economic status is not the whole story, however. Pakistani heritage pupils in poorest socio-economic circumstances reached levels substantially higher than those reached by white pupils in the same circumstances while Pakistani heritage pupils not affected by poverty had lower levels of attainment than the corresponding white pupils (RAISE p26). Research by Gillbourn and Mirza (2000) indicated that the impact of socio-economic factors differs for different groups: they suggest the correlation between class indicators and attainment is not as strong for Black pupils, for example. Charts demonstrating the relative performance of pupils eligible for free school meals and cohort as a whole (using 2002 PLASC

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characteristics) show that, though there is a difference in levels of attainment, the difference is particularly marked for white pupils and less marked for other ethnic groups (Aiming Higher ref.). From these variations it can be deduced that, while the impact of social and material circumstances is a genuine and urgent concern, there are other factors that need to be investigated when exploring reasons for, and possible solutions to, these inequalities of educational achievement.

Gifted, talented and the statistics

In the field of education for ‘able, gifted and talented’ pupils these statistics raise particular concerns about pupils from ethnic minorities who are not achieving as highly as they might, or who are not being afforded opportunities to develop or capitalise on their abilities and advance their skills (inclusion on a gifted and talented programmes, progression to A levels, to higher education, entrance into a top-ranking university) where such opportunities are linked to grades. The relatively high attainment of some ethnic groups will also be of interest to the teacher of ‘gifted and talented’ students who is concerned to be sensitive to the needs and experiences of all his/her pupils, achievers and underachievers, in order to be able to support and guide them in their work and choices.

The Excellence in Cities gifted and talented initiative aimed to redress some of the inequalities of achievement in the English education system, to look beyond the attainment statistics in the identification of gifts and talents and so enable those children and groups of children who are not attaining as highly as they might, to achieve success. The differentiation of educational provision for more able students is only justifiable if the identification methods used to select those children are robust. In 2002 the Department of Education issued the statement:

> ‘The gifted and talented scheme will identify children by looking at ability, rather than attainment, to capitalise on the talents of the individual child, regardless of ethnic background’

In the light of this aim the initial statistics relating the identification of gifted and talented pupils to ethnicity were disappointing. Inequalities persisted with white pupils more likely to be identified as ‘gifted and talented’ than other groups. The figures produced for 200? showed that the percentage of pupils identified by ethnic origin was as follows: white UK pupils10%, Indian pupils 6%, Pakistani pupils 5%, Black Caribbean pupils 4% and Black African pupils 2%. There are clearly issues that need to be addressed if Gifted and Talented education initiatives are to be able to stand up against criticism (see Gillbourn 2005) of social injustice.

Cultural Misunderstandings

Misreading the signs

Cohen and Manion described schools as ‘ miniature societies governed by their own special norms and values’ (Cohen and Manion 1981 p325). Any educational institution considering the influence of cultural factors on the achievement of its pupils, might start with acknowledgement that it has its own culture that with varying degrees of success it works to transmit to its pupils. It is easy for a professional working within a particular school and educational system to view that systems practices, its values, relationships and codes of behaviour, as general social and educational norms rather than recognise them as culturally specific.

Any child has adjustments to make when they move into a new school. Where the norms of the pupils’ home and community cultures are significantly different from those of the school, establishing themselves in the latter setting is a larger task. It is not just a question of obeying school rules, following teacher instructions and meeting the explicit requirements of

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the curriculum, it is also learning to read and to reproduce the small signs and signals (the use of words, tone of voice, body language) in order to know what is expected of them, what is allowed and what disapproved of, and to act accordingly. The pupils' sense of comfort within the school, and their sense of competence is likely to be influenced by the readiness and confidence with which they assimilate these school norms. This may in turn significantly affect their performance, their motivation for and commitment to learning.

The teachers too may have difficulty reading the cultural signs presented by their pupils and misinterpret their actions and responses when they do not conform to their image of the 'good' or 'successful' student. Common occasions of misunderstanding include the reluctance of many children of Asian heritage to look at their teachers and other adults when they are being spoken to (is it a sign of stupidity or of shiftiness?), the 'bopping' stylised walk of some black youth (a sign of defiance?). In a group interview, Craig (from Brent) recalls just such a cultural misunderstanding between teachers and pupils:

> 'Within my culture people can express themselves in a loud and enthusiastic and passionate way. This is how my parents are, and that's how I know how to be. At school I mostly had Black friends from the same ethnic and social backgrounds …The way we behaved was misunderstood at school and regarded as rudeness, aggression and bad attitude' (ref p158)

Misinterpreted patterns of behaviour can affect relationships in the classroom and patterns and generate tensions. Some of the confrontations between teachers and pupils that lead to the disproportionately high exclusion rates of Black Caribbean boys may have their origins in, or be aggravated by, such misunderstandings.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept, 'cultural capital' has relevance here. The concept is used to explain differences in educational attainment of different groups in society, the term 'cultural capital' denoting the symbols, ideas, tastes, preferences, language, behaviours that are used in social action. By analogy with economic capital, these have different values and can be converted into other forms, so children endowed with 'cultural competences' valued by society will have greater likelihood of converting this capital into academic success at school and university. Bourdieu's thesis was that middle-class parents are able to pass on to their children the competences that will enable them to persuade others of their aptitude and suitability for higher educational opportunities, while working class children, with less access to these resources, were less likely to be successful. Likewise children from ethnic minority cultures can experience disadvantage because of a similar gap between the cultural norms of their home community and those of the school.

The findings of Rollock's research into teacher perceptions of the 'successful' pupil in a secondary school with a significant Black population fit neatly into Bourdieu's model. Rollock asked staff to describe the characteristics of the successful pupil. The responses she received gave a clear indication of the cultural capital that had currency within that school. The cultural competences such pupils had at their disposal including, 'good conversational skills'; 'no obvious display of Black subcultures'; 'access to books'; 'learn instruments'. As one member of staff said:

> There are some children in this school who because they fit the look of an academically successful child, yeah, often quite hard working, always does the work on time, they are labelled as being the gifted ones, the very academically able ones … Ms S2 (Support staff) (Rollock p17 2005)

Craig's account offers an example of young people who did not possess the cultural competences (manner of speech, tone of voice) associated with the 'good' or 'successful' student in their school. In his seminal text (Coard 1971), Bernard Coard painted a very

different picture of the behaviour of Black Caribbean children in English schools in the 1970s, but Bourdieu's theory of 'cultural capital' still applies. He claimed that 'many behaviour patterns and ways of relating to the teacher and to other children which are part of the West Indian culture are misunderstood by the teacher' (Coard 1971 in Richardson 2005 p34). One common difficulty arose from the fact that children were not expected to talk or 'talk back' as much in the West Indian classroom as in the English classroom, and their reticence was taken for 'dullness' or hostility. Teachers today might wish to reflect on assumptions that could be made about the educational ability of students from cultures where young people are expected to be respectfully quiet in the presence of adults, particularly in light of the recent emphasis on the verbal expression of higher order thinking skills.

Some of the misunderstandings noted above, particularly those that label children as rude and defiant, can turn pupils into cultural misfits within the class and school. This perception of them as misfits are sharply realised when pupils are made to sit on their own in class because of a breakdown of relations and escalation of inappropriate behaviour, when they are sent out of class for a lesson, or end up being excluded from school. That the rate of Black Caribbean boys excluded from school is disproportionate to their percentage of the total population has long been known. It was clearly demonstrated in 2002/3 (the first year where official statistics related exclusion rates to ethnicity) where the percentage of exclusions for Black Caribbean students was 0.37 as compared with the national average of 0.13. The long-term outlook for excluded pupils is bleak. While they are out of school they are being denied opportunities to achieve. Sociologist, Robert Merton's dictum 'crime results from exclusion from legitimate means of achieving success' is still relevant today (Merton 1949) and the link between exclusion from school and crime is so strong that in 2001, Martin Narey, Director General of the Prison Service, declared that young people excluded from school 'might as well be given a date by which to join the prison service some time later on down the line.' (cited in John 2005 p102).

Cultural bias in assessment and identification

Coard documented the way cultural bias in assessment strategies contributed to the erroneous identification of many Black Caribbean children as ESN ('educationally subnormal') in the 1970s. The qualitative approaches to identification of learning difficulties, teacher observations and perceptions were subject to cultural misreadings of behaviour (see above) and the quantitative methods of standardised testing, he claimed, also had the effect of favouring some cultural backgrounds over others. Both the actual questions asked and the test situation itself, were, Coard argued, biased towards a white, middle-class culture (Coard 1971 in Richardson (ed) 2005). At the other end of the scale, 'gifted and talented' coordinators are engaged in the identification of the most able students within their schools. These teachers might consider how 'culture-free' or 'culture-fair' are the strategies (quantitative or qualitative) employed to assess the ability levels of their pupils. Even today, standardised assessments and intelligence tests (including IQ-based tests) may use vocabulary, experiences and skills that are not equally familiar or valued across different cultural groups. With the best intentions, those who design standardised test papers (such as mathematics and science SATS) face an impossible task trying to find 'real life' examples that are equally familiar and meaningful to children of all cultural backgrounds, 'a few Asian names …thrown in' as a tokenistic gesture (Sewell p50) is not enough.

In checklist assessments as opposed to written testing, there are also questions of cultural difference to be addressed. In her investigation into baseline assessment of the1990s, Burgess-Macey questioned the selection of the skills to be tested with these very young children. She asked why, for example, the knowledge of nursery rhymes should be privileged over knowledge of popular songs, of Christian hymns or verses of the Qu'ran. or whether the naming of colours is equally valued and practised behaviour in all cultures. Seemingly trivial cultural variations can make significant differences in identification of ability among these

young children. Do colour recognition assessments recognise, for example, that in different languages and cultures the point along the colour spectrum at which red becomes orange or blue becomes green differs? It is Burgess-Macey's concern that 'because the selection process is biased from the start' assessment practices in the early years might contribute to maintaining the stereotyped expectations of black and ethnic minority students that have had such a damaging effect in the past (Burgess-Macey 1994 p59).

Efforts have been made to overcome this problem of cultural bias by introducing 'culture fair' tests where the aim has been, not to find examples familiar to all, but to choose exercises that are as culturally neutral as possible so that the novelty factor is equal. In particular verbal material has been removed from the tests and tasks and an emphasis placed on the visual. The Raven Progressive Matrices tests, for example, are IQ-based tests, using a standardised scoring system, that employ abstract pattern completion activities. Even such abstract assessments, it seems, are not entirely free from bias. Indeed research in the 1980s revealed that nonverbal tests (including Raven Progressive Matrices) tended to show greater discrepancies across socio-cultural groups than the verbal tests (Jensen 1982 cited in Sternberg 1985 p77, p309). Some individuals are already familiar with these types of activity from taking similar tests or from everyday experiences with abstract kinds of materials. For these students such assessments do not measure their ability to cope with novelty but rather to apply skills they have already acquired in other contexts. On the other hand, research work on visual perception suggests that people whose previous experience and culture is mostly verbal are disadvantaged in visual tests (Bagsky 1957 and Deregowski 1980a cited in Thomas p132 2000). They would appear to be more suited to those children who have had plenty of experience of shape recognition and pattern making toys and jigsaws, than those who spend a good deal of time listening to conversations, talks and scripture readings in family, community and religious settings.

The limitations of formal assessment procedures are well rehearsed in Gifted and Talented literature (Freeman 1998). In a concern not to miss the underachieving gifted pupil, teachers are advised to use a variety of strategies and qualitative as well as quantitative measures of ability and potential. Often qualitative judgements focus more on behaviours than on attainment. Some authors in the field (Leyden 1998; George 1992) have formulated checklists that give teachers certain gifted behaviours to look out for. Though these may have a value in moving teachers beyond a too easy correlation between high ability and high academic performance, they too contain elements of cultural bias. David George's frequently used checklist is a case in point. He makes a distinction between the '*bright* child' whose characteristics include 'knows the answers', 'works hard', 'has good ideas', 'listens with interest', 'is receptive', 'absorbs information', 'enjoys peers', and the '*gifted* learner' who 'asks the questions', 'plays around yet tests well', 'has wild silly ideas', 'shows strong feelings/opinions', 'is intense', 'manipulates information', 'prefers adults' (George 1992). Reviewing these lists, it could be said that the 'gifted learner' is a cultural construct conforming more to a western post-romantic, individualist view of the person than to the traditional image of the Asian learner, for example (see below). The use of these two lists to distinguish the 'gifted' from the merely 'bright' privileges a particular cultural understanding of education, of the kind of deference and respect a pupil should show to adults in general and the teacher in particular, and indeed (with its emphasis on manipulation rather than absorption and reception) a particular cultural understanding of the nature of knowledge itself.

The use of standardised tests and assessment checklists present a reductionist approach to ability identification that limits both the teacher and learner. They may measure what is easy to measure, or measure that which accords with particular cultural norms of performance and behaviour, but do not afford the flexibility needed to build on what children from a variety of backgrounds can do and understand, and what they bring to the learning event from their own experiences and cultures. Schools and teachers might look for ways in which they can

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acknowledge the variety of gifts of their diverse pupils. How might they, for example, recognise and value (and incorporate into their ability identification procedures) the impressive memorisations feats of those students learning the Qur'an by heart to become hafiz, recognise and make connections with the business skills acquired by children of travelling showground communities from a very young age, or recognise and build on the intercultural expertise of their (often very young) bilingual and multilingual students as they negotiate their way through their repertoire of languages, make correct decisions about which language to use with which person, for which circumstances and on which occasions? How might such skills be assessed and incorporated into records of achievement and learning plans?

Cultural stereotypes: teacher actions

Another factor commonly blamed for the underachievement of particular cultural groups is the power of the cultural stereotype. Teacher attitudes have been explored in detail in numerous studies. The examples cited here support the view that these stereotypes have been and still can be an issue. Black Caribbean pupils (boys in particular) are often deemed to be particularly at risk from cultural stereotypes within schools that label them as physical rather than cerebral, as volatile, loud, challenging. Over the last four decades a number of influential texts have documented teacher attitudes to Black Caribbean pupils. These studies include 'How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System' (Coard 1971), 'Young, Gifted and Black' (Mac an Ghaill 1988) and Black Masculinities and Schooling' (Sewell 1997). Various studies have revealed teacher stereotypes of other ethnic groups that operate in our schools. South Asian girls are seen as 'oppressed victims' of their culture (Brah, 1994; Basit, 1997; Shain, 2003); (non Muslim) Asian boys are regarded as 'little', 'quiet', 'behavers and achievers' (Mac an Ghaill, 1988; Connolly, 1998); Muslim boys are seen as 'arrogant', 'argumentative', dangerous 'fundamentalist' low achievers (Ipgrave 1999; Archer, 2003); Chinese boys are 'not laddish', are 'rather quiet', 'not interactive', 'hard working', 'nice', 'polite' and 'like the idea of success', (Archer 2005); Chinese girls are 'focused', 'dedicated', 'would just work until you told them to stop', 'reserved', 'shy', 'quiet and submissive' to a fault (Archer 2005).

In the mapping of teacher perceptions, there is a danger of adopting too simplistic a view that creates its own stereotype of the teacher as essentially middle class and (subconsciously) racist. Sewell is careful to avoid this by presenting a more nuanced analysis of teacher attitudes (whether supportive, irritated or antagonistic) and to recognise the power of other in-school relationships, in particular peer group interactions, on the categorisation of students according to ethnic and cultural characteristics. That the predominant focus has tended to be on the teachers is partly explained by awareness of the power teachers have, for good or ill, over their pupils' educational opportunities and life chances. Teacher perceptions do matter because teachers act upon them.

One of the most commonly stated goals of schools, present in policy documents and mission statements across the country, is to enable pupils to 'fulfil their potential'. Teachers responsible for 'gifted and talented' education are, in their identification procedures, looking for students with 'potential' so that provision can be matched to the pupils' true 'ability' levels. The work of Rollock and others problematises the concept 'potential' and also demonstrates just how large a problem that concept poses for pupils of different cultural backgrounds. A key question is who decides what a student's potential is. Where 'potential' is not decided by attainment levels and standardised tests alone, the role of teacher perception is significant. Where teachers' views of their pupils' potential are influenced by cultural stereotypes, those stereotypes will also play a part. So when understandings of 'potential' determines the provision offered to pupils there is a danger that cultural stereotypes will have an undue influence on young people's educational opportunities and life chances.

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The effects of teachers' subconscious cultural bias can be felt in a number of ways, in teacher/pupil interactions in the classroom, for example, where differentiated responses to pupils' perceived levels of ability can affect their academic development. Where pupils are understood to be 'weak' they may be given more structured support leading them to the answer thus denying them the opportunity to work out the intermediary steps and develop their problem-solving skills themselves. Depending on the school structures of provision, cultural bias can have an impact on the targeting of particular groups of children for differentiated activities, on assigning children to separate ability tables or sets, on identification of pupils for the 'Gifted and Talented' programmes. Discrepancies in the identification of pupils from different ethnic groups as 'gifted and talented' have already been noted. A consistent finding in both the US and UK, is that where education systems use some form of internal differentiation (through tracking, setting, banding, streaming), black pupils are usually over-represented in the lower status groups with all the implications this has for future attainment (Gillbourn 2005). As lower ranked groups tend to receive less of the curriculum (content and skills), this assignment to a particular set can have a cumulative effect with pupils less and less likely to demonstrate the skills or attain the results that will enable them to be reassigned and catch up with their higher ranked peers.

David Gillbourn of the University of London frequently voices his concern about racial inequalities in the English education system. One of his areas of concern is the tiering of GCSE examinations in key subjects, so that pupils are entered for different papers according to their teachers' assessment of their chances of success. While those on the higher tier can be awarded grades A* to D, those on the lower tier can only be awarded C to G. The inability to achieve the higher grades can affect students' chances of beginning A level courses in some subjects or of gaining places at top ranking universities. Until 2006 the situation in Maths was even worse. A three-tier system operated, with those students on the Foundation tier unable to achieve the C grade that is commonly understood to represent a pass. In a two year study in two London secondary schools, Gillbourn and Youdell found that two thirds of the black pupils were entered for maths in the Foundation tier meaning, effectively, that two in every three black students could not but fail their maths GCSE (Gillbourn and Youdell 2000).

Cultural stereotypes: pupil responses

Previously suggestions have been made about how cultural bias could affect the structures that enable or impede success. Here affective aspects of learning are considered and the influence cultural stereotyping might have on pupils' motivation, confidence and engagement with school. Coard suggested that teachers' low expectations of West Indian pupils in the 1970s encouraged the children to feel themselves to be inferior and bound to fail leading to reluctance to communicate or try their best in assessment tests (p25). The reaction of teachers to pupil's low attainment can have a decisive effect on pupils' motivation. Low expectations can lead to a teacher making allowances for low performance or over-praising the work of a student who could in reality attain higher. Research into pupil motivation suggests that such reactions can be debilitating for the student, confirming them in their understanding of themselves as low ability (Urdan and Turner p312 2005). This sense of aptitude as being attributable to stable and relatively uncontrollable factors (socio-economic status, ethnicity, race) may be reinforced where the teacher appears to have low expectations generally of the group with which that pupil identifies. Even where teachers are not guilty of low expectations, pupils may attribute to their teachers attitudes they have encountered in their wider experiences of society. An Ofsted report in 2002 stated:

> ' …school experiences tended to be interpreted by pupils in the light of what they have seen, experienced and heard about wider society. Given this it is not surprising that pupils struggle sometimes to make sense of teachers' intentions and meanings' (Ofsted 2002 p33)

The powerful influence of self-image on motivation probably explains why children and young people of ethnic minorities often cite the academic success of older siblings and cousins, with whom they can easily identify as a key motivating factor. It is also the reason why successful schools where minority ethnic groups achieve highly are those where teachers and senior management make very explicit their high expectations for all (HMI 447 2002; Lambeth 2006).

Even where the student does not accept the other's stereotyping, awareness of their negative perceptions of ability can create an anxiety that leads to underperformance. Steele and Aronson, from New York and Stanford Universities coined the phrase 'stereotype threat' when they were researching possible answers to the problem that black African American students of equal ability and preparation so frequently under perform in college relative to whites of comparable education and social profiles. Their work has encouraged a number of other 'stereotype threat' studies, though more research needs to be done to explore the applicability of this theory to the English context. (Steele and Aronson 1995; Aronson and Steele 2005), 'Stereotype threat' is the awareness individuals have about stereotypes associated with their group, an awareness that might put them under additional pressure in ability-related contexts. Steele and Aronson suggest that, in assessment activities, stereotype threatened students are often dividing their attention between the task and the meaning of their performance in terms of what it says about *them* and members of their racial group. Research into the impact of stereotype threat has documented two consequences for student motivation: a determination to work extra hard to disconfirm the stereotype or a 'disidentification' with academic achievement which downplays the importance of doing well at school (Graham & Hudley 2005 p401) Further studies in the US indicate that stereotype threat effects are experienced by children of middle childhood (equivalent to Key Stage 3) as well as by older students. Following the logic of this theory, pupil awareness of ability-related stereotypes (held by teachers and others) of their cultural group, will influence their performance, their motivation and ultimately their achievement.

Teacher expectations can cause difficulties even for those students whose ethnicity is associated with high achievement. Research by Archer and Francis in London schools indicates that, in teachers' perceptions, the Chinese heritage school population has a similar hard working, high achieving profile to that of the Asian Americans for whom the term 'model minority' was coined in the 1960s. Ethnographic studies have revealed the anxiety felt by young Asian Americans who feel forced to cope with their 'superstar' image. As one stated:

> 'They [whites] will have stereotypes, like we're smart …They are so wrong, not everyone is smart. They expect you to be this and sometimes you just lose your identity …When you get bad grades, people look at you really strangely because you are sort of distorting the way they see an Asian' (Lee 1994 cited in Graham and Hudley 2005)

Archer and Francis found that the British Chinese pupils of their study also felt negatively pressurised by teachers' and peers' positive assumptions about their abilities and achievements (Archer & Francis 2005). The high attainment levels within this group suggest that high expectations of Chinese young people, where they are realistic, do not generally have a negative impact on performance, though for individuals the pressure might be hard to manage. Teachers are more likely to be able to support them if they are alert to these difficulties.

Another possible response by young people to cultural stereotyping, is 'cultural inversion' or the establishment of an oppositional cultural identity that eschews those characteristics associated with the dominant group. This might include the rejection of working hard for school success as a way of maintaining their cultural distinctiveness. The comments of the teachers in Rollock's study (ref), and the messages they convey to their pupils, would indeed

reinforce the view that there is a trade off for the black students between their cultural identity and academic success. Fordham and Ogdu posited a fear among African-Americans of 'acting white' by working hard and achieving highly and so separating themselves from their community or 'fictive kinship' group (1986) Sewell refines this theory with reference to the Black Caribbean subjects into a concept of 'acting elite', behaviour which can equally involve a break with the 'fictive-kinship' of a community of black peers who have chosen to define themselves in opposition to the system (Sewell p84 1997). His study of the power relations and cultural discourses at 'Township School' relates how Black boys responded to their sense of powerlessness in the face of the racist inherent in the attitudes and structures of their school by recourse to a macho and rebel interpretation of Black youth culture (1997).

Shain's study of a group of young people who have a very different profile in public perceptions also presents an instance of oppositional cultural identity. Her research with Asian girls in a number of secondary schools investigated the resistance strategies used by all-Asian female friendship groups ('gang girls') who asserted positive Asian identities against what they deemed to be the 'racist' attitudes of their teachers, who regularly truanted, did not take school work seriously and, against their parents' wishes, actively produced the expectation through their attitudes and behaviour, that they would not continue into post-compulsory education. The responses of both Sewell's and Stain's young subjects are detrimental to their chances to advance and achieve within the existing structures of the education system.

Cultural normativity

In consideration of possible reasons for marked differences in attainment of different ethnic groups within our schools this briefing has drawn attention to two seemingly contradictory trends, the school culture that is insufficiently sensitive to the different cultural backgrounds of pupils, and school attitudes and stereotypes that make too much. How is it possible to reconcile the two? There are in fact several ways in which these seemingly contradictory trends converge. Both adopt a reductionist approach with little recognition given to the complex and dynamic interplay of influences, of relationships, circumstances and individual character traits that make up the profile of each pupil. The school culture approach tries to fit the child into a limited and limiting approved model of a successful student (or gifted child), while the type of stereotyping instanced above makes simplistic judgements of a child's capabilities and aptitudes according to crude generalisations about the ethnic or cultural groupings to which they are deemed to belong. Ultimately the relationship between the two trends hangs on the question of normativity. Where the culture of the school, its practices and values, are viewed as the common standard and the students' home backgrounds and cultures are judged by the degree to which they accord with or deviate from this norm rather than on their own merits, it is easy for deficit models of these cultures, to emerge.

It should also be recognised that this emphasis on institutional culture lifts some of the burden of guilt that is all too readily placed upon the teacher, for the teachers too are working (sometimes against their better instincts) within a system, with structures, routines, expectations and assessment strategies that can limit their own practices and outlook. Schools too are subject to restrictive pressures from an education system that has clearly defined requirements in terms of pupil learning and teacher practice regulated by a series of tests, targets, assessments of teacher and school performance, targets and league tables. A number of instances of cultural misunderstanding have been noted at the micro level of classroom relations (communication skills, learning behaviours). The principle of cultural normativity also transfers to a more macro level with the family structures and lifestyles that gain approval in the dominant discourse of English society.

Powerful assumptions about societal norms underlie the system of education in the UK that are occasionally in tension with the living patterns and traditions of some cultural groups. One of these is the close association of education with a period of childhood, by which is

meant dependency and lack of adult responsibility. Children and teenagers from many families and cultures are given responsibilities in the home and in family businesses that are often seen to be in competition with their studies. Teachers and mentors could play an important role in guiding and supporting pupils to organise their academic work around these other commitments. Older girls from families and cultures where early marriage and motherhood is encouraged, can face particular pressures and hard choices between academic achievement and domestic harmony. Such concerns were expressed by some Bangladeshi girls interviewed for an Ofsted report (Ofsted 2004 p14-15) who were disheartened at the idea of being married early and wondered whether it was worth battling to do well at school. Schools and educational policy makers might consider taking up the suggestion of parents interviewed for the same report (p11) and devise ways in which post-16 and higher education could be fitted around marriage and motherhood.

In a general concern for a flexible education system that does not erect unnecessary cultural barriers or create unnecessary cultural tensions for young people and their families, it is important to have a proviso. The issues of marriage and children at work are controversial and raise important issues about the relativity of cultural values. In both areas there could be extreme and exploitative practices that society, however, culturally sensitive, might be unable to countenance, ‘forced’ (as opposed to ‘arranged’) marriages, for example, working hours and conditions for children that effect their health and safety. For teachers and schools the question is whether they can recognise and step aside from their own particular cultural assumptions and assess whether the difficulty they are dealing with is a genuine problem where human rights, health and safety are at stake, or whether it is an issue of cultural misunderstanding and institutional rigidity. An example of the latter that affects the access to education and achievement of significant numbers of children is the inability of our educational structures to work with a nomadic lifestyle.

Normativity and discontinuous education

The concept of the settled community is also foundational to educational structures. The school system is built around the idea of the neighbourhood school serving a fairly stable local population. Though it may suit the majority of the population, there are communities who do not fit easily within this model. Most obvious are the Gypsy/Roma and Traveller families with their nomadic lifestyle. The low attainment of these pupils in standardised assessments has already been noted. In addition there are the immigration patterns of many of the people who have recently come to Europe countries from other parts of the world, or who are moving within the newly enlarged European Union from country to country and town to town. There are also the children of families who return to their ethnic homelands for several months at a time in order to maintain their family links. The fact that the loaded word ‘turbulence’ is used to describe this mobility of the pupil population within any school is a clear indication that it is seen as contrary to the norm and the cause of problems for the school and the children.

Another word used for these groups and their experience of education is ‘interrupted’ as in ‘interrupted learning’ (Jordan 2001). The move from school to school and the waiting periods they experience as their placing in new schools is negotiated, tends to mean an interrupted curriculum. Also interrupted is the tracking of progress and identification of learning needs. For the more able students, particularly where attainment in standardised tests has been affected by gaps in their curriculum knowledge, it may take time for each new school to identify their gifts and talents and to match provision to their learning needs.

In her studies of ‘interrupted learning’, in particular in relation to the traveller population, Jordan argues that the problem lies not so much with the fact of mobility as with the inability of a rigid education system to provide for its needs (Jordan 2001 p132). Ofsted reports have also highlighted the lack of flexibility as a major contributing factor to Traveller exclusion for opportunities for high educational achievement (1999). Among the difficulties these pupils

face Jordan cites the lack of respect and understanding for the groups' varied situations; low expectations of them; an inappropriate curriculum and its delivery; harassment, bullying and racism from staff and peers, the lack of ready access to a school place; self-exclusion as a response to these difficulties; the lack of personal support to access and stay in the school system and unwillingness to provide guidance and targeted action at the local authority level in particular in developing distance learning opportunities where appropriate. In relation to the first of the factors on Jordan's list, the lack of respect and understanding for the communities' situations, some families have found tension between the requirements of the school and the maintenance of their own cultural traditions and structures. Traveller parents have questioned how the school understanding of what constitutes 'academic' success contributes to what is valued in their communities, particularly to the maintenance of their communities (Jordan 1999a, 2000a). Can traveller children only be successful in school at the expense of being successful in their own community (Leigeois 1994)?

Parallel issues face families who spend extended periods in ethnic homelands outside the UK, problems which are aggravated by the practice in many schools (themselves subject to pressures to have their pupil places continuously filled) of removing pupils from their registers after more than a couple of weeks' absence so that families have to renegotiate admission on their return and sometimes have to look elsewhere for a school placement. This inflexibility does not give due recognition to the importance in many cultures of maintaining strong links with an extended family, not only for emotional reasons but also because it is through these family networks that young people will be given the support and opportunities to achieve success in future careers. In light of the upturn in the Indian economy, for example, its increasing influence on global markets and the job opportunities that that entails, it could also be very advantageous for young people with family links in this country as well as the UK, to have opportunities to develop their fluency in the cultures, systems and structures of both societies.

Intercultural understanding

Engaging with the culture of the school

Though recognition of the institutional and societal origins of many of the cultural issues raised in this briefing does remove some of the unhelpful burden of blame on teachers, it does not take away their power to act upon the situation and effect change. The issues of interrupted and curtailed educational opportunities treated in the section above may require significant structural change, but other causes of misunderstanding and underachievement can be tackled at the micro-level of the classroom. Where the teachers and other staff are ready to reflect on and acknowledge cultural preferences and assumptions within their practice and institution, the communication and relationship between them and the students can be viewed in terms of developing intercultural understanding. If pupils' progress through the English education system and beyond is dependent on acquiring particular behaviours, forms of speech and learning patterns (if they need to know to sit quietly and still on the carpet while the Foundation Stage teacher reads a story, to develop the fluency in standard English of the examination or interview, or to be outspoken and challenge the views of distinguished scholars and of the teacher herself in the A level history class) then it makes sense for the teacher to acquaint their students with what is needed for success and to train them in these skills. If both parties recognise such training for what it is, the development of competences required to communicate and operate within a particular context for particular purposes, there is no value judgement involved of other cultural practices or styles to make pupils feel bad about themselves or effect negatively their relationship with the teacher. What is looked for is not the acculturation of the young people, but their developing intercultural competence, an ability to handle different cultures (school cultures, home, community and peer cultures) and manage the complex interplay between them.

A number of projects are being introduced into schools that encourage this approach (particularly with Black boys) providing pupils with strategies to analyse the structures within which they are working, to consider opportunities not just difficulties and to make the system work for them (DfES 2004; Geer 2005; Sewell 2007). In his forthcoming book, ('Generating Genius: Black boys in search of love, ritual and schooling' Sewell will offer such strategies for pupils and teachers. He writes of the need to encourage pupil 'resilience' rather than pupil 'resistance' (Sewell 2007). One of the strategies encouraged in the Key Stage 3 support materials 'Ensuring the attainment of Black Caribbean boys' (DfES 2004) requires the boys to consider their own learning styles, extend their learning styles repertoire, consider the learning offered across the school and recognise the variety of approaches within the lessons as opportunities to engage their own learning (p18). The ACE Project at Forest Hill Boys School aimed to raise pupil attainment by employing as project leader 'an expert practitioner 'who understands the issues and dynamics of classroom, the complexities of the curriculum, and the nature of classroom interaction', in other words someone who could pass on to the boys a keen insider understanding of the educational and institutional culture with which the boys were to be encouraged to work. The focus of the project was to guide the boys through a number of 'talk sessions' both to explore the cultures and stereotypes that contribute to their self-image and their relations with others, and to develop their competence in handling the intricacies of educational and classroom culture. The main topics include:

- Organising yourself for learning
- Effective learning strategies
- Study skills- independent learning
- Managing the dynamics of the classroom
- Peer pressure/stereotyping
- Culture identifying/self
- Aspirations – planning for the future
- Thinking skills
- Communication – talking and thinking about their learning

The use of Learning mentors is another strategy to encourage pupils to engage with school by thinking carefully about how school can be of relevance to them and how they can capitalise on educational opportunities offered to build for the future. A school in the London Borough of Redbridge with a majority Muslim population, developed an interesting mentoring scheme for Year 11 students whereby two of the local imams visited the school to meet with identified students in small groups to discuss attitudes to education, work and study patterns (particularly round examination time) and aspirations for the future. The school produced guidance for the mentors on their role and the mentoring process and on the use of target-setting and the use of data to help raise achievement. The imams were effectively inducted into the school systems and were in turn able to act as a conduit (trusted and respected by the pupils) for the school's expectations of attitude and behaviour at the same time making it clear how these expectations corresponded with the values and moral seriousness of the community culture. The sharp increase in A* to C grades at the school (from 5% in 1999 to 67% in 2003) was partly attributed to this mentoring scheme (RAISE p55-56).

Engaging with the cultures of the pupils

Intercultural understanding involves a two-way (or rather, given the complexity of culture, a multi-directional) movement. It requires teachers to be open to finding out about the influences on their students' lives, to become sensitive to their pupils' ways of communicating, learning how to interpret their words and actions, or at least how not to misinterpret them. The Key Stage 3 support materials mentioned above follow this line by asking teachers to consider instances of reflect on some of their positive and negative interactions with Black Caribbean boys, to reflect in detail on how the incident might have been viewed or experienced by the pupil and to consider how school practices and systems might be improved as a result of their reflections (DfES 2004 p34). Moving beyond this

heightened sensitivity to their pupils' experience, intercultural understanding requires the teachers themselves to find value in the cultural values, expressions and competences of their pupils. As they increase their awareness of cultural factors that influence their pupils' lives so they gain a better sense of their motivations, skills and learning styles, and can build on these. In 'Culture and Schooling', Thomas argues that many misconceptions about learning and assessment arise from ignorance about the role played by cultural determinants on the behaviour of individual learners. These determinants he categorises as socio-cultural and psycho-cultural (Thomas 2000 p135), the former category is concerned with the place of education within cultural value systems and with community and parental influences on motivation and aspirations. The second relates to the learning patterns and processes with which students may have developed through their upbringing. Both are areas of interest for teachers wishing to understand better their pupils' learning needs and both are considered in this section.

Socio-cultural determinants

Young people's faith can be a prime motivating factor and the valuing of that faith by their school, can make a marked difference to their relationship with the school and their learning. Though the religious beliefs and practices of young Muslim males have increasingly been perceived within society as problematic (Archer 2005 p. 63), interviews with academically successful Year 11 boys at two Sheffield schools (Choudry in RAISE) found that their Islamic identity was seen as contributing positively to that success. One boy, Shahrazaman claimed it was the main single factor and explained how Islam 'teaches you to be self-disciplined in the conduct of your everyday life' and 'places a high value on the pursuit of knowledge, which I wholeheartedly believe in and that's why I work hard at my studies'. The school was praised because 'we are given the opportunity to be Muslims', with copies of the Qur'an provided for students to read, a place for prayer and ready access to the local mosque. Thomas makes another strong link between pupils' motivation and their religion or philosophy when he writes of the influence of the Confucian ethical system with its emphasis on hard work and a striving for perfectibility. This, he claims, is so much a part of the socio-cultural background of many Asian learners that it helps to explain their high levels of academic success (Thomas p136-137). A study of reasons behind the comparatively high achievement of African heritage children in Lambeth schools cites the Christian faith of the families as a significant factor. For parents and many school staff a common faith, the report states, underlies their 'shared endeavour' (Lambeth 2006).

The Lambeth report draws attention to the importance of close links between schools, families and communities for raising the attainment of ethnic minority pupils. In a recent survey (DfES 2004) ethnic minority parents expressed a higher than average involvement in, and sense of responsibility for, their children's education. Pupils interviewed for an Ofsted report into Bangladeshi achievement showed that relations with parents were a key factor in shaping their aspirations and expectations (Ofsted 2004). The young people said that although school was important to them, family and religion were main priorities and a very significant consideration when they spoke about their hopes for the future. Some of the high achieving Pakistani pupils interviewed in Sheffield claimed that family expectation was the most important factor in their academic success; 'My family have high expectations of me and I want to achieve' (RAISE p38). Such views were reflected in the discussions recorded as part of a study of the motivations of Gujarati pupils in a Leicester primary school (Ipgrave forthcoming). The children are aware not only of their parents' high hopes for their academic success and future careers, but of the degree of support their parents are giving them in order to enable them to achieve these goals. In his studies of education among Chinese and Japanese students, Thomas distinguishes the phenomenon of 'filial piety' as a key motivating factor for young people who feel a duty to succeed at school in recognition of the energy and time expended by their parents on supporting their education (Thomas 2000 p138). Given these opinions expressed by parents and children alike, the ability of schools to work with

parents in the education of their children, can have a powerful and positive effect on their learning.

Earlier in the briefing it was suggested that an understanding of school culture as normative can lead to a deficit model understanding of the home cultures of the pupils. The role of parents in the motivation of their children is sometimes misread by teachers, where school expectations of pupil aspirations and future achievement are influenced by knowledge of the socio-economic status of the homes from which they come. The teachers in Rollock's study see successful pupils as those whose parents have 'good' jobs or are educated (Rollock forthcoming). Many of the ethnic communities that have moved to the United Kingdom over the last half century have done so with the express purpose of raising their family's fortunes and social standing (Ofsted 2004). The high achievement culture of these families is not always reflected in the living conditions and employment of the parents (Lambeth 2006). While teachers might expect the children of doctors to become doctors, for example, they might also bear in mind and work with the knowledge that taxi drivers and manual workers might have equally high and reasonable expectations that their children too might take up the medical profession.

Just as it is easy and misleading to make assumptions about parents' aspirations on the basis of their socio-economic status, so it would be equally wrong to make assumptions on the basis of their ethnicity. What this briefing recommends is that teachers, through parent meetings, individual parent/teacher interviews and other contact opportunities, should try to ascertain parents' aspirations for their children, the degree of responsibility the parents themselves feel towards their children's education, the nature of support they are already giving the children at home or through private and community run complementary education. Teachers are recommended to take seriously parents' aspirations for children and use these to nurture in these young people a sense of possibility and commitment to achievement.

Psycho-cultural determinants

Relations with parents can all too easily be affected by deficit models of their child-rearing practices (the children are allowed to stay up too late, they spend too much time listening to adult conversations and too little playing with educational toys such as jigsaws) and the support they provide for their children's learning at home (parents use the wrong approaches to mathematics, to reading and to writing which have to be unlearned in school). With a genuine concern for the advancement of pupils' learning, schools have often taken on the role of expert in their communication with parents, providing guidance on the methods they can use to support their children at home and sometimes supplying packs of educational materials that parents can use with their children. These strategies have great value in raising the families' awareness of school culture and of some of the skills their children will need to succeed within the school system. The inequality of the power relations can be problematic, however. There is a danger that parents, who have consistently supported their children's learning at home using methods familiar to them, might feel deskilled by this approach. Gujarati children at a Leicester primary school relayed the dismay of their parents when they were given the chance to try out Key Stage 2 SATs tests by the school and found they were unable to do them (Ipgrave forthcoming). By these approaches parents are being co-opted into a particular learning culture and their opinions only valued when they can engage in a particular educational discourse. Rollock records how the teachers in her study used as one of their criteria for the 'successful' pupil, the ability of parents to ask 'the right questions' in teacher/parent interviews (Rollock forthcoming).

Intercultural understanding requires a shift in the teacher and parent power relations. It involves acknowledging and celebrating the contribution families are making to their children's education on their own terms. It also requires teachers and schools to recognise the accumulated wisdom of different communities in the education of their young people and the parents' detailed experience of their children's learning. Rather than expecting parents to

assimilate a particular educational philosophy, teachers could use the opportunity of encounter with different educational methods to stand outside their accustomed frames of reference, re-evaluate some of their assumptions and consider carefully what they can learn from family and community approaches that might help them better understand their pupils' learning needs and the kind of support they can give.

Education provided for pupils outside schools by parents and by community complementary classes frequently employs memorisation and 'rote learning' methods. In a study in Leicester schools, able Gujarati children reported being encouraged to copy out passages from books word-for-word, to learn dictionaries and to memorise passages from books of British history (Ipgrave forthcoming). For thousands of young Muslims their mosque education centres round the key task of learning the Qur'an by heart without any room for error. The passivity of these transmissionist models of learning and the focus on acquisition of a given, objective body of knowledge are not currently in fashion in English mainstream education where the emphasis is more on active 'constructivist' approaches, where (partly as a result of Gifted and Talented initiatives) there is a growing interest in higher order cognitive skills of analysis, synthesis and evaluation, in 'deep learning' that favours these skills, as opposed to 'surface' learning with its preponderance of memory and factualisation. In spite of the predominance of this current trend, or perhaps because of it, some commentators have asked whether our schools have something to learn from other educational cultures too (Thomas 2000). Can schools find ways of developing in their own curriculum the respect for knowledge, the appetite for learning more and the concern for accuracy on which the transmission approach to education is predicated? Are there lessons to be learnt by mainstream teachers from the memorisation and repetition strategies used so effectively in the mosque school tradition (Gent 2005 p 51)?

A cause for reflection, and rethinking of pedagogical assumptions, is the notable academic success of students from 'Confucian Heritage' countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, China, who are, in the main, exposed to transmissionist models of education with an emphasis on rote learning and recall. On a global scale the students outperform their peers from western countries in problem-solving subjects like mathematics and science and continue to outperform them when they carry on their studies in higher education institutes in the western world. In the creative sphere, too, young people from these cultures have made significant contributions in the fields of music and film. The very high achievement of pupils from Chinese heritage in English schools has already been commented on. In their account of 'The Chinese Learner', Watkins and Biggs (1996 cited in Thomas 2000 p134) have disputed the claims that learning within these cultures is of low quality and only engages students at surface levels. In their study they have shown that the initial receptive stage in their learning is preparation and provides the resources for periods of analysis, interpretation and 'thinking through' ideas. Thomas writes of a 'more reflective attitude to learning' that is sometimes confused by Western educators as a sign of docility (Thomas 2000). A greater understanding of the 'psycho-cultural' influences on pupils' learning, might help teachers to avoid misconceptions about pupil ability and misreadings of pupil learning behaviours, and to find ways of building on learning styles with which pupils are familiar and comfortable.

The intercultural curriculum

Schools interested in recognising the cultures of their pupils have for several decades used the curriculum as a way of introducing a multicultural flavour. The initial impetus for this came with recognition in the 1970s of the poor self-images that Black children entertained and the linking of this phenomenon with low achievement. These attitudes were seen as a consequence of an ethnocentric education system and the multicultural curriculum was designed to address the issue (Milner 1975). More recently the National Curriculum and Key Stage Strategies require schools to introduce pupils to elements of a variety of cultures (stories, poems, art, music, religious customs etc.) Reports and guidance on the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, including Aiming High (DfES 2003); achievement of

Bangladeshi heritage pupils (Ofsted 2004); The Achievement of African Heritage Pupils (2006), stress the importance for pupil motivation and achievement of seeing their cultures and histories reflected in the curriculum. An example from one secondary school with a high proportion of Bangladeshi pupils illustrates how this can be done. An audit investigated how each subject addressed cultural diversity and Bangladeshi heritage. RE and PSHE provided opportunities to discuss family and community life, issues of racism and stereotyping; in mathematics there was work on Islamic patterns and on the contributions of Muslim scholars to the discipline; the geography curriculum included a study unit on Bangladesh, History included a study of the movement of Bangladeshi families into the local area and in English a study of language change provided opportunities for pupils to read and speak in Bengali and Sylheti (Ofsted 2004).

Critics of the multicultural curriculum have seen it as a bolt on, at times tokenistic, at times patronising, glossing over the real problems of ethnic underachievement (Keel, 1994). The strongest criticisms came in the 1980s from those with overriding ‘antiracist’ concerns (Mullard 1984, Troyna 1983 in Jackson 2005), who argued that the multicultural education movement was actually playing the racists’ game by avoiding the key issues of racist inequalities of power and creating stereotypes of distinct and separate cultures. Those with a less political stance could still question how pupils might receive the motivational benefits of seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum they studied and yet avoid presenting them with a reified understanding of culture that simplifies their cultural identity and emphasises the separateness of cultures rather than their complexity and the interplay between them. A number of theorists from the 1990s have begun to address this question with recommendations for a ‘critical multiculturalism’ (May, 1999) or ‘reflexive multiculturalism’ (Rattansi 1992) that allows both minority and majority students to recognise and explore the complex interconnections and the gaps between their own and other cultural identities. Within the context of his study of ‘Township School’, Sewell advocates such a critical multicultural curriculum that goes beyond an easy celebration of diversity, to engage with areas of cultural tension, that enables young people both to challenge inequalities and to reconsider the negative aspects of their own sub-cultures (Sewell 1997 p51-2).

Critical and reflexive models moves beyond an instrumental use of multiculturalism to motivate minority pupils to achievement, to a multicultural curriculum that enables pupils to develop key intercultural competences of dialogue between cultures, analysis of cultural expressions and the relations between them, reflection on and re-evaluation of one’s own cultural identity. It is an approach that requires pupils to exercise higher order cognitive skills. In an American context Banks (1993, 1997 cited in Ford 1995) used Bloom’s hierarchy of thinking skills to identify four different ways to infuse multicultural content into the curriculum. Level 1 is the ‘Contributions Approach’ whereby teachers focus on discrete element of pupils’ cultures (festivals, foods, music, dance, heroes). This, Banks claims, is a low level approach where the cultural phenomena may be discussed but their meaning and significance is not explored. It is the ‘saris, somosas and steelbands’ approach that Troyna criticised in the English system of the 1980s (Troyna and Williams, 1986). It is deemed to be a ‘safe’ approach that avoids controversy but that in fact serves to reinforce stereotypes. In the Additive Approach of Level 2, the concepts, themes and perspectives of ethnic minority students are added to the curriculum but without any change to its overall structure. Key texts are introduced, key events discussed but there is little analysis of ethnic and racial identity or philosophies. Level 3, the Transformational Approach requires curriculum revision and changes in perception. Instead of focusing on the way people from minorities have contributed to mainstream society, it focuses on the synthesis and interaction of diverse cultural elements that has made up the American nation. For students in England, studies of an imperial past and of the complex patterns of international migration of recent history and the present, provide the context for similar study. Finally Level 4, the Social Action Approach has an emancipatory agenda empowering students to make decisions about important social issues, to examine issues related to prejudice and discrimination (to explore, for example,

the role and purposes of the media in raising the profile of ethnic and religious identity and difference) and develop strategies and plans for improvement.

The implications of more critical and higher level approach to a multicultural curriculum are various. For teachers and pupils it requires intercultural engagement and a readiness to find out about and learn from each other and even to change their own understandings as a result. It is an approach that requires increased sensitivity to the cultural perspectives of others. It provides an opportunity to explore the various issues of differential achievement, relations between school and student cultures, cultural stereotyping, cultural misunderstandings, religious, family and community influences on motivations and aspirations that have been raised in this briefing. For the student such a curriculum can provide the motivation of study immediately relevant to one's own experiences and self-understanding, as well as supplying opportunities to develop to an advanced level those skills that will enable them to excel.

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