

1 EARLY EDUCATION

MULTIRACIAL PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

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Background to the study

In recent years there has been much written on 'race', ethnicity and education yet, somewhat surprisingly, little material has been based on observational studies. I wish to argue that, if we are to understand fully the workings of the education system (particularly its influences on black children's educational outcomes), we need to consider both the problems and solutions which are experienced and created at the 'chalkface'. Indeed, practitioners, academics and the black (1) communities have criticized research projects, government inquiries and local initiatives which omitted to address problems at the school level (Troyna, 1987). The value in conducting research into school processes and the resultant effects is borne out by the numerous studies which have looked at aspects within schools, and have revealed the influences which individual schools can have on the progress and academic achievement of their pupils (e.g. Rutter et al., 1979; Gray et al., 1983; Mortimore et al., 1988).

More recently there has been an increasing amount of observational work conducted in multiracial schools. Most of the research has been carried out in secondary schools (Driver, 1979; Wright, 1987; Mac an Ghail, 1988; Gillborn, 1988). Observational studies in this field have yielded insightful accounts of black children's experience of secondary schooling. The finding to emerge consistently from the studies is that black and white pupils experience schooling differently. For example, compared with their white peers, Afro-Caribbean pupils typically experience greater amounts of criticism and conflict in their relationships with white teachers. Consequently, as a group, Afro-Caribbean pupils are likely to be disadvantaged within the secondary school setting.

The few studies available on black children's primary schooling show Afro-Caribbeans to be already disadvantaged at this stage of their education. The most detailed study of black children's primary schooling was conducted by Peter Green in seventy multiracial primary and middle school classrooms. Green's findings revealed that in the classroom, in comparison with other pupil groups, Afro-Caribbean pupils (especially boys) received more criticism, and experienced relatively more authoritarian and negative relationships with their teachers (Green, 1985). Whilst providing insightful accounts of life in multiracial primary school classrooms, this work gives little indication of the processes responsible for the classroom life experienced by the different pupil groups. Indeed, the lack of attention given to the underlying processes which generate the different classroom experiences documented for the multiracial context has led some commentators to argue that the disproportionate amount of control and criticism experienced by Afro-Caribbean pupils may simply be a consequence of these pupils' classroom behaviour (see for example, Foster, 1990).

The context of the study

This article aims to examine black children's experiences within the primary classroom, focusing particularly on their relationships with their teachers and classmates. Black children's day-to-day classroom experiences are examined through the use of classroom encounters drawn from my 1988/89 ethnographic study of four inner-city primary schools.(2)

The selection of the four schools was based on two major criteria:

- (a) that they should have a substantial proportion of children of Afro-Caribbean and Asian origins, and

(b) that they should contain both working-class and middle-class areas in their catchment zones.

However, schools falling in middle-class areas in the city failed to meet criterion (a) which was the overriding criterion. Four schools (A, B, C and D) were selected that came closest to reaching the two criteria. Schools, A, B and C are nursery/infant schools (3-8 years, two multiracial and one predominantly white); school D is a multiracial middle school (8-13 years).

According to census figures, the catchment area for school A contains 6 per cent of the city's black population, originating from the following areas of birth: West Indies 12 per cent; Pakistan and Bangladesh 8 per cent; India 4 per cent; and UK 76 per cent. This is an area of mixed council and private housing.

The catchment area for schools B, C and D contains 16 per cent of the city's black population, originating from the following areas of birth: West Indies 22 per cent; Pakistan and Bangladesh 18 per cent; India 10 per cent; and UK 50 per cent. This area is mostly a large post-war council housing estate, with over 80 per cent of children entitled to free school meals. The staff and student characteristics of the four schools are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Staff and student characteristics of the study schools

<i>School</i>	<i>Afro-Caribbean</i>	<i>Asian</i>	<i>Mixed Race</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Other</i>
<i>Teaching staff</i>					
A	0	0	0	9	0
B	0	0	0	12	0
C	0	0	0	10	0
D	0	0	0	13	0
<i>Support staff</i>					
A	0	0	0	0	0
B	1		0	1	0
C	1	0	0	1	0
D	0	0	0	1	0
<i>Nursery: teaching staff (3)</i>					
A	0	0	0	1	0
B	0	0	0	2	0
C	0	0	0	2	0
D	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Nursery: support staff (3)</i>					
A	0	0	0	2	0
B	1	1	0	2	0
C	2	1	0	2	0
D	-	-	-	-	-
<i>School pupils</i>					
A	12	5	3	153	0
B	41	65	38	131	2
C	32	37	22	79	0
D	23	37	14	ill	3
<i>Nursery children</i>					
A	3	1	1	15	0
B	12	21	8	3	2
C	6	8	7	44	0
D	-	-	-	-	-

Methodology

The ethnographic approach is characterized by a concern to chart the realities of day-to-day institutional life. During the study close observation of classrooms and schools was undertaken. Approximately 970 pupils and 57 staff (which included teachers, nursery nurses and other support staff) were observed in the classroom.

The specific research methods used were:

- 1 Classroom observations of pupils and staff. These were documented via note-taking, case studies, tape recordings and verbatim descriptions of events.
- 2 The same methodology was used in recording interactions in other school settings.
- 3 Informal interviews with all teachers observed, most support staff and headteachers.
- 4 Informal interviews with most pupils observed in the classroom.
- 5 Personal interviews with either one or both parents from the following sets of parents: six white, four Afro-Caribbean and four Asian from school A, and eight from each of these groups for schools B, C and D.
- 6 The use of attainment test scores completed for schools B, C and D. These were not available for school A.

This methodology of intensive observation and interviews is thought to be the most suitable for eliciting the views of teachers, pupils and parents on the widest range of issues relating to the schools. This approach is also sensitively disposed to capturing school experience in its entirety.

My own ethnicity, as an Afro-Caribbean, produced a variety of attitudes. For some white teachers this was a source of insecurity and antagonism. This varied with the level of acquaintance with the teacher. The black pupils often held me in high esteem and frequently used me for support when they felt stressed and under threat. Throughout I remained empathetic to everyone and non-judgemental. This rapport generated considerable co-operation from teachers and pupils.

Teacher-pupil relations

Primary education is generally assumed to be rooted in a child-centred ideology (Alexander, 1984). The quality of interpersonal relationships and experiences offered to the child at the school level is fundamental to such an approach. Regardless of whether the primary ideology is as widespread as claimed, the first impression of the schools in the study was that a pleasant atmosphere and a constructive relationship existed between teachers and children. There was an emphasis on providing caring support and a friendly and encouraging environment for all the children. This approach was also reflected in the schools' pedagogy. There was a degree of sensitivity to the needs of the different groups of children as shown by some use of multicultural materials and images. The vast majority of the staff (e.g., teachers and support staff in the classroom) seemed genuinely committed to ideals of equality of educational opportunity.

However, classroom observation revealed subtle differences in the way white teachers treated black children. Differences in teachers' treatment of these children were observed both within the nursery and junior classrooms.

The Asian child in the classroom

In the nursery units children came together as a group each day for 'story time' and (English) language work. Through effective discussion and questioning, the teacher encouraged the children to extend their spoken English - through talking about stories, songs, objects and so on.

In these formal sessions, the Asian children were generally observed to be excluded from the discussions because of the assumption that they could not understand or speak English. On the occasions when the Asian children were encouraged to participate in a group discussion, teachers often communicated with them using basic telegraphic language. When this strategy failed to get any response the teachers would quickly lose patience with the children and would then ignore them.

This was also the observation of the black nursery nurses working in the nursery units, as the following comment from school B reveals:

They [white teachers] have got this way of talking to them [Asian children] in a really simple way ... cutting half the sentences 'Me no do that' sort of thing ... and that is not standard English. And they've [teachers] got this way of saying words 'That naughty' and they miss words out and it really does seem stupid ... I feel that it's not my place to say 'Well that's a silly way to speak to children . . .' I worry about what it tells the white children who think that the Asian children are odd anyway.

Teachers often expressed open irritation or frustration when they believed that the Asian children's poor English language skills interfered with their teaching. The scenario below illustrates experiences common to the schools observed.

In a classroom in school A, 5-6 year olds are working on a number of activities. The class teacher calls children out individually to listen to them read. She asks an Asian girl, recently arrived from Pakistan and in the school for less than a term, to come to her desk.

- Teacher:* (to Asian girl) Right, let's see what you can do.
(Teacher opens a book, pointing to a picture.) This is a flower, say flower.
Rehana (4) nods nervously, appears a little confused.
- Teacher:* This is a flower. After me, FLOWER.
Pupil doesn't respond.
- Teacher:* (Calls for assistance from one of the Asian pupils.)
Zareeda, would you come here a minute. (*Zareeda walks over to the teacher's desk.*) What is the Urdu word for 'flower'? (*Zareeda fidgets nervously.*) Tell her in Urdu that this is a flower.
Zareeda looks very embarrassed, refuses to speak. A few children gather around the teacher's desk.
Zareeda hides her face from the children who have gathered around the teacher's desk.
- Teacher:* Come on *Zareeda*, what is the Urdu word?

Zareeda refuses to co-operate with the teacher, stands at the teacher's desk with head lowered, looking quite distraught.

Teacher: Zareeda, if you're embarrassed, whisper the word to me.

Zareeda does not respond.

Teacher: (*Visibly irritated*) Well, Zareeda, you're supposed to be helping, that's not the attitude in this school, we help our friends. You're supposed to be helping me to teach Rehana English ... (*To the Asian girls*) Go and sit down, both of you ... I'll go next door and see if one of those other Asian children can help me. (*Teacher leaves the room.*)

The incident has attracted the attention of the whole class. Whilst the teacher is interacting with the Asian girls, the white children are overheard making disparaging remarks about 'Pakis'.

In the classroom many of the Asian children displayed a quiet and controlled demeanour; in comparison with other children they appeared subdued. There was a sense in which the Asian girls seemed invisible to the teachers. They received the least attention from the teacher in the classroom. They were rarely invited to answer questions and take a lead in activities in the classroom. Interestingly, for children of this age group, greater classroom co-operation was observed between Asian boys and girls than was the case for other pupil groups. In the classroom these children operated as a closed group.

Initially, such a reaction to their classroom experience was in itself perceived to be a problem by some teachers, as reflected in this comment from a teacher at school B:

The Asian children tend to be self-isolating. I have to deliberately separate that group. They tend to ignore all other children - are not too happy sitting next to anybody else and see themselves as their own little group. They tend to converse in their own language. I'm afraid I have to say 'Now come on, stop'.

When asked to explain why Asian children conversing in their mother tongue in the classroom was a concern, she pointed out:

Because I don't know what is being said. It could be something against the other children in the class. I mean, I've no idea what is going on. Often one [Asian child] will come up to me and say 'Miss he's swearing', that kind of thing. They always tell on each other of course. But no, I don't encourage that, at least not in the normal classroom situation. They [Asian children] do go as a special group to Mrs Reeves [English as a second language support teacher] and she does special stories in Urdu with them.

Among the negative responses to Asian children expressed by teachers was also open disapproval of their customs and traditions, often considered to pose problems for classroom management. Such disapproval added to the negative experiences of school of some of these children, precisely because of the contradictory -expectations of home and school.

Preparing for physical education lessons, for example, posed some difficulties for the Asian girls because pupils were required, particularly at the nursery school, to undress in the classroom. The girls employed a

number of creative measures to acquire some privacy, such as hiding behind chairs or under desks. The teachers often showed total disregard for the feelings of these children, openly disapproving of what they considered was over-sensitive, modest behaviour on the part of the Asian girls. At the end of the PE lesson the Asian girls were the recipients of teachers' sarcasm - 'Well, don't you wish you were all as quick getting undressed?'

The anguish experienced by the Asian girls was expressed by these 7 and 8 year olds at school A:

- Parvin:* We don't like PE. I get a headache when we do PE.
Rashida: I don't like it because we are not allowed to do it.
Researcher: Why?
Parvin: Because it's like my mum and dad said, her mum and dad, if you do PE you get Gonah.(5)
Rashida: We go to mosque and if you do PE and you just go to mosque like that, you get smacked from that lady. That's why we don't like to do PE. We don't want trouble from God for doing PE.
Parvin: Because we don't allow other people to see our pants, so we hide behind the table when we get changed for PE.
Researcher: What does the teacher say when you hide behind the table?
Parvin: Sometimes she shouts.
Researcher: Have you told the teacher about your feelings?
Parvin and Rashida: No no
Researcher: Why?
Rashida: Because we're scared.
Parvin: Because we don't like to, she would shout.

The girls are expressing a fundamental conflict between the perceived expectations of their background and the requirements of the school. However, they were reluctant to share their feelings with the class teacher, because of the fear of being reprimanded. Thus, the teacher was perceived as being unsupportive.

Another example of teacher insensitivity in dealing with Asian pupils is illustrated by the following scenario at school D. The teacher was distributing letters to the class to take home to parents to elicit their permission for a forthcoming school trip. The teacher commented to the Asian girls in the class 'I suppose we'll have problems with you girls. Is it worth me giving you a letter, because your parents don't allow you to be away from home overnight?'

The cumulative effects of teachers' attitudes towards Asian children was to create a sense of insecurity for these children in the classroom. Moreover, the attitudes of the teachers influenced the Asian children's social disposition among their classroom peers. They were extremely unpopular, especially among their white peers. Indeed, children of other groups would refer to the very same features of the Asian children's perceived character deficiencies (which the class teacher had previously drawn attention to in the classroom) to tease and harass them.

Such responses tended to counteract the positive attempts by teachers to address multicultural issues and led to an ambivalence from Asian children on curriculum topics or school celebrations focusing on aspects of their traditions or customs. On the one hand, they expressed some pride in having aspects of these

acknowledged by the school. Yet on the other they were concerned that this often exacerbated the teasing, ridicule and harassment which they felt they received daily, particularly from the white children.

The Afro-Caribbean child in the classroom

As with the Asian child, the Afro-Caribbean child carries a range of expectations of their behaviour and educational potential, right from the nursery class. While the Asian child may experience a pattern made up of assumed poor language skills and negativity towards their cultural background alongside expectations of educational attainment, the Afro-Caribbean child's experience is often largely composed of expectations of bad behaviour, along with disapproval, punishment and teacher insensitivity to the experience of racism. Some Afro-Caribbean children of Rastafarian origin also experience a cultural disapproval.

An example of such assumptions revealed at a very early stage took place in a nursery group of 4 year olds in school C:

- Teacher:* Let's do one song before home time.
Peter (white boy): Humpty Dumpty.
- Teacher:* No, I'm choosing today. Let's do something we have not done for a while. I know, we'll do the Autumn song. What about the Autumn song we sing. Don't shout out, put your hand up nicely.
- Mandy:* (*Shouting out*) Two little leaves on a tree.
Teacher: She's nearly right.
Marcus: (*Afro-Caribbean boy with his hand up*) I know.
Teacher: (*Talking to the group*) Is she right when she says 'two little leaves on a tree'?
- Whole group:* No.
Teacher: What is it Peter?
Peter: Four.
Teacher: Nearly right.
Marcus: (*Waving his hand for attention*) Five.
Teacher: Don't shout out Marcus, do you know Susan (*white girl*)?
Susan: Five.
Teacher: (*Holding up one hand*) Good, five, because we have got how many fingers on this hand?
- Whole group:* Five.
Teacher: OK, let's only have one hand because we've only got five leaves. How many would we have if we had too many. Don't shout out, hands up.
- Mandy:* (*Shouting out*) One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.
Teacher: Good, OK how many fingers have we got?
Marcus: Five.
Teacher: Don't shout out Marcus, put your hand up. Deane, how many?
Deane: Five.
Teacher: That's right, we're going to use five today, what makes them dance about, these leaves?

Peter: (Shouting out) The wind.
Teacher: That's right. Ready here we go.
Teacher and children sing: 'Five little leaves so bright and gay, dancing about on a tree one day. The wind came blowing through the town, whoooo, whoooo, one little leaf came tumbling down.'
Teacher: How many have we got left?
Deane: (Shouting out) One.
Marcus: (Raising his hand enthusiastically) Four.
Teacher: (To Marcus) Shush, Let's count, one, two, three, four.
Teacher: How many, Deane?
Deane: Four.
Teacher: Good, right, let's do the next bit.
Teacher and children sing the next two verses.
Teacher: How many have we got left, Peter?
Peter: Don't know.
Mandy: Two.
Teacher: I know that you know, Mandy.
Marcus: Two.
Teacher: (Stern voice) I'm not asking you, I'm asking Peter, don't shout out. We'll help Peter, shall we. Look at my fingers, how many? One, two. How many, Peter?
Peter:
Teacher: Very good. Let's do the next bit.
Teacher and children sing the next verse; at the end of the verse:
Teacher: How many have we got left, Susan?
Susan:
Teacher: Good, let's all count, one. Let's do the last bit.
Teacher and children sing the last verse; at the end of the verse:
Teacher: How many have we got left?
All children: None.
Teacher: That's right there are no leaves left. Marcus, will you stop fidgeting and sit nicely.

Marcus was frequently the recipient of teacher control and criticism. He was often singled out for criticism, even though several pupils of different ethnic origins were engaged in the same behaviour.

In a conversation about the above observation, the Afro-Caribbean nursery nurse attached to the unit commented:

Marcus really likes answering questions about things. I can imagine he's quite good at that because he's always got plenty to say ... but they [white teachers] see the black children as a problem here.

Black nursery nurses in another nursery unit of school B also expressed concern about the attitudes of white colleagues towards Afro-Caribbean boys in particular. One of them pointed out:

The head of the nursery is forever saying how difficult it is to control the black children in the nursery, because they only responded to being hit ... there is an attitude that they all get beaten up at home and

they're all used to getting a good slap or a good punch. There are one or two [black children] that they are quite positive about ... they happen to be girls. I think it is a very sexist nursery. The black girls, they are positive about, are thought to be clean, well spoken, lovely personalities. As for the boys, I think boys like Joshua [Rastafarian] and Calvin who have recently moved into the reception class, they were labelled disruptive. When Fay [Afro-Caribbean nursery nurse] was there she really got these two children to settle, because they had somebody to relate to, that understood them, realized that they weren't troublemakers. They just needed somebody to settle them, especially Calvin, he related to her really well. Then just when he was settling down, they upped and took him [transferred to the reception class] ... He went right back to stage one, he sat outside the classroom for the first few months of school apparently ... all he used to do was sit outside the classroom. I used to go over to speak to him, I'd ask him what had happened. He used to say 'The teacher said, I've been naughty, so she's put me outside.'

In contrast to the lack of attention which the Asian children often faced, Afro-Caribbean boys received a disproportionate amount of teachers' negative attentions. For example, there was a tendency for Afro-Caribbean and white boys to engage in task avoidance behaviour in the classroom, to fool around when they should be working and to be generally disobedient. Teachers were observed to be more inclined to turn a blind eye to flagrant breaches of normal classroom standards when committed by white boys, or to be lenient in their disapproval. By contrast, similar conduct on the part of Afro-Caribbean boys was rarely overlooked by the teachers. Furthermore, Afro-Caribbean boys were sometimes exclusively criticized even when peers of other ethnic origins shared in the offence. Disapproval was usually instant. The punitive sanctions employed by the teachers included verbal admonishment, exclusion from the class, sending children to the headteacher, or withdrawal of privileges. Afro-Caribbean boys were regularly the recipients of these punitive measures, which were often made a public matter. Such reprimands often went beyond discipline to become more of a personal attack on the individual concerned, as in the following example from school B:

A class of 7-8 year olds settle down to work after morning break. The children are seated four to a table. The classroom noise varies from low to medium level. The teacher, seated at her desk marking the children's work, keeps a vigil on a table where the following four children sit: one Afro-Caribbean boy (Carl), two white boys and one white girl. Every time the classroom noise level increases, the teacher looks at the Afro-Caribbean boy, who works effortlessly at the task set him, stopping occasionally to converse with the white boys seated at his table.

*Teacher: Carl get on with your work.
The Afro-Caribbean boy gives her a disparaging sideways glance. Attends to his work.
The classroom noise decreases temporarily. The classroom noise rises again. The teacher looks up from her marking and sees that Carl and the white boys seated at his table are engaged in task avoidance behaviour.*

Teacher: (Shouting) Carl stop disrupting the class!
Carl: It's not only me, (pointing to his peers) they're not working.
*Teacher: (Shouting) Carl leave my class, go and work outside.
I'm not having you disrupting the class.
Carl picks up his book and leaves the room, giving the teacher a disparaging sideways glance.*
Teacher: (Addressing the class) Look at that face (referring to Carl). Go on outside. The trouble with you is that

you have a chip on your shoulder.

Carl spent the remaining school day outside the classroom, working in the corridor.

In a conversation with the class teacher, she admitted that she had excluded Carl from the classroom on other occasions, against the policy of the school. The teacher appeared not to be concerned that Carl's exclusion from the classroom meant that he could not participate in the lesson.

Teacher: He stops me doing my job. I mean my job isn't a disciplinarian, or a perpetual nagger, my job is to teach and I'm not able to do that because of him constantly interrupting. If I'm not looking at him he'll do something terrible to make me.

Researcher: Have you shared your experience with the headteacher, for instance?

Teacher: Yes I mean she has been very supportive but is unaware of the constant stress factor in the classroom, you know where you feel you need to eject that child from the classroom. But we're told not to put them outside, so the next thing is to send them to Mrs Yates [headteacher]. I got to the point on Friday ... that last half hour, I just thought there's no way - he'd get the better of me. So I sent him down to Mrs Yates and I hadn't realized that Mrs Yates wasn't in. So he sat there with the secretary all the time, which I mean is a plus as far as that is concerned, my class gained the benefit of his absence. Carl's behaviour is a shocking problem. Now there are other children in the class with problems, a lot of it's behavioural, ever so much of it is learning difficulties and then you've got all that plus a bright one like Carl, you know it's not a very good teaching/learning situation.

Afro-Caribbean boys' experience of public reprimands were not confined to the classroom, however. This experience extended to other formal settings, for example assemblies. Consider the following example from school C:

Four classes in school C (approximately 70 children) gathered in a large hall with their class teachers for morning assembly. The children are seated in the middle of the hall in a semi-circle (except for one class who stand up to sing to the rest of the children), Seven teachers sit around the semi-circle.

The class finishes singing to the assembly.

The teacher conducting the assembly waits until the children are sitting down and then endeavours to engage the assembly in a drill which is frequently used in the classroom to settle the children and focus their attention.

Teacher: Look this way, right children. Hands on heads.
Hands on shoulders

Teacher: (Shouting in anger) Stop everyone! Calvin stand up, go to the back of the hall!

There is total silence. Then Calvin, the 5 year old Afro-Caribbean boy referred to by the nursery nurse above, stands up slowly, looks around in embarrassment, and defiantly slithers across the hall with his hands in his pockets. Everyone's eyes, including the teachers', follow Calvin as he makes his way to the back of the hall some eight yards away. The teachers look on disapprovingly as do many of the children. When Calvin eventually arrives at the back of the hall he stands with his face to the wall.

Teacher: (Shouting in anger) Turn around and face this way Calvin.
Calvin shrugs his shoulders defiantly and refuses to turn around to face the teacher and the rest of the assembly.

Teacher: (Shouting very irately) Come here Calvin!

Calvin turns around and faces the assembly and slithers back to his seat, looking extremely dejected, confused and defiant. He stands where he was sitting previously. All eyes are on Calvin.

Teacher: (Disapprovingly) Tut, tut.

Teacher: (Sarcastically) So you can hear me - sit down! Right children, let's try again. Hands on heads, hands on shoulders. (Looking at Calvin) Calvin, pay attention and do as you're told! I don't want to pick on you but I can't help noticing that you are not doing as you are told. (Looking at the rest of the children) And it's not only Calvin who is not paying attention, there are other children not listening to what I'm saying. At the end of the assembly the children are instructed to return to their classes.

Teacher: Children, I want you to very quietly make your way to your classroom. (Pointing to three children) You three stay behind! I would like to talk to you. The children all leave the hall except for these three, a white girl and two white boys. The teacher takes them to the back of the hall, out of earshot.

Teacher: (To the three children) You saw me telling Calvin off for not sitting still and paying attention. You three behaved as if this was not also expected of you. You too are expected to sit still and pay attention.

After the three pupils had been told to return to their classroom, the teacher made the following comment to me about the incident:

Poor Old Calvin. I don't mean to pick on him, but he's one of those children who just can't conform. He's not very bright you know.

When I spoke to Calvin about his feelings regarding the above and other incidents, he said: 'It makes me feel sad when teachers tell me off for nothing.'

From the teachers' staffroom conversations it would appear that both Calvin and his friend, Winston (another 5 year old Afro-Caribbean boy) had poor reputations in the school, acquired when they were in the school's nursery, where they had been described as 'very disruptive'.

Experiences such as these led Afro-Caribbean boys to identify their relationships with teachers as a special difficulty. Samuel, a 7 year old Afro-Caribbean child at school B, talked of what he perceived to be the teachers' unfair treatment of other Afro-Caribbean pupils:

Samuel: I always get done and always get picked on . . . I want to go to a black school with all black teachers, it's better. I want to go to a school with just black people.

Researcher: Why?

Samuel: Because when you go to a school with white people they give you horrible food and you're always picked on when you don't do nothing. When it's white people, they just say stop that and stop doing this.

Researcher: Are you saying that you would like some black teachers here [in the school]?

Samuel: Yes.

Researcher: Have you ever told anybody this, have you ever told the teachers?

Samuel: I haven't said that to any of the teachers ...because they'll be cross and say the white people just treat black people the same as other people. And one time someone hit Sandra [Afro-Caribbean child] and she was crying, and if it was a white person and I said 'Miss she's crying', she would have went there straight away but when it was Sandra, she [the teacher] just ignored me. And she said 'Get in the line' [join the queue] and I said 'You only think about white people'. Then she told Mrs Johnson [headteacher] and Mrs Johnson started shouting her head off at me.

Researcher: SO you felt that the teacher didn't do anything because Sandra was black?

Samuel: Yes, because if it was a white person, she would say 'What's the matter', and then she would have said, 'What's up?' And when you hit 'em, if someone said it didn't hurt, she just say 'Stand against the wall.'

Researcher: Do you think that the teacher treats black children differently to white children?

Samuel: Yes.

Researcher: In what ways?

Samuel: Because when it's black people, and they just run down the stairs. I mean when Martin [white boy], he ran off, she said 'Come back, stop at the door' and Martin didn't hear, Martin ran off. And then Richard told me that the teacher want us to come back to the classroom, so I walked back. Then I told

on Martin, and Miss just told me to shut up, she said, 'Be quiet'.

- Researcher:* What about the Asian children, the Pakistani children, how do the teachers treat them?
- Samuel:* Treat them the same as black people.
- Researcher:* In what way?
- Samuel:* It's just that they treat Pakistani people a little better than black people.
- Researcher:* Can you just tell me why you say that?
- Samuel:* Because every time anything goes wrong in the class, and everyone's messing about around the carpet, they call out me, Rick and Delroy [both Afro-Caribbean] and that. But they don't call out the white people and the Pakistani.
- Researcher:* How does this make you feel?
- Samuel:* *(Long thoughtful pause)* Sad.

This view was also echoed by older children. Benjamin, an 11 year old Afro-Caribbean child at school D, said:

- Benjamin:* My teacher can be all right, but other teachers irritate me a lot. This teacher called Miss Lucas irritates me. When everybody's making a row in the hall, they call my name, instead of other people's. . . they don't like black people.
- Researcher:* What makes you say that your teachers don't like black people?
- Benjamin:* They don't, because there's a girl in my class, Raquel. There is only me and her in the class that's black. Miss Smith, she's always involving Mr Jones [the headteacher] a lot. Always going to see Mr Jones. It's always black children getting done. You know Raquel's brother, he was in trouble a lot, and it was always because of other kids, white kids. This white boy pushed Raquel down the stairs. Now if it was me, I would have got detention. That boy never got detention. He went in the head's room for about three minutes and came back out. The girl [Raquel] was curled up on the floor in pain. You should have seen all her legs, cut up. And there's this prejudiced dinner lady that don't like blacks.

In addition to their perceived regular experience of reprimands, children felt that the other teachers discriminated against them in the allocation of responsibility and rewards. A 9 year old Afro-Caribbean child at school D said:

In the first school the teachers were really prejudiced. There was quite a lot of coloured people in the class and Miss Butler ... she'd never picked any coloured people to do a job and nearly all the white people got a biscuit, but the coloured people never. Like if a white person wanted to go to the toilet, she'd say yeah, but if a coloured person wanted to, she'd say no.

A teacher at school D expressed her objection to being accused by the older Afro-Caribbean children of being prejudiced:

I was accused of doing several things last year. 'I didn't like blacks.' 'You are only saying that because I'm black.' 'You wouldn't be picking on anyone else'- this came particularly from Delroy, who has got a big chip on his shoulder. I think it's because his dad left and there is a lot of emotional instability there. But I objected to that ... I am not saying that I am not me, I am sure that I respond to things in a very unfavourable way, but I am fighting it. I am not saying I am pristine and my halo is glowing, but at least I am aware of my own shortcomings and I do make positive steps to overcome what has been instilled in me for years. Whether or not things come out sort of unconsciously without me knowing. I am sure that if I knew things were coming out, then I would take positive steps.

The Rastafarian experience

One group who seemed to be particularly prone to experiencing prejudice were the Rastafarian children. Here too, expectations seem to have emerged even in the nursery class.

An Afro-Caribbean carer at school C expressed her considerable distress at the responses of white colleagues to Levi a 3 year old Rastafarian child who was having difficulty adjusting to the nursery environment. Levi, on occasion, would lash out in frustration. She felt that her white colleagues were reluctant to accommodate his needs as they would normally do for a white child in similar situation. As she states:

When Levi first came in [to the nursery], he did things. I got the feeling that Maureen [white teacher] resented him. Because he took up too much time. He had only just turned 3. She used to say 'Well, I'm not going to waste my time like that.' And if Levi messed about, I think sometimes the way she handled him, made him do things. If a child is going to bite you or scratch you, you'd make sure they didn't. You'd hold their hand or you would stop them. She didn't, she just let him do it, then she'd flare up and walk across [to the school] and tell the head. In the end the head said 'We've got to keep a record of his behaviour, write down incidents.' I just didn't write anything down. He's lashed out at me ... he's come back to me the next day and said sorry about what he's done. And I think 'Fair enough. He's only a child.' I just think Maureen blows it up. I don't see him as a problem. Confidential notes are kept on him. I don't think his mother knows. What upsets me about it is that when this first happened, the reason why the head said that she wanted to keep records on things that he'd done was in case he ever needs statementing.(6) She would have the evidence. I was really upset, he's 3. I'm really glad that Levi behaves the way he does, he says sorry whenever he does things ... Only bad things goes in this book . . . I never write in this book. I don't agree with them [colleagues] because you don't know who's going to see it or where it's going to go.

By the time they were older, Rastafarian children were seen by some teachers as a particular threat to classroom management:

I would say that probably the black children, particularly the Rastafarian children, are taking the lead in quite a lot, they are making the running quite often, but not in all cases. Those children I'm sure are being made particularly aware by their parents as regards racism. And there is a problem of a small child trying to negotiate a world which they have been made aware is a racist one. You know, they've got to watch out -and actually finding out that their teacher is one. A teacher faced with such children is quite vulnerable. I think it is very complex, because they're sort of getting their own back from a racist white world.

An example of this was given by the headteacher of school C recounting her experience with a 4 year old Rastafarian boy. As with the teacher quoted above, she expresses a sensitivity to the child's experience of racism, but an apparent incomprehension in knowing how to tackle this.

He was in his first term in school so he was under 5, and he was vulgar in class. He had this habit of running wild and hurting other children and we actually removed him from the class before he actually hurt other children. So he had been removed and he came into my room where he didn't want to be and he was angry and he just screwed up his face and said, 'I hate you, I hate you, you are white ... and you're not a Rasta'. He felt that I was getting at him because he was black, I think it was the first time I had actually confronted the issue and that's what I feel with several of the Rastafarian children in particular, that's what they see. So there is this enormous barrier because of who we are.

Multiculturalism in the classroom

In all the schools individual teachers were observed to be genuinely trying to take the multicultural nature of the classroom into account in curriculum application. A common practice was to draw on the resources provided by the children themselves. Unfortunately, the teachers' efforts were not always immediately rewarded and their sincerity was often questioned by the ethnic minority children concerned. The teachers' efforts often only served to make the ethnic minority children feel awkward and embarrassed.

This situation was observed to occur for two fundamental reasons. First, the teachers often appeared to lack confidence, basic factual knowledge and understanding of the areas or the topic they were addressing. More significantly, the teachers also clearly communicated this lack of competence to the class. For instance, teachers frequently mispronounced words or names relevant to the appropriate area or topic. This frequently got laughter from white children, but floods of embarrassed giggles from the black children. This situation unintentionally served to make topics or areas of knowledge associated with ethnic minority values and cultures appear exotic, novel, unimportant, esoteric or difficult. Moreover, the intended message of the teacher's approach was often at variance with the black children's experience of racial intolerance in the school.

The black children's responses to the sincere intentions of individual teachers to use them as a resource were essentially to refuse publicly to co-operate with the teacher, dissolve into giggles or lower their heads with embarrassment, deny or conceal skills or knowledge. The white children, on the other hand, often laughed, ridiculed, taunted or looked on passively.

The lesson reported here, in a class of 10 year olds in school D, highlights aspects of this observation. As part of its language work, the class was looking at the linguistic composition of the school.

The teacher was using a text printed in two languages - Urdu and English - as a resource.

Teacher: Last time we talked a little about the different languages we speak at home and in school, and we made a list on the board, and I said that we would talk about this book that I found in the library (*holds the book up to the class*). Rehana and Aftab might be able to help me. It is an unusual book. Can you tell me why? (*Holds book up for class to inspect.*)

White girl: It's got funny writing.

Teacher: It's written in two languages. English and can YOU tell me Rehana?

White boy: Jamaican.

Rehana: (Shyly) Urdu.

Teacher: Is that how you say it? Urdeo?
Rehana laughs, embarrassed.
White pupils snigger.

Teacher: (To Rehana) Say it again.

Rehana: Urdu.

Teacher: Urdeo.
Asian pupils laugh, embarrassed.

Teacher: Say it again.

Rehana: Urdu.

Teacher: Urdeo.
Asian pupils laugh, embarrassed.

Teacher: Say it again.

Rehana: Urdu.

Teacher: (Mimicking Rehana but showing signs of defect in the pronunciation, laughs) Urdeo.

Teacher: (Laughingly) How do you say it, Aftab?
Aftab holds his head down, refuses to respond.

White boy: It's Pakistani language.

Teacher: Can we write it on the board. (Teacher writes the word 'Urdu' on the board.) Because you see what we've been saying. We pronounce things differently. But not just to lots of other countries. We pronounce things a bit differently than everywhere else apart from 'Hometown'. Paula [white girl], where do you come from?

Paula: Portsmouth.

Teacher: How long have you been living in 'Hometown'?

Paula: Don't know.

Teacher: Since you were little. So Paula has lived most of her life in 'Hometown' but Paula's dad has lived most of his life in Portsmouth and all over the place. And he doesn't talk like me. He doesn't talk like Paula. He's got what we would call an accent. A quite different accent. He pronounces lots of things quite differently. You are fortunate really, because lots of your teachers come from different parts of the country. I come from 'Hometown'. I've lived in 'Hometown' all my life, Mrs Mason comes from 'Hometown', Miss Robinson comes from 'Hometown'

I think that's it ... I don't think none of the other teachers do. They come from all over the place, all over the country. When you live in a different part, not just of the world, but England, you pick up different accents. Now an accent is when you pronounce words differently. One word that I would pronounce differently is 'Urdeo'. I know that 'Urdeo' is completely wrong. (Looks over to the Asian pupils.) Is it spelt like that in Pakistan (pointing to word

'Urdu' written on the board)?

Rehana: (Shyly) No.

Teacher: No, it's not spelt at all like that because that is not 'Urdeo' writing or (*with a grin*) 'Urdo'. A lot of the things in 'Urdeo', as we found a lot of things in Ancient Egypt, cannot be translated exactly, because there are some words that come in Egyptian, that we haven't got in English, some words in English that we haven't got in Egyptian, and there are some words in English that we haven't got in Arabic. That's why I told you that some parts of the Bible are quite difficult to translate because they were not written in English but ... ?

Afro-Caribbean

boy: African.

White boy: Welsh.

Teacher: (*Laughing*) No, not Welsh.

White girl: Jewish.

Teacher: Arabic, originally written in Arabic. It can't be directly translated. It's the same with this book. This can't be directly translated. (To *Asian boy*) Can you read that? (*Boy bows his head.*) I think he's shy, that's fair enough. Well I can't read it, I might even have it upside down, I don't know. (To *Asian girl*) Can you tell us about 'Urdeo', is it written like that (*pointing left to right*) or written like that (*pointing right to left*)?

Rehana: No, that way (*pointing right to left*).

White pupil: Backwards.

Teacher: It's written from right to left?

Rehana: Yes.

Teacher: No, it's not backwards. It's English that's written backwards.

White pupils: (*Exasperated*) Is it?

Teacher: Don't forget that when the Ancient Egyptians and lots of Eastern countries were writing, we were still swinging in trees and living in holes in the ground. *Pupils laugh.*

Teacher: And living in caves. We couldn't write, and they could write in hieroglyphics. The Egyptians wrote downwards. The Chinese write down from top to bottom. I'm not sure where, but I think there's somewhere which actually writes upwards, is it the Japanese? Bottom of the page to the top of the page. We wouldn't get Aftab to read this book because he's a little bit shy, I know he can read it

Teacher views

So far I have concentrated on both Afro-Caribbean and Asian pupils' relationships with teachers from the nursery to infant classroom. I have focused on the pattern of classroom interaction, in particular how this is mediated by the children's ethnicity. In both cases pupils' ethnicity was shown to adversely influence their relationships with teachers. Classroom observation indicated that teachers tended to treat Afro-Caribbean children (especially boys) in a more restrictive way than other pupil groups. For instance, issuing orders rather than encouraging them to express their ideas. Asian children, on the other hand, received less individual attention; in other words, they tended to be overlooked or underestimated by teachers. These children were also frequently the recipients of teachers' expressed annoyance and frustration. Reflected in these patterns of classroom interactions would appear to be teachers' expectations and 'typing' of these pupil groups. In order to explore this further it is necessary to examine teachers' expressed views or adopted perspectives on both Afro-Caribbean and Asian pupils.

Classroom observation studies in a variety of settings suggest that, on the whole, teachers categorize or develop typifications of the children they teach (see, for example, Rist, 1970; Leiter, 1974; Hargreaves et al., 1975; Sharp and Green, 1975). It is recognized that the use of typifications is a normal part of interaction in many social situations (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). However, the classroom context is a particularly significant one in which the teacher has to face and cope with a relatively large number of children. Given the teacher's occupational reality, typing is a means of reducing the complexity or, as Schutz (1970) states, 'making the world of everyday life "cognitively manageable"'. Thus the teacher simplifies by classifying. Related to the typification that teachers develop of pupils is the 'ideal pupil' model. The notion of the ideal pupil is a construction which is drawn primarily from the lifestyle and culture of the teacher concerned.

The ideal pupil for teachers is likely to be a child who acts in ways which are supportive of teachers' interest-at-hand, who enables them to cope and so on. Work by Becker (1952) and, more recently, Sharp and Green (1975) has suggested that teachers differentiate between pupils according to how closely they meet the ideal pupil criteria. Children, therefore, tend to be classified and typed by the ways in which they vary from the ideal. For instance, social class factors have been found to be reflected in teachers 'specifications' of the ideal pupil. Classroom observations reported above suggest that ethnic differences also influenced the way in which teachers viewed their pupils.

Teachers' views in relation to their experience of the classroom were concerned with the children's motivation and adjustment to the learning situation. Their views of the children's educability revealed extremely complex feelings. Often these revealed an ambivalence about their working conditions. Yet they generally exhibited personal and professional concern for the children.

The teachers' main concerns about classroom life related first to their perceptions of the children's competence and, secondly, to their behaviour in the classroom. The levels of competence across all groups of children were considered by the majority of the teachers to be relatively poor. But certain skills were recognized to be poorer in the white children, as this teacher from school C explained:

In all the groups, the speech, language, listening, the concentration, are low, generally at lack of competence levels. There is also low energy levels, tiredness, lassitude ... poor responses to requests and a lack of compliance that goes across the board. If I were referring children for special needs, they would be more likely to be white. In fact, for language development they would be more likely to be white than Asian, because relatively speaking the Asians are making progress given that you take into account that English is a second language. These children are more competent in English than the children who had been exposed to English ... from English parents. That is when you really get worried, because you realize that the level of competence is deteriorating.

However, the majority of teachers, as this one from school A, considered all the children positively disposed to most aspects of classwork:

Generally speaking the children do have, within limitations, a good attitude to work. They have limited concentration skills, but within those parameters they do actually do their best. Their attitude to work is one of 'I will do my best to do this'. I would say a child who doesn't, try is fairly rarer than the ones who do ... I think most of them have a strong desire to please and are also proud to please ... They like the idea of doing their best, if you say, 'Would you like to try again?' If you don't make an issue of it, they will do it again.

Further probing showed that children were differentially categorized on the basis of their orientation to work. For instance, white girls and Asian children, particularly boys, were considered to be the most motivated groups. On the other hand Afro-Caribbean children were often considered to reveal the lowest motivation, a view expressed by the teacher below:

I would say that the Asian boys, in general, are the most individually motivated in that it seems to come from within, from whatever input they have had at home, but they are much more determined to succeed, they know their work and they listen, they have the greatest listening skills in my class and this is very generalized overall. . . The difference between white boys and Afro-Caribbean children is that there is no difference. If they have been to bed early, then they might do well that day. If something happened in the playground, they are not going to. They don't seem to have any incentive or deep urge to want to succeed in that educational way that the Asian boys do ... I do sometimes feel though, especially last year that some of the children, Afro-Caribbean, felt like they were underachieving and consequently because of that they wouldn't try. They would get to a point ... where if they reached a problem like a stage in maths which they hadn't come across and they were stumped, they would get very upset about it, over the top, dramatic, upset about it, rather than just, 'I can't do this - how do you do it?' It was like 'I can't do it, because I am hopeless'. I had two children in particular last year who reacted in this way.

Teachers regularly reported the prevalence of problem behaviour in the classroom and around the school. The problems commonly referred to by teachers were aggressiveness, disobedience, distractability, overactive behaviour, teasing, quarrelsome attitude, children being overdemanding, conflict with peers, having temper tantrums and emotional problems.

Boys were considered to be more of a problem than girls and Afro-Caribbean children were seen as being of a greater problem than white. Asian children were less associated with behaviour problems. On the other hand, Afro-Caribbean boys were generally associated with aggressive, disobedient and distractable behaviour. Teachers frequently talked about feeling worn down by the sheer number of teacher-pupil interactions which involved some element of control or response to acts of indiscipline, particularly on the part of the Afro-Caribbean children. Furthermore, teachers felt that a succession of disruptive moments in the classroom often led to a change in the nature of their interactions with the children. Thus a point articulated by a teacher:

I would say some days I fulfil virtually nothing. Quite seriously, some days it's a battle. Some days you are quite happy at the end of the day, I feel I have achieved quite a lot, it all depends really on the temperament of the children. And I mean the powerful children in the class, their temperaments really do dictate the mood of the class, which is quite sad in a school like this, 'cause it means that the new children and the quiet children get swallowed up, that worries me. They don't get the attention at the time that they should have. These quiet children are likely to be girls, more girls than boys, but I do have some boys who will just get on with what they have to do and don't hassle me at all ... I have one

little Asian girl who I would like to spend more time with her, because she has got a lot to offer, she just sits there and gets on with what she has to do and doesn't bother me at all. I think that is how they are brought up, don't you? To be quiet and get on with it, and they are not troublemakers at all, they are very nice children. They are swallowed up definitely, which is sad. Delroy and Vincent [two Afro-Caribbean boys] are the trouble, very disruptive. I have to admit I like Delroy, I don't think I would have survived if I hadn't liked him. I mean quite seriously as well, there is something very appealing about him. At times I could strangle him, he's a very nice boy, he's got a very nice nature, he's very kind. You get him on your own, you know, in the right place at the right time, he can be kind. Vincent, I have to be careful with because I find him very difficult to relate to. I mean possibly I could spend more time with them all, but at the moment I can't. I am afraid my attitude tends to be negative and I have to think 'Come on now, be positive.'

An examination of teachers' classroom logs, where daily experiences were recorded, showed a tendency for some teachers to direct their frustration at the Afro-Caribbean children.(7) This was reflected through the nature of the teachers' written comments, which often ranged from negative stereotyping to insults. For example, this recording on Justin (age 6), an Afro-Caribbean boy:

I think Robert [fellow pupil] may be in little pieces by the morning. He had an argument with Justin today and I've seldom seen a face like it on a little child. The temper, rage and marked aggression was quite frightening to see. I wouldn't be surprised in years to come if Justin wasn't capable of actually killing someone. When he smiles he could charm the birds off the trees, but when he's in a temper he is incapable of controlling himself. He has an extremely short fuse, is a real chauvinist and to cap it all he's got a persecution complex. He has to be handled with kid gloves.

A comment on the behaviour of Ruth (6 years old), an Afro-Caribbean girl, was in a similar vein:

What a thoroughly objectionable little bitch, she's intelligent enough to egg others on and seem totally innocent herself. She pinches, nips and uses her brain to impose her will on others. She's one of those children who can't bear others to have friends - she like to break-up friendships (and is very good at it). If she were to use her brain in the way a normal child would, she would be bright by any standards.

Not all the teachers' comments recorded in their classroom logs relating to Afro-Caribbean children were as harsh and intemperate in tone. Nonetheless, the illustrations presented were symptomatic of the feelings of some of the teachers. Overall, the teachers' view showed a general tendency to associate Afro-Caribbean children (particularly boys) with behaviour problems.

In contrast, teachers in their general conversation, as well as in their interviews with me, often cited Asian children as a group being a 'pleasure to teach'. However, classroom logs revealed certain contradictions in their attitudes. Some teachers were less favourably disposed to those Asian children who were perceived as having learning problems arising out of language difficulties; those who were perceived as operating as an exclusive group; and those who tended to converse in their 'mother tongue' in the classroom. In general, teachers showed greater approval of those Asian children who were perceived to be socially integrated in the classroom and proficient in the English language.

Peer relations

An aspect of the 'primary ideology' is a form of pedagogic folklore which, inter alia, views childhood as an age of innocence. Regarding issues of 'race' and ethnicity, the popular belief still exists among teachers that young children are 'colour-blind'. Moreover, primary teachers assume that young children, whilst capable of unacceptable behaviour, remain free from the malign influences of individual racism.

In the nursery classroom, children reflected their awareness of racial and ethnic differences in conversations with both teachers/carers and peers, and attributed value to these differences. A dialogue between Charlene, a 3 year old Afro-Caribbean girl and Tina, a 4 year old white girl during creative play in school C illustrates this perfectly.

Charlene: (cuddling a black doll) This is my baby.
Tina: I don't like it, it's funny. I like this one (holding a white doll) it's my favourite. I don't like this one (pointing to black doll). Because you see I like Sarah, and I like white. You're my best friend though, you're brown.
Charlene: I don't like that one (pointing to the white doll).
Tina: You're brown aren't you?
Charlene: I'm not brown, I'm black.
Tina: You're brown, but I'm white.
Charlene: No I'm not, I'm black and baby's black.
Tina: They call us white, my mummy calls me white, and you know my mummy calls you brown. When you come to visit if you want ... She'll say 'hello brown person. . .I like brown, not black. Michael Jackson was brown, he went a bit white.

Observations also suggest that children at this early age were showing a preference for members of their own racial/ethnic group and a desire to mix and play with them rather than with others. This 'own-group' preference did on occasion reflect antipathy towards children of other skin colour or cultural groups.

The children's preference for members of their own racial/ethnic group is corroborated by an Afro-Caribbean Child Care Assistant at school B:

The white children, particularly a set of white children, even though they relate to me and Tazeem (Asian carer) all right, they won't play with anybody else, when I say with anybody else I mean black or Asian children. There are a couple of black children that won't play with Asian children but they won't play with white children either. I've noticed that the Asian children play very well and they play well amongst themselves and alongside each other but they don't mix themselves as well ... But I think there is an attitude in the school that makes the Asian children feel negative about themselves as well.

Even at this early age, white children tended to be extremely 'negative towards the Asian children in both their attitudes and behaviour. They often refused to play with them and frequently subjected them to threatening behaviour, name calling and hitting.

An example of this is shown in the incident below in school B:

A group of four white boys (aged 3-4) were collaboratively building a tower block out of the building blocks. An Asian boy walked over with the thought of participating. Two of the boys were heard to say vehemently, 'No, Paki, no, Paki'. Another boy pushed the Asian boy aggressively. The Asian boy wandered off looking quite dejected.

The nursery teachers/carers were also aware of similar incidents of this nature. As an Afro-Caribbean carer at school B points out:

Peter . . . [the] blond headed boy, I notice that he used to go up to the Asian children in a really threatening way, just threatening behaviour. He wouldn't say anything. If the Asian children had anything he would take it off them. The Asian girls, they'd leave things, by just the way he looked at them. They'd leave something if they were playing with it. He would look at them and they would drop it.

In the classroom, white children engaged in persistent racist namecalling, teasing, jostling, intimidation, rejection and the occasional physical assault on black and ethnic minority children. Aspects of this behaviour are illustrated in the following incident from school A:

I was in a classroom observing and working with a group of six white 6 year olds on English language and number tasks. Taseem (an Asian girl) came over to the group, and with a rather desperate look on her face asked me to help her.

Taseem: 'Miss Cecile, can you help me do times by?'

Taseem was working on a multiplication exercise which she did not fully understand. The ten sums she had completed for this exercise had been marked as incorrect by the teacher and she had been asked to do the exercise again. I spent some minutes explaining the exercise to Taseem. The children in the group were very resentful of the fact that I had switched my attention from them to Taseem and also that she had joined the group.

Researcher: (*After having finished explaining the exercise*)
1 Taseem, do you understand how 'times by' works?

Jane (a white girl):

No, she won't understand, she's a Paki.

Taseem is very upset by this comment and is on the verge of tears.

Researcher: (*To Jane*) What do you mean?

Because she's a Paki.

The other children in the group are sniggering.

Researcher: And why should she not understand multiplications because she is a Pakistani?

Because she's not over us and she's not in our culture.

Michael (a white boy):

She's Paki! (*Laughs*)

Researcher: What is our culture?

Jane: England.

Researcher: She is in England, she lives in England.

Yeah, but she comes from Pakistani.

Alice (a white girl):

Yeah, Pakistani, she was born in Pakistan she means.

Taseem: (*Dejected but in protestation*) I wasn't, I was born here.

Jane: She couldn't understand, that's what I think because she speaks Paki.

Other children: (*To Taseem*) Where were you born?

Researcher: Yes, just because she speaks 'Pakistani' it does not mean that she can't understand how to multiply.

Jane: Because when I say something, she doesn't know

what I say. And when it were assembly they were doing a Paki dance.

Researcher: Taseem was born in England, her parents are from Pakistan, but she was born in England. Her parents are from Pakistan but she was born in England.

Taseem: My parents are here.
The researcher continues to assist Taseem with her number work. The other children become increasingly resentful.

Jane: (Sharply) Will you help me now?

Some of the children take to taunting and namecalling Taseem. However, sensing my disapproval of their behaviour, they adopt a strategy of name calling by sounding out the letters.

Jane: P-A-K-E, P-A-K-E!

Alice: (Quietly spoken, but so I would hear) She's a Paki!

Researcher: What does P-A-K-E mean?

Jane: (With a mischievous grin, whispering) She's a Paki!

Taseem: (Visibly distraught) Miss, I want to go out to play.

Echoing of P-A-K-E from the other children.

Alice: She's a Paki, that's what it means.

This encounter not only highlights the existence of racism in the very young, but it also shows that the children are well aware of its taboo status. On recognizing my displeasure with their remarks, they endeavoured to disguise their intent. The teachers, with only a few exceptions, mentioned that racial intolerance was prevalent among the children. Indeed, the white children's attitude and behaviour towards the Asian children was a concern for the majority of teachers. A teacher at school A explains:

The Asian children are getting so picked on, it's awful. In the playground the Asian girls never leave the teacher's side. One little girl last week, they [white children] never left her alone, she was really frightened. I mean she really did need protection. . . but we can't stand next to her all the time. Every time I looked, somebody was at her.

One strategy for avoiding expressions of racial intolerance was to separate children of different ethnic groups. The following teacher's comment was typical of many that were expressed to me:

I have to think very carefully when I select children to work together because, more often than not, white children will refuse to sit next to or work with a Pakistani. You have to bear this in mind so as to avoid any nastiness.

In their view on aspects of school, many of the white children volunteered particularly vehement feelings towards the Asian children. Some also expressed a certain abhorrence at the prospect of being taught by a black teacher. The example below from school D pointedly illustrates these views:

Jason (white boy, age 12): 1 don't like the Pakistani children. I call them Pakis.

Mostly Zahid, he's about the best one in the school.

Researcher: Why do you not like the Pakistani children?
Jason: Don't know. Like blacks because I've got a lot of black friends. Most of me friends are black anyway. I've got more black friends than I have white.

Researcher: What have the Asian children done for you to dislike them? Got me in trouble with the police, and that ... They blame me for going in houses ... Saying that I've been smashing the windows and that.

Researcher Did you?

(Long pause, smirk) No.

Researcher: Do you think that it is really right for you to dislike people for no reasons?
(Defiantly) Yes.

Researcher: What's right about it?

Jason: They're buying all shops and all that There's only one shop what's in't a Paki shop round our way. And they're not going to let Pakis take it. Mr Smith round our way, he's white.

Researcher: How do you know he's not going to let this happen?
Jason: Because he's told me mum and that the rest of the shops been taken over by Pakis. It's not right for white people. Everytime they walk into a shop they see a Paki.

Researcher: What's not right about it?
Jason: Don't know, I don't like it.

Researcher: Providing there are the things in the shop that you wish to buy, does it matter who owns it?
Jason: *(Angry) I don't go to Paki shops.*

Researcher: It could be said that you're racially prejudiced?
Jason: If I'm prejudiced, I wouldn't like blacks at all, but I do like blacks. Some of me friends are black . . . there's no black shop owners on our road, they're all Pakis except for one.

It is interesting to note the complex nature of Jason's reasoning. On the one hand he expresses hostile attitudes towards Asians. At the same time he hastens to add that he cannot be considered 'racially prejudiced' because he has black friends. Many of the white children expressed a definite view against being taught by black teachers. My discussion with two young children in school B, Samantha (aged 7) and Claire (aged 6), encapsulates this view:

Samantha: Ranjit is the best behaved [in the class].
Researcher: Why is she the best behaved?
Samantha: Because she helps - she works here.
Researcher: Who is Ranjit?
Claire: She's that lady.
Samantha: She's that lady.

Researcher: Can you describe her to me?
Samantha: She's got long black hair, she's got a striped jumper on and she's got black eyes
Researcher: And is she a teacher?
Samantha: No, she helps Mrs Moore [class teacher], helps us.
Researcher: How do you know she's not a teacher?
Samantha: Because she's not here all the time - she only comes Wednesday, Thursday and Friday mornings

Claire: ... and a little bit

Samantha: She's brown.
Claire: She's yellower than Zahra [an Asian girl in the class].
Researcher: Have you ever been taught by a brown teacher?
Samantha: No.
Researcher: Would you like to be taught by a brown teacher?
Samantha: (*Aghast*) No.
Researcher: No? Why?
Claire: I don't like it.
Researcher: Why don't you like it?

Claire: I just like talking with I like talking with white teachers and (*under her breath*) I don't like talking in Paki's language
Samantha: In Urdu.
Researcher: Why don't you want to be taught by a brown teacher?
Samantha: Because we don't like her because she speaks Urdu.

Researcher: Why don't you like people speaking in Urdu?
Samantha: Because Urdu people are from Pakistan and nobody knows what they're talking about

Claire:and we don't want to learn Urdu

Researcher: So you don't want a brown teacher?
Claire and Samantha: (*Together*) No!
Samantha: I'd like a French teacher
Researcher: You'd like a French teacher? Why would you like a French teacher?
Samantha: So I could go to France when I grow up and I'd know the language
Researcher: But wouldn't you like to go to Pakistan when you grow up?
Claire and Samantha: (*Together - aghast*) No way!
Researcher: No way? Why?

Samantha: Because it's too far and I might get sunburnt because it's always sunny there and (*under her breath*) the people ... and sometimes it doesn't shine

Researcher: You don't like the sun?

Samantha: Sometimes I do.

Researcher: So you wouldn't like to have a brown teacher then?

Claire and Samantha: No.

Researcher: Don't you think a brown teacher would be a good teacher?

Samantha: No.

Researcher: No? Why?

Samantha: She is sometimes, but sometimes she'd speak in Urdu to the other children because some children like the Urdu and don't understand English and she'd speak in Urdu.

Researcher: And wouldn't you like her to do that?

Samantha: No. Because we'd think she wasn't listening to us because she wasn't

Claire: Because we'd think she's playing [not being serious with them].

Conclusion

In this article I have examined the pattern of classroom interaction experienced by both Afro-Caribbean and Asian children, from the nursery to the upper primary classroom. I have focused in particular on the ways in which their ethnicity is reflected in their relationships with classmates and teachers.

Both Afro-Caribbean and Asian pupils faced negative teacher interaction in the classroom. In both cases this teacher response occurred when these children were seen by the teacher as an apparent threat to classroom management or teacher effectiveness. The teachers' response reflected to some extent their perception of what constituted appropriate pupil behaviour or, put differently, their notion of the 'ideal pupil'. The kinds of behaviour exhibited by Asian pupils which elicited a negative teacher response were shown to be different from those which produced a similar teacher response towards Afro-Caribbean pupils.

Ostensibly, the Asian pupils (particularly the younger ones) were perceived as a problem to teachers because of their limited cognitive skills, poor English language and poor social skills and their inability to socialize with other pupil groups in the classroom. However, teachers' expressed views revealed images of Asian pupils and parents which were not always negative. Teachers expect pupils of Asian origin to be industrious, courteous and keen to learn. They also tend to assume that Asians are well-disciplined, highly motivated children from family backgrounds where educational success is highly valued.

Afro-Caribbean pupils by contrast (especially boys) were always among the most criticized and controlled group in the classroom. Perhaps of most concern, in addition to the frequency of critical and controlling statements which Afro-Caribbean pupils received, was the observation that they were likely to be singled out for criticism even though several pupils of different groups were engaged in the same act or behaviour. Just as they did in relation to Asian children, teachers often held generalized images of Afro-Caribbean pupils.

However, in contrast to the Asian pupils, teachers' images of Afro-Caribbean children tended to be negative; more significantly, teachers' negative expectations transcended their judgements of these children's ability.

The evidence provided on the relationships between the children themselves within the classroom shows that victimization was a common experience for many Asian pupils. Racist name-calling and attacks from white peers was a regular, almost daily, experience for Asian children. Teachers were aware of the racial harassment experienced by Asian pupils, but were reluctant to formally address this issue. Thus the treatment they received from white peers proved to be a further source of classroom insecurity for the Asian children.

This article has highlighted the complexity of classroom life in the multiracial context; moreover, it confirms the analysis of Parekh (1985) and others concerning the fallacies which often underpin debates regarding the existence of racism in schools. As black pupils, children of Afro-Caribbean and Asian origin experience school in similar but also in very different ways, some of which are highlighted above. In both cases, the pupils' ethnicity influenced their interaction with teachers and their experience of teacher expectations. Only in the case of the Asian pupils did ethnicity appear to be a direct influence on their relations with their classmates.

It is generally accepted that the foundations of emotional, intellectual and social development are laid in the early years of formal education. The kind of education a child receives at this stage, therefore, is considered to be of greatest importance. From the evidence gathered in connection with this project, it could be argued that some black children are relatively disadvantaged at this stage of their education.

Notes

- (1) 'Black', as used throughout the article, refers to those of South Asian or Afro-Caribbean parentage.
- (2) This study was conducted as part of a CRE-funded research project.
- (3) It was common practice in the schools for the nursery units to be staffed by one or two teachers and several nursery nurses. In the schools, the nursery nurses (often referred to as Care Assistants) worked as support staff in the classroom.
- (4) All names used throughout the article are pseudonyms.
- (5) 'Gonah' is a term used by Moslems to mean sin (in the eyes of Allah).
- (6) Statementing is a formal assessment of a child's cognitive and behavioural development, normally undertaken by the school and the Psychological Service.
- (7) Classroom logs were used by teachers in all four schools as a systematic way of recording facts and incidents relating to pupils. They were available for consultation by other staff.

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