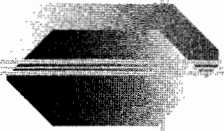


Multiculturalism in English State and Church Education :
an Historical Perspective / Dr Arthur Naylor. — In :
Annales de philosophie et des sciences humaines. — N° 9
(1998), pp. 57-60.

Cover title : Annales de philosophie et des sciences
humaines. — Bibliogr.

1. Education. 2. England — Intellectual life — 20th
century.

PER L1044 / FP63328P



Multiculturalism in English State and Church Education : An Historical Perspective

USEK, le 11 avril 1996

Dr Arthur NAYLOR

Principal of St Mary's University College - Strawberry Hill — England

A STATE PERSPECTIVE

This presentation examined the role of the State and the position of the Church in England on multiculturalism in an educational context over the last twenty years.

1. In relation to the State the far-reaching implications of the Race Relations Act 1976 on educational development were considered. The Act had two basic objectives :

« To regulate behaviour by laying down minimum standards which should govern relations between groups and individuals in a civilised society.

To encourage behaviour and actions necessary to overcome the effects of discrimination and disadvantage and thereby help to create a society in which groups and individuals enjoy genuine equality of opportunity ».

2. In the context of the present Lebanese situation, the Rampton report 1981 was mentioned in particular the views expressed on a genuinely pluralist society.

« We would ... regard a democratic pluralist society as seeking to achieve a balance between, on the one hand, the maintenance and active support of the essential elements of the cultures and lifestyles of all the ethnic groups within it, and, on the other, the acceptance by all groups of a set of shared values distinctive of the society as a whole. This then is our view of a genuinely pluralist society, as both socially cohesive and culturally diverse ».

3. The Swann Report 1985 provided a broad definition of multicultural education which has helped to shape development in the English context :

« A “good” education cannot be based on one culture only, and in Britain where ethnic minorities form a permanent and integral part of the population, we do not believe that education should seek to iron out the differences between cultures, no attempt to draw everyone into the dominant culture. On the contrary, it will draw upon the experiences of many cultures that make up our society and thus broaden the cultural horizons of every child. That is what we mean by “multicultural” education ».

4. By 1988 the Education Reform Act, which established the national curriculum in England, set out that schools were expected to provide :

« A balanced and broadly based curriculum which : promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society ; and prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life ».

5. These national enactments can be interpreted in local policy statements. The following is drawn from an English local education authority policy statement published in 1995 :

« Schools and colleges should ensure that all young people :

- receive an education in which there is positive representation of diversity and accurate information ;

- have equal access to all aspects of education irrespective of race, gender, class or disability ;

- develop a greater awareness and understanding of the shared values of society and show mutual respect for features of diversity.

County of Surrey Local Education Authority

A CATHOLIC CHURCH PERSPECTIVE

6. The Catholic Church has also addressed issues of multiculturalism in education.

In 1981 a report — *Signposts and Homecoming* — was published by a study group set up by the Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. The report was all-embracing :

« Preparation for life in a multi-racial society “involves the entire curriculum as well as the “hidden curriculum” — teacher attitudes, the ethos of the school, structural arrangements such as streaming, relations with parents — in other words the whole school ».

7. In 1984 the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales issued its own statement — « *Learning from Diversity : a Challenge for Catholic Education* ». It stated that :

« Catholic schools must offer an education which prepares pupils for life in a racially and cultural diverse society. Such an education is one which :

- assists children to appreciate the present and historic value of all cultures and races and their contribution to British society and fosters a positive world view ;

- informs all aspects of school life including the curriculum, teaching methods resources, staffing, structures and practices of the school or college ;

- challenges the prejudices and stereotypes of all those involved in the school : teachers, parents and pupils ;

- assists children to develop a positive racial and cultural identity and prepares them to face the moral and intellectual challenges of this generation ;

- prepares children to live in, and help create a multi-cultural society, based on unity in diversity, characterised by justice and equality, in which racism is thing of the past ».

8. These national statements by the Catholic Church have also been interpreted at diocesan level. The following example is from a report of the diocese of Westminster : *Teaching from Diversity, 1988*.

« Two approaches were in the final analysis, inextricably linked : the long term objective of racial harmony requires interchange of cultural values and also the translation of cultural respect into material equality ; little will be achieved by cultural exchange alone, but no more will be achieved in a climate of fear and mistrust. The Catholic education system is fortunate in having the principles of Christian love as a core of shared values around which to build a better and more integrated society ».

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