



University of HUDDERSFIELD

University of Huddersfield Repository

Thomas, Paul

Youth work, racist behaviour and young people Education or blame?

Original Citation

Thomas, Paul (2002) Youth work, racist behaviour and young people Education or blame? *Scottish Youth Issues Journal* (4). pp. 49-66. ISSN 1469-0780

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/381/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

Youth Work, racist behaviour and young people – Education or Blame?

Paul Thomas

Senior Lecturer in Youth and Community Work, University of Huddersfield.

Published in 'Scottish Journal of Youth Issues', No. 4, Summer 2002: pages 49-66.

Introduction

This paper explores the issue of racist behaviour by young people, particularly White young people and the response of youth workers and other educators to that racism. In particular, it argues that anti-racism is simply not working with the young people it really needs to work with. The paper provides evidence that youth workers have been disempowered by understandings of anti-racist policy and practice, and that the same policies may well, unintentionally, be having a negative affect on the most marginalised white young people. The paper argues that this may well be due to 'deficit' understandings of such white young people, understandings close to 'underclass' pathology.

The paper was conceived before the events of summer 2001, which saw violent clashes involving white and Asian young people, and the Police, in several towns in the North of England, and violent incidents directed at Asylum Seekers across the UK, culminating in a racist murder in Sighthill, Glasgow. However, these events can be viewed as all too predictable. They pose fundamental questions of theory and practice for Youth Workers and other educators already working with young people who may support, or even perpetrate, such acts of racist violence.

This paper aims to debate these questions by focussing in particular on the findings and lessons of an action research project carried out by the University of Huddersfield, material from which has since been published by the Commission for Racial Equality as 'Open Talk, Open Minds' (CRE, 1999). The methodology and findings of this research are discussed below.

Recent work around the varied experiences of Ethnic Minority young people in the UK (Modood et al, 1997) has questioned simplistic notions of racial disadvantage amongst non-white young people. Analysis of young peoples' social exclusion from the education and employment mainstream (SEU, 1999), shows that youth disaffection and exclusion cuts across simple black/white lines. This suggests that we should really be talking about class (or 'social exclusion', as current politicians prefer). However, as we watch white young people from Burnley or Oldham making overtly racist statements on TV, notions of right and wrong, of winners and losers, appear quite clear. The national statistics on racially-motivated crime, if not racial economic disadvantage, are very clear in terms of the white/ethnic minority relationship. White people are responsible for the vast majority of racially-motivated crime in the UK, despite the contrary figures for the Oldham area (which raises some evidential issues for the police) which the British National Party has sought to exploit over the past year.

Statistics on racial crime, show that young people under the age of 25 are responsible for 40% of all reported racial crimes (the fact that many 'low level' incidents, such as graffiti, are not classified because the victim does not see the perpetrator, suggests that this figure is actually higher)(CRE, 2001a). The

perpetrators are overwhelmingly white young men (1996 British Crime Survey quoted in CRE, 2001a), who are responsible for 61% of all racial attacks on Asians and over 40% of all attacks on African-Caribbeans. Many of the high-profile racist murders of the last few years which have forced us to confront the continued reality of overt racism – Rolan Adams. Rohit Duggal, Stephen Lawrence- have been carried out by white young people. Surveys have demonstrated for many years that the average age of perpetrators of racial harassment may be as low as 13-14 years old (Leeds CRC, 1986), and that, 'Racially motivated offences are much more likely to form part of a series than other offences' (CRE, 2001a).

Can anyone respond effectively to this reality and to the increasingly aggressive racism of some white young men, many of them from poor working class areas? Are they to be condemned and criminalised as anti-social trouble makers, or are they themselves to be regarded as victims deserving of support and intervention, their racism seen as a symptom, as well as a cause, of youth exclusion and frustration. It is suggested here that youth workers can play a crucial role in 'moving on' such young people, but only if Youth Work can re-assess its current assumptions and practice in this area.

Youth Work and Racism

This could be seen as a 'typical' statement made by commentators looking at Sighthill, and other areas where Asylum seekers have been placed:

It is also important to recognise that in many industrial towns the areas with sub-standard housing are under-going fundamental social changes that have sometimes led to serious disturbances among some of the young people. New and strange faces appear on the doorsteps and congregate in the streets as workers from many lands find a job and a home in Britain. The integration of these families brings problems, and has sometimes created a sense of insecurity and a fear among the established community that housing standards will deteriorate further.

In fact, it's a quote from the Albemarle Report of 1960, which was, and remains, the high point for the publicly funded Youth Service in England and Wales. (HMSO, 1960) Clearly, Youth Work has been struggling with the concept of effective practice within a multi-cultural setting for some time.

Young people, both ethnic minority and white, have been central to the acting out of struggles around racism in modern Britain. This has put Youth Work, from Albemarle to the present day, at the forefront, as a service with a proven record of making contact both with ethnic minority young people, and with young people who are, in general, at risk of involvement in criminal and anti-social behaviour. However, Youth Work did not get its practice in relation to Black communities 'right' for many years, and now a growing number of commentators

are questioning how effectively youth work has responded, as an education-based service, to racist behaviour by young people?

There can be no doubt about youth work's commitment to opposing prejudice and discrimination of all types, a commitment shown in the design and content of professional training courses at all levels (Banks, 1999; NYA, 1997). How this commitment has been operationalised is more of a question.

Youth Work's response to ethnic diversity and racism can be seen to have changed markedly over time, changes largely mirrored by the English education system as whole. Keith Popple (Hazekamp and Popple, 1997) sees this response as having evolved through four distinct phases or 'approaches':

- (i) Monocultural
- (ii) Multicultural
- (iii) Anti-racist
- (iv) Cultural/political

(Popple in Hazekamp and Popple, 1997, p27-36)

Monoculturalism, the belief that incomers had to 'adapt' to the culture and beliefs of the 'hosts', was the philosophy of Albemarle – these youth clubs are open to all, and anyone can join. In practice, open access youth provision was, and is, dominated by white young men interested in sport. Ethnic minorities and young women voted with their feet, leading to the alternative culture of community –organised and funded voluntary youth provision within ethnic minority communities. This assimilationist approach was re-emphasised by the Hunt Report of 1967(DES, 1967), which was concerned with ways in which the Youth Service could assist with the integration of young immigrants into British society. The Hunt Committee rejected calls for separate provision, and urged the Service to bring white, black, and Asian young people together in clubs and projects. The resulting exclusion of ethnic minority young people from youth work's publicly funded mainstream was commented on (CRC, 1977) but was only slowly addressed.

Multiculturalism was the response, believing that exposing communities to each other's beliefs and 'cultures' would break down barriers created by ignorance and misunderstanding. Despite strong criticism, this approach still has a valuable role to play within education programmes. However, it has been rightly exposed by writers such as Chauhan (1990), who point out that multiculturalism fails to adequately meet anyone's needs; it fails to tackle the real discrimination in jobs and services faced by ethnic minorities, but also fails to highlight the reality of racism and its origins for white people.

Supporters of 'anti-racist' educational approaches challenged these inadequacies. Within the Youth Service, the Thompson Report of 1982(DES,

1982) proved a watershed with its calls for direct educational discussion of racism, and significant increases in numbers of youth workers and managers from ethnic minority backgrounds. The wider anti-racist movement stressed the need to expose the origins and operations of racism, and to directly challenge its realities. Policies backed up by monitoring and awareness training were at the core of the strategy.

The need for such a strong move towards anti-racism in youth work cannot be disputed, given the historical exclusion of ethnic minorities from publicly-funded youth work, and the involvement of young people in racial violence and harassment. The Thompson Report finally gave the green light for Local Authority provision that specifically catered for particular groups of ethnic minority young people, and policies on racist behaviour by both young people and staff were adopted for the first time. There can also be no disputing the need to make staff aware of their responsibilities in relation to racism.

That said, there has been growing evidence that anti-racist approaches have been problematical – pedagogically questionable, and, possibly, counter-productive in their impact on both practitioners and young people. Popple identifies such approaches as having a ‘condemnatory’ strand, saying that, ‘It is a worrying aspect that some youth workers who claim to practise anti-racist work hold to the view that the working class need to be shocked or bullied into understanding racism, and that the same working class need to change their ideas for their own good’. (Popple in Jeffs and Smith, 1990, p143)

The dangers inherent in such approaches were clearly identified by the Report of the Macdonald Inquiry into the murder of Ahmed Ullah at Burnage High School, Manchester, 1986. (Macdonald et al, 1989). The Inquiry blamed the ‘clumsy’ implementation of so-called anti-racist policies for creating a negative cycle that directly led to Ahmed’s death. The Report stated that:

The fundamental error of these morally based anti-racist policies is that they assume that a complicated set of human relations, made up of many strands, including class, gender, age, size, and race, can be slotted into a simple white versus black pigeon hole...This simple model assumes that there is uniform access to power by all whites, and a uniform denial of access to power to all blacks. Clearly, this is not the case. We do not believe that an effective anti-racist policy can exist unless the other issues are also addressed and dealt with, in particular class and gender (Macdonald et al, 1989, p348)

This is the area that research carried out by the University of Huddersfield aimed to explore, and which is discussed below. This research can be seen as part of the growing debate around how to implement effective ‘cultural/political’ approaches. Such approaches take popular culture and the way different groups of young people see and understand the world as their starting point. They also link with political education approaches which recognise that

individual attitudes and behaviour occur within a framework defined by wider economic, political and social forces within society-they try to build on common experiences. (Pople in Hazekamp and Pople, 1997, p33)

Open Talk, Open Minds

The Anti-Racist Work with White Young People Project was an action research project designed and carried out by the University of Huddersfield's School of Education and Professional Development, in collaboration with the Commission for Racial Equality, and Kirklees Racial Equality Council. It was supported by the five West Yorkshire Local Authority Youth Services (Leeds, Bradford, Kirklees, Calderdale, and Wakefield), and managed by a Steering Group made up of representatives from:

- School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield
- Kirklees Racial Equality Council
- Commission for Racial Equality
- West Yorkshire Local Authority Youth Services

The rationale based on field experience, of those designing and guiding the research process, was that 'anti-racist' approaches have had a mixed impact on youth work; Specifically that youth workers were not actually planning and implementing programmes of anti-racist work with young people likely to display racist attitudes and behaviour. That is not to say that youth workers were, or are, condoning racism, but that they were operating in a limited and reactive way only.

The decision to carry out a piece of action research was a deliberate one. Firstly timescales and resources were limited, but there were deeper reasons for this approach. According to Elliot (1991), 'The fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge. The production and utilisation of knowledge is subordinate to, and conditioned by, this fundamental aim' (Elliot, 1991, p49). Elliot sees action research as a way of resolving the 'theory practice problem' - the fact that educational practitioners are often suspicious of theories, formulated by outsiders, which seem to 'explain or demystify their own work with young people. This is particularly true of sensitive issues like anti-racism, where theory and 'official' understandings are the problem.

Action research approaches allowed practitioners to come together and to analyse their own existing practice and assumptions in a very honest and open way, without feeling under attack from outside experts. This reinforces Elliot's belief (1991, p50-1) that action research is closely connected to Schon's (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner. The action research approach adopted in this situation also enabled a focus on tangible progress - on real and visible impacts in terms of individual practice, materials that other practitioners could use, the cascading of that experience,

and changes to the professional qualification curriculum at the University of Huddersfield.

The research involved creating a focus group of face-to-face youth workers from the five West Yorkshire Local Authority Youth Services. Workers were first nominated by their Principal Youth Officer, and then contacted by University staff, following a request for workers who were, or had been, engaging with this issue actively in practice. The group identified was overwhelmingly, but not exclusively white, and mixed in terms of gender and age.

The methodology, of a series of focus group sessions, was chosen because of the potential it offered for perspectives generated through group interaction, as well as from individual experience. Frey and Fontana are enthusiastic advocates for this 'group interview' approach:

The group interview is an excellent mechanism... Not only do group interviews take advantage of group dynamics, provide insights into social relationships in the field, reduce distance between researcher and the social context, and reduce total cost, but this type of interview can stimulate new ideas, identify language or symbols not previously acknowledged, serve as a testing ground for hypothesis or analytical suggestions, and expand the depth and variation in response or description.

(Frey and Fontana in Morgan, 1993, p32-3)

The key challenge posed by this approach to research is that 'different skills' are required by researchers. These skills take the form of 'sensitivity to group processes' (ibid, p33). In fact, those skills of sensitivity, inclusiveness, and facilitation are central to youth and community work. The focus group sessions and process were facilitated by Howard Holmes, a highly experienced former Youth Worker and Youth Service officer from Sheffield. Howard brought both experience and credibility to the role- the fact that he himself wrestled with such issues in practice helped animate the groupwork process.

The focus group process consisted of a series of in-depth explorations of the issue, based on the group members' own practice experiences of engaging with racist attitudes and behaviour from young people. The focus group meetings were held on 'neutral' territory, and proceedings were all on the basis of strict confidentiality, so that youth workers could speak entirely frankly. Meetings between researchers and senior Youth Service officers were held separately, to avoid organisational 'politics' becoming an issue. By using small group discussions, and creative discussion techniques, the focus group process aimed to encourage honest sharing of experience and perspectives from participants, even if these seen to be contrary to established 'orthodoxies'.

This process confirmed many of the fears underlying the original hypothesis – the youth workers involved clearly identified a number of ‘blocks’ which, they felt, prevented proactive responses. Given that the focus group was made up of experienced and qualified Youth and Community Workers, all committed to the principles and practice of anti-discriminatory work, this poses serious issues for us all to ponder on

What the research process highlighted was that anti-racist approaches had unintentionally stifled and confused youth work practitioners, rather than energised them as effective educators. One Youth Officer was asked whether their staff were likely to initiate anti-racist programmes, and replied crisply, ‘They won’t touch it with a barge-pole!’ (CRE, 1999.P.10). The reasons for this negative impact were identified and discussed with the workers involved in the research.

Well-meaning Equal Opportunities policies seem to have actually created a fear of ‘getting it wrong’ amongst white youth workers, the fear of being ‘exposed’. ‘With some Black workers, you’re frightened of saying the wrong thing, and that they’d say you were racist’, said one worker (CRE, 1999, p11). Engaging young people with racist views in a programme of dialogue and education is going to lead to the airing and verbalising of unpleasant and offensive views and attitudes, a necessary first step, but one which many workers understood to be outlawed by policies. ‘No racism’ may actually be resulting in ‘No discussion about racism’.

This seems to be partly about a lack of skills and confidence – many workers don’t feel that they are equipped to engage in such dialogue, even if it was ‘allowed’. One worker commented, ‘If you are challenged on something by a young person and you begin to doubt the position you’ve taken... then you feel undermined’. (CRE, 1999, p11). This hasn’t always been helped by Youth Worker training, which at times has concentrated on understandings of racism to the detriment of the skills involved in actually engaging with it. It is true that many white youth workers don’t know a lot about the culture of ethnic minorities, or of the history of migration and colonialism which is the background to the current situation, but that shouldn’t prevent effective educational work. Many workers carry out highly effective drugs education programmes with only limited information, let alone any direct experience of drug use. They do this by using core youth work values of respect for clients and their personal experience, and the key youth work skill of ‘conversation’, which is central to effective informal education (Jefferies and Smith, 1989). The research suggests that on the particularly sensitive issue of racism, youth workers sometimes ‘stop’ being youth workers, that they stop drawing and acting on their ‘core’ skills of ‘informal education’ (Jefferies and Smith, 1989) – the ability to develop ‘conversation with a purpose’ through listening and questioning as part of an equal and positive relationship with young people.

This de-skilling may well have been strengthened over time by leaving ethnic minority workers to lead on and deal with race issues within organisations. One worker commented that, 'After we had some problems, the first reaction of the worker-in-charge was to bring in a Black part-time worker. He was then expected to deal with and lead the club's response to the racists' (CRE, 1999, p12). Too often over the past twenty years, asking a Youth Service Policy Maker or Manager about their 'anti-racist work' has brought a response about the provision for ethnic minority young people – highly important, but not the same thing.

The conclusion of the research's focus group process was to step back from the 'ideology' of anti-racist education and focus on the skills needed for it. The workers involved did this by analysing the possible 'ingredients', or causes, of a racist act by a young person, and then identified existing educational materials, which address those issues.

The 'ingredients' identified were:

- Stereotyping and misinformation
- Insularity/lack of contact with other groups
- Parental influence
- Peer group pressure
- Cultural identity
- Low status and poor self-esteem
- A fear of difference
- Inability to make connections
- A sense of unfairness

(CRE, 1999, p19)

The second part of this action research process then involved the identification and analysis of existing anti-racist educational materials which were viewed as effectively addressing the individual 'ingredients' outlined above. This process was led by the researcher, but focus group members also identified materials. Contrary to assertions made by many youth workers and teachers, there are a lot of good and appropriate anti-racist educational materials around; the problem is that many workers lack the confidence and the clarity to use them in work with prejudiced young people. The focus group process supported that assertion – the real issue was the purpose of the work, and the planning and skills that underlie it.

Workers then took these materials back to their practice settings and tried them out with groups of young people. The young people concerned were informed of the process and its objective prior to sessions. The intention was not to measure the impact of the materials on young people- that is the objective of the larger second stage, currently being planned. This was a small, first-stage process,

and the real focus was on worker understanding and confidence- youth workers were asked to plan and try out sessions based on the approaches and materials identified by the focus group, and to then report back to the focus group.

Although these approaches were tried out in admittedly artificial conditions, the youth workers identified themselves as much more confident and clear in their own minds when running discussions and other activities around racism. The researcher summed up the focus group members at the end of the process as 'really buzzing... they couldn't get enough of it!' This was built on with presentations to Youth Service personnel within the West Yorkshire Local Authority Youth Services, and special seminars in Huddersfield and in London (jointly organised with the National Youth Agency) to launch the Commission for Racial Equality publication 'Open Talk, Open Minds' (CRE, 1999) based on the approaches and perspectives identified by the research process. These events included focus group members facilitating discussion groups.

The research has also led to a fundamental re-think of the School of Education and Professional Development's own teaching/training approach to anti-racism within professional qualification courses at the University of Huddersfield. As a result, new teaching sessions, based much more on the 'skills' perspective identified by the research, have been devised and used on both Youth and Community Work and Teacher Training courses within the University.

White Young People and Anti-Racism

It can be argued that these issues of Youth Work strategy, training, and face-to-face implementation raised by this research are not the only blocks to effective anti-racist youth work. How do anti-racist approaches actually view the white working class young men responsible for many of the acts of racial harassment and violence in the UK? Does the positive, humanistic, and person-centred value base of Youth Work hold up when we engage with the reality of these young people, or do anti-racist strategies inherently 'blame' those young people for their behaviour?

It can be argued that 'cultural/political' approaches and the academic discourse that has informed them (see Cohen, 1988; Hewitt, 1993; Back, 1996;) do see this 'blaming' of white young people as being central to 'anti-racist' approaches. Les Back, who has looked closely at the reality of young people's interaction with ethnic difference and racism in 'New Ethnicities and Urban Culture', says of well-meaning anti-racist educational policies that:

'The consequence was that the complex combinations of racist and non-racist sentiment that were evident in the lives of young whites were simply ignored. Rather, young people were simply offered a moral line that they could either subscribe to or be punished by.'

(Back, 1996, p3)

Cultural approaches certainly ask hard questions about 'anti-racist' approaches, and how youth work's values have been operationalised within them.

There is increasing evidence that anti-racist approaches in schools and youth work have unwittingly alienated already disaffected white working class young people. Greenwich Council and Greenwich Youth Service's recognition of this led to their support for the research of Roger Hewitt (1993). Hewitt identifies a consistent 'feeling of unfairness' amongst such white young people – a feeling that ethnic minorities get preferential treatment, and that the 'native' population is blamed for everything. This has been fuelled by a belief that anti-racist education strategies have led to racist language or behaviour by young white people being treated much more severely by schools and youth clubs than other forms of anti-social/criminal behaviour by ethnic minority young people. The perception of young people interviewed by Hewitt is that they are in poverty and face social exclusion, yet other communities seem to get preferential treatment. The fact that white people as a whole are better off educationally and economically than ethnic minorities in the UK doesn't square with the daily reality of life for the overwhelmingly white populations of Britain's most impoverished council estates.

This can be reinforced, in Roger Hewitt's view, by the way other cultures are 'celebrated' and presented as part of multi-cultural/anti-racist strategies. 'In contrast to these reductionist versions of what "being from a different culture" means, white English pupils have no simplified, unitary concept of "English culture" that is "celebrated"' (Hewitt, 1996,p39). In this way, an attempt to be genuinely 'inclusive' may have had unforeseen consequences. 'For some white English pupils, the celebration of cultural variety actually seems to include all cultures that are not their own. It is not surprising that white children, especially, it seems, young people from working class homes, experience themselves as having an invisible culture, even of being cultureless'. (Hewitt, 1996, p40)

This can be located within a wider debate in which anti-racist educators need to get involved – what is 'Englishness' (or 'Scottishness')? The end of Empire, entry into the European Union, and genuine devolution within Britain have all arguably left the white English without a clear or positive identity. The dangers of this vacuum can be clearly seen in the culture around English football fans abroad – they don't know how to dress, what to sing, or how to portray themselves, and many assume that the locals all hate them (even before they've set off!) Too often, the gap has been filled by an aggressive and nasty 'Invading Army' mentality, based on a nostalgic and partial re-working of history (Miles, 2000). This behaviour abroad has echoes of more mundane, day-to-day racism back home. Anti-racist strategies may, again, not have helped here – the focus on exposing the 'crimes' of Empire is understandable, but, at times, has come

close to implying that everything about (white) English history is repressive and negative. The recent, and well-meaningly multi-cultural, statement by Robin Cook that chicken tikka masala was now England's national dish, may not have played so well at grass-roots level.

The racism which can and does result from such perceptions of being 'cultureless' (or viewed as such) is violent and frightening – the racist murders of Rohit Duggal, Rolan Adams and Stephen Lawrence in Greenwich were a direct trigger for Hewitt's work, and for the support it received. Hewitt also counsels against assuming that parents and the older community are the source of this racism, that it is a problem that will inevitably get better. 'In certain housing estates that are especially characterised by adolescent racism, there is little evidence that this is primarily due to parental racism reproducing itself. Young peoples' ideas of race can and often do exist quite independently of their parent's influence' (Hewitt, 1996, p57)

How should youth work respond to such young people? Securing support for the research project was far from easy. Funders felt that white young men had dominated youth work and education, and that they were the perpetrators of many race crimes, so why should they be 'rewarded' with any more resources? There also seemed to be an underlying pessimism in some quarters that such behaviour could not be changed, that 'that's what those sorts of young men are like'. This debate has been sharpened by the sudden switch to a public anti-racist position by many sections of the media and establishment in the wake of the MacPherson Inquiry into Stephen Lawrence's death. Such a public move away from Racism is obviously to be welcomed, especially from the Daily Mail (although it hasn't extended to asylum seekers), but it does leave sections of white young people, who have embraced racism as 'their' culture, very far from the supposed mainstream of society.

Is the overt racism of some white young people in Glasgow, Oldham, or Burnley an inevitable reaction to their economic and social exclusion, or is it part of a wider cultural outlook that actually lies as a direct cause of this marginalisation? It is argued here that racist behaviour in poor white areas is seen as but one facet of 'underclass' culture that is directly responsible for the social unravelling of local communities. There is increasing debate over the extent to which an 'underclass' analysis underpins the current Government's whole approach to social policy. (MacDonald, R, 1997). Macdonald's definition of the 'underclass', if it really is to be seen as existing, is:

A social group or class of people located at the bottom of the class structure who, over time, have become structurally separate and culturally distinct (my emphasis) from the regularly employed working class and society in general through processes of social and economic change (particularly de-industrialisation) and/or through patterns of cultural behaviour, who are now

persistently reliant on state benefits and almost permanently confined to living in poorer conditions and neighbourhoods
(MacDonald, R, 1997, p3-4)

Overt racism and an apparent refusal to accept the concept of multi-cultural communities, a reality that seems to be developing on white estates in Oldham and other British cities, may well equal a 'cultural distinctness' Charles Murray, the 'father' of underclass theory, views the 'negative' lifestyle and culture of the so-called 'underclass as the cause of their social exclusion and poverty (Murray, 1990). Critics see this as 'blaming the poor for their poverty'. Is well meaning but inflexible anti-racism perilously close to blaming poor white young people for society's racism, a convenient explanation for racism that is actually inherent to the operation of our global economic system?

The trap that youth work certainly needs to avoid is that of condemning and 'writing off' the young white people currently displaying racist views (although educators should never condone racism). Not only would such an approach be counter to Youth Work's ethos, but would be dangerously counter-productive. Instead, youth work should now be looking to engage positively with those young people as a matter of urgency

Youth Work can play a vital role in helping those disaffected, prejudiced and frustrated young people 'move on'. Youth workers already have unique access, based on their voluntary participation, to many of these young people who are disaffected from other agencies. The onus is on youth work to meet this challenge in a robust but educative way that draws on the analysis of 'cultural/political' approaches to racism advocated by Hewitt, Cohen and others, and which the University of Huddersfield's research aimed to operationalise. This will clearly involve the issue being prioritised by Youth Work's funders – not only is racism deeply damaging to ethnic minority young people, but it is doing grievous damage to the development and prospects of the white young people who currently seem to be embracing it.

We have proof that targeted youth work interventions, based on 'cultural/political' approaches do work. The Bede House detached youth work project (Dadzie, 1997) made a real impact on young people involved in racist/criminal behaviour on one South London housing estate. The unique aspect of this piece of work was not the methods – they used traditional detached work approaches, backed up by trips and activities (they carried on being youth workers!)- but that the project explicitly targeted these young people because they were involved in overt displays of racism. 'The Project grew from a belief that such young people are often motivated by a misdirected anger, based on misinformation, fear and feelings of impotence about their own social and economic circumstances' (Dadzie, 1997,p1). Judging the impact of youth work is always difficult and especially problematic in areas of prejudice and of personal attitudes. However, local police attributed a drop in the number of reported racial

incidents to the Bede House Project, and the Project itself saw real changes in behaviour. 'Young people who only a few months before had been aggressively racist in their views and behaviour, were starting to opt out when their mates made racist jokes or comments. Provocative statements designed to entertain the group or negate the workers' views were being rephrased as genuine questions by individuals who were starting to doubt their own and others' assumptions' (Dadzie, 1997, p3-4)

This paper has tried to outline pedagogical ways forward for youth workers in relation to making a real, measurable impact on youth racism. The University of Huddersfield is currently designing a larger, second stage of our action research process, a stage designed to test out the approaches, and materials based on those approaches, identified by the first stage and highlighted in 'Open Talk, Open Minds' (CRE, 1999). Such educational work needs to be done with white young people especially disaffected young men, and we know that youth work can make an impact with that client group. The question remaining is whether Government and other funders of youth work, will invest and show faith in the potential of all young people, or simply write off a section of youth as 'racist' and anti-social jobs who are beyond the pale. We choose the latter at our peril.

Paul Thomas

(Senior Lecturer in Community Education – University of Huddersfield)

Tel: 01484 478267

Email: d.p.thomas@hud.ac.uk

References

Back, L (1996) *New Ethnicities and Urban Culture*, London: UCL Press

Banks, S (Ed) (1999) *Ethical Issues in Youth Work*, London: Routledge

Chauhan, V (1990) *Beyond Steel Bands 'n' Samosas*, Leicester: National Youth Bureau

Cohen, P and Bains, H.S. (Ed's) (1988) *Multi-Racist Britain*, London: Macmillan

Commission for Racial Equality (1999) *Open Talk Open Minds*, London: CRE

Commission for Racial Equality (2001a) *Racial Attacks and Harassment – Factsheet*, London: CRE

Commission for Racial Equality (2001b) *Young People – Factsheet*, London: CRE

CRC (1977) *Seen But Not Served: Black Youth and the Youth Service*, London: CRC

Dadzie, S (1997) *Blood, Sweat and Tears – A Report of the Bede Anti-Racist Detached Youth Work Project*, Leicester: Youth Work Press

DES (1967) *Immigrants and the Youth Service: A Report of a Committee for the Youth Service Development Council (The Hunt Report)*, London: HMSO

Elliot, J (1991) *Action Research for Educational Change* Buckingham: Open University Press

Hazekamp, J.L. and Popple, K. (Ed's) (1997) *Racism in Europe*, London: UCL Press

Hewitt, R. (1996) *Routes of Racism: The Social Basis of Racist Action*, Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books

HMSO (1960) *The Youth Service in England and Wales (The Albemarle Report)* cmdn 992, London: HMSO

HMSO (1982) *Experience and Participation- Review Group on the Youth Service in England (The Thompson Report)*, London: HMSO

Jeffs, T and Smith, M (Ed's) (1989) *Using Informal Education*, Milton Keynes: Open University

Jeffs, T and Smith, M (Ed's) (1990) *Young People, Inequality and Youth Work*, London: Macmillan

Leeds CRC (1986) *Racial Harassment in Leeds, 1985-6*, Leeds; Leeds CRC

Macdonald et al (1989) *Murder in the Playground – The Report of the Macdonald Inquiry into Racism and Racial Violence in Manchester Schools*, London: Longsight Press

MacDonald, R. (Ed) (1997) *Youth, the 'Underclass', and Social Exclusion*, London: Routledge

Miles, K (2000) *An English Fan Abroad – Euro 2000 and Beyond*, Edinburgh: Canongate

Modood, T, and Berthoud, R et al (1997) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, London: Policy Studies Institute

Morgan, D.L. (1993) Successful Focus Groups - Advancing the State of the Art, London: Sage

Murray, C. (1990) The Emerging British Underclass, London: Institute of Economic Affairs

National Youth Agency (1997) Professional Endorsement of Qualifying Training in Youth and Community Work, Leicester: National Youth Agency.

Schon, D (1983) The Reflective Practitioner, London: Temple Smith

Social Exclusion Unit (1999) Bridging the Gap-New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training, London: HMSO