

**Education for an Age of Interdependence**

A series of provocation papers

# **Skills for interdependence: Social Cohesion**

Rachel Briggs



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## **Skills for interdependence: Social Cohesion**

Rachel Briggs

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Immigration has changed the face of British society, with the proportion of people living in Britain who were born in foreign countries now standing at over 10%.<sup>1</sup> The diversity of immigrants has also increased during this period. In 1971 people from the 'Old' and 'New' Commonwealth countries accounted for 30% and 32% of inflow; by 2002 these proportions were 17% and 20% respectively. Those in a broad 'Middle East and Other' category have gone from 16% in 1971 to 40% in 2002.<sup>2</sup> Recent statistics show that the number of babies with foreign-born mothers has almost doubled in the last decade, from 84,497 in 1997 to 160,340 in 2007. In some cities, including London, Slough and Luton, more than half of babies have mothers born overseas, and in the London borough of Newham the figure is 75%.<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that the UK has benefited enormously. Evidence suggests that creativity is enhanced by immigration and diversity; immigration is generally associated with more rapid economic growth; and in ageing countries, immigration is important in maintaining the social security system.<sup>4</sup> However, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect change on this scale to be entirely problem-free. As Saul Alinsky said, 'Change means movement. Movement means friction. Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world can movement or change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict.'<sup>5</sup>

Academic Robert Putnam argues that higher levels of diversity result in lower solidarity and trust. People living in diverse areas exhibit lower confidence in local government, local leaders and the local news media, and lower political efficacy, and are less likely to register to vote. They are less likely to expect people to cooperate to solve dilemmas, and fewer volunteer or get involved in community projects. They have fewer close friends and confidants, are less happy, and spend more time watching television.

Evidence suggests a similar shift towards social isolation in the UK, but research conducted for the Commission on Integration and Cohesion found that it is not diversity per se that impacts on cohesion, but the rate of new migration. But even this is not the most important factor. The four drivers are deprivation/affluence; whether an area is rural or urban; whether the area is experiencing new migration (and therefore higher churn); and in some urban areas, whether they have experienced industrial decline within the last 30 years.

In other words, it is an area's stability that matters

most. And when immigration is placed within the context of a series of other profound shifts (the technological revolution, the end of deference, labour market reforms, globalisation and the wholesale emancipation of women in the public sphere), it is not surprising that anxieties are rising and people are 'hunkering down'.

Sometimes, these anxieties escalate into tensions and conflict. It was the riots of 2001 that really put the question of cohesion on the agenda, when Oldham, Burnley and Bradford experienced violent clashes between young people predominantly caused by racial tensions, exacerbated by orchestrated rivalries between criminal gangs.<sup>6</sup> The causes were different in each place; in Oldham they were due to racial tensions between Asian and white communities caused by social division and poverty; in Burnley gang rivalries were blamed; and in Bradford, tensions flared when an Anti-Nazi League march led to a stand-off with National Front supporters. The bombings of July 2005, and the continuing threat of violent extremism is a reminder of the danger of social division escalating into violence, as is the growing gang culture and growth of violent crime, especially amongst young people.

Despite the fact that deprivation is the single most important driver of poor cohesion, government spending on community cohesion (£50 million over the next three years) does not tackle this or indeed any of the other key drivers. Instead, community cohesion – described in the latest government guidance as 'what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together' – focuses on what might be termed 'getting along' activities. The government says in its guidance, 'While we are clear that deprivation, crime/ASB, inequalities, population churn, housing, education etc influence cohesion, they are not issues where we would target cohesion policies.'<sup>7</sup> Cohesion policies are delivered through what the government describes as 'three ways of living together': a shared future vision and sense of belonging; a focus on what existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity; and strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.

Schools have an important role to play in building cohesion to ensure that the UK can seize the opportunities offered by immigration and globalisation. In fact, much progress has been made in recent years, and there are a number of initiatives in schools in England that could be said

to be promoting cohesion and a more international outlook:<sup>8</sup>

- Citizenship is a statutory subject at key stages three and four, and the recent Goldsmith review suggested it be made statutory at primary level
- The new secondary curriculum that will come into force from September 2008 has a series of 'dimensions' including 'identity and cultural diversity' and 'global dimension and sustainable development'
- The new secondary curriculum has three aims, one of which is to 'enable all young people to become responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society'
- The Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) has a programme of work on 'sustainable schools', which looks at embedding greater understanding of sustainable development issues
- There is a duty on schools to promote community cohesion
- The Department for International Development (DfID) has a major programme of work raising the profile of development issues in schools, including funds for NGO projects with schools, and funding a website with teacher resources on global perspectives ([www.globaldimension.org](http://www.globaldimension.org))
- DCSF funds 'Who Do We Think We Are Week', which runs in schools to promote discussion of identity and diversity

However, the schooling system does not recognise social cohesion as being core to its work. Its main driver remains the 'standards agenda', which means that anything that does not relate to numeracy, literacy and test results is routinely de-prioritised. Teachers have raised concerns about the new duty of schools to promote community cohesion, as directed by the Education and Inspections Act 2006. In a recent study, the Institute of Community Cohesion found that many felt that the duty is too burdensome and that it is in danger of becoming another tick box exercise as with previous duties, such as the Race Equality Duty. Others expressed concern that it is not relevant to a white mono-ethnic setting and a number of schools raised concerns about the lack of confidence among teachers expected to address cohesion issues. The majority of schools were unaware of existing local community cohesion work in their area, and had little knowledge of funding streams or the role of the local authority.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear that a step change is needed in approaches to education and there are three main components: a renewed curriculum; new approaches to learning; and schools acting as safe spaces for interaction. Many examples of good practice can already be found, but these must become the rule rather than the exception.

## A renewed curriculum

The curriculum in English schools needs a fresh injection of global perspectives to reflect the realities of an interconnected world and highly diverse communities. A recent report by Ofsted found that much geography taught in schools is not relevant to today's world and that many teachers need to update their approaches to incorporate global issues and sustainable development.<sup>10</sup> Even citizenship education is highly UK-focused. And the teaching of foreign languages became optional in secondary schools in 2004, just when they have never been more important to the country's future competitiveness.<sup>11</sup>

The international primary curriculum is a shining beacon of good practice. One of its core aims is to 'explicitly help children develop an international perspective as well as reinforcing their own cultural heritage', and it is currently taught in over 300 schools in the UK. It addresses history, geography, art, ICT, science and a range of other subjects, but does so through a topic-based curriculum.<sup>12</sup> And there are many schools like Huish Episcopi Secondary School in Somerset which has bucked the trend on language teaching: it is taking part in a scheme to bring qualified teachers from Taiwan to the South West of England to teach Mandarin Chinese as well as Taiwanese culture and customs.<sup>13</sup>

## New approaches to learning

Change is the only constant in today's world, which means it is not enough to update the curriculum with new content. Alongside this, schools must adopt new teaching methods that produce inquisitive and open minded young people, capable of navigating their way through whatever life might throw at them. Hetan Shah, chief executive of DEA, an education charity that promotes global learning, puts it this way: "Education must at its heart be about learning, and approaches that tend towards simple messages such as 'recycling is good' do not necessarily promote learning. Ultimately, what society needs are citizens with critical minds who can come to their own conclusions about the world around

them.”<sup>14</sup> DEA campaigns for, amongst other things, the introduction of new pedagogical methodologies that recognise that teachers cannot have all the answers and instead allow for greater pupil participation and voice. They point to a number of emerging methods, such as Philosophy for Children, and Open Spaces and Dialogues for Enquiry. Others have highlighted the potential role of culture in teaching young people new skills, such as observation and cultural literacy.<sup>15</sup>

## Schools as sites for interaction

Schools are one of the few places within a community that can build both bonding and bridging capital. Properly managed interaction can counteract the negative impacts that diversity can have on solidarity, but four things must be present: equal status between groups; working together on a shared goal; personal interaction; and some authority that all groups acknowledge which can define the social norms that support the contact.<sup>16</sup> Schools have already begun to see their community role as wider than merely the education of pupils. Many offer after-school care for children whose parents work, run evening classes including language tuition, and so forth. Schools should build on and develop this community-centric role further, and local authorities and the government nationally should support them.

Schools can also help by bringing their pupils into

contact with new people and different experiences. Schools have traditionally run overseas trips and exchange programmes, mostly with schools in other European countries due to the practicalities, costs, and the focus on building bridges across Europe in the second half of the twentieth century. Where possible, these trips should be extended to the new emerging economies of China, India and Brazil. However, there is often no need to leave the country to get a taste of a different culture or set of traditions. New technologies can be exploited, pairing schools across boroughs, working together collaboratively on projects and activities, and linking with local cultural institutions working with minority cultures could all contribute towards building new links between young people from different backgrounds.

The Britain of today looks and feels so different from the country into which I was born in the 1970s. Since then immigration, globalisation, technology, and the decline of manufacturing have left their mark and – in most cases – their impact has been positive. This is now a country with one foot constantly in the departure lounge and where difference is the new uniform. Inevitably, these changes have sometimes come at a cost, and the country is still working out how to live together successfully. Schools have a vital role to play in building cohesion, helping to create citizens with the knowledge, confidence and curiosity to make the most of this new interdependent world.

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<sup>1</sup> Cities in Transition: Britain's increasing plurality, Barrow Cadbury Trust, 2008

<sup>2</sup> Steven Vertovec, The Emergence of Super-diversity in Britain, Working Paper No 25, University of Oxford, 2006 <http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/publications/Working%20papers/Steven%20Vertovec%20WP0625.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7574382.stm>

<sup>4</sup> Robert Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first century", The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture, Scandinavian Political Studies, Vol 30, No 2, 2007

<sup>5</sup> Saul Alinsky, Rules for Radicals, 1971

<sup>6</sup> Q&A: 2001 northern town riots, <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/print/news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5032166.stm> (accessed 21/07/2008)

<sup>7</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, Cohesion Delivery Framework: Overview, annex D, June 2008

<sup>8</sup> This draw on an excellent essay: Hetan Shah, "Solidarity in a Globalised Society: Implications for Education Policy", in Nick Johnson (ed.), Citizenship, Cohesion and Solidarity, The Smith Institute, 2008, pp61-70

<sup>9</sup> Alveena Malik, Sticking Together, 26 June 2008, <http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/cgi-bin/go.pl/article.html?uid=4096>

<sup>10</sup> Geography in Schools: Changing Practice, Ofsted, 2008

<sup>11</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/politics\\_show/7001570.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/politics_show/7001570.stm)

<sup>12</sup> [www.internationalprimarycurriculum.com](http://www.internationalprimarycurriculum.com)

<sup>13</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/politics\\_show/7001570.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/politics_show/7001570.stm)

<sup>14</sup> Hetan Shah, "Solidarity in a Globalised Society: Implications for Education Policy", in Nick Johnson (ed.), Citizenship, Cohesion and Solidarity, The Smith Institute, 2008, p70

<sup>15</sup> Kirsten Bound, Rachel Briggs, John Holden and Samuel Jones, Cultural Diplomacy: The role of culture in international relations, Demos, 2007

<sup>16</sup> Miles Hewstone, "Intergroup Contact: Panacea or prejudice?", The Psychologist, Vol 16 No 7, July 2003

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