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Violence in schools and representations of young people: a critique of government policies in France and England

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This paper examines media discourses in France and in Britain relating to young people, violence and disaffection in schools, setting these within the framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which emphasises young people's participation rights. It analyses policy initiatives developed since 1997 in each country to address concerns about young people, disaffection and violence, examining these in the light of research evidence. It considers how public policies are variously shaped by research findings and by media representations. In France, attempts to reduce violence in schools have been accompanied by recognition that schools structurally produce disaffection and violence. In England there has been a shift in policy discourses. In 1997 the primary emphasis was social inclusion, but greater weight has since been given to the need to combat crime. (Male) youth disaffection is linked to crime. Policies addressing standards and achievement have been prioritised over policies to combat social exclusion. In both countries researchers and the media give particular attention to urban communities where minority ethnic communities live. Individual schools are labelled as failing and large numbers of young people are excluded or marginalised. In both countries minority ethnic students are over-represented among those formally excluded from mainstream education and in the least popular, most stigmatised, schools and classes. Violence and disadvantage are effectively institutionalised. Discourses in each country are racialised and disaffection is associated with minorities. Yet both countries offer universalist rather than targeted policy responses. Opportunities for student participation in school decision-making are limited.

Introduction

This paper examines media discourses and policies in France and in England relating to the disaffection of young people in schools. It considers ways in which dominant

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discourses about young people and violence influence official discourses and policy developments. We argue that in both countries these discourses and policies may compound rather than address the problems of disaffected students and those seeking to return to school following a period of absence or exclusion. In both countries there are significant numbers of young people who resist the constraints of the formal education system and who are labelled disaffected. Young people from minority ethnic communities, refugees and other newly-arrived students are more likely to be characterised as disaffected and are often poorly served by their schools. In France, the situation has been radically politicised. The media have encouraged a perception of violence in schools following an authoritarian discourse that plays on fears of insecurity. This found favour with teacher unions and led to the resignation of a high-profile education minister. In England, policy-makers have responded by introducing measures, also with the support of the teacher unions, which led to an increase in the numbers of young people being excluded from mainstream schooling, either formally or informally. Our research suggests that more attention needs to be given to the reasons for disaffection rather than to the symptoms. For many young people the day-to-day experience of school may be one of violence. Indeed, we have argued that some sanctions, including disciplinary exclusion, which may have severe and lasting damaging effects, including long-term social exclusion, are a form of institutionalised violence (Osler, 2005).

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: a common agenda for preventing violence

In both France and England policy rhetoric acknowledges the importance of providing an education appropriate to the needs and interests of learners as well as to the interests of the State. We argue that education policies need to be brought in line with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC) which obliges public authorities to listen to young people's perspectives and to consult them in matters which affect them. The CRC provides a clear agenda for education policy-makers. First, it emphasises young people's participation rights and sets a standard against which policies and practices with regard to decision-making in schools may be judged. The clear expectation in the Convention is that young people will have a voice in decisions that affect them. We argue that engagement of young people in decision-making is a means of preventing violence in schools.

Secondly, as a human rights instrument based on equality, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) reinforces the importance of anti-discriminatory and equal opportunities policies. Such policies are of key importance given the evidence of structural inequalities and racism in European societies. Racism and inequalities operate to exclude and disadvantage learners in a number of inter-related ways. Students may be subject to inappropriate curricula, unduly harsh discipline or other discriminatory practices, which lead to feelings of alienation and disaffection (Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; Osler & Hill, 1999). Any of

these may have an impact on attainment and may lead, potentially, to reactive violence and subsequent disciplinary exclusion, when a student responds to everyday racism from teachers or fellow students which has gone unrecognised or unaddressed (Essed, 1991; Stirling, 1992; Chebel d'Appollonia, 1998). There is evidence that such discrimination may lead to disaffection, incivility and, in the worst cases, violence, and this is causing concern to governments, parents and unions in France and Britain (OFSTED, 1996; Osler, 1997, 1998; Debarbieux, 2002). Evidence from the school inspection agency for England suggests that although there is a link between school exclusion and achievement, black children who are excluded are not necessarily disaffected (OFSTED, 1996). Teacher expectations may be shaped not only by pervasive racial stereotypes which exist in the wider society (Mirza, 1998), but also by behaviour teachers may not fully understand, such as reactive violence or incivilities. Teacher expectations of the academic performance or behaviour of students from particular ethnic groups leads to allocation to particular classes, schools or examinations (Wright, 1992; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000) which in turn have an impact on student attainment and access to jobs and higher education (Modood & Shiner, 1994). In 2003 the British government finally admitted the possibility that such patterns may amount to 'institutional racism' in schools and that this may contribute to lower levels of achievement for some minority ethnic students (DFES, 2003, p. 16).

The CRC has proved extremely influential across the world. In particular it has caused policy makers to start considering children not just as '*objects* of protection but as *subjects*' with an entitlement (Verhellen, 2000, p. 34). All but one of the nations in the world have now ratified the CRC, and the vision of children it contains is gradually having an impact on policy.

> Children are not—as they have so often been presented in the past—mere dependents, the property of their parents, 'apprentice adults'. There has been a remarkable increase in political discussion of the interests and wellbeing of children, with greater 'visibility' of children in public policy. (Aaronson, 2000, p. 4)

However, this conceptual switch, which places children not as consumers of education but as citizens, with participation rights and entitlement to equal opportunities, has been relatively slow to permeate education policy as it relates to schools in both countries. Further, little has been done to prepare teachers for a change from a culture of control to one of learner participation. Our study of school disciplinary systems and young people's levels of participation in school decision-making led us to the conclusion that:

> At school level one of the obstacles is a misunderstanding of the nature of children's rights and a fear amongst teachers that children's rights may be in opposition to the rights of teachers. It is sometimes argued that, if informed about their rights, young people will begin to demand rights without acknowledging their responsibilities. Not only is this a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of children's human rights, which are based on the principle of reciprocity, that is to say, respecting the rights of others but it is also, perhaps, to underestimate young people's capacity and willingness to acknowledge their responsibilities. (Osler, 2000b, p. 55)

Important evidence to help identify the causes of disaffection and violence can be collected by listening to young people, including those who feel excluded or marginalised. However, current education policies in France and England appear to give insufficient emphasis to young peoples' perspectives and the complexity of their needs. Moreover, it appears that public education policy in both countries is strongly driven by media representations of violence and young people. These representations encourage a view that many young people, particularly boys and young men, are out of control and a danger to adult society. They reflect a tendency in many countries to see youth as an indicator of the health of the nation (Griffin, 1993; Wynn & White, 1997; Osler & Vincent, 2003). The policy response is one of seeking to regain control and protect adults. However, the logic of the CRC is that young people are themselves vulnerable and require protection and support as well as a chance to participate.

Initiatives that involve young people in schools as partners do exist in both countries. In France there is a flourishing tradition of co-operative education inspired by Freinet (Auffrand, 1997; Lefranc, 1997; Beattie, 2002). In England a number of educational organisations, such as the Children's Rights Alliance, National Children's Bureau and Schools Councils UK, support the development of more democratic schools. There are formal structures for student participation in schools in France, as there are in a growing number of other European countries (Davies & Kirkpatrick, 2000; Osler & Vincent, 2002). In 2000 the French government reinforced these already well-developed structures for the formal representation of student views, by introducing a staff–student consultative committee, the *Conseil de la Vie Lycéene* (CVL), in each *lycée* (for 15–19 year olds) (*Bulletin Officiel de l'Education Nationale,* 2000). The vast majority of students judge these structures to be ineffective (Bellon & Pujol, 1998; Merieu, 1998). Formal structures are only part of the solution. In neither country is a wholehearted democratisation of schools supported by government policy.

There is evidence that the participation of young people in school decision-making can itself help to reduce the levels of aggression and violence in schools. Negative school cultures denying student participation breed resentment and violence (Revel, 1999; Carter & Osler, 2000). Empirical research in both France and England suggests that schools that guarantee the participation rights of learners, as a management strategy, are well disciplined and orderly (Baillon, 1998; Osler, 2000b). In England the model of the 'listening school' has been successful in countering bullying (Thorne, 1996). In France the importance of listening to learners is stressed in a study of school management styles (Vitali, 1997) and in a study of schools that have overcome violence (Fotinos & Fortin, 2000). Dialogue with learners is also recognised by the main secondary teachers' union in France, the *Syndicat National des Enseignements Second Degré (SNES),* as part of a strategy to counter school violence (Fotinos & Fortin, 2000).

Vocabularies of violence in schools

The Gulbenkian Foundation's Commission on Children and Violence defines violence as 'behaviour against people liable to cause physical or psychological harm'

(Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995, p. 4). The Commission observed that: 'In general, children are far more often victims of violence than perpetrators' (Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995, p. 1). Most importantly, the Commission noted:

> Schools can either be a force for violence prevention, or can provide an experience which reinforces violent attitudes and adds to the child's experience of violence. (Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995, p. 139)

The French government adopts the term *la violence à l'école* (violence at school) (Ministère de l'Education Nationale, 2000). However, since violence is not a single monolithic phenomenon, it is sometimes pluralised by academics as *la violence en milieu scolaire* (violence in schools) (Debarbieux, 1996, 1999a and b), *violences à l'école* (types of violence at school) (Charlot & Emin, 1997) or *les violences scolaires* (types of violence in schools) (Lorrain, 1999). The French discourse tends to be about incivility, making a moral judgement implying anti-social behaviour.

Official documentation in England tends to use the term disaffection, rather than violence to cover a range of behaviours and attitudes among school students who fail to conform to disciplinary codes and cause problems for school authorities. One example can be found in the report of the chief inspector of schools, who noted in 2003 that levels of poor behaviour remained stable, with one in twelve schools causing some concern:

> The behaviour of pupils is unsatisfactory in too many of these schools, and I know the relentless draining of staff morale and the sapping of energy and initiative that insubordination and cynicism from groups of disaffected pupils can cause day in and day out. (OFSTED, 2003, p. 3)

'Disaffection' is used as an explanatory term to account for a range of behaviours, including low attainment, persistent disruption, truancy and other forms of self-exclusion. Disaffection implies behaviour that is reactive to the school as an institution, though this is usually treated as an individual rather than a group phenomenon. More sensationalist media reports have implied that the 'unruly and disruptive' behaviour of young people is widespread, as in a report in *The Times* which referred to a 'disaffected generation' (9 January 2002, p. 7). Government documentation addresses related phenomena, including 'racial harassment', 'sexual harassment', and 'bullying'. The media also give coverage to these phenomena, focusing most regularly on bullying.

Institutionalised violence, racism and exclusion

It is recognised to some extent in both systems that policies and practices discriminate against some groups and thus constitute institutionalised violence. In both countries there is, for instance, a marked concentration of minority ethnic students in the least prestigious schools and the lowest sets within schools. Experience of injustice and inequality may lead individuals or groups to engage in reactive violence against the institution, its agents or their peers. Addressing underachievement and consequent disaffection is one strategy for reducing violence. However, any analysis of policy

discourses on violence (or disaffection), racism and inclusion/ exclusion needs to acknowledge that the relationship between young people's achievement and factors such as social class, gender, ethnicity and other aspects of identity is extremely complex.

In France it is difficult to establish which young people are performing well at school and which are underachieving, since there is no attempt to monitor attainment by ethnicity; this concept is simply not recognised as having any relevance to the provision of public services in a Republican tradition. Because ethnicity, like religion, is considered to be a private rather than a public matter, statistics are not collected or analysed by ethnicity, only by nationality.[1]

Without monitoring information, it is impossible to make precise comparisons of school achievement of the different ethnic groups in France. The general official view is that, all other things being equal, the children of migrants do equally well in school as students from the majority population. However, all things are not equal since there is well documented discrimination which occurs as a result of racialised choices made by parents in selecting schools and the racialised streaming practices of teachers (Lorcerie, 2002). This is confirmed, albeit unwittingly, in a report from the Haut Conseil à l'Intégration (HCI, 1998), which acknowledges indirect discrimination in the French school system. Young people from visible minorities are over-represented in the most disadvantaged schools and in the lower sets, where they have restricted access to more prestigious qualifications (Debarbieux & Tichit, 1997). The HCI report is published by the Ministry of the Interior. Lorcerie (2002) notes that it was ignored by the Ministry of Education.

In France, segregation of black and minority ethnic students both within schools and between them is increasingly recognised within the academic community as a racialised result of universalist education policy (Debarbieux & Tichit, 1997; Payet, 1997; Dubet, 1999; Tribalat, 2000; Cousin, 2001; Felouzis, 2003). Even where research studies have attempted to examine differentials in student achievement by ethnicity (Vallet, 1996; Poncet, 2000), the results have been interpreted in terms of class rather than as an effect of racism (Bronner, 2001; Gilson & Croissandeau, 2001).

French education policy is unable, because of particular definitions of Republican principles, to address the issue of the underachievement of minority ethnic students because it refuses to identify them (Van Zanten, 1997; Broadfoot *et al.*, 2000, p. 76). Indeed, of all the hundreds of research briefs (*notes d'information*) published by the French education ministry between 1995 and 2001, only two address ethnicity as a dimension. These both describe, in geographical terms, where 'foreign' students are concentrated. Thus, in a study of primary age learners, it is reported that they are concentrated in *ZEP*, (*Zones d'Éducation Prioritaire*) (specially funded urban education priority areas), and that, unsurprisingly, few attend Catholic schools (de Lacerda, 2000).

In England, as in France, young people from minority ethnic groups find themselves over-represented in disadvantaged schools and lower sets (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000). Nationally, young people of African Caribbean and Bangladeshi heritage

perform less well than their peers but there are considerable variations in attainment between children within the same ethnic group, according to the geographical area and local education authority in which there school is situated (Tikly *et al.*, 2002). Patterns of attainment by gender are complex, with considerable variations between students from different ethnic backgrounds and social classes. Overall, the gender gap in attainment is less significant than the gaps associated with ethnicity and social class (Epstein *et al.*, 1998; Griffin, 2000; Osler & Vincent, 2003). Whereas we might expect education policies to address this inequality, in both countries we find instead policies to address the symptoms of the inequalities, namely violence and disaffection in schools.[2] Discourses are racialised, for example where disaffection with schooling is linked to particular ethnic groups, but policy responses tend to be deracialised and universalist.

In England, education policy has been dominated since the 1990s by a concern to raise standards. One means of doing this is the publication of league tables, comparing school performance on examination and test results. This has resulted in some schools, typically those in economically disadvantaged areas, being stigmatised as failing. As minority ethnic students are disproportionately represented in these areas, their schools are more likely to be labelled in this way. To avoid such labelling, schools have been inclined to exclude students whom they see as troublesome, demanding of resources and contributing little to their academic profile. The fact that African Caribbean learners are greatly over-represented among those excluded from school (Osler & Hill, 1999; Wright *et al.*, 2000; Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2000) suggests that a form of institutional racism is widespread in the education service. Although, following the publication of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report (Macpherson, 1999), the British government acknowledged institutional racism as a feature of British society (Home Office, 1999), the Department for Education was slow to recognise that this extended to the education service (Osler, 2002). There is an interesting parallel to be drawn with the situation in France, where the Ministry of Education ignored the conclusions of the Ministry of the Interior with regard to systemic racial discrimination in schools. The Department for Education in London finally made an implicit acknowledgement of the possible existence of institutional racism in a consultative document (DfES, 2003) published four years after the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report.

Institutional racism is a human rights issue. Once this is recognised, the corollary is that questions of racial justice need to be addressed explicitly in public policy. In England, initiatives designed to address racial inequalities are usually subsumed within policy initiatives labelled social inclusion or equal opportunities. They are not generally recognised as part of a human rights agenda. Those campaigning for human rights, including children's rights, do not always recognise race equality as a central area of concern. Race equality issues are a key part of any human rights framework. It may sometimes be necessary to use such phrases such as 'human rights and race equality' (Richardson, 2000, p. 82) in order for this link to become explicit. Exclusion from school is one issue often addressed as part of an undifferentiated special educational needs agenda. It would appear that many researchers and professionals give

little more than passing recognition to the ways in which students from particular ethnic groups, notably African Caribbean learners, remain disproportionately vulnerable to disciplinary exclusion (see, for example, Hayden, 2002; Daniels *et al.*, 2003).

Statutory guidance published in 1999 by the Department for Education and Employment marked a significant step towards a more integrated approach. It aimed:

> to help schools in improving attendance, cutting exclusions and reducing discipline problems—including bullying and racism—thereby improving the learning environment for all children. (Scoresby, 1999)

This initiative followed a report from the Social Exclusion Unit on *Truancy and School Exclusion* (SEU, 1998) and was complemented by DfEE-funded research into reasons for exclusion from school. The results present exclusion as a school management issue with specific special educational needs and race equality elements (Osler *et al.*, 2000).

Media discourses and the politicisation of school violence in France

Policies addressing violence in schools are often driven by public concerns which are in turn fuelled by media representations. A media campaign sensationalising violence and schools from about 1995 precipitated a succession of government action plans. New national plans to combat violence in schools were announced by the conservative minister Bayrou in 1995 and 1996 and by the socialist Allègre in November 1997 and January 2000. The question of violence and schooling dominated the educational agenda in France in the school year 1999/ 2000 to the extent that Allègre was forced to resign following widespread demonstrations and strikes by concerned teachers.

A central demand of teachers was increased resources to tackle effectively the deterioration of the climate of insecurity in the nation's schools. In May 2000, the editorial which greeted the new minister, Jack Lang, in the educational monthly *Le Monde de l'Éducation* (p. 3) put effective treatment of violence in schools as the most urgent issue demanding his attention. Amongst the first new measures announced were indeed those aimed at 'improving citizenship and attacking violence', by increasing formal democratic consultation structures for school students (*Le Monde de l'Éducation,* July–August 2000, p. 11).

Concern about violence in schools has been expressed across the political spectrum. A centre right Senator reported that media coverage in the late 1990s focused on: a general increase in violence and bad behaviour, this particularly in lower secondary school but increasingly involving younger students; violence as a mainly urban phenomenon concentrated in schools in education priority areas (*ZEPs*); causes of violence, namely, poverty, family circumstances and school failure (*échec scolaire*) (Lorrain, 1999, p. 23).

These key media points of interest points are reinforced by official briefings from the ministry of education. The implicit message from both the media and government is that this violence is associated with learners from minority communities, who are

over-represented, by definition, in ZEP (a high proportion of black and minority ethnic students is a criterion for designation).

The discourse of violence in schools is one feature of a national concern in France about violence and insecurity, particularly in urban areas. These concerns have been exploited by the racist right (Rey, 1999; Wieviorka, 1999). Press and other media coverage has sensationalised the issue:

> playing on the worries and worst fears of some voters and feeding a populist xenophobic ideology. (Lorrain, 1999, p. 26, our translation)

Attempts by a respected university publishing house to disseminate a sociological understanding of urban violence have further dramatised the situation in schools. For example:

> The facts. At the start of 2000, teacher strikes over violence in schools were widespread. Since 'the way of life on the streets has taken over secondary schools', teachers lives have become a nightmare in the growing number of schools categorised very euphemistically as 'sensitive' or 'difficult'. The chaos in secondary schools is indescribable. (Bauer & Rauffer, 2000, p. 36 our translation)

The authors take an entirely teacher-centred perspective, providing no explanation for the state of affairs other than to imply that increasing numbers of young people are inadequately socialised. Although there is no direct reference to the ethnic background of the perpetrators, the authors include, without commentary, an appendix giving a breakdown of 'the actual ethnic make up of "sensitive areas"'. Given that Republican neutrality (*laïcité*) denies the relevance of ethnic communities in public policy formation, this is provocative and appears to be a deliberate attempt to racialise the debate. There is no attempt by the authors to identify features of school life that may lead to reactive behaviour. They do not make reference to racial harassment, racist insults and racist physical and verbal violence perpetrated by teachers, all of which are documented and illustrated in research studies (see for example, Debarbieux, 1999b).

Bauer & Rauffer (2000) further sensationalise the situation by listing incidents reported in the press in the 1999/2000 school year, citing frequent reports of extortion, theft, threats, insults and vandalism. They quote instances of staff molested, slapped in class, spat upon and having their cars damaged. Students are said to deal cannabis in the toilets, urinate in corridors, and throw chairs through (closed) windows during a class. Less frequent incidents cited by these authors include gang warfare, attempted murder, death threats, student riots and an attempt to poison the staff coffee. Further coverage, by the press and the teacher unions, ensured a high level of political attention.

The debate in the educational press moved on, during the academic year 2000/2001, concentrating less on acts of physical violence and more on low level but all pervasive 'incivility' (see, for example, *Le Monde de l'Education, January 2001*). Incivility corresponds to British notions of rudeness, unacceptable behaviour and disruption. When learners are denied institutionalised routes for raising grievances or resolving conflicts or injustices such behaviour may be a rational response. Official

and institutional responses tend to concentrate on the symptoms, that is the provocative behaviour, rather than on the underlying causes. Research suggests that school staff in France, like their counterparts in England, are often forced into stressful and confrontational situations with young people with little institutional support or training (Debarbieux, 1999a; Baillet, 2000; Osler & Vincent, 2003).

The portrayal of school violence in the British media

There have been three strands of sensational press coverage of stories of violence and schools in Britain. The first is of a number of genuinely shocking and rare events, such as the murder in the playground of Burnage High School, Manchester, of Ahmed Iqbal Ullah in 1986 or that at the school gate of London headteacher Philip Lawrence in 1995; the Dunblane School massacre in 1996; the diary of a young Sikh, Vijay Singh published after his suicide in 1997; and the conviction for assault on a student and subsequent acquittal of Welsh headteacher, Marjorie Evans in summer 2000.

The second strand of media coverage concerns stories about schools labelled as failing, such as the Ridings School in Halifax, West Yorkshire, where teachers in 1996 were so concerned by the breakdown in discipline that they threatened strike action unless large numbers of students were excluded. Such coverage has, in fact, been relatively common and in these cases issues of student behaviour and indiscipline have been prominent. The Ridings School story took on considerable political resonance in the run-up to a general election, as an education journalist noted:

> The danger, from the Government's point of view, was that the extraordinary spectacle of a school spiralling into chaos and disintegrating before the eyes of the nation would be linked in the public mind with its own drive to increase selection. (Gardiner, 1996)

The case of the Ridings School was portrayed as exceptional; the key issue was whether large scale exclusion of students could be used to restore order. The story did not cause a generalised concern among teachers about violence in schools, although it may well have contributed to a widespread public feeling that teaching is an unattractive career. In general, teachers and parents are more likely to be concerned with inspection regimes than with personal safety. In summer 2000, for example, when the representatives of all the major teacher and headteacher unions were asked at the end of the summer term what was most concerning their members, a main concern was the OFSTED school inspection system (House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, Minutes of Evidence, 12 July 2000). Only one union leader focused on poor relationships between students and their teachers, speaking of 'problems of indiscipline, not in every school, but in far too many schools in this country'. The annual report of the Chief Inspector of Schools for 1999/2000 concluded: 'the proportion of good behaviour far outweighs that which is unsatisfactory'. The tone was far from alarmist, but the report did note that '[t]his year, for the first time in recent years, inspectors report increasing levels of poor behaviour' and described this evidence as 'an early warning' (OFSTED, 2001, p. 19).

The third strand of media coverage focuses on the exclusion of individual students, nearly always boys. Although research studies have shown African Caribbean boys are up to six times more likely to be excluded from school than their white male peers (Osler & Hill, 1999) the media have deracialised the issue. Most of these individual reports are of white boys. An examination of this media coverage from the mid-1990s (Parsons, 1999) revealed a tendency to emphasise the violent nature of the excluded students and the danger they posed to other students and to teachers. All the examples cited are of boys, reflecting the media's focus. These stories run alongside others on male 'underachievement' and reflect what as been labelled as a crisis of masculinity.

The British media have also highlighted the problem of female school bullying. The focus on boys' 'underachievement' continues but it has been set alongside a renewed and more measured interest in girls' needs. Thus a journalist writing in *The Independent* observed:

> Bad boys have been hogging all the attention for too long. For the past six or seven years, boys' underachievement, boys' disaffection and boys' exclusion from school, have been constantly—not to say, obsessively—pored over by government ministers, Ofsted inspectors and the media. Girls, meanwhile, have been sitting pretty, praised to the skies for their exam results, which have overtaken boys at GCSE and A-level.

> But now, we are told, all is not well with the girls. Their academic averages conceal a significant pool of underachievement: in 2000, 14% of 16-year-old girls had no qualifications. Girls are said to be suffering from bullying; they are engaged in self-destructive behaviour such as cutting themselves; and they are excluded from school officially and unofficially. (Hinds, 2002)

The Observer followed this with an extensive article on girls and bullying in a full-page article in March 2002. This article claimed:

> Schoolgirls' ways of being cruel to each other are now so insidious and sophisticated that their victims can feel the devastating effects well into adulthood. (Hill & Helmore, 2002)

Research evidence on violence and racist behaviour in French schools

Debarbieux's research findings (1996) informed the 1997 Allègre action plan against school violence, and his follow up report (1999a) underpinned the second phase in 2000. Having analysed a questionnaire survey of 85 schools and conducted follow up interviews, he concluded:

> Violence is not just criminal violence. The real problem is anti-social behaviour (*incivilité*) at the same time as a feeling of insecurity and the breakdown of order. (Debarbieux, 1999a, p. 12 our translation)

This was confirmed by teachers, who in the first report, collectively named 14 different types of violence in their schools. Of these, by far the most common were 'swearing and racist abuse' and 'pupils fighting' (Debarbieux, 1996, p. 100). The research thus gives some perspective to the sensationalist press coverage. By far the most common forms of violence are student on student physical violence and more

generalised verbal violence not only by students. However, these were reported in only just over half of the schools surveyed. Violence directed against teachers was reported in only 10% of schools in a sample in which schools in less favoured areas were consciously over-represented (Debarbieux, 1996, p. 72). Three years later staff in schools had become more conscious of violence in their institutions. Almost half of the teachers surveyed considered that there was considerable violence in their school compared to a mere 7% in the earlier study (Debarbieux, 1999b). Teachers in England are far less likely to fear or encounter violence (Gill & Hearnshaw, 1996; Blaya, 2002).

Overtly racist behaviour has been recorded in many French schools. Research conducted for the national school inspectorate found that nearly half the schools in the sample examined reported racist behaviour by students. In one in five there was racist behaviour by staff (Tallon, 1979). Two decades later Debarbieux (1999a, p. 81) provided evidence of overt xenophobia and racism expressed by parents and staff. His report confirms the racialisation of the discourse of violence in schools and the negative labelling of minority ethnic students.. The research team reports a close relationship between levels of violence and the feelings of students, particularly those from minority communities, that they are victims of social exclusion (Debarbieux, 1999a, p. 123).

In France the term *violence* is being used as a shorthand expression to describe a feeling that schools are at the mercy of forces that teachers and the institution itself cannot adequately control, including anti-social and disenchanted young people. One of the reasons for the violence is considered to be *l'échec scolaire* in its double meaning of failure at school and (hence) failure of schools. Violence is defined as aggressive behaviour towards people and property, but the aggression is very often seen as a backlash against the failure of schools. In this sense schools are often said to produce violence. As a result, the discourse of violence and education in France contributes to national angst about the failure of 'the school' as a public, indeed Republican, institution.

Research evidence on violence, student disaffection and exclusion in England

A major survey of 'personal safety and violence in schools' based on data from over 2300 institutions, was carried out following the murder of headteacher Philip Lawrence in London in December 1995. Serious assaults by students on staff were reported as occurring in 3% of schools with one third of schools reporting student assaults on staff of less severity. 12% of schools had confiscated weapons from students. In 6% of schools outsiders had assaulted staff, though in 14% outsiders had assaulted students. Half of schools reported incidents of staff being verbally abused by parents. Virtually all schools reported assaults by students on other students, in 7% of schools the assault was extremely serious (Gill & Hearnshaw, 1996). The survey does not appear to have asked about verbal or physical assaults by staff on students, nor did it inquire about racially aggravated physical or verbal violence. The results

were not sensationalised by the press, nor have they been taken up by political campaigns.

Until about 2000, research to support the policy drive to raise standards concentrated on 'disaffection'. This refers to students who appear to have lost motivation and who may start to engage in reactive behaviour including incivility, disruption and violence against school property. The House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment (1998) reported evidence on disaffected students. The report does not mention violence. Rather it focuses on a group of young people excluded from the benefits of education, whether by absenteeism, formal or informal exclusion from school or by failure to achieve basic skills and minimum formal qualifications. The report notes that these young people, estimated as 8% of all 14–16 year olds and between 9 and 16% of 16–19 year olds are characterised as predominantly male, disproportionately from African Caribbean backgrounds. Lower achieving students, African Caribbean boys and children looked after by local authorities are greatly over-represented among those subject to permanent disciplinary exclusion. Moreover, those with statements of special educational needs are reported as being seven times more likely to be permanently excluded than those without. A link with criminality in the wider world is also established, since the 'disaffected' also includes a high proportion of young offenders and a high prevalence of risk-taking behaviour, such as smoking, drugs and early sexual activity.

Other evidence suggests there are notable differences between the profile of a typical white student excluded from school and that of a typical black student. White students are more likely to be of below average achievement, have a history of trauma and disaffected behaviour, and are likely to be excluded for verbal abuse (incivility). Black excluded students are more often of above average achievement and more commonly challenge teachers' judgements (OFSTED, 1996; Osler *et al.*, 2000). Most attention has focused on boys subject to disciplinary exclusion. Girls' exclusion remains under-researched. Our own study of girls and exclusion in six areas of England concluded that because of the links made by the media and policy-makers between boys' violence, exclusion and crime, resources were more likely to be directed at them. The hyper-visibility of particular behaviours, more commonly exhibited by boys, means that other students, predominately girls, can behave badly, exclude themselves and even drop out of school, without much attention being given to their needs. Their exclusion becomes invisible because it does not match the dominant view of exclusion.

Policy responses to school violence in England

In England the inspection regime is integral to the policy focus on standards. Published league tables effectively stigmatise schools and education authorities with poor academic results. Effectively a quasi-market operates, with parents seeking schools with the best results and schools seeking to attract students who are likely to realise their potential and enhance the school's reputation without incurring additional costs to the institution. Students with behavioural or social difficulties are thus

more vulnerable to disciplinary exclusion. The British Labour government has been criticised for undermining its own efforts with respect to equality and disaffection by retaining league tables and system of open enrolment brought in by the previous overtly market-driven administration (Vulliamy & Webb, 2000). Certain groups of minority ethnic students are among the most vulnerable in this system, notably newly-arrived students and those requiring specialist language support. Yet, an analysis which explains systemic discrimination solely in terms of education markets is over-simplistic. As we have shown, the French school system, which has been far less subject to market forces, also operates in a discriminatory way towards students from minority communities, who are placed in the least successful schools and in less prestigious courses.

Following the 1997 general election, the new Labour government established the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) with the role of developing policies for a more inclusive society. Its report *Truancy and School Exclusion* made explicit the link between school exclusion and longer-term social exclusion, warning that young people excluded from school 'are in danger of becoming tomorrow's criminals and unemployed' (SEU, 1998, p. 1). The report gave out a clear policy message, that schools should not use exclusion or condone truancy as a routine means of dealing with disaffected or failing students. The government set a target to reduce exclusions by one third by 2002. Exclusion was made more difficult, and permanent disciplinary exclusions fell each year from a peak figure of 12, 467 in 1995/96. Nevertheless, as the number of officially recorded permanent exclusions fell there was evidence of a rise in both unofficial (unlawful) exclusions and short-term exclusions (Osler *et al.* 2000).

From 2000, in response to demands from teacher unions there was a shift in policy. The British government made it easier to exclude young people and further restricted parents' rights of appeal. Teacher unions and government discourses began to reflect media discourses, linking poor behaviour and incivility with crime. Commenting on a rise is the number of official exclusions, one union leader opined that the figures 'reflect the rising levels of pupil violence, disruption and abuse' (Osler & Vincent, 2003, p. 35). In the 2001/2002 school year exclusions again began to rise. Government rhetoric began to focus on exclusion as a means of addressing (male) youth violence in schools (Osler & Vincent, 2003, pp. 34–38).

Throughout, government expressed concern at the disproportionate number of African Caribbean boys amongst those excluded, but avoided setting specific targets to address the issue. In doing so policy-makers have ignored research evidence which shows that when exclusion figures are cut the disproportionate exclusion of particular groups tends to persist unless specific measures are taken to address the inequality (Osler & Hill, 1999). In England, the prevalence of formal and informal exclusion from school is considered by policy-makers as an inevitable price to pay in the drive to improve standards. The school system itself is not seen as failing, nor is exclusion recognised as a form of institutional violence.

A 2001 White Paper *Schools Achieving Success* promised that from 2002 all excluded students should receive a full-time educational programme (DfES, 2001) in special units which would 'tackle disruptive behaviour, exclusion and truancy and

support the most vulnerable children in our society' (DfEE, 2001, p. 59). The practical difficulties in accommodating these young people and others who are out of school as a result of truancy, caring duties and self-exclusion were underestimated, despite a warning from the Audit Commission (1999) about the scale of the problem. In reality exclusion from secondary school often marks the end of a young person's school career.

British government rhetoric now acknowledges the importance of listening to students and of directly tackling racism in schools. In its consultation paper on raising levels of achievement among minority ethnic learners it draws on research to suggest that in schools that are successful in addressing racial inequalities:

> There is a strong ethos and culture of mutual respect where pupils are able to have their voices heard. There are clear and consistent approaches to bad behaviour, bullying and tackling racism across the whole school with a focus on prevention. (DfES, 2003, p. 28).

Significantly the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2002 requires inspection services, including OFSTED, to monitor how public bodies are promoting race equality. OFSTED is required to report on exclusions and the levels of achievement of minority ethnic learners. School inspectors have been issued with guidance which requires them to give consideration to schools' legal duties to promote race equality, National Curriculum guidance on inclusion and the government's policies aimed at raising educational standards and promoting social inclusion and race equality (OFSTED, 2002, p. 7). What the guidance does not address are potential tensions and contradictions between different government policies, such as the standards policy and the inclusion policies. It is also unlikely that, even with two days training on inclusion, inspectors will feel confident to make judgements about schools' legal duties relating to race equality (Osler & Morrison, 2000 and 2002) particularly in those schools judged to be successful, where the time spent on inspection is brief.

Policy responses to school violence in France

Both the French and the British governments have invested significant resources to tackle school violence or disaffection, truancy and exclusion. The January 2000 Allègre action plan included thousands of extra posts, including 2000 *emplois jeunes* (unqualified adult helpers); 4000 *aides éducateurs* (assistant youth workers); 800 *surveillants* (young supervisory staff); and 1000 liaison workers linking schools with communities. These resources were targeted in 10 areas and within these areas 75 schools received special police protection (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2000). Schools are required to record details of incidents of violence, though the ministry dropped the weekly monitoring of data, suggested for some schools, in early 2001. A large proportion of these poorly paid and unqualified staff is likely to be recruited from black and minority ethnic communities. Their lowly and subordinate position within schools tends to reinforce what one commentator has termed the 'continuing colonialism of institutions' (Pain, 2000, our translation).

French governments of right and left are wedded to a view of Republican neutrality, *laïcité,* that refuses to allow for ethnic difference as a factor in educational achievement. Whilst strongly supportive of antiracism as an element of personal action, official discourse is disinclined to acknowledge the possibility of institutional racism within the education system. Yet, ironically, in 2003, leading political figures from the right and the left, including the Prime Minister, made speeches in favour of legislating against the right of Muslim girls to wear headscarves in schools. Such proposals fail to acknowledge the multiple identities of students. In effect, the school—a Republican institution—is promoting sameness, rather than equity, as an ideal. Integration is privileged over pluralism. Yet, as Figueroa has observed:

> Far from diversity being disintegrative or a fault to be overcome, the experience of the different is primary, and a rich resource. What matters is how the diversity is articulated with other factors such as the distribution of status, resources and power, and how it is perceived and evaluated. The plural society can have a national identity which includes diversity, a respect for difference and a valuing of pluralism. A society remains maximally viable only if its diversity, if its difference/similarity, is respected and dealt with in various constructive ways. (Figueroa, 2000, p. 54)

The challenge to French policy-makers is to accept difference in order to avoid institutional barriers which serve to exclude and discriminate. It is interesting to observe that in both France and Britain education policy makers have, as we have seen, been equally reluctant to acknowledge the existence of institutional barriers, in the form of structural racism/discrimination. Although the British government acknowledged institutional racism in the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report (Macpherson,1999) and passed the Race Relations (Amendment) Act in 2000, the report's recommendations with regard to education were not fully implemented (Osler & Morrison, 2000). In particular, education ministers were unwilling to acknowledge the existence of institutional racism or to take measures to target specific racial inequalities until 2003. This contrasts with initiatives in other ministries to address inequalities (Department of Health, 1999; Home Office, 1999).

Both the British and French governments stress the importance of education for citizenship as part of their measures to tackle apathy and disaffection, as do the French teacher unions. Citizenship became a formal subject in the National Curriculum for England from 2002, a decade after it was introduced in France. However, as we have argued elsewhere, in both countries too much emphasis is given to an undifferentiated national identity and too little to political literacy and the struggles of minority communities (Osler, 2000a; Osler & Starkey, 2001). Moreover, education for citizenship requires some recognition of the current citizenship of young people in schools and their right to have a say in decisions that concern them, in conformity with the CRC (Audigier, 1999; Osler & Starkey, 1996, 1998, 2000; Starkey, 2000).

Conclusion

There is a tendency in many countries to see youth as an indicator of the health of the nation (Griffin, 1993; Wynn & White, 1997) and our analysis suggests this is the case

in both France and England. Media representations of young people in both societies appear to have a considerable impact on public polices relating to violence and disaffection in schools. In France it is more readily acknowledged that violence in schools reflects a systemic problem, whereas in England there is a tendency to see youth disaffection as a problem located within individual learners. Consequently, policy initiatives in France have sought to address feelings of insecurity in schools, particularly by increasing learner surveillance. In England, the tendency has been to exclude 'disaffected' learners from the school. The intention has been to provide individual support to young people in difficulties, although, in reality, the result is to isolate and further marginalise the excluded student.

In both countries, governments stress the importance of integration and social inclusion, recognising education as a key means to take forward this policy. Yet, whilst schools are potentially powerful instruments for preparing young people to participate in society, and at their best give them the right and the opportunity to participate in the life of the school itself, they remain, in many cases, institutions that create failure, resentment and exclusion. They can 'either be a force for violence prevention, or can provide an experience which reinforces violent attitudes and adds to the child's experience of violence' (Gulbenkian Foundation, 1995, p. 139).

Governments in both countries, and particularly the education ministries, find it challenging to acknowledge or confront systemic and institutionalised racial discrimination that undermines policies initiatives to promote educational and social inclusion. The French State denies the significance of ethnic identities, seeing difference as something which might undermine Republican neutrality and national identity. Although public policies in Britain acknowledge diversity, insufficient attention is given to inequalities. It is inequalities rather than diversity which threaten stability and social cohesion within a plural society. Teachers and other education professionals need opportunities to understand issues of diversity, justice and equity. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a useful framework in which these issues might be debated, particularly as it gives legitimacy to young people's right to engage in policy formation.

Notes

1. In fact, statistics based on 'racial' origin were collected by the Vichy government during the Nazi occupation of 1940–1944 and then used to discriminate systematically against ethnic and religious minorities. The Vichy government participated actively in Nazi projects of genocide of the Jewish and Roma populations of Europe. It is consequently understandable that there is extreme reticence to sanction or propose any form of monitoring by ethnicity and that this effective ban on categorising by ethnicity or religion should have lasted over half a century.
2. In England there have been, at local authority level, initiatives to address these inequalities. At national level, there is just one exception to the deracialised policy, a ring-fenced fund for raising the achievement of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. The Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant was £155 million in 2002/ 03 (DfES, 2003b), less than 0.4% of the total education and training budget for England.

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