

New Deal for Communities

The National Evaluation

Research Reports

Beyond a Colour Blind Approach: Addressing Black & Minority Ethnic Inclusion in the Education Strand of New Deal for Communities

Research Report 49

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**Beyond a Colour Blind Approach:
Addressing Black & Minority Ethnic
Inclusion in the Education Strand of
New Deal for Communities**

Research Report 49

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Executive Summary

'Because you know what's going on in the world now, I am always worried I am not safe until I get home. I don't feel one hundred per cent safe.' (Volunteer 1, First Step, Newcastle)

'They are all different people from different countries and they come here, it is a place they can go and they will be welcome.' (Participant 2, First Step, Newcastle)

'Race' and racism are volatile issues in British public life. The inclusion of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people is a politically heated topic that raises particular sensitivities in areas of pronounced social disadvantage where visible minorities often provide an easy target.

BME inclusion remains a highly sensitive and somewhat problematic area for many NDC partnerships. There is relatively little BME 'voice' in and across NDCs and the profile of BME communities remains generally low. There are very few education projects that explicitly address BME needs and, where there are, there is frequently resentment from white residents that money is spent on what they see as a small and undeserving part of the community. However, the few NDCs who have decided to tackle these issues have done so with great dedication.

This second detailed report on the issue of BME inclusion in the education theme arises from work in 2004/05 and draws primarily on fieldwork undertaken in two NDCs:

- Newcastle NDC
- Sunderland NDC (*Back on the Map*)

The two NDCs featured in this report are among the few to evidence any explicit attention to BME inclusion in their education work. They also provide an interesting contrast in terms of the audience they address and their aims and objectives. Newcastle's **First Step** is a centre offering formal and non-formal education for BME women and is outside the mainstream provision. Sunderland offers an educational programme called '**Who am I?**' in its primary schools (being expanded to the secondary schools), teaching its pupils about various religious and minority ethnic communities living in the area. Being located in the mainstream, this was not about offering education to BME communities alone, but teaching mainly white children about contemporary British society and helping them avoid stereotyping and encouraging them to challenge racism.

The projects have been especially **successful** in certain respects:

- 'First Step' (Newcastle) is breaking down the isolation experienced by many South Asian women locally
- 'Who am I?' (Sunderland) is adding to work on ethnic diversity in the mainstream curriculum and introducing BME voices into school
- both projects break the silence on issues of local racism and discrimination. They are challenging negative assumptions and working towards greater race equality and social justice
- the projects embrace a perspective that rejects simple assimilation: they argue that greater social cohesion is only possible when differences are recognised and valued
- 'First Step' is adding to local capacity building in the BME community through a range of enhanced social and educational skills, including work on English as an Additional Language and Information & Communications Technologies

Key factors associated with successful initiatives are:

- recognising that targeted action is required to address race inequalities: ignoring difference (sometimes called a 'colour blind' approach) does not work
- capacity building through employment and training of local residents
- providing childcare is absolutely essential: without the crèche most young mothers would be excluded from participation in 'First Step'
- recognition of local community needs: in this case, a women-only centre, with no male participants or staff, was a necessity

Some **barriers and problems** remain:

- lack of adequate space is a major problem preventing 'First Step' from expanding further and building on its success
- in Sunderland funding has been problematic, with delays in receiving the promised resources creating uncertainty and preventing the appointment of much-needed staff
- a reliance on unpaid workers is a major problem. Community-based workers should be adequately paid in order to ensure stability, coherence and to demonstrate respect for local residents' contributions
- in Sunderland the NDC partnership needs to demonstrate its commitment: strong and visible support is vital

Introduction

The inclusion of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people is a politically heated topic and one that raises particular sensitivities in areas of pronounced social disadvantage, where visible minorities often provide an easy target for those wishing to find a scapegoat.

BME inclusion remains a highly sensitive and somewhat problematic area for many NDC partnerships. There is relatively little BME 'voice' in and across NDCs and the profile of BME communities remains generally low. There are very few education projects that explicitly address BME needs and, where there are, there is frequently resentment that money is spent on what is often seen by white residents as a small and undeserving part of the community. However the few NDCs who have decided to tackle the BME issues have done so with great dedication.

This second detailed report on the issue of BME inclusion in the education theme arises from work in 2004/05 and draws primarily on fieldwork undertaken in two NDCs:

- Newcastle NDC
- Sunderland NDC (*Back on the Map*)

The projects that are in progress vary in focus and size and have been running for different lengths of time. This report covers the following areas:

- the context in which the BME projects have been established and the problems they are trying to address
- the nature of the intervention in terms of objectives and targeted beneficiaries
- the ways in which the projects have been delivered, in particular focusing on the different types of interventions that are offered and the assumptions behind these interventions
- current outcomes and impact of the projects
- key lessons that have been learnt so far

The Local Context

Socio-economic context

The socio-economic context in which the BME projects have been developed is common to many NDC areas, with pronounced levels of social and economic disadvantage. A brief review of some key indicators gives a snap shot of some of the main issues.

According to the baseline information that was gathered to identify local need, Newcastle NDC has high levels of unemployment. In 2001 the proportion of workless adults was 23.7% (claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), Income based JSA or Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA)) compared to 15.1% in the region and 9.1% in England as a whole. The area also experiences low levels of household income with 37.8% receiving income support and housing benefit, compared to 18.2% in the region and 13.3% in England as a whole. Of the children aged under 16 living in Newcastle NDC 54.3% were living in these households. 66.6% of primary age children are in receipt of Free School Meals compared to 35.8% in the region and 19.3% nationally.

The **Newcastle NDC** (formally WestGate NDC) covers four areas: Arthur's Hill, Cruddas Park, Elswick and Rye Hill in the west end of Newcastle. These areas are amongst the most disadvantaged wards in England. In this they compare very unfavourably with the thriving,

prosperous central shopping and commercial areas of Newcastle, currently undergoing something of a cultural and economic renaissance. Residents outside the NDC area generally hold negative and stigmatising perceptions of the area.

Unemployment is also high in Hendon and East End area of Sunderland. Nationally around 7% of households receive income support and 19% housing benefit: in Sunderland 34% of the local households have incomes of between £5-10,000 pa and over 1200 residents out of the 10,000 claim income support. These figures highlight significant levels of poverty and social disadvantage.

The Policy Context

Historically, race relations is a particularly sensitive and volatile issue. The findings of a recent Home Office survey, involving more than 15,000 interviews, indicates that there are many causes for concern. A significant proportion of respondents, for example, felt that racial prejudice had worsened over the last five years. This view was more common among people of lower socio-economic status and those with no formal qualifications - both indicators, of course, that are present to a high degree in NDC areas. Many of the same respondents also stated that they anticipated a further worsening of racism in the five years to come.

Two in every five respondents in England and Wales thought there was more racial prejudice in Britain today than five years ago. One in three thought levels had remained the same and one in six thought there was less racial prejudice than five years ago.

Perceptions of more racial prejudice now than five years ago were higher among the following groups:

- White respondents (44%) compared with black (35%), Asian (33%), and mixed race (32%) respondents;
- Older respondents (50 years old and older);
- Women compared with men – this pattern was consistent across all ethnic groups;
- People occupying lower socio-economic groups;
- People with no qualifications.

Two in every five adults in England and Wales thought there would be more racial prejudice in Britain in five years' time than today.

Predictions that there would be more racial prejudice in five years' time compared with the present were higher among the following groups:

- White people;
- Older people;
- People occupying lower socio-economic groups;
- People with no qualifications.

Perceptions of racial prejudice and discrimination in England and Wales

(adapted from Attwood et al 2003, pp. 27-41)

Levels of tension and racial hostility have risen considerably in some areas following the events of September 11 2001. In Leicester, for example, one of the first academic studies of harassment following 9/11 revealed that South Asian women were especially vulnerable to attack (BBC, 2002). Similar findings emerged in several states of the European Union. A report into Islamophobia for the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia noted:

'Islamic communities and other vulnerable groups have become targets of increased hostility since 11 September. A greater sense of fear among the general population has exacerbated already existing prejudices and fuelled acts of aggression and harassment in many European Member States' (Allen & Nielsen, 2002, pp. 5).

The detailed report on the UK noted:

'A significant rise in attacks on Muslims was reported across a range of media in the immediate aftermath of September 11. Numbers of incidents of violent assault, verbal abuse and attacks on property were noted, some of which were very serious. Muslim women wearing the hijab were easily identifiable and widespread targets for verbal abuse, being spat upon, having their hijab torn from them and being physically assaulted. A number of prominent mosques around the country were similarly attacked, ranging from minor vandalism and graffiti to serious damage through arson and firebombs' (Allen & Nielsen, 2002, pp. 29).

In addition to the rise in anti-Islamic racism following 9/11, many minority communities have also suffered from negative reaction to public debate on the issue of asylum and immigration. This issue received a growing amount of coverage during the early 2000s and was clearly exploited by far right groups such as the British National Party (Gable, 2004; Modood, 2005).

As this report was finalised ethnic diversity, immigration and asylum had once again emerged as a major issue. Following terrorist attacks in London in the summer of 2005 there was renewed debate about the need for further immigration controls and a surge in recorded race hate crimes around the country (BBC, 2005).

This is the context in which NDC projects are operating. It is a context where fear of attack has heightened considerably following the events of 9/11 and where each news story about asylum and immigration raises the tension on the streets and in local communities.

Black & Minority Ethnic inclusion in the New Deal for Communities

Addressing the particular disadvantages of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups is an important strand in the NDC initiative. However, a general review of partnerships' education projects in the summer of 2004 revealed that very few partnerships had any dedicated work on this issue and that there had not been a significant improvement since the data for our first report was gathered in 2002 (Rausch & Gillborn, 2003). This is surprising, and disappointing, because the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000) placed a series of general and specific duties on public authorities to take proactive steps to improve the service provided to minority communities.

When we asked partnerships for details of their BME education projects, some described initiatives that aimed in general at raising educational attainment: they reasoned that such projects were relevant if a significant proportion of the target audience are of BME heritage. This is a reasonable assumption but it repeats a common misperception that BME communities will benefit equally as educational standards are improved more generally: unfortunately, experience in England has shown that this is not the case. Despite an overall improvement in standards since the late 1980s, the major inequalities of attainment remain between white pupils and their peers of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and African Caribbean heritage (Gillborn, 2004). Similar inequalities also persist in the labour market (Strategy Unit, 2003).

These findings suggest that targeted action is required to address important ethnic inequalities. This clashes with some people's preference for a so-called 'colour blind' approach, that is, attempting to treat everyone the same regardless of their ethnicity. Despite the laudable aims

of such a policy, however, research in both the UK and US has clearly demonstrated that in practice such an approach tends to mask ethnic inequalities and lead to inaction.

This also raises a more general concern as to how BME projects are being defined and indicated in local NDC planning and evaluation reports, particularly with regard to the evaluation of outcomes.

One of the principal areas of concern with regard to BME inclusion in education is the fact that there is little mainstream provision for BME communities and that the profile of such communities needs to be raised. Despite government commitments to raise the profile of BME issues, our work across the education theme of NDC reveals very little targeted attention to this issue.

The two NDCs featured in this report are among the few to evidence any explicit attention to BME inclusion in their education work. They also provide an interesting contrast in terms of the audience they address and their aims and objectives. Newcastle's *First Step* is a centre offering formal and non-formal education for BME women and is outside the mainstream provision. Sunderland offers an educational programme called '*Who am I?*' in its primary schools (being expanded to the secondary schools), teaching its pupils about various religious and minority ethnic communities living in the area. Being located in the mainstream, this was not about offering education to BME communities alone, but teaching mainly white children about contemporary British society and helping them avoid stereotyping and challenge racism.

Racism

In both Newcastle and Sunderland the interviews with the project participants and project delivery agencies revealed racism as a major problem. The Project coordinator at First Step gave a few examples of the wide range of incidents the women using the centre had experienced:

[There is] 'quite a lot of anecdotal evidence. Young children, you know, pulling scarves, throwing stones, breaking into houses, pushing things through letter boxes. (...) Dog shit. And then major incidents, a couple of racially motivated, certainly grievous bodily harm and a couple of murders, I think. (...) Quite a bit of BNP activity. They've been allowed to march in the West End, which has caused quite a lot of tension. The other tension, I think, between the white community, and what they perceive ... what they read in the press, you know, asylum seekers and refugees having this, that and the other... it's a pressure they are putting on to the health service and that sort of thing, I've heard that quite a lot as well. A lot of stereotyping, I guess, as well. But there is quite an undercurrent of racism. And people don't report it. It's very under-reported.' (Project coordinator, First Step, Newcastle)

Some of the women at the centre feel unsafe when walking home or simply uncomfortable outside. This seems to have increased after the events of 11 September 2001.

[It is] 'not comfortable or not safe enough to walk. Because you know what's going on in the world now, I am always worried I am not safe until I get home. I don't feel one hundred per cent safe.' (Volunteer 1, First Step, Newcastle)

A number of them brush off their experiences with racist comments and many believe that a lot of this could be avoided if there was more education. However, their experiences with racism have left the women very upset. Generally they find it hard to understand why they are not seen as human beings as opposed to targets for racist abuse 'Pakis'.

'Personally I haven't suffered that much, apart from little like, racist comments, like – "Hey Paki!" Everyone's a "Paki" here and I sometimes feel like turning around and saying – "I am not from Pakistan". But everyone's Paki.' (Volunteer 2, First Step, Newcastle)

'If they are educated, enough education, it will make them know that ...all human beings, all the same, even if different colour.' (Volunteer 5, First Step, Newcastle)

This problem is perpetuated in school and sometimes very difficult to identify. Parents, who may already struggle to understand the English school system, often feel overwhelmed and do not know where to turn or what to do.

'A lot of women come in and say their children are being bullied at school and it may be racially motivated, it may not. So that's why we are doing something now on bullying in schools, translating a leaflet on what you can do, who you need to talk to, those sorts of things.' (Project Co-ordinator, First Step, Newcastle)

The Hendon area, where Sunderland NDC is located, has also had a number of problems with racism. Again, this seems to have worsened after 9/11.

'After 9/11 my issue of when I'm covering my head I'm called, "Oh, Bin Laden's wife." Just because I've got a headscarf on, you know...' (Community Ambassador 1, Sunderland)

The steering group of 'Who am I' is made up of the community ambassadors from the various local BME communities. They see educating young children as a vital step, not least by challenging some basic ignorance about the nature and history of Britain as an ethnically diverse nation:

'And most of racism, to my knowledge anyway, and I've lived here for twenty-odd years, is - goes back to people's lack of knowledge, lack of understanding, not knowing who this person.... You know, people think we've landed from somewhere, (...) you know, our parents have been here, my grandfathers, you know, fought for Britain. That kind of - it's just that people don't see that background. People just think one day, like the aliens around us somewhere, we were just dropped on Hendon or Sunderland or wherever.' (Community Ambassador 1, Sunderland)

Integration into the local community is seen as only being possible if a separate sense of identity can be maintained and dignity preserved. Erasing differences is not seen as they key to better understanding between the communities:

'...but people like me want to keep our identity as it is, and we want that identity to be respected. (...) What I'm trying to emphasise is that this is a multicultural, multinational sort of country. And its high time people accepted that. Rather than people having to change - to shave their beards or whatever - because of pressures or compulsions.' (Project co-ordinator, Who Am I Project, Sunderland)

Other problems and barriers to participation

Racism is not the only problem the local NDC residents face. As elsewhere the childcare issues, identified in a number of previous education-theme reports, are central to the take-up of any NDC project and crucial for equal access. First Step has overcome that barrier by offering a crèche on site.

Women's representation is also an issue, especially with BME women who are badly under-represented on many community boards:

'...the BME women are very poorly represented on every level of the decision making process. If they are represented at all it will be by male community leaders. Who don't, actually, consult, I don't think, with any women. They might just decide to jump on to something or other, but very rarely. So if you look at all the decision-making, look at the

council, coming down to the partnerships, everything like that, go to the meetings, there's very little BME women's representation.' (Project participant, First Step, Newcastle)

In part this paucity of representation is due to meetings being at the wrong time, the lack of childcare, and/or the lack of interpreters. Interpreters are also needed to help BME parents access and communicate with their children's schools.

Poverty and paucity of resources, as in other NDC areas, are also a central problem.

Nature of the Interventions

The NDC-funded interventions aim to address some of the problems mentioned above. In particular they aim to help the BME communities overcome racism and discrimination.

Newcastle

First Step is a registered charity that has been running for fourteen years. It is a multi-ethnic project addressing, in particular, the needs of minority ethnic women. However it is open to all women. The centre offers the development of key skills, including English as an Additional Language (EAL), basic IT skills, English as a Second Language (ESOL) with ICT, and numeracy. Vocational Qualifications (including NCFE national awarding body for Classroom Assistants and an NVQ in childcare) are also on offer. There is home-based learning through trained volunteers for those who cannot access the centre.

The project also provides non-formal learning opportunities in art and other areas for women, plus volunteering opportunities to challenge inequality. First Step's mission is about social inclusion, economic inclusion, political inclusion and social cohesion. There are a large number of BME women who access the centre and the courses offered. Currently there are over 20 nationalities represented and over 321 women register for courses every year.

'We are multi-racial so...we have women from the Indian sub continent: Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, the Middle East, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, South America, Taiwan and Malaysia. Quite a mix of women really. But that will include asylum seekers and some refugees, political refugees.' (Project co-ordinator, First Step, Newcastle)

There are two full time members of staff and some part time members helped by lots of volunteers who provide the interpreting services. NDC funding includes both capital and programme funding.

Sunderland

The **'Who am I?'** project is based in a primary school located in the NDC area. The majority of work involves engaging with school pupils in Years 1 and 2 aged between five and seven years old. The project is being expanded to include pupils aged 10 in their first year at secondary school - year 7. These year groups were targeted as the entry points for both primary and secondary school and ages at which important views and opinions can be formed. Community ambassadors from the various locally represented faiths and communities have been trained and deliver sessions to the pupils about the six belief systems that are most common locally: Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism and Buddhism. The work is delivered in one half-day session per primary school class group, per faith. They explore the basic principles of these belief systems before each class group spends up to one whole day visiting a particular place of worship or other building of significance to each of those faiths. The project is currently funded for two years and around two thirds is met by the NDC.

Aims and Objectives

The main aims and objectives of *First Step* are to overcome language barriers and improve employment prospects. In addition, they provide childcare and help with travel costs. It is recognised that many BME women, who are not proficient in the English language or who face other barriers from home such as caring responsibilities, need a lot of practical and emotional support to get out of the house.

'They do not want to come out of the house unless they feel the service is providing all the support. Like childcare support, travel expense, translator and things like that.' (Project Coordinator, First Step, Newcastle)

The *Who Am I* project aims to recruit and train Community Ambassadors to work in local schools within the national curriculum framework. They tell their stories, give an insight into their daily lives, and challenge myths about their culture. Consequently the project is not just about faith. The biggest aspect of this education project is knowing about other people's backgrounds, celebrating the differences as well as the similarities. Young children are targeted as they are seen as the future generation where there is hope of change.

'For them to have all the facts about, you know, where did we come from, why people do something different to themselves, or how similar their lives are. (...) [It is] about arming the children with the facts, you know, and hopefully they can tackle the myths.' (Community Ambassador 1, Sunderland)

Teachers see this project as being particularly useful, both complementing the national curriculum on world faiths and helping the children understand the differences amongst the various communities without building up prejudices.

'The idea is to promote the idea, amongst the children, that, you know, if you're a Sikh or a Muslim there are certain things they have in common with you. And also to...so that children know exactly what is a Sikh, what is a Muslim.' (Teacher 1, Sunderland)

It is hoped that the children will gain knowledge they would not have received from the adults at home and that they can feed the information back at home, in this way widening the benefits of the projects.

Beneficiaries

The main beneficiaries of First Step are BME women living in Newcastle. Since NDC funding is only a part of total funding, women from outside the NDC area also have access to the centre and its programmes. This is significant because it works against the sense of a 'post code lottery', where some NDC funded projects have found near neighbours and close friends barred from access because of where the NDC boundary has been drawn. For the BME women, who do not feel comfortable in other community centres or mixed colleges, this centre allows for an all female environment whilst offering both formal and informal learning opportunities:

'Not everyone is comfortable to go to Westgate College because it's mixed, and not everybody is happy to go to Newcastle College and do all these courses...' (Education Development Worker, First Step, Newcastle)

The course participants are mainly from the BME communities. A number of them become volunteers and 'give back' to the centre. There are also some white participants:

'Mostly the English are mostly volunteers, although we have a mixture and then we have just an odd one or two that actually are service users.' (Project co-ordinator, First Step, Newcastle)

A number of women have come through major trauma in their home country, including war and exile. The informal atmosphere, the art classes and the mutual support amongst the women, all help create a very close-knit community. Many miss their extended families and this support network has become crucial to their social life.

'And I joined Pat's class as a stencilling student. And I really enjoyed it, because when you don't have any relative you feel frustrated all the time staying inside, and especially the winter. And winter is not my season. I am a sunny weather person. I like to go there and I started learning playing with colours, and enjoyed it.' (Volunteer 3, First Step, Newcastle)

'I actually came here, in this country, because my husband had a political problem in our country and he is like an asylum seeker in this country. And when we came here, although we both had a qualification and a good job in our country...' (Volunteer 4, First Step, Newcastle)

The classes are about capacity building in numerous senses: they offer are so much more than simply teaching the language. They also help with confidence building and in many cases allow the women to gain qualifications which can be use to get a job either in England or back home.

'I had problems, I didn't have the speech problem, English problem, but I didn't have the confidence to talk (...) I was a housewife in Pakistan and when I came here I had so much responsibilities at once, because I had to take my daughter to the specialist, because she had special needs, and my husband said - you have to go by yourself. So First Step build up my confidence to talk to people' (Volunteer 3, First Step, Newcastle)

'Many benefits studying here. (...) But most of them, when they go back, they have a computer course. It will benefit them because some of them are already teachers in their country, so when they go back they will have more, more confidence.' (Volunteer 5, First Step, Newcastle)

Who am I? was set up in light of a general feeling of unease in the community. Increased BME activity in the NDC area was breeding tension and there was a need to bring people closer. The project was set up to benefit the local children but to extend into the rest of the community via the schools. The beneficiaries are mainly the children going through the course. They are targeted at a very young age, in order to help challenge racism before it can become too firmly entrenched, and to give the opportunity to learn about the various local communities in their areas.

'...initial conversation with myself and the other neighbouring heads was: what happens to children after they're five where they suddenly adopt prejudices? You know, why is it we can have children playing together, never recognising differences, whether it's skin colour or nationality or, you know, any differences at all, what is it that goes wrong? And we talked about that long and hard. And, actually, realised that what we had was to harness that naivety, if you like, when they're very young, and give the children everything that you've described about accepting difference, and build on it. Therefore the project - I don't know whether you've actually said it - is actually focusing on very young children, so we were looking at children aged, sort of, five rising to six, and six rising to seven. (Community Ambassador 3, Sunderland)

Combating ignorance is one of the benefits, but learning about other faiths (as required in the National Curriculum) is also a part of the experience. Often very little knowledge or

understanding can be assumed at the outset; some teachers were shocked by the views revealed in a pre-project questionnaire with their children.

'And the amount they have learnt because we did, at the beginning, we did it was like a little questionnaire with them, (...) And they didn't have a clue. It was basic - asking them where did people pray, and my children were saying, "In caves" and "On top of a hill." They didn't know anything. (...) I think going out to visit places where they worship, because other than that...seeing photographs, and it makes it more real. And if they can get to see...I mean, yesterday, the first thing my children said when they went into the synagogue was, "Oh look, they've got chairs as well".' (Teacher 2, Sunderland)

Challenging entrenched beliefs, and advancing understanding, can be a difficult process to measure accurately. However, there are signs that BME children of different religions are now more comfortable talking about their traditions and home life in class and with their peers, which, in turn, can foster better classroom relations amongst the pupils.

'I've got two little Muslim girls in my class and they've become more open in talking about themselves and their religion, which they didn't before, they didn't share it.' (Teacher 2, Sunderland)

The project has benefited the schools and also the trained community ambassadors who have had to come together across communal and religious boundaries to set up a combined educational programme. In this instance it has been incredibly helpful in capacity building and strengthening community cohesion:

[It] 'helped me to feel that I'm more a part of the wider community and not just, you know, that I'm not just there for a, you know, for a part of the community, if you like. So it's broadened my horizons as it's broadened their horizons.' (Community Ambassador 2, Sunderland)

Parents also benefit as they are now invited to come along to the fieldtrips. This again is helpful in the community building process and allows for any questions to be answered.

'I had parents coming along, and my parents were totally fascinated. And when we were at different places they were actually putting their hands up and asking questions.' (Teacher 1, Sunderland)

Delivery

The Newcastle First step project is housed in its own premises, which it bought with the help of NDC money. It has over the years expanded from a one-room enterprise to a small house containing a crèche, an art/classroom, an IT room, a kitchen and a room for administrative purposes. Still the premises are too small to meet the ever-rising demand on the courses.

The Centre provides a range of courses such as English, ICT, French, Art, Childcare, classroom assistance, an information course for parents with children in schools (keeping up with kids) and a number of other less formal activities. To take part in the vocational courses a minimum level of English is expected. Students mainly find out about the centre through word of mouth. None of the women interviewed had ever seen the centre advertised: they had all heard about it from family, friends or neighbours. Many seemed to think that this inspired confidence as the centre always came personally recommended.

'We've never really had to advertise that much. It's always been word of mouth. And I think that organic growth has built up a trust and a credibility. And people hear about us and want to know more about us. And I think that's what has worked, and it's been a long

process. It's not been a short, sharp, shock. It's been a long process.' (Project coordinator, First Step, Newcastle)

Volunteers teach English and serve as interpreters but their role is also to befriend those who attend the centre. There is help with linking people into services and helping with more personal matters, such as how to help children with homework or provide some listening support. Informal support is valued just as much as the courses on offer. There is also careers advice: if the development workers hear about jobs, they are listed and pinned onto the board. Then there is help with the CV and if it gets to the interview stage there is a mock interview. One volunteer described her job as follows:

'Helping students understanding what they are reading and writing, because most of the students want to understand what they are reading. That's what they keep telling, you know, when they go to other places - we are just reading and writing but we don't understand what the word means. That was the important thing for them, to have a bilingual volunteer and interpreter available, that they understand every little word, like what it means in Bengali. So they know exactly what it means, properly.' (Volunteer 2, First Step, Newcastle)

First Step is linked in with a number of outside agencies and has an extensive range of networks that include Newcastle College, Westgate Community College, the Angelou Centre, and other community based projects. Lecturers from the local college teach the accredited vocational courses.

One special course held in the centre allowed the women taking part some introspection into their own lives, what they had experienced and how it had affected them. For most of them, especially those with traumatic stories about how they came to Britain, it was a cathartic experience:

'We have to speak about ourselves and about our lives, and difficulty we had in our life, and what was the most upset you had about it, and the happiest time in your life, and then we had to talk about it. I think loads of time I just started crying. I told her the saddest time in my life was the time that my daughter was born. And everybody surprised, they said - why? And I said it was two months after I came here. I was pregnant when I came here. And I couldn't communicate. I couldn't speak English at all.' (Volunteer 4, First Step, Newcastle)

All of the women interviewed who had taken this course said how important this experience had been in creating bonds amongst themselves, but also in dealing with difficulties they were experiencing during their daily lives in England.

There is a long waiting list for all the courses and for the ICT class there is now an enrolment day where people can put down their name on a first come-first served basis. Courses are fully booked for 10 weeks at a time. For classes where the course is ongoing (Basic English, art, home tuition) new places are given on the basis of whoever has been on the waiting list for the longest time. This can happen when a current student leaves (because they have progressed to higher level, moved away etc). Sometimes, when there are enough resources, an additional class is run. For those wishing to volunteer they wait until there is a small group of around 5 people to run training sessions. The volunteers would then be given a placement either at the centre or as a home tutor. The centre tries to be as fair as possible in light of the spiralling demand. Yet all participants expressed the wish for more courses despite their understanding that this was impossible due to the limited space out of which the project operates.

In Sunderland delivery of the programme is through a lead agent (Education Business Connections Ltd) and a steering group made up of teachers, school governors, local parents, residents and the community ambassadors. The programme is delivered in the local primary

schools and there has been a start at one of the local secondary schools as well. The Community Ambassadors come to the class and explain their culture and religion by bringing photos, artefacts and clothes. This is to stimulate hands on learning and discussion about issues affecting a multicultural and socially diverse community.

'I bring lots of clothes and, you know, I bring it out, and, you know, say to the children, "Do you know what this is? Do you know what this is?" And they want to learn and they love trying things on, and this is what it's about, the touch and feel (...) It's actually very comfortable, you know, when they hear their parents say, you know, "It's awful, isn't it, for them to be covered head to toe," you know, "Poor things." They can say, "Well, not really..." (Community Ambassador 1, Sunderland)

In the past, attempts to help introduce white pupils to ethnic diversity have sometimes fallen into the trap of merely looking at exotic artefacts which, although superficially interesting, do nothing to challenge deeply held stereotypes and racist perspectives (Dadzie, 2000 for guidance). This problem is an ever-present danger but conscious attempts to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions help to ensure that the work does not remain merely at the level of what has sometimes been called 'the Three S's approach': Saris, Samosas and Steel bands (Troyna & Carrington, 1990, pp. 20).

The project also allows for visits to the places of worship: a church, a Gurdwara, a synagogue and a mosque have been visited so far. The children start to form relationships with the Community Ambassador and feel confident in asking questions. The community Ambassadors are recognised in the schools and children get excited when they see them:

'...all I've heard all morning is "Charles this," "Charles that." (...) He is their friend now.' (Teacher 1, Sunderland)

The community was at the basis of the development of 'Who am I?' The idea came from a local BME resident, and the steering group did a lot of community consultation to find out about how parents felt about their children being taught this way in schools:

'We did a lot of community consultation prior to even asking for funding. We did consultation (...) [in] Hendon, you know, we went out to the schools and we asked parents to come in and we did questionnaires when we asked local parents, you know, "What do you think of a project like this?" And the feedback was just excellent' (Community Ambassador 1, Sunderland)

As a result, the project is working towards greater understanding and more harmonious race relations. Importantly, the work does not remain in a vacuum of isolated or 'special' provision: classroom activities in art, drama, science, geography, history, RE and PSHE also compliment the project and add to its status. There is also a community festival that endeavours to bring the local communities of faith, ethnicity and geography together.

Outcomes and Impact

Both the projects have been very successful and have attracted local community members in different capacities. Newcastle's *First Step* has, in particular, addressed the problems faced by BME women by helping them out of their isolation and allowing them to come to a women-only centre.

'They feel comfortable to come. Our husbands are happy for us to come here. And when you go to class and its just women you feel more confident to talk, so if women are a little bit shy, and things like that. A good, friendly environment, we are like a big family. So even though I am now working I am still coming here.' (Volunteer1, First Step, Newcastle)

Learning the English language is especially valued. Contrary to the media image of South Asian communities as inward-looking, many of the people we met prized this element above everything else:

'She said before she could not communicate at all, but since she did the course here, if she had to collect her son from the school for some reason, she can explain, and if she has to make an appointment she knows what to say. If somebody knocks on the door for anything, or for information, we will understand what they want.' (translation, participant 4, First Step, Newcastle)

However this alone is not enough. The women feel a need to understand their children's school, communicate with authority and learn to live a world increasingly shaped by new technologies.

'Some of the parents, they don't know anything about the computers and new things, then they start to learn it and they are a help to their children as well, and if they find a job, they can help their family and stuff. And sometimes they spend their time here very nicely and confidently and more positively. They make more friends, different communities, different people.' (Participant 7, First Step, Newcastle)

The women do not only feel more confident but the centre has for many meant they can lead an independent life, despite being mothers and wives and having family responsibilities. In some cases this has included finding paid employment either at the centre or elsewhere.

[The project coordinator] 'phoned me one day and somebody recommended my name to her as a Bengali interpreter. And I said I can, but sorry I've got a little baby with me. And [she] said - no problem, we've got a crèche. So the joy I felt that moment, just to come out of the house with the baby. And I used to come, I think, two days a week. And there were some courses here when I was here. Computer course, art course, they were on offer, and I did it because I wasn't doing anything else. Then I became more involved, and I was doing interpreting more regularly. And I also take the mother tongue Bengali class now, and I also work as a volunteer here and I am a member of the management committee now.' (Volunteer 2, First Step, Newcastle)

Women who have not had the opportunity to get much formal education in their country of origin benefit tremendously. One woman had not learnt how to read and write her own mother tongue. At First Step she not only learned English, but also how to read and write in her mother tongue. After being proficient in both languages she was able to take on other courses and get work:

'And she did a sewing course and a computer course and now she is earning a little money from home, with the sewing. Which has given her a little bit of independence. And I think that's a great achievement of her.' (Volunteer 2, First Step, Newcastle)

A number of the women find it frustrating that they are not allowed to work. This is especially hard when they are asylum seekers and already face a difficult social situation. Volunteering at First Step allows them to do something constructive.

'I am not allowed to work in this country and I wanted to do something useful. (...) I just felt useful, you know?' (Participant 1, First Step, Newcastle)

First Step has created a multinational, multicultural community where everyone is welcome and comfortable:

'They are all different people from different countries and they come here, it is a place they can go and they will be welcome.' (Participant 2, First Step, Newcastle)

The outcomes of the **Who am I** project have been no less pronounced. Children are learning about other communities, but they are also starting to ask questions of what makes up their own community.

'... those who are Christian, (...) have less of a grasp of what it means to be part of a faith community. So, having said that, many of the children have been baptised, and they know that (...). And so they're not completely devoid of any kind of concept of faith, but it is much more diluted. And I think there is a question mark, if you like, that some of those children, when they learn about other faith groups and see that people have a strong allegiance to them and a strong identity, may end up feeling, "Well, where do I fit in?" because they may not really identify with the church any more than with the mosque or the Gurdwara or the synagogue. And they might feel that they don't fit in anywhere.' (Community Ambassador 2, Sunderland)

During the learning process the children enjoy the visits and get excited about the various community traditions they learn about. The community ambassadors have also seen the effects in their own lives:

'It's taught me – I think this is what [the project coordinator] has said earlier on - to respect other people's religions and other people's faiths.' (Community Ambassador 3, Sunderland)

So in effect the project is impacting at the adult level as well as at the level of the children.

What Works

Capacity-building through employment and training of local residents is central when trying to help BME residents feel a part of the community. First Step promotes training and gives the right support in a relaxed and informal atmosphere.

Providing childcare is absolutely central as most of the women are mothers and have small children. Without the crèche they would be unable to attend.

Recognition of local community needs is important. In this case, a women-only centre, with no male participants or staff, was a necessity. Meeting other needs includes helping the women understand their children's schools and the English system, helping them get jobs, and more generally giving them the kind of support network they miss by not having their families around.

As a result many say that the centre has become like their home and the people they meet there are like their family:

'First Step is where you come to learn, to have a good life, that's my view. And to me it's like, I don't feel like you are coming to a workplace or anything, I feel like I am coming to my second home.' (Volunteer 2, First Step, Newcastle)

'It is like a family here for me.' (Participant 3, First Step, Newcastle)

Community cohesion is an important aspect not only in Newcastle but in Sunderland as well. The project team is now very much part of the local school:

'The amount of goodwill which I have experienced is beyond words, really. (...) The schools have extended a full co-operation. I really feel part of the school now. And I go to the staff room, I have my tea, I have my lunch there; I don't feel like an outsider, that's the most important thing.' (Project co-ordinator, Sunderland)

Problems Encountered/Barriers to be Overcome

The need for expansion is critical for First Step in Newcastle. There is simply too much demand on the limited resources and the waiting lists are growing. More and more women have to wait to get access to courses and this can be disheartening. All those interviewed raised the issue that there was a desperate need for more classes, more teachers, more volunteers, and, fundamentally, more space to house all of that.

The difficulties in Sunderland are very different. There seems to be **shortage of funding** for the project as some NDC funding has not come through and certain items and artefacts could not be purchased for the lessons. **Delays in receiving the promised funding** have also delayed the appointment of a much needed assistant.

Again the project needs to **expand** its provision (to more year groups and to secondary schools).

A reliance on unpaid workers has been commented upon in previous education theme team reports. Here, once again, the Community Ambassadors are unpaid and the project relies on their good will. Their dedication and enthusiasm cannot be relied upon forever. In view of the funding levels and mission for the NDC initiative, their contribution should be adequately recognized and resourced.

The Sunderland NDC partnership needs to demonstrate its commitment: this project is having a real impact in an area of work (BME inclusion) where the NDC initiative as a whole is extremely weak. The partnership could draw important lessons from the project's success but we were struck by the sense that the partnership does not view the project as a priority. For example, despite considerable forward planning and patience, it proved impossible for the evaluation team to meet with anyone from the partnership during our fieldwork. In a project as important as this, the strong and visible support of the partnership is vital.

Conclusions

Addressing deep-seated racism is a vital but extremely difficult task. Overall it appears that most NDC work in the education theme has failed to move beyond a colour blind approach by recognising that targeted positive action is required if long standing inequalities of opportunity, educational attainment and employment rates are to be addressed.

This report has focused on two projects that, unusually, have made this decisive move.

The projects have been especially **successful** in certain respects:

- 'First Step' (Newcastle) is breaking down the isolation experienced by many South Asian women locally
- 'Who am I?' (Sunderland) is adding to work on ethnic diversity in the mainstream curriculum and introducing BME voices into school
- both projects break the silence on issues of local racism and discrimination. They are challenging negative assumptions and working towards greater race equality and social justice

- the projects embrace a perspective that rejects simple assimilation: they argue that greater social cohesion is only possible when differences are recognised and valued
- 'First Step' is adding to local capacity building in the BME community through a range of enhanced social and educational skills, including work on English as an Additional Language and Information & Communications Technologies

Key factors associated with successful initiatives are:

- recognising that targeted action is required to address race inequalities: ignoring differences (sometimes called a 'colour blind' approach) does not work
- capacity building through employment and training of local residents
- providing childcare is absolutely essential: without the crèche most young mothers would be excluded from participation in 'First Step'
- recognition of local community needs: in this case, a women-only centre, with no male participants, or staff was a necessity

Some **barriers and problems** remain:

- lack of adequate space is a major problem preventing 'First Step' from expanding further and building on its success
- in Sunderland funding has been problematic, with delays in receiving the promised resources creating uncertainty and preventing the appointment of much-needed staff
- a reliance on unpaid workers is a major problem. Community-based workers should be adequately paid in order to ensure stability, coherence and to demonstrate respect for local residents' contributions
- in Sunderland the NDC partnership needs to demonstrate its commitment: strong and visible support is vital

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