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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a small-scale, recently completed qualitative project conducted in the United Kingdom that focuses on links between refugee families and the schools their children attend. The project attempted to study the relationships between refugee parents and education professionals in order to identify factors that encourage or hinder the strengthening of home-school contact and communication. The research involved a study of four primary (elementary) schools in two inner-city districts in two large cities. Data were collected from parents, teachers, and others about the relationship between home and school. The analytical framework that is used in the paper focuses on models of school-community relationships and the role of the headteacher in determining the particular ethos of each school. School practices and teacher attitudes are described, and the issues are considered in the context of recent public sector reforms, particularly in education policy and practice. Findings show that the social, political, and economic context in which refugee families exist is enormously disabling. Emphasizing flexibility and the permeability of home-school boundaries would help address the concerns refugee parents have over the educational futures of their children. (Contains 50 references.) (SLD)

Responding to diversity? Refugee Families and Schools

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Responding to diversity: Refugee Families and Schools

Abstract

This paper reports on a small-scale, recently completed qualitative project conducted in the UK which focuses on links between refugee families and the schools their children attend. It is generally accepted in the UK, the USA and elsewhere that parental involvement is part of educational 'good practice' with regard to all families. However a gap between rhetoric and practice is often apparent. Therefore the project aimed to study the relationships between refugee parents and education professionals in order to identify factors that encourage or hinder the strengthening of home-school contact and communication.

The research involved a study of four primary (elementary) schools in two inner-urban districts of two large cities. This paper presents data collected from refugee parents, teachers and others concerning the relationship between home and school. The paper sets the data within an analytical framework which focuses on models of school-community relationships and the role of the headteacher in determining each school's particular ethos. It describes school practices and teacher attitudes towards refugee families, and locates the case study schools in relation to the model of ideal types developed earlier. It also seeks to contextualise the issues discussed by briefly considering recent public sector reforms, particularly in education policy and practice.

Responding to diversity? Refugee families and schools

Introduction

This paper reports on a small-scale qualitative project conducted in the UK which focuses on links between refugee families and the schools their children attend. It is generally accepted in the UK, the USA and elsewhere that parental involvement is part of educational 'good practice' with regard to all families. However a gap between rhetoric and practice is often apparent (Vincent 1996). We set out to study the micro-politics and processes of relationships between refugee parents and teachers, in order to flesh out existing good practice' gudelines and ascertain the attitudes, expectations, relationships and resources that act to encourage or hinder positive home-school relations.

This paper focuses on school responses to refugee populations. First of all, we endeavour to contextualise the experiences of refugee children in relation to schools by briefly considering the impact of 'survival issues' (eg status, housing, benefits) on their lives. Second, we focus on home school relations, describing two ideal types of school engagement with its surrounding communities, and locating our case study schools in relation to these types. We highlight in particular the role of the headteacher in influencing school priorities and ethos. We conclude by suggesting that relationships between refugee parents and families reveal and reflect absences and distances which exist between many marginalised families, and schools.

The study

There is relatively little information on the educational experiences of refugee children once they have arrived in the UK (an absence that appears to pertain to research elsewhere). Quantitative information collected by the Home Office (central government) relates solely to the asylum process, and whilst several local education authorities (LEAs) in London collect data concerning the distribution of refugee children amongst their schools, these are very much local ad hoc initiatives. The nature of the available data base is in itself revealing of the overriding concern to categorise and survey refugee movements with a view to control (an example of Foucault's analysis of the state's desire to categorise, group, segregate and control, Richmond 1994). Most of the existing literature on settlement is concerned, not with education, but with refugee families' access to and experience of health, welfare and housing services (eg. Balloch 1993, Gammel et al, 1993). The nature of links between race, ethnicity and educational progress and achievement has been the subject of several recent government-sponsored reports in the UK (eg

OFSTED 1996, Blair et al 1998, OFSTED 1999), although the experiences of refugee pupils and families is largely absent. We have tried in a small way to rectify this in this project.

We worked with four case study primary (elementary) schools in two inner urban areas, which, between them, had a range of experience of having refugee pupils and addressing their specific circumstances. The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews (through interpreters where appropriate). Interviews were conducted with refugee parents, teachers in the schools, workers employed by local education authorities (school districts) specifically to support refugee children, refugee community activists and local authority officials. The total number of interviews conducted was 71 with 33 refugee parents participating in the study. The parents came from Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, and The Congo. We also observed parent-teacher meetings in school and analysed relevant school and local authority documents. The observations of parent-teacher interactions proved an effective method of gathering data on relationships and also triangulating data gathered through interviews. The data was fully coded and analysed by progressive focusing (see for example Ball 1991). For reasons of space, this paper deals with two of the four sample schools, referred to here as Freshfields and Greenford Schools (for details of the other two schools, see Vincent & Warren 1998). Both schools are in a London local authority which we are calling Northway.

The Local Education Authority (LEA)

Northway is a small, densely populated Labour-controlled London authority. During the 1990s it has witnessed a ten-fold increase in the number of refugee children in the schools, the total standing at 1,700 in 1997 (report to education committee, September 1998). The demand on its resources, especially housing and hostel accommodation is severe, and during 1998 the authority were forced to employ a former school building as a temporary emergency shelter. In the field of education it funds a refugee support team whose workers had been supporting both schools mentioned here. Statistics are kept concerning the distribution of refugee children throughout the borough, and there are plans to try and improve the collation of information concerning the achievement of refugee pupils as a group.

Migration to the UK

Before going on to discuss the research findings in more detail, we wish to draw attention to the wider issues of migration, displaced populations, reception procedures adopted by Western states, and the process of settlement. Western Europe shares with North America a so-called 'pragmatic' approach to immigration (Richmond 1994), which reflects the existing balance of political and economic power. Although attempts to mitigate the situations within countries from where refugees are or might

soon be flowing are part of the strategy, the emphasis is on 'state security ..translating into a preoccupation with border control' (Richmond 1994 p. 221, also Taylor 1989 p.20). This approach in Europe is deeply inflected with a Eurocentric body of thought, drawing on images and ideas dating back to the time of European imperialism and the expansion of repertoires of racist thought (Gabriel 1994)

Defining terms

In this paper, the term 'refugee' is used to include both asylum seekers and those who have already been granted refugee status[1]. With increasing levels of migration world wide in the 1990s, it is difficult to divide population movements into easily-defined groups such as economic migrants, those seeking family reunion, refugees or illegal immigrants. Nonetheless a few general statements can be made about the characteristics of refugees. The main characteristic is the involuntary nature of refugee flight . It is possible to draw a rough distinction between migrants who are *drawn to* a country, whereas refugees are *driven from* their own country: 'Immigrants are deemed to be propelled by hope to better their life whereas refugees are trying to rebuild some part of what they have lost' (Joly 1996, p.144)

> Refugees had to leave as a result of factors which in the last analysis were not primarily economic and they did not make a decision with primarily positive connotations. What all refugees have in common is that they left their country of origin because a dramatic change jeopardised the life they were leading, although this change need not always be sudden. If things had continued as before the change, they would have stayed. Their move also involves a collective character. In that, they differ from so-called economic migrants as the latter have an individual project to change their life circumstances to improve them, (Joly, 1996 p.149)

Daniele Joly also goes on to argue that refugee attitudes towards settlement are influenced by their relationship to their country of origin and whether they wish to or hope to return. Most of the parents we spoke to be did indeed have what we termed a project of return. This was an important factor, influencing their attitude towards their

[1] A refugee is someone who has left their home country 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or particular political opinion' (Article 1 of the 1951 UN Geneva Convention). Some refugees (programme refugees) are accepted as a group by the host country, others apply individually for asylum. Whilst applying for refugee status, an individual is known as an asylum seeker. Asylum seekers in the UK can be granted refugee status and the right to permanent settlement, or Exceptional Leave to Remain (ELR, which gives them fewer rights), or have their case refused.

children's schooling, and injecting it with a sense of urgency. They saw it as crucial that their children be well-educated in order to help re-build countries shattered by civil war.

The context of settlement

Immigration legislation: Fortress Europe

Immigration legislation has, without doubt been getting more limited and punitive since the 1980s, leading to a 'culture of restrictionism'. This phenomenon is observable in many Western states; as borders within Europe slowly dissolve, the border around Europe harden and solidifies (Richmond 1994, Joly 1996).

In the UK, the 1993 Asylum and Immigration (Appeals) Act and the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act have reduced the rights of asylum seekers to be housed in permanent local authority housing and reduced their rights to welfare benefits. *iNexile*, the magazine produced by the voluntary organisation, the Refugee Council, comments that 'over the past two years the system of support for asylum seekers arriving in the UK has descended into chaos' (editorial, September 1998).

Refugees are generally drawn to settle in large cities with more heterogeneous populations, more chances of work and temporary accommodation. In the UK this translates into London and over 80% of the refugee population in the UK have settled there. This means that schools, and other welfare agencies have some experience of meeting the needs, if not specifically of refugees, of bilingual families[2] . For this reason, it is particularly concerning that the newest piece of restrictive legislation, the 1998 Immigration and Asylum Bill, emanating this time from a Labour government, proposes to institute a system of 'no choice' housing which would in effect serve to disperse refugees outside London . The Bill also proposes to remove asylum seekers from the mainstream benefit system, establishing a new agency to run a national 'safety net' programme of support in kind (i.e. cashless). The overarching ideology of the policy as a whole, running though proposals for support, detention and decision-making remains deterrence, or as *iNexile* put it 'deterrence through destitution' (September 1998 p.13). For those existing asylum seekers, the Labour Government has put some measures in place to deal with the backlog of cases awaiting decisions, but this is proving a very slow process. For many, their future remains uncertain.

[2] Staff at one of the four case study schools, Southcote Grange School located on the outskirts of a city in the Midlands spoke of their recent uncertainty over how to respond to their first refugee pupils.

> The immediate problem a refugee faces is his status. Am I accepted here or am I not accepted here? That is the basis, everything will flow from that, because if you are thinking everyday 'will I be thrown out?', you won't do anything at all (Northway community group worker)

The 'bogus' refugee

The concern of affluent nations to protect and conserve their resources means that those seeking to make a claim on them have to be subjected to stringent procedures to assess their worthiness. This task is less problematic if all claimants are positioned as potentially unworthy. Indeed individual moral unworthiness is not the only criterion used; refugees are also positioned as a danger to security (also Richmond 1994, Gabriel 1994 , European Parliament 1990). This can be personal security with stories of criminal asylum seekers (*iNexile* Feb. 1999) as well as the security of the nation state or collection of nation states. Gabriel (1994) notes that the European Community (EC) group which deals with issues of immigration is known as the `Trevi group, an acronym which stands for 'terrorism, radicalism, extremism and violence' (p.162)

The figure of the 'bogus' refugee, in the UK simply to exploit the benefit system has become, to use Cohen's (1980) term, a powerful 'folk devil' . The debate on asylum and immigration is generally conducted in terms of numbers and cost, whilst references to moral obligations are marginalised. During the research period (1997-8) there were a number of instances of hostile coverage of refugees in both the local and national press (see also *iNexile*, Nov 98). Even in the supposedly liberal environment of local government in Northway, and moreover within a team charged with responsibility for policy making on issues involving refugees, the stereotypes appear to have infiltrated the collective consciousness.

> The discussions are frequently interspersed with jokes, you know, a sort of flippant approach, which kind of, what shall I say? Kind of reveals the degree of scepticism that's working around whether or not these are real refugees or real asylum seekers.....It comes out as well with comments like refugees seen to be using mobile phones, giving the impression that that's not appropriate, those sort of....You get anecdotal evidence of stories about refugees being involved in business and trading etc., attempting to claim benefits...There isn't any kind of discussion about what, if that is happening, why it's happening, and there aren't any discussions about understanding behaviour (Northway employee and member of policy making team)

Welfare provision – housing and local government

Recent legislation[3] has restricted refugee access to public housing, although local authorities still have a responsibility to house families with children. As a result many families find themselves in a series of temporary accommodations. Homeless families face difficulties finding school places, maintaining the children's regular attendance, and participating in the life of the school. Lack of space and facilities adds to the stress families are already under in trying to make a new life. The academic progress of these children may also suffer through frequent disruption. Schools also face considerable demands in terms of settling new children who may then move on quickly and without warning (Power et al 1995). Yet statistics on pupil mobility are not widely gathered, so its effects are overlooked (Dobson 1998). One case study school, St Peter's, was close to a large bed and breakfast hostel and we spoke to five of the families living there who had children at the school. We include here a quotation from an interview with three of those families who are speaking through an interpreter.

> They think that one of the reasons why the children are not doing such good is because of the conditions they are living in. They are not very good, especially for the children. They see that even in their [rooms] they don't have any sort of desks where the children can do their work or read something or do any drawings so maybe that is one problem.....Then the problem is if they bring [homework] home, they haven't got good conditions (interpreter)

Local government in the UK underwent a fundamental reorganisation during the 1990s. Two common features of that reorganisation have been a decline in funding from central government and constraints on abilities to raise local taxes, and a concomitant emphasis on value for money. This clearly impacts on the money available for supporting nascent community groups, as one Northway employee describes,

> Most of the [refugee] groups have come into the borough in the last six years I would say, and that has also coincided with the timing of major cuts to all the borough's services. That is a very difficult time to come in and try and put your roots down.....There was some indication that there might be more council money [for community groups] but it's not proved to be the case. I suppose I really did think that some of [the refugee communities], by this

[3] Namely the Asylum and Immigration Act (Appeals), Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 and the Housing Act 1996

> point, would have established themselves and located themselves in offices..have their own space and a working environment. It's almost not the case as I am sure you have seen. They really are struggling..in what feels like a very crisis ridden environment in the borough, (Northway refugee support worker)

Another feature of local government in the 1990s has been the introduction of values and practices imported from the private sector to accompany the whole scale restructuring of the sector. The aim has been to revolutionise what was commonly portrayed as local government's inefficiency, bureaucracy, wastefulness and partisanship. The introduction of market forces into service delivery, combined with reduced public sector funding in the late 1980s and early 1990s was intended to foster efficiency, value for money, and direct accountability to customers (Cochrane 1993; Radnor et al 1996). This ideology combined with the general marginalisation of the claims of refugees outlined earlier, resulted in a situation where other priorities take precedence over a desire to respond to all those in need.

> The agenda now is, runs right through the Council, is value for money and efficiency and high quality services, and that's not a bad thing. I think we'd all support that and would not support waste anywhere, but there is also a cautiousness...[The social services department] would see their prime function as protecting the public purse and ensuring that claims that are made against it come from genuine need....There's a climate, the sort of climate which is driven by financial constraints, rather than personally you're looking at best meeting the needs first, and this council, I can see why they've got to be like that, in the sense that they have to control the limited funding they've got, but I get the impression that there's a greater acceptance of hype around bogus refugees....[The council policy group on refugees] are still individuals who are genuine, they're there, in that team, because they're interested in the work and want to do the best.....but I can see that it hasn't got the drive to protect the interests of refugees as the first priority, you know, it's to protect the public purse (Northway employee).

This situation was not, of course, unique to Northway and the authority in comparison to other urban authorities was and remains active and supportive in this area.

The contextualisation of education policy: The education market

The education system cannot be studied in isolation from the political, economic and social context. We have already mentioned the developments in immigration, welfare and housing policy which have affected the reception and settlement of refugee families. It now remains to trace the effect of the competitive market place in education which has developed over the last decade, and in which schools now operate, on pupils, such as refugee pupils, deemed to have additional educational needs.

Schools in England and Wales were restructured by the 1988 Education Reform Act and subsequent legislation. That act changed the way in which schools were funded and organised, and the ways in which children were taught and assessed. Schools are encouraged to compete with one another, and to take in as many pupils as they physically have space for. Schools get funded for each pupil they have, so it is important for schools to attract as many pupils as possible. Parents are encouraged to choose a school, and in order to help them make that choice, schools have to publish indicators of their performance, so that parents can judge how a school is doing relative to other nearby schools. One of the most important of those indicators is the publication of the exam / test results that children take throughout school.

The competitive environment in which schools now exist does not reward them for attracting newly-arrived pupils. Such students are often expensive in terms of additional provision, and may not provide an instant payback in terms of high test results. Children who are newly arrived in the UK, who may speak little English, are unlikely to score highly on tests, at least at first. Two of the case study schools in particular realised that the dominant focus on output measures had a detrimental effect on their positions in the local 'league tables' (ranking schools via their test results), and didn't reflect the actual achievement of the pupils during their time at school, which was often quite dramatic. Therefore there was strong support from the headteachers of the case study schools for 'value-added' measures which would show how pupils had improved whilst they had been at a particular school, rather than simply measuring their performance when they left.

As funding is largely pupil-led, all schools are under pressure to attract as many pupils as possible. The need to increase school numbers, of course, conflicts with the ability of the school to serve a transient homeless population. If a school is full, it will not be able to take in pupils who arrive without warning mid-term. Thus refugee pupils tend to be clustered in less popular (and therefore poorer) inner city schools.

Home and School - World's Apart?

It has become commonplace to talk of parent-teacher 'partnership'. Yet despite the frequency with which this concept is employed, its manifestation in practice often

differs from the rhetoric. Indeed it has been claimed that relationships between parents, particularly working class and minority ethnic parents, and education professionals are marked by not the equality which term 'partnership' suggests, but rather an imbalance of power in favour of the professionals (eg Lareau 1989, Vincent 1996, Vincent & Tomlinson 1997). One of our respondents described home-school relations in the following way:

> It's about power and who has the power and how much a parent is really going to be given an opportunity to really know about that, and is there space for change there, and could you think about teaching in a slightly different way at least initially....How much can one shift, what is shiftable and what isn't. But of course, it's very difficult in schools at the minute because they are tied down with other things (Northway refugee support worker)

Most teachers do not see themselves as particularly powerful individuals[4],although their professional knowledge and their location within an institution can give them a position which some parents find intimidating. This introduces the need for a view of power which sees it having diverse sources and being heterogeneous in its manifestations. Iris Marion Young cites Foucault as suggesting that we should look beyond an understanding of power as dichotomous in being, a model of dominant and subordinate groups, and instead emphasise its dispersal through the action of many individuals who are 'simply doing their jobs or living their lives, and....do not understand themselves as agents of oppression' (Young 1990, p.42).

Social class has been posited as a key variable (often the key variable) in determining parents' relationships with teachers (eg Lareau 1989, Vincent 1996, Reay 1998). Working class parents are generally understood to have little effective voice in relation to a school and to be positioned by teachers as in need of tutelage concerning appropriate forms of parenting and interaction with the school (Vincent & Martin 1999). In contrast, there have been instances of middle class parents strongly influencing the organisation of schools as well as teachers' pedagogic styles and curriculum content (eg Apple 1996, Reay 1998). It is however too simplistic to suggest a distinction between working class and middle class parents in their ability to affect change in school. Not all middle class parents inevitably experience schools as 'malleable' (Butler 1995). The relationship will depend not only upon the range of social, cultural and material resources open to parents but also their willingness to deploy them in seeking to make the school act in a particular way, as well as the micro-political processes, interests and

[4] Diane Reay gives an example of this when she refers to teachers in a predominantly working class school trying to reconcile mothers' demands for information, for extra resources and above all for educational outcomes that transformed their children's life chances' (1998 p.124) with what they felt it was possible for them to achieve from within the classroom.

relationships which shape the school's responses. Refugee parents do not in any case fit neatly into the working class / middle class dichotomy. Many come from middle class backgrounds in their countries of origin, but the easy fit between their family habitus and that of the school, usually assumed to exist between the homes of professional middle class groups and schools, is lacking. To quote Gewirtz et al (1995) their cultural capital is in the 'wrong currency', something the parents we spoke to felt keenly (see Vincent & Warren 1998 for further details)

Institutional cultures

Our data indicate marked differentiation between the case study schools in terms of their approach to home-school relations in general. Clearly the priorities schools identify help to shape their ethos, what they stand for, their mission[5]. Our discussions with refugee parents and teachers led us to become particularly interested in the ways in which schools defined the boundaries between themselves and surrounding communities, and, particularly, how teachers understood the balance between pastoral care and academic care . In Rutter and Jones (1998), Crispin Jones asks what we consider to be a key question:

> And one question remains uninvestigated: what is the effect of the balance that each school places on pastoral and academic issues, however crudely defined? Does the time..put into pastoral care detract from academic care and subsequent academic performance and vice versa? (Jones 1998 p.179)

We can define pastoral care as a concern with the non-academic progress of the children, which is likely to be heavily influenced by their family circumstances. Schools can see pastoral care and academic care as potentially in tension with one another or in support of one another. To put it another way and to paraphrase one of our respondents, is knowledge about the child's background, background knowledge, or is it central to the educational project? Schools' decisions on this issue will influence their approach to home-school relations, and in particular the nature of the boundaries they maintain between home and school. We suggest two ideal types (and stress that they are ideal, not actual types)

Approaches to home-school relations: two ideal types

Schools as learning institutions

[5] Of course, schools are far from autonomous in making these decisions and primary schools in the UK are currently experiencing a pronounced degree of regulation and central direction.

This ideal type is to a large degree a product of the restructuring that has taken place over the last 10/15 years in education, first under Conservative Governments and with particular themes continued under the Labour Government. The language and ideas of school effectiveness and improvement is a major influence. Achievement is seen as the key aim of the school, and all elements of the school are organised around this objective. Raising levels of achievement benefits current pupils of course, as well as attracting future pupils (through giving the school a strong position in the league tables). Contact with parents is seen as a way of enhancing achievement through harnessing parental support to the goals of the school. This may also include using parental knowledge and skills as a resource within the school. Community or family issues that do not have a direct impact on the running of the school are seen as peripheral. 'Social responsibilities' risk 'distracting [the school] from its primary academic purpose' (Levin & Riffell 1997 p.47). Therefore children are viewed as abstracted from their home environment when they are at school. The boundaries between the school and the communities from which its pupils come are distinguished by a degree of rigidity and impermeability.

Schools as communities of learning

This model has a more inclusive understanding of who constitutes the stakeholders in children's education. The boundaries between school and community are relatively permeable. Academic achievement is still regarded as the school's primary purpose, of course, but a concern with and knowledge of the 'whole' child is seen as crucial in creating an environment conducive to academic achievement. The emphasis on the whole child requires a knowledge of and recognition of the child's culture, personal history and current living circumstances. As well as forging links with individual parents, the school has links with parents as a collective, perhaps hosting community group meetings, language classes, adult education and so on.

These models are ideal types. Most schools will be positioned somewhere in between these two extremes. Other commentators describing a similar phenomenon but in different terms have written of schools choosing between maintaining professional expertise and responding to the different demands of the communities they serve (eg McClure & Lindle 1997)

However we do not wish to be understood as suggesting a simplistic dichotomy between 'achieving' schools and 'caring' schools (Power et al 1995). Nor are we suggesting that our first ideal type, *schools as learning institutions*, ignores the personal lives of pupils, or that teachers in our second ideal type, *schools as communities of learning*, would see themselves as having primarily pastoral

responsibilities. Rather, as we noted earlier, it is a matter of how home-school relations are understood. What does the school see as the purpose of parental involvement, of community links? Indeed, maintaining fixed boundaries between home and school is not the same as saying that parents are kept out of school all together. Indeed, such a school would certainly report on a child's progress to parents, and may have imaginative and effective ways of doing so. But the school would not get involved with other aspects of the child's life. The child's educational progress is the concern, and in focusing on that, the school would abstract the child as far as possible from other elements of his/her life. A school with more permeable home-school boundaries would want to learn as much as possible about a child's life, seeing that as affecting the child's education.

Role of the headteacher

Our point here is that schools find their own position on the continuum, take particular elements from the different models and find their own settlement. The nature of that settlement, what it looks like, is greatly influenced by the values and priorities of headteachers.

Research on the values and ethics of the market in education (Grace 1997, Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe 1995) suggests changing discourses and practices of leadership as heads seek new settlements which reflect the changing constraints and opportunities in managing a school in the 1990s. Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe (1995) identify a number of overlapping characteristics which describe a move away from older forms and styles of leadership based on a public service ethos and traditional professional values (a state they refer to as 'bureau professionalism' or 'welfareism') to those based on the need to respond to and survive within a market driven climate (which they refer to as 'managerialism')

What they, and other commentators (eg Yeatman 1993, Clarke & Newman 1994, Whitty, Power & Halpin 1998) are describing is a trend towards management practices associated with the private sector which are taking centre stage in education. This has led to the development of features such as a reliance on quantifiable output measures and performance targets, the devolution of management control, the development of new reporting, monitoring and accountability mechanisms (in the case of education, OFSTED (the national inspectorate) and the national tests fulfil this function), the imitation of certain private sector management practices such as the use of short term labour contracts[6],

[6] This is a particular feature of work for teachers with EAL (English as an Additional Language) responsibilities

the development of corporate plans, performance agreements and mission statements (Boston 1991)

> The New Management discourse in education emphasises the instrumental purposes of schooling- raising standards and performance as measured by examination results, levels of attendance and school leaver destinations, and is frequently articulated within a lexicon of enterprise, excellence, quality and effectiveness' (Gewirtz & Ball 1997 p.10)

Whilst there is some measure of agreement amongst commentators on the features of managerialism, it is harder to identify with the same degree of accuracy what may be being left behind, apparently sacrificed to the need to maintain or improve upon a school's place in the league tables. Gewirtz and Ball (1997) argue that what they refer to as 'bureau-professionalism' or 'welfareism', embraces a range of values and practices.. Some of these have attained central status within the profession, become 'condensation symbols' (Edelman 1964). That is, they are accepted as a 'good thing' even though they remain difficult to define, and may mean different things to different people. Examples of such concepts include 'valuing all children equally', a 'caring' ethos. Other values which can be associated with 'welfareism' but have not attained widespread acceptance and usage, even before the advent of managerialism[7], include anti-racism and community and parental involvement in education. With regard to the latter, Stephen Ball (1997) argues that managerialism articulates with, and feeds off existing bureaucratic values, the most salient feature of which in this case is its ambivalence towards the involvement of parents . Similarly Gerald Grace (1997) notes that the autonomous traditions of school leadership, and trends towards professional insularity resulted in often defensive reactions to initiatives to widen decision-making powers to include parent and community involvement.

It has been suggested that, given these two competing 'languages', managerialism and welfareism, that heads in the 1990s are bilingual - not a term of our own invention (Clarke & Newman 1992), but a particular appropriate one for this project. Clarke & Newman use the term to refer to heads who learn to speak the new language of management whilst retaining some values and priorities characteristic of their role as educators. Headteachers therefore use two (at least two) languages to address their several concerns. The incursion of the newer language inflects the old, giving rise to a different set of priorities and nuances.

[7] It is not being suggested that the post-war period in which welfaresim was dominant was a 'golden age' of democracy and equality.

The balance, the accommodation, the degree of interpenetration between the two languages, may be influenced by the head teacher's own values and beliefs, and the particular situation in which their school is in, its recent history, their relationships with and perceptions of the pupil and parent body, the teaching staff, the local authority and the governors. As Gerald Grace notes, 'the established cultural practices and the old leadership settlements are breaking up and new patterns are emerging' (1997 p.314). Heads may also deploy different languages in different contexts and situations. The way they present their priorities, the spin and emphasis they put on their words may vary depending on who the listener is. What we are suggesting therefore is that the particular nature and extent of the head's bilingualism will affect the way he/she defines 'appropriate' home-school relations. We now seek to illustrate our arguments with reference to Greenford and Freshfields schools.

Greenford

Greenford School (430 pupils) is located near a busy main road serving a large housing estate in an area close to a large estate with a reputation for racial tension. The school has expanded rapidly during the 1990s as Bangladeshi families moved into the area. Over half the school's pupils are of Bangladeshi origin and the school has worked hard to provide a secure environment for the pupils. The numbers of refugee children have grown rapidly, and the headteacher (a white man who had been in post 8 years) attested to the school's struggle to switch its self-image from one of a school which had one dominant minority ethnic group to one with a more varied ethnic population. The school had a high rate of pupil mobility (approx. 25%).

To return to the relationship identified by Crispin Jones between the academic and the pastoral, the headteacher at Greenford suggested that the relationship is a tense one. He described how in the past, at his school, the academic had been sacrificed to the pastoral, and spoke of his strong reaction against what he saw as an old, out-dated and ineffective notion of welfareism in education. In his view, teachers' interest in the lives of their pupils, their concern to encourage their personal and social development was in danger of exceeding their focus on raising achievement. As such it had been a complacent culture.

> Lots of teachers liked to come to Greenford because it was a multicultural school, and they felt they would like to be the guardians of multicultural education, yes? ..... One of the areas I had to shift - and it took me quite some time to shift it - was the issue that teachers aren't here to teach. You respect, you have knowledge of other cultures or children you are working with, but at

the end of the day, achievement is what we're after. Quite a number of people left within the first few years.....I took away a kind of power base [from those teachers who left]. How can I put it? It's very difficult to describe it in a way - but there was a culture in the school, held by some people that was not very helpful to education basically. It was helpful in supporting families maybe, but it wasn't particularly helpful in terms of teaching children to read and write and to become academically successful. We have shifted that culture now by careful appointment of staff. You know, we are now looking at a team of people who, by and large, have that commitment to achievement....I think whatever intake, our driving goal is achievement. You know, how we get there, we obviously then have to take into account the background of our pupils, and whatever, but that's the goal to continue to raise achievement[8]

I have to make it very clear to teachers that you are not social workers....by being clear of your role then you are of most benefit to all the children in your class...When I came here, there was a certain group of teachers, children had to learn to read by osmosis and things like this. Forget it, you want those children to have the tools to be able to learn as quickly as possible because that is going to help them. That ethos has changed and I think it's changed nationally, anyway it's not just this school. But that was a big sea change, I felt that we really felt that teaching and learning is our job and OFSTED [the national inspectorate] has put it into perspective in that sense (headteacher, Greenford).

However, as the headteacher also points out it is not feasible to entirely separate the academic development of a child from other factors influencing his/ her total development. Talking about parents' evenings, Greenford's head described the incursion of personal, social, cultural and financial family matters into the school.

[8]. Gewirtz and Ball (1997) quote a new headteacher, hoping to turn around a 'failing school adopting a similar position.

In schools we care, but we need to express our deep caring through providing a learning environment and opportunities for work, so we need to take one step back from the indulgence of trying to solve all the students' problems. They have different backgrounds , but this is not a branch of the social services, and we are not social workers. Although we have to educate with a knowledge of students' backgrounds, we need to put work and education at the top of the agenda (Gewirtz & Ball p..28)

> Parents get as long as they want really, but it's basically a 15/20 minute slot, and often like in all parental consultations, what comes up is more than just so and so is getting on very well. You know domestic issues come up, social issues come up, and during that fortnight, I get an awful lot of referrals from teachers about things that are happening....Almost all parents attend. Those who don't attend, we harass and telephone to get them in to school because we think it's [contact with the family] very important

Links with parents remained an important part of Greenford's concerns. Parent-teacher consultations were firmly focused on informing the parent of the child's strengths and weaknesses to date, and enlisting parental support in helping the child to progress. Thus parent-teacher contact was seen as part of the strategy to raise achievement, rather than an end in itself.

> Better communication helps achievement, you know, it's one of those things that does feed into achievement (headteacher)

As we said earlier, heads can switch between the two 'languages' of welfareism and managerialism. The concern for the 'whole' child, a concern with the child's personal and social development, a concept more clearly associated with welfareism than managerialism, is retained by Greenford's headteacher. For example, he makes a point of visiting the playground every day, saying

> It's my opportunity to look around the edges of the playground to see what's not happening, as opposed to what's happening in the middle of the playground...[To find a way] whereby those children [on the periphery] do become involved, with a little skulduggery, sort of setting up situations to some extent, to give those children support in the playground, because the playground can be a very, very lonely place if you speak no English, if you are worried, apprehensive, nervous or whatever'

Greenford's headteacher has defined the school's role with clarity. The school's task is to concentrate on success in the one major area of improving teaching and learning, and this strategy appears to be working in terms of test scores. Greenford's 1997 scores for the achievement of 11 year olds were above national and local averages in maths and science and showed a considerable improvement on previous years' results. Staff have a coherent remit and do not dissipate their energies trying to be all things to the pupils. Constructing a consensus that excludes other values is an identifiable

aspect of what Willmott (1993) refers to as 'corporate culturism'. This has the effect of reducing ambivalence and correspondingly personal insecurity as to what teachers should be doing.

> One of the concerns is - and one we have got away from - is that, you know, we are not the housing benefit agency, we are not social services. Yes, we know where to send to, but we can't deal with it ourselves. (headteacher, Greenford)

This last was an issue we asked heads about, the extent to which they felt able to get involved with the non-educational issues with which refugee families have to contend. Greenford' s headteacher was often asked to write letters, particularly about housing, on behalf of families and would respond to requests, as well as referring parents on to other agencies.

The headteacher's bilingualism was strongly influenced by his perception of his school's recent past. He advocated an apparent narrowing of the school role to an almost exclusive focus on the task of raising achievement, as defined by test scores. Other concerns, and particularly the influence of often difficult family circumstances is ruled out of court - something to be referred to, dealt with, by another agency. The child's happiness, the school creating and maintaining links with parents are all means to the end of higher achievement. The headteacher at Greenford felt that this overriding emphasis on achievement would be welcomed by families with children at the school. The interviews we conducted with parents suggest that his assumption was correct. However, this symmetry in goals and aims, was undermined by an asymmetry of view concerning how they should be achieved. It was difficult for parents, from marginal and often pressurised situations to share in the school's educational project. The current arrangements for contact and communication were not, parents suggested, sufficient for them to access the school curriculum, teacher talk and teaching and learning styles in a way that would allow them to become 'partners' with the school. This was expressed strongly by two groups of Somali parents, voicing the views of other individuals.

> Every term the school needs to inform the Somali parents about the problems of their children, not waiting for parents' evening because there is this problem of language. It should be a more active way, of, how do you say, a policy, an active way of coming and meeting the needs of this community (interpreter)

> The breakdown is not because the Somali community lacks language but because the school is unwilling to contact, to come forward and to meet the needs of the community. [Another mother] is saying 'I cannot communicate with the school, it should be the other way round, because the school has got the resources....We are not belonging to the mainstream, and the mainstream knows the system' (interpreter)

The school held two parents meetings a year, which were arranged as a personal appointment with the class teacher. Those parents who didn't attend were asked to come in at another time. However no interpreting arrangements were made (except for the Bangladeshi population). It was assumed that parents would being someone with them who could speak English. In practice, as is common at many schools, this often meant that the children were used as interpreters.

The school had a worker from the local authority's refugee support team working at the school to develop closer home-school links. To this end she had organised coffee mornings for refugee parents. It was originally planned for teachers to attend these on a rotating basis. However, the responsibility slowly devolved to a relatively junior teacher who was the designated link with the authority worker. She explained the non-involvement of the other staff in the following terms,

> I think people at the school do think that parents are important and the relationships are very important, but at the end of the day you have got to do the National Curriculum and it's what you do in the classroom, that is your job (teacher, Greenford School)

We also gathered evidence that such discourses were being played out within the LEA. An administrator outlined this perception, describing it as at odds with the approach taken by the authority's refugee support team.

> There's a perception that, how much of a myth it is and how much of a kind of element of truth might be in it, I'm not sure, but the [refugee support workers] ha[ve] tended to over-emphasise the welfare issues at the expense of the education issues. I think maybe within [the language support service], maybe within the [inspectorate and advisory body] there is a kind of automatic, or a tendency to resist consideration of welfare issues, because they see that that's welfare issues again, and [the refugee support teachers'] proper place is in schools, in classrooms, on achievement, not necessarily working with families.....There have been complaints from headteachers about the

> balance not being right, and that there are teachers behaving like social workers....It's only in a few cases, and it's only because, it kind of mirrors the perceptions that exist in the department as well about the balance between work in schools and work outside schools (employee, Northway LEA)

Similarly a worker from the refugee support team described a similar attitude amongst teachers at another school (not part of this project)

> [The staff were] slightly doubtful, a bit suspicious...just not really understanding why it would be so important to have a group of parents meet for coffee....'How does that connect to the children? All this work with parents is all very well, but we are interested in the children's education'

This suggests that relationships with parents, any parents are seen as lying on the fringes of a teacher's concern. The current education policy climate encourages schools to position themselves towards one end of our continuum - schools as learning institutions. We acknowledge that some might say, this is where their priorities *should* lie. However, we suggest that there is an alternative view - that schools can be effective as learning institutions, and may be more so, if they seek to develop fluid boundaries with their surrounding communities (for a discussion of boundaries in relation to home/school, see David et al 1993).

Freshfields Primary School

Freshfields with 472 pupils is a Victorian three decker building located in a generally affluent residential area. The headteacher, a South Asian woman, had been in post two years. The school had undergone considerable demographic change over the past twenty years. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the school's population was drawn from a more uniformly middle class population, which included bilingual children. That changed during the 1980s and the school now has a very mixed population in terms of social class as well as ethnicity. Many of the current pupils do not live in the immediate locality.

Freshfields presented an example of a different balance between welfare and managerial values. The headteacher's language when describing the boundaries between home and school differed noticeably from her counterpart at Greenford. She presented a language of time, trust and building relationships and constructs her account of home-school relationships through the use of anecdotes about particular incidents and individuals.

> This Somali child that we had.....he was constantly in trouble, constantly hitting out...What was useful was to call in mum and say to her 'look, I am not putting up with this behaviour. You need to do something about it,' But at a level for her to tell it as it is: 'actually I can't begin to tell you what my life is like at the moment'. So although your expectation of the behaviour doesn't actually change, it has given you an in road, I mean I still see [the mother] regularly...That was the way into the family if you like. Now had that parent seen me as somebody who they came to and got told to take their child away, and I wasn't going to discuss it etc., we would never have had that (headteacher)

> I think probably that is the thing I have learnt most is that you have to give people time, but you have also got to build up a trust (headteacher)

> I think that is the thing, it's that, time. I mean as far as I can see there are very few places that our parents, particularly our refugee parents, get time...other than school (headteacher)

The headteacher's reasons for her approach were not linked to the school's history, as was the case at Greenford, instead being closely related to her own experiences, growing up as a child of Asian origin in a largely white environment, and like the refugee families in her school, having to negotiate an overt 'otherness'

> [We wish to promote] things like that you know - that kind of pride in their culture, that kind of understanding, that kind of confidence will make a whole lot of difference. They won't go into school wearing pink tights because they want to be white, like I did...You know I do partly it because of my own experience

Freshfields' headteacher also writes letters to, and liaises with various bodies (eg housing authorities). It was difficult to tell from their general accounts whether there was an appreciable difference between the involvement of the heads at Greenford and Freshfields in either the number of cases or the depth to which they took their involvement. However, Freshfields' headteacher saw such work as clearly within the remit of the school.

> I don't think there is anyone else to do it, Simon, I don't, and actually as long as they are still getting their entitlement to education, as long as a child is still achieving, this is only an extra, [which] for peanuts, we can provide

Like the head at Greenford, Freshfields' headteacher employed both a managerialist and a welfarist language. She was acutely aware of the competitive environment in which schools now exist, and the need for Freshfields to maintain its appeal and thereby its pupil population vis a vis other schools. To this end, she adopted an 'entrepreneurial', proactive approach to obtaining resources for the school and to promoting the school, activities which took up a considerable amount of her time. The school hosted community language classes, the establishment of which provide another example of the head's bilingualism. She saw the main purpose of these as fostering the children's notion of identity and self confidence, but was also ready to employ the argument that the classes would improve the children's learning of English too, feeling that this was the more 'acceptable' defence. In her efforts to convince the governing body to fund the language classes, she marshalled the support of parents and teachers, aware that she needed to address the governing body's concern that the classes would prove value for money, but that it was hard to provide the governors with the argument they really want - the promise of quantifiable payback.

> What [the governors] wanted, I suppose was for me to able to say, this project will cost us £4000, what is that £4000 going to give us in terms of results, and unfortunately that is what it's like isn't it (headteacher)

At Freshfields the pastoral elements of the school's relationship with individual parents were fairly well-developed. Some parent-respondents spoke very warmly of the personal support the school had offered them, and they responded by supporting the school. However, the interface between school and refugee parents was the remit of just a few front-line staff, the head and the two EAL (English as an Additional Language] teachers. The role of the EAL staff in particular was an example of the 'key person syndrome', where responsibility for a particular issue is devolved to just one or two individuals who are charged with developing and holding the school's store of knowledge on the particular topic. In addition, the headteacher's personalised approach had disadvantages in that it risked creating close relationships with just a few individuals, whilst not necessarily reaching the wider parent body. Thus there

were instances when individual refugee parents closely involved with the school were positioned as representatives, standing for the community to which they belonged.

To some extent, therefore, refugee parents, as a group, still had difficulty in accessing the school. We observed some parent-teacher meetings at Freshfields which suggested that parents are often quite passive in these exchanges and don't ask many questions. To give just one example.

> The class teacher said the child had a general weakness, a 'deficiency' with fine motor skills, which meant his handwriting was poor. She suggested ways in which the parents could help at home, giving the child things to do with his hands, not just handwriting practice. [Somali mother] says nothing but nods occasionally. Teacher comments that the child is 'good at everything else though' but doesn't go into much detail. Asks the mother 'is there anything else you want to ask me?' before moving off. Mother shakes her head and thanks the teacher (fieldnotes, Freshfields)

It is worth making the point that this feature of parent-teacher contact is not something confined to refugee parents, as earlier research suggests there is often a vagueness at the heart of parent-teacher interaction over children's progress (Vincent 1996, Reay 1998, Walker 1998, MacLure & Walker 1999). A Kosovo Albanian mother at Freshfields made the same point, saying 'they say, "oh, he's great", that's it'. She continued by saying that she found it difficult to ask too many questions in case staff thought, 'she asks too much for her son or daughter'. Such parental reticence and diffidence whilst by no means limited to refugee parents is arguably compounded by their awareness of their marginal status, their 'otherness', as they attempt to operate in an unfamiliar system with unknown assumptions and rules of behaviour.

Conclusion

We have argued that the broader social, political and economic context in which refugee families exist is enormously disabling. They then enter a school system which, by and large, caters for a stable, monolingual population (Power et al 1995). In some institutions few concessions are made to their disorientation. Traditionally the 'real' work of schools has been seen as the teaching of the formal curriculum with minimal interaction with the pupils' homes. The current emphasis on school improvement means that schools are encouraged to co-opt parental support. However this too allows parents little opportunity or autonomy to act as equal partners with the school. We suggest that the incursion of managerialist practices into education serve

to emphasise the performance and achievement of disembodied pupils as measured by national tests. This directs schools to focus on the delivery of the curriculum and minimise other concerns, such as pastoral issues. Yet we believe that the relationship between the academic and the pastoral is worth overt and explicit consideration by schools. The balance between the two helps shape a school's ethos and practice and provides the context in which pupils achieve. The nature and scope of home-school interaction clearly reflects the relationship between the two.

The refugee parents participating in the study had questions and comments on both the way in which their children's schools currently operate, and the progress their own child is making. But many of those views and opinions remained hidden from the school, submerged in a web of conflicting concerns and competing priorities which may include, for example, housing, status, benefits and racism. Moreover, they may prioritise achievement, but most do so from a starting point of confusion and lack of knowledge about the UK education system; they speak a different language and are met by an unfamiliar set of practices. An emphasis on the flexibility of school systems and the permeability of home-school boundaries would, we suggest, help to address the concerns of refugee parents for the educational futures of their children.

Finally we conclude that the findings from this project suggest that a study of the circumstances of refugee pupils in school is not simply a specialist exercise, of relevance to a relatively small group. On the contrary, it is suggested that the presence of refugee students 'reveal[s] problems that have always been there within the education system itself' (Jones & Rutter 1998, p.2). We argue that the difficulties refugee families face in developing meaningful and positive contact and communication with schools may be obvious and tangible (not sharing a common language with the teachers for example) but in essence they also reflect the difficulties which many parents face, particularly those from black and minority ethnic groups. Currently other priorities are being piled on to primary schools in the UK and space and resources are limited. However we suggest that headteachers still retain a measure of autonomy and discretion, sufficient to enable them to encourage dialogue between the school and its different communities concerning the ways in which learning can be best facilitated.

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