Delivering Equality and Diversity in a White Working Class Further Education College

Simon Bennett

Cornwall College of Further Education

(LSIS Research Fellow 2010/11)

Introduction

This report, prepared under the LSIS/Ifl Research Fellowship Scheme 2010/11, seeks to put into perspective the Equality and Diversity (E & D) agenda as it is applied in the Further Education (FE) sector in the UK. In particular, it seeks to evaluate the approach of an FE College situated in a catchment area with a predominantly white population. The study seeks to explore whether a robust E & D strategy can be successful in changing attitudes and adding value to the education of students whose experience of a multi-racial community is restricted. As a result, much of this paper focuses on race equality issues, although reference is made to other elements of the E & D spectrum – religion, gender, disability and sexuality.

This evaluation of the application of E & D practice has been carried out at Cornwall College, a large FE institution with seven campuses covering the length and breadth of Cornwall. The social culture of Cornwall has its own particular characteristics and has an important bearing on the demographic of the College's student body, as does the local economy and levels of deprivation, which are high in comparison to much of the UK.

Tables 1 and 2 compare the ethnic makeup of the Cornish population with Cornwall College's student numbers. According to the 2001 census, the overall BME population (defined as all ethnic groups other than 'White British') in Cornwall was 2.9%. However, more recent experimental data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggest that the minority populations are growing. The table below shows ethnic groups in Cornwall as recorded in both 2001 and mid-2009:

Table 1: Cornwall population by ethnic group, Census 2001 and mid-2009

	2001 (Census)		2009 (estimated)	
Ethnicity	**Count**	**% of population**	**Count**	**% of population**
White British	**484,543**	**97.1**	**493,600**	**92.9**
White Irish	2,209	0.4	3,100	0.6
White Other	7,403	1.5	12,500	2.3
White Total	**494,155**	**99.0**	**509,200**	**95.8**
Mixed, all groups	2,292	0.5	5,300	1.0
Asian or Asian British: Indian	411	0.1	3,500	0.7
Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	149	0.0	1,800	0.3
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	231	0.0	600	0.1
Asian or Asian British: Other Asian	178	0.0	1,600	0.3
Black or Black British: Black Caribbean	307	0.1	1,400	0.3
Black or Black British: Black African	307	0.1	2,200	0.4
Black or Black British: Other Black	142	0.0	400	0.1
Chinese	531	0.1	3,400	0.6
Other Ethnic Groups	411	0.1	1,800	0.3
BME Total (All except White British)	**14,571**	**2.9**	**37,600**	**7.1**
Total	**499,114**	**100.0**	**531,200**	**100.0**

Source: ONS

There are two main reasons for the increase in the BME population of Cornwall over this period. The first is the development of Higher Education in Cornwall through the Combined Universities of Cornwall (CUC), attracting students from elsewhere in the UK and abroad. The second is the increasing numbers of migrant workers, mainly from Eastern Europe (and Poland in particular), undertaking low-paid work in the agricultural and tourism sectors. New National Insurance registrations in Cornwall for foreign nationals rose from 730 in 2002/3 to 2610 in 2007/8 (Cornwall Council, 2009). Many such migrant workers have undertaken vocational qualifications at Cornwall College.

The next table shows the ethnic make-up of the student population of Cornwall College over the last three academic years:

Table 2: % of students enrolled at Cornwall College by ethnic group

Ethnicity	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
White	97.3	97.2	97.1
Mixed, all groups	0.5	0.6	0.6
Indian	0.1	0.1	0.2
Pakistani	0.1	0.1	0.0
Bangladeshi	0.1	0.1	0.1
Other Asian	0.5	0.5	0.6
Black Caribbean	0.2	0.2	0.2
Black African	0.3	0.3	0.3
Other Black	0.1	0.1	0.4
Chinese	0.2	0.2	0.0
Other	0.6	0.5	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Cornwall College Goldmine software

Note: the percentages in this table exclude those students categorised as 'unknown'

The definitions used by the College for enrolment data vary from those used by the ONS, as all 'white' students are included in a single category. Therefore direct comparisons are not possible across all ethnic classifications, although it can be concluded that the proportion of students from ethnic groups is a little less the general population as set out in Table 1. The percentage of non-white students at the College (2.9% in 2009-10) is below the corresponding figure for the population of Cornwall overall (4.2% in 2009).

One further factor relating to ethnicity in Cornwall is its strong local identity. Cornwall is an area of the UK isolated principally by nature of its geography, but its Celtic history, language and culture have engendered a local perception of a separate, culturally independent Cornish region, resistant to the outside notion that it is simply an extension of the South West of England. With the traditional fishing, farming and mining industries now either fragmented or non-existent, there exists considerable deprivation and associated problems of low educational achievement. These factors have strengthened local feelings of independence from the rest of the UK. The 2001 Census was the first time that 'White Cornish' was allowed as an ethnic identity (although it was not a separate tick-box). Subsequent surveys by the County Council (e.g. PFA Research, 2007) suggest that as many as 35% of the population describe themselves as 'White Cornish' – a significant sub-section of the population.

The origins of this study were in an article (Guardian, 2009) which was prompted by new guidelines issued by OFSTED for the inspection of FE colleges.   From 2009/10, an FE College's achievements in the field of E & D would be a 'limiting grade' for the overall assessment, meaning that a College's overall assessment could be limited by an unsatisfactory performance in the area of E & D, even if other areas were highly rated.   At the time there was uncertainty as to how the new guidelines would be applied, and in the newspaper article the Principal of Cornwall College, Dave Linnell, expressed concern that some institutions would be penalised simply because they happened to serve a community which was predominantly one ethnic group.

This was a particular issue for Cornwall College, as their OFSTED monitoring visit in 2008 had highlighted that insufficient progress was being made in the field of E & D:

The college has not made sufficient progress in addressing this area for improvement identified at inspection in 2006. The college does not have an action plan to promote cultural awareness and diversity in the curriculum, and is not monitoring progress in implementing improvements. The self-assessment report for 2006/07 includes scant reference to this aspect of provision. Few of the students that inspectors met during the monitoring visit felt that the college promotes cultural awareness and diversity effectively. (OFSTED, 2008)

The College management responded accordingly to address the reported deficiencies. A co-ordinator was appointed to oversee both revision of the curriculum and to initiate College-wide activities to raise the E & D profile.   One such initiative was the Cultural Diversity Week, first held in March 2009 following a pilot Cultural Awareness Day in November 2008. The Cultural Diversity Week sought to involve all faculties and campuses of the College in promoting awareness in a manner relevant to subject area, or in tutorial sessions. The first was arranged for March 2009, and two further weeks have now been held. The impact of the Cultural Diversity Week is examined later in this paper, but the various strategies put in place by the College management were successful, at least in terms of the next OFSTED monitoring visit:

[The College] has now made significant progress and has introduced a wide range of new and improved approaches to support the promotion of cultural awareness and diversity into

the curriculum. The college appointed a coordinator for this work soon after the last monitoring visit who has responsibility across all the college sites. A strong focus now exists on cultural awareness and diversity in the self-assessment report. Cultural diversity and awareness are now included in the teaching and learning strategy and there are clear action plans to support improvements. A good range of teaching materials and links to further resources is available on the college's virtual learning environment (VLE), which are accessible to both staff and students. (OFSTED, 2009)

The improvements were also reflected in the 2010 full OFSTED inspection, in which similar comments were made. The College was graded 'Good' in their provision of E & D.[1]

Methodology

This report follows the guidance on case study educational research as described by Bassey (2003). Bassey describes three types of educational case study: theory-seeking and theory-testing case studies; storytelling and picture-drawing case studies; and evaluative case studies. This project falls into the latter category, and is defined thus:

Enquiries into educational programmes, systems, projects or events to determine their worthwhileness, as judged by analysis by researchers, and to convey this to interested audiences. (p117)

To evaluate the impact of E & D policy at Cornwall College, a number of interviews and focus groups were undertaken between October 2009 and February 2011. Interview subjects included College management, College staff and a sample of students including the Student Union President. Reference was also made to documentation prepared by the College to support their E & D strategy, including:

- Single Equality Scheme
- College Implementation Plan
- Equality and Diversity Annual Reports
- OFSTED monitoring reports and full inspections

---

[1] *A separate grade for Equality and Diversity was not given in 2006. Overall the College was rated 'Satisfactory' for effectiveness of provision.*

- Cultural Diversity Week reports

Reference was also made to the College's VLE platform, Moodle, which has a separate area for E & D resources to support teaching and learning.

Literature Review

The history of race relations and multiculturalism in the UK is complex, shaped by population movements, political tendencies and world events. A useful source for academic study on these issues is the Runnymede Trust, an independent 'think-tank' active in racial awareness issues. A former director of the Runnymede Trust, Robin Richardson, has written a number of articles addressing race issues in education. Two papers in particular, Getting Them Together and Looking Back, Looking Around (www.insted.co.uk) position racial awareness in the field of teaching and learning. Richardson argues that the approach to race equality in the field of education is essentially the addressing of 'hearts and minds', assisting students to address issues that arise in a social situation. A theoretical approach, borrowed from the age discrimination agenda, has relevance in race awareness. A map is used to illustrate how human beings relate to one another:

Figure 1: the mental sketch map with which humans perceive themselves and others
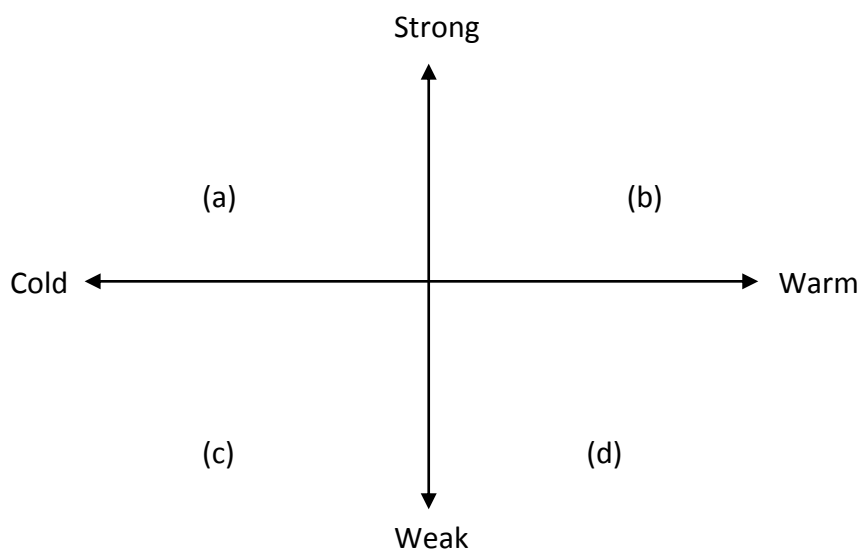
Four categories of human nature are described, representing the four segments of the diagram:

a) People perceived to be hostile and competent

b) People perceived to be hostile and weak

c) People perceived to be well-disposed and weak, and

d) People perceived to be well-disposed and confident

Most will put themselves into category (d), and for the purposes of the model are referred to as PLU, or People Like Us. It follows that the view the other categories as PLT – People Like Them. At the heart of the equalities agenda is how the PLU see and treat PLT. Such debates are at the heart of community cohesion.

If the role of FE practitioners is to educate hearts and minds, it is important to reflect on the basis of teaching and learning in this area. The common sense view is that intolerance breeds discriminatory behaviour which results in inequality of power and resources in society, thus:

Figure 2: A common sense view of cause and effect

Prejudice ⟶ Discrimination ⟶ Inequality
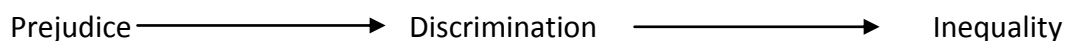
A more complex view, borne out by history, suggested a more complex model in which the three ingredients is not simply a matter of cause and effect:

Figure 3: A more complex view of cause and effect

Prejudice

Discrimination ⟷ Inequality
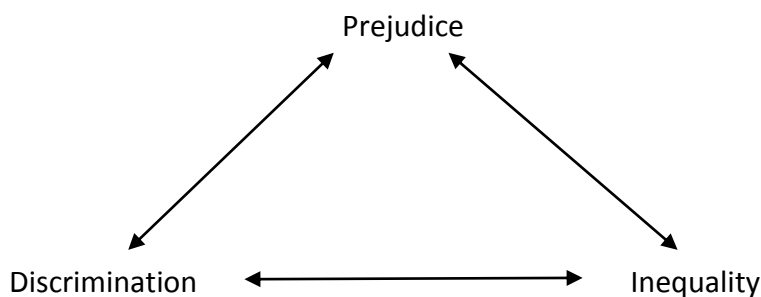
So for example, it is argued that *'slavery was not born of racism. Rather, racism was the consequence of slavery'* (Williams, 1944).

Richardson gives a final example from the disabilities agenda. The installation of ramps in public buildings was regarded by many to be an unnecessary expense benefiting only a small minority. However, ramps are now appreciated by a wider group – those with buggies, heavy luggage, or temporarily affected by, say, a sprained ankle. The existence of ramps in

our public buildings is a reminder of the differences that are part of the society in which we live, and we can all benefit from the kind of society in which such differences are welcomed.

Essentially one of the main objectives of the Cultural Diversity Week and other awareness-raising activities was to address the PLU/PLT relationship, which is particularly pertinent in a large homogenous group such as the white student population at Cornwall College. The various activities scheduled during the week are intended to generate a higher level of understanding of how the majority population integrates with minority groups.

Data summary and analysis

Display exploring European ethnicity

The main thrust of the Cultural Diversity Week was to involve all College sites and faculties in relevant activity, and three such weeks have now been completed[2]. The list below gives a flavour of the activities undertaken:

- Talk and debate from local politicians on diversity;
- Global-themed food at College restaurants;
- Exhibition and lecture by the rainforest charity Cool Earth;
- World Music sessions and a samba workshop;
- Fairtrade information and a competition;
- Workshops on Citizenship;
- Celebrating Cornish culture: performance by a Cornish music band, a pasty-making evening and a Cornish language workshop.

---

[2] The third such week took place in 2011, shortly before the submission of this paper.

Cornish music band Dalla playing in the Student Union Bar

Students attending a drumming workshop

Fairtrade Coffee Promotion

The strengths of the week, gleaned from evaluation material completed at the time and subsequent interviews, can be summarised as follows:

- Enjoyable activities for students and staff, and widespread participation;
- Integration of students from different curriculum areas;
- Some match funding from the College to support activities;
- Link with other events – Fairtrade Fortnight, St Piran's Day (Cornwall's patron saint), Holi festival, etc.

- Some activities continued beyond the week – multicultural food in canteens, Bollywood dance lessons etc.

A number of ideas were suggested to improve the focus of the week, including:

- Improved communication in advance of the event, i.e. from the beginning of the academic year and at Fresher Fairs, etc.;
- More educational links with specific activities;
- Greater emphasis of the broader aspects of diversity – gender, sexuality, disability etc. The focus was biased towards 'cultural' diversity;

One activity that illustrated the impact of the Cultural Activity Week in 2010 was the promotion by the Cornwall College Student Union of the work of Amnesty International. A range of activities were arranged to raise awareness of human rights issues around the globe. These included a speaker from the organisation, and the promotion of the 'Red Hand' campaign, which aims to prevent children being used as soldiers. Supporters were asked to cover their hands with red paint, and the images were sent to the UN by way of a petition.

Tutorials on the subject of prisoners of conscience were conducted - appropriate lesson plans and tutorial resources were made available for tutors.

Students were brought together to create the Amnesty International logo using an outdoor area of the College. This publicity event received a good deal of press coverage locally.

amnesty.org.uk

A number of Cornwall College students, including officers of the Student Union, were asked about the Cultural Diversity Week in particular and E & D practice in general at the College. The discussions took place in early 2011. There was a mixed response, suggesting that, in the opinion of some students, the profile of E & D is not applied consistently over the whole curriculum. The following points were made:

- Tutorial time devoted to E & D is not always treated with importance and respect by students, with an insufficient range of issues covered;

- In some cases E & D activity can be confined mainly to tutorial time. Application in teaching areas was largely dependent on the subject being taught;

- A number of students still felt that the College's overall attitude to E & D was 'ticking boxes for OFSTED' – in other words fulfilling statutory requirements was seen as a separate, more important objective than fulfilling its obligation to students;

- The Cultural Diversity Week was regarded by some students as something that 'comes and goes' – in other words the appropriate issues were highlighted for a single week during the year but then put back down the agenda for a further twelve months – 'a showcase for OFSTED';

- Although the students emphasised that in their experience, although there was an absence of prejudice in College life, there was a lack of confidence in how the College would respond to any incidents as they arose. One student perceived this as 'a lack of trained staff' (despite the fact that all staff are required to undertake regular E & D training). Perhaps understandably, students were more familiar with Student Union responsibilities and lines of communication than with the College reporting framework;

- Lack of leadership in some faculties;

- Concentration by the College on anti-racism to the detriment of the rights of gay and disabled students;

- On one site the Student Union had appointed an Equality and Diversity Officer but the individual had not received formal training for the role, nor had the post been widely publicised among the student body;

- The Cultural Diversity Week (for 2011) had not been publicised to students as well as it could have been, and there were problems establishing lines of communication

between SU officers and the student body with regard to establishing which issues should receive a high profile;

Generally, students understood the importance of E & D as part of their overall educational experience at the College. One student reflected the view of his group in this quote:

[E & D activity] does help you to become a more well-rounded individual … going to College isn't just about passing exams. It should be about personal development.

As part of the drive to support tutors in the teaching of E & D, a space on the College VLE (Moodle) has been allocated to house resources.

The site is open to all users of the College Intranet and offers ideas and suggestions of activities appropriate to understanding of E & D issues.

Conclusions

In assessing the impact and value of the educational policies that underpin FE E & D strategy and lead to events such as the Cultural Diversity Week, it is important to revisit the framework of diversity in Britain and how it relates to the education sector.

The trigger for this study was the nature of the demographics of Cornwall (and Cornwall College), i.e. a predominantly white population. Anti-racism policy requires constant reappraisal in our increasingly ethnically diverse society. When the Race Relations Act first came into being in 1976, it was in response to a culture of ethnic relations where all non-white groups were seen as potential victims of discrimination. The development of our

society in the intervening years is such that the proliferation of minority groups has given rise to a number of new forms of prejudice, and the picture has become less clear. Some studies (e.g. Modood *et al.,* 1997) argue that there are certain ethnic groups such as Chinese and African-Asians (Hindus and Sikhs arriving from Africa) that cannot be described as 'disadvantaged' in a meaningful way, while certain white working-class groups have experienced considerable educational and economic disadvantages, giving rise to a 'white backlash' to anti-racist policies, particularly evident in the education sector. The term 'racism' has been reassessed from being *'something that white groups only do to non-white groups'* (Ashmore *et al.,* 2010) to a more measured view of how our multitude of communities interact in a complex society.

Some academics argue that the original concept of multiculturalism, incorporating the celebration of difference and the promotion of ethnic diversity, has given way to 'integration' or citizenship incorporating the practices and traditions of a society. The 2001 riots in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford triggered a policy of 'Community Cohesion' based on the premise that society was being fractured by what was effectively ethnic segregation, with ethnic groups living separate but *'parallel lives'* (Ritchie 2001). Central to this policy is that young people of different ethnic backgrounds should be given space for meaningful direct contact with one another to enhance understanding at an individual level. However critics of such a policy argue that by putting the onus on communities in this way implicitly transfers the blame for segregation (Kundnani 2002) and essentially is another face of the 'assimilation' policies of the 1960s.

As has been explored in the introduction to this paper, the practice of E & D in any institution greatly depends on the setting and the demographic of the relevant society. As Ashmore et al., (2010) state:

… there is a constant struggle to sustain practices committed to social justice. We need to recognise that educational processes cannot simply be viewed from an institutional position and that they need to be placed within the relational setting in which education is located as well as its wider social context.

At Cornwall College, as would be the case at any other College with a large homogenous majority, the application of E & D has to be appropriate to the nature of the student

population, in this case predominantly 'White Cornish'. The Cultural Diversity Week has been successful in its objective of raising the profile of these issues among staff and students. However, as Coffield (2008) argues, the true nature of teaching and learning is that students are given a platform to contribute to their own education in a positive way, using *'critical intelligence'* described by Coffield as *'to express the idea more directly, the ability to detect bullshit and the moral courage to expose it publicly'*. The recent interviews with students show that the College cannot afford to be complacent in the face of other positive feedback and successful OFSTED inspections. The constant turnover of students demands that the high profile of these matters should be maintained to ensure that a community of tolerance and understanding is established as part of the inbuilt culture of college life.

Simon Bennett
May 2011

Word count: 3,961

References

Ashmore L, Dalton J, Noel P, Rennie S, Salter E, Swindells D and Thomas P (2010) *Equality and Diversity,* from Teaching in Lifelong Learning, A Guide to Theory and Practice, eds. Avis J, Fisher R and Thompson R. Open University Press: London

Bassey M (2003) *Case study research.* From Educational Research in Practice, eds. Swann J and Pratt J. Continuum: London

Coffield F (2008) *Just suppose teaching and learning became the first priority…* Learning and Skills Network: London

Cornwall Council (2009) *Understanding diverse population groups in Cornwall: Migrant workers* Cornwall Council: Truro

Guardian (2009) *When it comes to colleges, some are more equal than others.* 21st July

Kundnani A (2002) *An Unholy Alliance? Racism, religion and communalism.* From Race and Class, 44(2): 71-80

Modood T, Berthoud R, Lakey J, Nazroo J, Smith P, Virdee S and Beishon S (1997) *Ethnic Minorities in Britain.* Policy Studies Institute: London

PFA Research Ltd (2007). *Quality of Life Tracker Survey.* PFA Research: Bodmin

Ritchie D (2001) Oldham Independent Review.

Richardson R (2004) Looking Back, Looking Around – the university lecturer as modern saint [Accessed at www.insted.co.uk, 19 November 2009]

Richardson R (2007) *Getting Them Together – the equalities agenda in education, autumn 2007 and beyond.* [Accessed at www.insted.co.uk, 19 November 2009]

Richardson R (2000) *'Children will be told lies'.* Runnymede Trust Quarterly Bulletin, December