Exploring supplementary education: margins, theories and methods.

Abstract

Existing knowledge of supplementary education, that is education organised and run by political, faith or ethnic groups outside of formal schooling, is patchy. This article is an exploration of the histories of supplementary education in the twentieth century. It is organised into three sections.

The article begins by reviewing some existing literature and argues that supplementary education has been a topic of marginal concern for social historians, sociologists and historians of education. This marginal status has often been reflected in the way in which a dominant account of the history of supplementary education has entered the research literature despite a rather selective evidential base. The second section of the article deploys an expansive definition of education, and presents some new historical evidence concerning African Caribbean and Irish supplementary education. A final arguments section reflects on the significance of supplementary education and suggestions some topics for a future research agenda.
Introduction.

In post 1945 Britain supplementary education existed in a highly politicised environment. The existence of supplementary education projects could be offered as evidence of social and educational failure, a reaction to programmes of assimilation and a response to the racism of mainstream schools that damaged pupils academically and psychologically. In this view, supplementary education was interpreted as an attempt to preserve particular faith or cultural identities and promote achievement in a way that mainstream schooling had singularly failed to do. Alternatively, supplementary schools could be seen as a threat to national values and their activities offered as part of a wider explanation for educational failure. The correct policy response was the provision of clearly articulated national values in schools that would serve to integrate migrant communities and their children. Yet, for all the political attention lavished on supplementary education and its implications for national identity and belonging, community relations and cohesion and modern citizenship there exists relatively little research into the origins, development and practice of supplementary education.

This article makes a contribution to uncovering a history of supplementary education in post 1945 Britain. It focuses on two groups – first and second generation Afro-Caribbean and Irish migrants – and their attempts to develop supplementary systems of education in the second half of the twentieth century. In using the term supplementary education – rather than schooling – the parameters of this study are intentionally broad. There are a number of reasons for this. One is that


² For a recent argument of this kind see the text of Ofsted Chief Inspector David Bell’s lecture to the Hansard Society in 2005 http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/cei/Citizenship.pdf (last accessed 4 July 2009). See also ‘Islamic Schools a threat to national identity’, The Times, January 18 2005.


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a prime concern of this article is educational agency; we are interested in the activities of people who organise for the purposes of learning. This can happen in supplementary schools set up and developed for children that meet weekly, but it can equally concern adults in evening classes or mixed groups in summer camps. The focus, in other words, is on the modes of organisation and communities of practice, not specific institutional credentials. This suggests a second reason for our concern with education rather than schools; our interest in the process of learning. The case studies that follow in this paper are framed around an understanding of learning as a socio-cultural process and the intention here is to stress how a shared interest in supplementing, improving or correcting perceived failures in state education led to the establishment of new communities of effort and interpretation in which educational and political discussion and debate generated some kind of shared memory, vocabulary, and strategy for change. Ultimately, these debates translated into various kinds of resources – documents, texts, campaigns, schools for example – that serve to construct and represent the community, and help to develop its practices.

The argument presented here develops in three parts. In the first part we undertake a review of the small amount of relevant literature in the sociology and history of education. In doing so we argue that whilst no satisfactory empirical study of post war supplementary education has been produced, what does exist is a small but important sociological and educational literature, particularly on black supplementary schools. On the strength of this literature an orthodox interpretation has developed on the origins and purposes of supplementary education, but it is one based on a rather weak and selective evidential base. There now exist various documentary sources that enable the researcher to return to this history and develop a more complex view of these schools and their origins.

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5 In recent years relevant archive collections have been assembled in specialist archives such as the George Padmore Institute and the Black Cultural Archives. Research projects have also identified and catalogued previously ‘hidden’ collections in local authority archives: see for example the website of Birmingham Archives and Heritage Service, http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk (last accessed July 14 2010). For academic analysis of these developments see, for example, Mary Stevens, Andrew Flinn and Elizabeth Shepherd, ‘New Frameworks for community engagement in the archive sector: from handing over to handing on’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 16, 1&2 (2010): 59-76.

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The second part of the article explores some of these opportunities. It consists of two case studies in supplementary education: those organised and developed by the Afro-Caribbean and Irish communities of post 1945 Britain. These groups have been selected partly for pragmatic reasons in that they help to demonstrate the kinds of materials now available for educationalists working in this field. There are also intellectual reasons for these selections. African Caribbean schools are of particular interest because they represent the outcome of arguably one of the most successful parental movements around education in twentieth century Britain. The current political valorisation of their work has the potential to hide or negate the conflicts and struggles that accompanied their development.6 The Irish were for most of the post war period the largest ethnic minority community in Britain.7 Their educational struggles are therefore worth recording simply for empirical reasons. But in juxtaposing Afro-Caribbean and Irish groups it may be possible to begin transcending research paradigms, built around categories of race that can limit our understanding of educational phenomena.8

The final section of the study draws out some key arguments that emerge from these case studies. In particular it is argued that it is possible to construct new genealogies for supplementary education by paying close attention to the increasing variety of evidence now available to historians and educationalists. The availability of traditional documentary sources relating to the development of ethnic minority communities reflects not just important changes in archival practice but also the legacy of the kinds of educational projects that were popular and commonplace in post 1945 Britain. Another legacy of these movements is the existence of all kinds of sources — in the form of films, music, documentaries, radio programmes, oral histories, performance art — that attest to a process of social learning in migrant communities. That learning was diverse and drew on different experiences and forms of capital. But all of it was related to and conditioned by wider structural

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relationships, of class, gender and generation. The general argument here is that supplementary education projects require detailed, localised and empirical research.

**Reviewing supplementary education**

The historical ignorance surrounding supplementary education is easily identified in the post war history of Britain. In mainstream historical narratives the term education is usually reduced to a consideration of formal educational policy whose significance is often couched in terms of the socialization of young people and the spread of modern citizenship. In the post 1945 period, it is typical to find that this modernist project of creating good citizens reached a crisis with ‘left-wing ideas’, ‘progressive educational theories’ and the decline of parenting producing social problems in the form of a decline in the standard of behaviour of young people and an increase in violence and crime. It is worth noting this kind of historical narrative both because of its considerable political salience, but also because it usually completely ignores the existence of supplementary schools or, indeed, any kind of educational agency that was a key factor in developing community identities and equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge to negotiate a space in Britain. Ethnic histories usually say something about the importance of schools and education for immigrant and ethnic minority groups, but discussion is brief and limited to the observation that immigrant groups often established their own schools which, in the case of twentieth century Jews at least, encouraged the enculturation of young people. Perhaps this picture of neglect should not come as a surprise. In part it reflects a more general failure on the part of historians of education to substantively engage with the educational experiences of ethnic minority communities, and related issues of race. The result is that existing claims about post war supplementary schools tend to rest on sociological and

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educational research. Of course, this is not necessarily problematic but the absence of historical perspective and analysis does limit our understanding of the practices and potential of supplementary schools. One extended example will illustrate this point.

In a recent paper Francis, Archer and Mau write, by way of background to their study of Chinese complementary schools, that such schools have:

a wide range of purposes, from educating pupils about their cultural origins, history, language and so on, to supplementing mainstream education. They have a long history in Britain, and the Resource Unit for Supplementary and Mother-Tongue Schools lists over 200 of these schools across the UK attesting to a rich seam of pedagogy and learning that reflects the diasporic practices existing beyond mainstream education.¹²

They also describe supplementary schools as being able to provide ‘social networks and space to negotiate identities; transmission and celebration of aspects of “culture”; “space” from racism; and additional education (in community language and/or other subjects and skills)’. Such schools, they argue, can constitute powerful vehicles via which minority ethnic parents (who often feel alienated by the mainstream education system) can influence their children’s education, and ‘create discursive contestation to the educational status quo’.¹³ Now, whilst this constitutes an accurate general summary of the role and practices of supplementary schooling, its long history receives only cursory recognition and seemingly has no impact at all on the extensive claims that follow regarding the pedagogy and learning of these schools, and their relationship to issues around identity formation, cultural transmission, racism and educational agency. This is unsatisfactory for two reasons: one theoretical and one empirical.

Theoretically, whatever particular supplementary schools do – the kinds of learning they promote, the identities they facilitate, the modes of socialisation they encourage – they are the product of social action. That is, supplementary schools offer evidence of the ways in which social


¹³ Francis et al., ‘Language as capital or Language as identity’, 521.

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agents come together and deploy particular cultural forms and resources in pursuit of particular objectives. The important point is that different groups will do this in different ways – depending on the cultural forms available to them – and with different outcomes depending on particular social contexts and conditions. These conditions are the product of history; they come from the past and set both constraints and opportunities on what different groups will achieve in their educational activities. In failing to delineate histories of supplementary schooling researchers risk being unable to critically evaluate their practices.

Empirically, the marginalization of the history of supplementary schooling is problematic because that history is now often invoked as an educational resource. Sometimes this is implicit, as with Francis, Archer and Mau whose reference to a long history sits alongside claims about a ‘rich seam of pedagogy and learning’. Elsewhere, and increasingly in political discussion, that history is explicitly claimed, as in a recent parliamentary debate, as an ‘extraordinary resource’ that can play ‘a fundamental role in facilitating mainstream education, cultural expression and community cohesion’. But such claims are impossible to substantiate or evaluate because we know so little of this history. In fact, when historical evidence is cited it usually comes from two influential studies – Reay and Mirza (1997), Mirza and Reay (2000) — that recognise the value of historical perspectives but should not be conflated with a history of all supplementary schools.

In these two studies Reay and Mirza construct a genealogy of black supplementary schooling that, in turn, uses as a starting point Maureen Stone’s *The Education of the Black Child in Britain* (1981). Though there are significant differences in the conceptual framing of their arguments, all

14 Ibid., 522.
15 See, for example, the speech in the House of Commons by Labour Member of Parliament Joan Ryan. House of Commons Hansard Debates, 26 February 2008, column 1065.
three studies employ ethnographic research methods to explore the activities of a small number of schools – four in each case – in London. The data they gathered are rich in detail. It is, for the most part, directly drawn from interviews conducted by the researchers with black educators involved in the schools. The results are valuable accounts of the trials, tribulations and successes of the schools. And yet there are also problems. The first difficulty is that for disciplinary and ethical reasons the black educators and their schools cannot be identified. At a very simple level, therefore there are questions around whether the researchers worked in the same schools or different ones. Whatever the case, with a maximum of eight schools documented there are legitimate questions around how representative or widespread the kind of documented practices were. Because the identity of the educators must remain anonymous it is impossible to judge whether we are listening to the voices of a vocal minority or a consensus view of black supplementary schooling. Of course, this does not invalidate the data that has been collated, but it does mean that it should be treated with caution.

In surveying how Stone’s work has been used there is, however, a notable lack of appropriate caution. Stone’s work is cited as an authority for all kinds of claims. Mirza and Reay (2000), for example, developed an analogy suggested in Stone’s work, arguing that the Socialist Sunday schools and the black supplementary schools both constituted ‘counter publics’. The Socialist Sunday schools struggled ‘to produce working class discourses to counter hegemonic middle class views on education’ and black groups ‘repeatedly found it necessary within a wider social context of white hegemony’ to form ‘subaltern counter publics’. Further, the ‘radical and transformative work’ of black women in supplementary schools in bringing about identity transformation through challenging the codes and values of white hegemony, the promotion of radical blackness and the adoption of progressive and child-centred praxis constituted ‘a new social movement’. It may well be, as they assert, that black supplementary schools are ‘gendered spaces of collective action’ and ‘spaces of radical blackness’, but their claims are based on only four case studies, a point which they

18 Space permits selective examples of these claims only, but others can be found in Winston James, ‘The Black Experience in Twentieth Century Britain’ in Black Experience and the Empire, ed. Phillip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Trevor Carter, Shattering Illusions. West Indians in British Politics. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986).

19 Mirza and Reay, Spaces and Places of Black Educational Desire, 532.

20 Ibid., 533-535.

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acknowledge: ‘we cannot argue that they are typical of black supplementary schooling as a whole’.  
This is an important recognition of the empirical point that was also not adequately addressed in an earlier, groundbreaking, piece of educational research that featured the same case studies.

In that earlier 1997 study – ‘Uncovering Genealogies of the Margins: black supplementary schooling’– Reay and Mirza produced a local database of supplementary schools based around the London Boroughs where nearly 60% of the African Caribbean population in the UK are known to live. They identified sixty such schools located in fifteen boroughs and found that 65% of the teachers were women. In this study, they briefly explore Stone’s analogy, but the main focus is the application of Foucault’s genealogical method to uncover the counter memories of black educators in order to ‘critique and challenge’ dominant discourses on ‘race’ and to ‘map out what has been left out of generally accepted knowledge about the relationship between ‘race’ and education’. Using genealogical methodology they documented through their four case studies the existence of a gendered social movement characterised by female collective action and provided an empirical platform for the later study. Finally, while acknowledging that Foucault’s method allowed a different version of traditional history to be presented they were categorical that their research was ‘not historical, our data reaches back over 20 years unlike the centuries which Foucault’s genealogies spanned’.

The use of the genealogical method is important for historians as it clearly allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles in the past which are excluded from mainstream narratives. However, in his essay ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, Foucault, in his conceptualisation of genealogy, distinguished between ‘descent’ as opposed to the ‘evolution’ of ideas and practices as a means of avoiding a narrative of the past which dissolves ‘the singular event into an ideal

21 Ibid., 537.
22 Reay and Mirza ‘Uncovering Genealogies of the Margins’, 482.
23 For the genealogical method see Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality Volume One: An Introduction (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1979).
24 Ibid., 480-81.
25 Ibid., 481.

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continuity – as a teleological movement or a natural process’. Genealogy, in this sense, seeks to identify disjunctions as well as continuities. The significance of this observation for understanding the history of black supplementary schooling and, what we see as a problem with existing educational research, are threefold. First, as already indicated, there is a danger that research findings become received knowledge in the literature. In this case, supplementary schools are like Socialist Sunday schools, they represent a new social movement and they are gendered spaces of collective action. Second, and relatedly, the knowledge as gathered and interpreted in the 1980s by Stone or by Reay and Mirza in the 1990s becomes the dominant account of black supplementary schooling and is read backwards into the past and consequently offers a static description with no acknowledgement of the organic nature of supplementary schools, their fragile histories, their different and changing ideological positions or their change from one status to another, as signalled in the title of Valentino A. Jones’ book *We Are Our Own Educators! Josina Machel: From Supplementary to Black Complementary School* (1986). In other words, there are no disjunctions but only continuities in the history of black supplementary schooling. Third, this ‘ideal continuity’ potentially closes down other possible avenues of research as it becomes embedded as received knowledge.

Despite some surface and obvious differences, similar kinds of arguments can be made in respect of our second case study; the Irish in post war Britain. For even if the Irish lacked a formal system of supplementary schools, they were involved in educational projects that sought to make sense of, and come to terms with, the experience of migration. However, our knowledge of these projects is somewhat sketchy and it comes out of a small but influential sociological literature on Irish migration, settlement and community formation. Mary Hickman’s research has been the most illuminating and influential in this area. In a widely cited monograph Hickman argued that the provision of Catholic schooling had served as an important vehicle for the promotion of social and

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occupational mobility for the Irish community in Britain, but it had also served to denationalise them, and to suppress the development and articulation of Irish nationalist identities in Britain.\(^{28}\) Moreover, Hickman has argued that the historical legacies of this process are still clearly visible today. On the one hand the Irish are often understood as an immigrant community who have successfully absorbed a dominant white British identity, but on the other hand they remain subject to discrimination that produces significant material and psychological disadvantage. This disadvantage is then explained in terms of the strength and the power of dominant Irish and English national identities that resist and silence the kinds of situated ethnicity – or hybrid, postcolonial identities – reported by the Irish in Britain.\(^{29}\)

There is a great deal of importance in this kind of research, not least a theoretical model that stresses the fluidity of identity and the agency of individuals who construct meaning. Ethnographic interviews may provide rich and interesting data when individuals reflect on their sense of identity, but there remains much more to be done if these personal narratives are to be convincingly mapped onto the wider structures of history and society. These ‘structures of feeling’ are best understood against a wider understanding of class, gender, race and generation in the post war period. In other words, the hybridized identifications reported by Hickman and others have a history that remains to be written.

If, as the literature suggests, a sense of difference – of being somehow Irish – was learnt and developed in the private sphere of the home, the resources were available for thinking or learning about being Irish in the public sphere remain to be documented. It is telling that in a recent paper one interviewee discussed the absence of organisations for the second generation Irish, and links


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this absence to a perceived public failure to understand and recognise Irish ethnicity. Yet, as this article will briefly document, cultural and educational organisations did exist. They worked to educate second generation Irish about the histories of Ireland and Britain, and to explore their tangled relationships. They championed Irish language learning. They provided evening classes, Saturday schools and developed a significance presence in the adult and higher education sectors. In doing so they attempted to provide the resources for new forms of subjectivity for the second generation Irish. It is to those projects – and to our case studies of Afro-Caribbean and Irish supplementary education – that attention now turns.

Case studies: mobilisations against unpopular education.

Black mobilisation against unpopular education

Large numbers of black children first began to enter the education system in Britain in the late 1950s. Situated in white working class urban areas, the fabric of the schools they entered was neglected and the schools lacked basic teaching equipment. The 1960s saw black parents across the UK increasingly raise their concerns over the education that their children were receiving. In London, the struggle against an ‘unpopular’ education was led by the North London West Indian Association (NLWIA). In March 1969 the NLWIA protested against Haringey Borough Council’s decision to introduce ‘banding’ as a mechanism for dispersing black and Asian school children across the Borough. Such a policy contravened one of the fundamental principles of the 1944 Education Act, namely that as far as possible children were to be educated in accordance with parental wishes. The NWLIA organised a mass demonstration, pamphlets were printed, parents’ committees formed and petitions signed. The campaign was a success and the scheme was dropped in 1971. Knowledge of the campaign circulated beyond London and acted as a mobilising agent amongst black parents. 1969 saw the formation of the Caribbean Education Association (later the Caribbean Education and Community Workers Association or CECWA). The Association was established to campaign against


31 George Padmore Institute (GPI), London. BEM 2/2/1/2/1-4 undated (January 1972?) constitution of the Caribbean Education and Community Workers Association.

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police harassment of black youngsters, the categorisation of black children as ‘slow learners’ and the nation-wide practice of placing black children in schools for the educationally subnormal. A three day seminar was organised in 1970 and included a paper by John La Rose on the struggle against banding and one by Bernard Coard on ESN schools. Coard re-drafted his paper after the conference and the CEWCA published it in 1971 as How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System. The cogently argued text was accompanied by a series of recommendations including ‘start[ing] up supplementary schools in whatever part of London, or Britain, we live’. 10,000 copies were sold; Coard travelled across England giving talks, and anger and outrage in local black communities was channelled into organised protest in all the major cities with large black populations. Supplementary schooling was ‘an idea whose time had come’. Black supplementary schools appeared in all of the larger cities, with at least six in London, and a national conference of supplementary schools was convened by CECWA in 1972. It is to the nature of these schools that attention will now turn.

The Malcolm X Montessori School began in May 1970 when Ajoy and Katherine Ghose set up a table in a street in Notting Hill, London and engaged children in conversation. A meeting was organised for parents which Hakim Tahar, organiser of the Malcolm X Schools Programme in the United States, addressed. Sixteen parents and their children supported the idea of a school and


34 Ibid, 39

35 Carter, Shattered Illusions, 92.

36 Kwame Nkrumah school (Hackney black teachers), the Malcolm X Montessori Programme (Ajoy Ghose), the George Padmore school (John La Rose and the Black Parents’ Movement), the South-East London Summer School (Black Unity and Freedom Party), Headstart (Black Liberation Front) and the Marcus Garvey school (Black Liberation Front and others)

helped to pay the rent for a large room in a house in St Ervans Road. The school followed Malcolm X’s belief that ‘a child is not born stupid, it’s made stupid’ and used Montessori methods:

She, like Malcolm X, believed in the potential of all children ... We follow her methods in trying to provide the children with a stimulating environment which will prompt them to discover things for themselves, to ask questions, to develop their particular creativity, and at all times to be given qualified answers to their enquiries, not foolishness.

The school was open 9.30 to 5 in the holiday period, for 3-4 hours each evening and at weekends during term time and the children were between 5 and 11 and ‘mainly black’. The pupils all came from the same road and this was deliberately engineered by the organisers: ‘the programme is a street programme, where everybody knows each other and sees each other. We not only know the children but the parents too and they know us’. The Datchwyng Saturday school in Peckham was established in 1975. It emerged from discussions in a parents’ group set up in the previous year as its founder Nel Clark wrote: ‘A community cannot be passive and allow a racist education system to disadvantage our children. We need to do something’. Held on Saturdays, with one professional teacher, Clark, and parental help, by 1980 126 children from fifty-six families were attending the school. Reading, writing, English, mathematics and art and craft were taught. Clark in her account of the school’s history identified some of the problems faced by Saturday schools:

One of the problems which faced us when we started ...was the attitude of some parents who felt that the school was not good enough for their children. Some children felt that five days in school was enough ...Some West Indians felt that Black History and Black Studies should be taught. Some parents felt that only qualified teachers should be doing the teaching. Despite these problems the school continues because parents who felt the school was helping their children have continued to give their support, and it was noticeable that the children from these families attended regularly and made more progress with their work than others did. There were also parents who sent their children to the school, but never visited it themselves, nor took an active part, and subsequently the children withdrew.

The school also offered an evening session for 14-16 year olds. In 1980 the school organised an exhibition of children’s work which was attended by LEA teachers and inspectors, but there had


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been no formal contact with the local schools which the pupils attended during the week. The Josina Machel Black Supplementary School [JMSS] opened in January 1976 at Newington Green Advice Centre, North London and offered Arithmetic, English, Reading, Black History and Geography lessons for 9-11 year olds. Before it opened the organisers, four activists in the National Institute of Black Studies, ran summer schools – ‘we took children away from the Inner City. We organised, on these occasions, courses combined with plays, arts and crafts based on our History and Culture’ – and it was this experience which gradually translated into the establishment of a supplementary school. The intention was:

to continue the historical tradition of Black people wherever they find themselves, i.e. to continue their education by ‘classes’, lessons and generally by supplementing and developing theirs and their children’s education by whatever means possible.

The school, as the 1981/82 annual report, states was ‘not formed as a direct criticism of the State schools in the Boroughs of Hackney, Haringey, Islington or Enfield’, but to bridge the gap between the educational needs of black children and the expectations of teachers in the in state schools. Four teachers volunteered to help and parents raised money for equipment and gave their time. Initially, twenty-five children were taught in mixed ability classes, by the mid 1980s the numbers had doubled and the age range extended to 5 and 16 year olds. The teaching of African History was seen as essential to ‘provide the psychological cement’ to help black children in mainstream schools, a view shared with ‘our Patron Saint Malcolm X.’ The running of the school was managed by the staff and a Parents’ Committee. JMSS did not separate itself from the mainstream system but actively sought to engage with local schools and to shape education policy as the struggle over black education was to be a long one: ‘the Black Community must plan for ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF EDUCATIONAL WAR AND BEYOND’.

40 Ibid., 123-125.
41 Valentino A. Jones, We Are Our Own Educators! Josina Machel: From Supplementary to Black Complementary School (London: Karia Press, 1986) 2, 4, 11-12.
42 Jones, We Are Our Own Educators, 6, 8, 49.
43 Ibid., 1.
Mobilisation around education did not happen in isolation. Campaigns by parents were also supported and complemented by a network of black political organisations and groups44, bookshops, publishers and advice centres45 and weekly or monthly newspapers46. There were also separate non-education based defence campaigns in support of people arrested defending communities from racist attacks, campaigns against institutional practices which sectioned disproportionate numbers of black males into mental institutions and group resistance by black youth against the deprivations of inner-city living, against police harassment on the street, particularly under the ‘Sus’ laws47, and deaths in police custody. Black artists (photographers, filmmakers, painters, musicians and dub poets) challenged racist practices and stereotyping and showed how, in Stuart Hall’s words, ‘slavery, colonisation and colonialism locked us all – them (you) and us (them) – into a common, unequal, uneven history’.48 Filmmakers such as Horace Ové (Pressure, 1975), Isaac Julien (Territories, 1984), John Akomfrah (Handsworth Songs, 1986) in particular worked to reclaim this history and project it into the future and used and frequently subverted documentary modes and conventions in order to explore issues around ‘race’ and identity.49 Ove’s groundbreaking film Pressure (1975) directly addressed issues around education as it tells the story of Tony, son of West Indian immigrants, who finds himself caught between his parents’ church going conformity and his brother’s Black Power militancy as he seeks employment after leaving school. The film also dramatised disagreements

44 These included, for example, the Black Unity and Freedom Party, Black People’s Freedom Movement, Black People’s Alliance, Racial Adjustment Action Society and the Free University for Black Studies. The latter operated in London in the early 1970s.

45 These included, for example, Black People’s Information Centre, Grassroots Storefront, Unity Bookshop, New Beacon Books and Bogle Ouverture Publications.

46 These included, for example, Black Voice, Grassroots, Freedom News, Frontline, Uhuru, Harambee, Paw, African, West Indian Gazette, Magnet, Race Today, Black Liberator, Caribbean Times.

47 The informal name for a stop and search law that permitted a police officer to act on suspicion or ‘sus’ alone, see Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John M. Clarke and Brian Roberts, Policing the Crisis. Mugging, the State and Law and Order (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1978)


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about tactics so characteristic of social movements, a concern also addressed in the black press. La Rose (1976) pointed to a split in activism between black youth political organisation, such as the London based Black Students’ Action Collective\(^{50}\), and broader based black political organisation with black youth taking more radical positions in the area of education. The Black Parents’ Movement formed in 1975 and based in London and Manchester tried to bridge these differences and form alliances with radical youth movements.\(^{51}\) Tensions and fractures also emerged as a consequence of what was perceived as an undermining of independent black activism through the involvement in black community initiatives of state sponsored organisations, such as the Community Relations Councils (CRCs), and the acceptance of CRC and LEA funding for supplementary schools.

**Irish mobilisation against unpopular education**

The increase in Irish Catholic marriages in the 1950s and 1960s, and their typically large families, meant an increase in baptisms and an escalating demand for denominational Catholic schools. The 25 per cent increase in the Catholic school population recorded by Bernard Sharratt in the 1960s can largely be attributed to the Irish population in Britain.\(^{52}\) Delaney is broadly accurate, however, when he observes that in these schools teaching about ‘faith rather than fatherland predominated, and that communicating the distinctive features of Catholicism was the overriding objective’. ‘On the face of it’, he summarises, ‘English Catholic schools certainly did nothing to encourage the articulation of Irish identities’, a role that remained to a considerable degree in the private sphere.\(^{53}\) And yet the changing political and social conditions evident in the period after the 1960s helped to facilitate the emergence of more visible and assertive second generation Irish identities were already developing. Three things might be noted here.

First, political events in Northern Ireland in the period from the late 1960s onwards had a major impact on the Irish in Britain. The emergence of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland,


\(^{53}\) Delaney, *The Irish in Postwar Britain*, 158-159.
the bombing campaigns of the Provisional IRA in the 1970s and early 1980s and, arguably most importantly, the resulting introduction and application of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the hunger strikes of 1981 aided the ethnicization of the Irish in Britain. The identification of the Irish as an officially suspect community, subject to popular hostility and to the sweeping powers of stop, search (as with the ‘Sus’ laws) and detention given to the police encouraged a sense of the Irish – both first and second generation – as a community apart. Second, and as has already been argued, the new social movements that emerged in the same period and that were dedicated to social transformation routinely undertook educational activities in order to combat the effects of discrimination. The educational activities of various black groups in Britain offered an example of how the experiences of migrant individuals and their children could be harnessed and used as the basis of a programme of education dedicated to social and political change. Indeed, it was the relative success of these campaigns, and the spaces that they created for the articulation of minority ethnic demands, encouraged the ethnicization of the Irish. Especially from the late 1970s it is possible to detect a conscious attempt to construct ethnic boundaries and mobilise them in the pursuit of social and political change. Educational projects were crucial to this construction. Third, and importantly, at least some of these educational projects owe their success to the disproportionate participation of Catholic children in grammar school education in the 1960s. This meant that a generation of children of Irish migrants were ready and able to take up the opportunities available after the expansion of higher education in the 1960s. As a result there emerged a critical mass of activists in the 1970s who were central to the organisation of educational projects for the purpose of social transformation.

And yet if the Irish in Britain seemed to be reaching towards some provisional agreement that an Irish identity (or at least a set of inherited traditions or a distinctive culture) could no longer


55 Mirza and Reay, Spaces and Places of Black Educational Desire, argue that despite the routine nature of these activities ‘education as a site for collective social action is often overlooked in the literature on new social movements’. Sociology, 34 (3): 524.

be assumed, but would have to be consciously fostered, promoted and taught, there was rather less agreement on how this should be done and what should be included. The result was what Noel O’Connell described in 1985 as a ‘plethora of new societies, some local, some national’ dedicated to the education of Irish people.  

Arguably the most important of these educational bodies was the Irish in Britain Representation Group. Founded in 1981 it appeared at the outset as a predominately a cultural and educational body. Initially its primary aim was usually expressed in terms of the preservation of the Irish way of life in Britain. What this meant in practice was usually an attempt to transmit a sense of Irish identity to the British-born members of the community which rested on the idea of preservation: aiming to preserve Irish tradition and culture in Britain. The second national conference of the Irish in Britain Representation Group in 1983, for example, adopted a resolution in which the purpose of historical research and education was defined primarily as to ‘encourage and foster a sense of identity and an understanding of Irish cultural inheritance among people of Irish origin and their descendants’.  

Such a view supported and attached a great deal of significance to broadly defined cultural and educational activities. Particularly important for the purposes of this study is the role that the IBRG and its Education Officer Naseen Danaher played in the promotion and development of supplementary education projects for Irish adults, young people and children, as well as the application of specifically Irish perspectives in the formal school curriculum. At the same conference in 1983 Danaher called on delegates to:

- check the policy of their local authority, ask to see the school syllabus, and the books in the libraries. It was also possible to liaise with Roman Catholic schools and contact other Irish cultural organisations. Courses, for example, the Irish language and Irish history could be provided (through night classes if necessary).


58 London Metropolitan University (LMU), Archive of the Irish in Britain (AIB), Irish in Britain Representation Group Box 1: Minutes of the second National Conference of the Irish in Britain Representation (26.03.1983), p.4.


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In this later period, in which multicultural education as articulated in the Swann Report\(^{60}\), was now at least rhetorically adopted, it is noticeable how the IBRG accepted the necessity for supplementary education for adults – especially parents and teachers – but where children were concerned their efforts were centred on changing curricula in schools. There are several reasons for this: lack of leadership in the Irish community at large was routinely alleged in debate and more convincingly, if also more provocatively, it was sometimes argued that most Irish migrants and their children had no meaningful attachment to a wider Irish community in Britain.\(^{61}\) In fact, it was precisely this predicament, and the fear of losing children to the community, that acted as an additional motivation for activists. Perhaps most importantly, however, was the changed political context in which minority education projects operated. In this respect the campaigning successes of black groups provided a model for the Irish and provided evidence that effective lobbying could promote change. This was particularly the case in education policy where some progressive local authorities created an environment in which the hope of curricular and pedagogical reform in pursuit of multiculturalism now seemed realistic. Moreover, Labour’s victory in the 1981 London council elections, and Ken Livingstone’s subsequent emergence as a leftwing leader of the Greater London Council (GLC) meant that progressive policies designed to alleviate racial disadvantage were taken seriously and funded. In short, it is possible to detect something of a cultural and educational renaissance underway amongst those diverse Irish communities in Britain in the 1980s. In specialist archives, as well as in scattered local government files, newspaper reports and autobiographical accounts language classes – for adults and children – at Saturday schools, history courses and research, reminiscence work and literacy projects flourished. Space does not permit a full exploration of these projects so a few examples must suffice.

Inevitably given patterns of migration, a good deal of this activity centred on London. The IBRG, for example, founded a number of local groups in London boroughs like Harrow (December 1982) and Camden (1985). Their aims tended to be articulated along the lines of promoting a positive sense of Irish identity, partly by combating the negative effects that derogatory Irish stereotypes had on

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young people, and these sometimes warned of the alienation from family and community that resulted in the recruitment of young Irish people for fascist politics. Recommended responses were cultural and educational: the GLC’s Race Relations Advisor noted that regular ceilidhs were an opportunity for the Irish to ‘enjoy their indigenous culture’, whilst language teaching, exhibitions and displays on Irish history and oral and video reminiscences were a method of ‘strengthening the cultural identity of the Irish community’. The first publication of the very significant work done by the Ethnic Communities Oral History Project funded by Hammersmith and Fulham Libraries was the 1988 *The Irish in Exile. Stories of Migration* by Anne Lynch. The GLC also helped to fund the research and collections work of the Irish in Britain History Group whose origins lay in a hugely successful conference held in 1980 and attended by over four hundred delegates to explore the history of the Irish in Britain. Projects to record popular experiences of migration and community life, a programme of monthly seminars, the foundation of an archive of the Irish in Britain and the publication of an important bibliography all quickly followed. Irish language classes blossomed – the *Bun Scoal Lan Gaelach* – in Brent was reported to be very popular in 1985 and it is possible to trace the activities of creative writing, theatrical and community art groups. Yet perhaps most energy was reserved for the campaigns that sought inclusion of an Irish dimension in formal education, and a greater presence for Irish Studies in the informal and tertiary education sectors. This has recently been the subject of some historical research, but a great deal more is required if the processes through which Irish dimensions came to be applied to formal curricula is to be adequately understood. For the moment it is perhaps enough to note the relative success of the

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62 London Metropolitan Archive (LMA), IBRG (Harrow). LRB/FN/C4/02/09-10. Funding applications and reports 1983-86.

63 LMA, IBRG (Camden), LRB/FN/C4/02/56. Funding applications and reports. 1985-86.

64 LMU, AIB, Irish in Britain Representation Group Box 1; Irish in Britain History Group – Statement of Policy (undated); Irish in Britain History A *History of the Irish in Britain* (London, 1986); Fionn Mac Cool, ‘March of history’ *Irish Post*, September 13 1986: 8


Irish Dimensions in British Education conferences, the curriculum material produced that related to it and its application at secondary level in a manner that attempted to remove a framing of Irish history as an aspect – and a relatively minor one – of British politics. Moreover, the support for this kind of campaign could now sometimes be found in the institutions of adult and higher education where Irish Studies was beginning to establish its presence.

Inevitably, these attempts to research and educate the history of the Irish in Britain involved a politics of both history and education. The meaning of this historical research and its place in the context of a developing multiculturalism, and a broader anti-racist struggle, was a subject of consistent debate. If one strand of thinking supported a broadly multicultural approach – with an emphasis on cultural transmission and the exchange of information – another adopted a consciously anti-racist position the value of historical study lay in its ability to identify racism as a structural feature of capitalist economies. This was basically a Marxist or neo-Marxist argument, heavily inflected by a particular reading of history that sought to develop links between ‘colonial minorities’.

Arguments

As stated at the outset, this study was conceived as an exploration of supplementary education as it was developed by post 1945 immigrant and ethnic minority groups in Britain and it important to stress the term exploration. At the moment understanding of supplementary education for ethnic minority groups is dominated by race relations or educational studies paradigms. The task

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67 LMU, IBRG, Box 1: Reports on 1st (February 1984) and 2nd (1990) National Conferences on Irish Dimensions in British Education; Letter and typescript document entitled ‘Racism, Education and the Irish in Britain’ Mary Hickman (IBRG, Islington) to Frances Morrell (leader Inner London Education Authority) 5 August 1983.


69 For detailed accounts of the development of multicultural education and anti-racist struggles see: Barry Troyna and Jenny Williams, Racism, Education and the State (London: Croom Helm, 1986) and Barry Troyna and Bruce Carrington, Education, Racism and Reform (London: Routledge, 1990)

here was to construct a history of supplementary education that deliberately transcended ethnic

group identities (thus the inclusion of the Irish and Afro-Caribbean case studies), one that was

interested in the process of learning (thus the broad definition of education) and one which returned
to original sources. The agenda was ambitious. We also recognise that while we can point to

similarities between the experiences of Afro-Caribbean and Irish supplementary education in post

1945 Britain their respective trajectories are also very distinctive. Nevertheless, we believe that

three key arguments emerge from the research.

Supplementary education was a vibrant but diverse field of activity in post 1945 Britain. The
case study of Afro-Caribbean supplementary schools demonstrated the variety of size, ideology,
organisational structures and physical settings to be found among those pioneering schools. For the
Irish similar diversity was in evidence in the different philosophies and practices of supplementary
education projects. The first arguments emerging from this data are, therefore, rather simple but
important empirical ones. By concentrating on the process of learning – and not the simple existence
of schools – it has been possible to identify the emergence of what Said called communities of effort
and interpretation. 71 These were communities who came together to supplement and correct
perceived weaknesses in state education. If these efforts are currently recognised at all – and they
are routinely ignored – they are often discussed in terms of the preservation of identities in the face
of pressures to assimilate, or in terms of a longer history of resistance to state education projects.
Now, while these arguments remain relevant they do not do justice to the diversity, context or
imaginative efforts of the activists who were involved with them.

Jones, in his account of Josina Machel school, pointed to ‘the historical tradition of Black
people wherever they find themselves’ to engage as educators of themselves and their children. This
suggests some other possible genealogies for understanding the emergence of supplementary
education projects in the 1970s and 1980s. 72 The long tradition of black activism in Britain with links
to the anti-slavery and anti-imperial movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Pan
African movement of the 1930s and the self help movement organised by Dr Harold Moody and the

71 Said, Cultural and Imperialism.

72 Jones, We Our Own Educators!

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Myers, K and Grosvenor, I. 'Exploring supplementary education: margins, theories and methods',
League of Coloured Peoples in the 1930s might be considered predecessors to these educational campaigns. For whilst new black political groupings emerged in the 1970s many activists were involved in political struggles before their arrival in the UK in the 1950s and 1960s. Further, as Hall commented, Afro-Caribbean culture and history ‘is precisely’, the result of the ways slavery, colonisation and colonialism ‘were irrevocably locked together’ and research on black slave communities has shown that while seemingly powerless slaves performed small acts of resistance on an everyday basis to challenge their oppression and to express their subjectivity. Denied direct forms of written expression slaves used traditional vernacular forms – storytelling, folktales, and music – as a means for their own education. Further, in the post slavery and emancipation period of Caribbean history the missionary movements produced black teachers, but also what were termed ‘irregular teachers’ in 1840s Jamaica, who operated outside of the missionary school system much to the concern of white missionaries: ‘if a natural outlet is not opened for the exercise of the talents and zeal of our brethren, they will break out in irregular methods’. Such ‘irregular methods’, the use of traditional vernacular forms and evidence of earlier self help black organisations all point to the possibility of constructing more complex black supplementary education genealogies.

Even if the less established historiography of the Irish in Britain makes it difficult to document it may also be possible to construct Irish supplementary education genealogies. For whilst Mary Hickman’s important work dominates current understandings of the education of the Irish in Britain, here too it is possible to point to a tradition of oral narratives, music and dance as a form of education. These are unconventional but important potential sources for historians and they could

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74 Hall, ‘Reconstruction work’, 6.


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help to shift a research agenda away from the existence of schools and more towards the question of learning.

In any case, it is clear that the long term perspective of the historian can help connect the post 1945 supplementary education with the existence of earlier forms of education, opposition and resistance. Yet it is also important to understand the specific circumstances of the period. And here the existence and then the slow demise of European empires are crucial. The scholar activists and educationalists documented in this paper were profoundly shaped by those events, and they sought to locate their own histories of migration in that broader context. In fact, a second key argument concerns precisely these cultures of history.

The scholar activists in the Irish and Afro-Caribbean communities of post 1945 Britain were routinely keen to map the impact of colonialism, to record and celebrate moments of resistance to colonial and imperial rule and, in doing so, to construct traditions and histories of opposition that supported claims to distinct historical experiences and contemporary identities. Sometimes these attempts were clearly romanticised and sketchy on historical evidence. But more important for present purposes was the way in which they brought people together for the purpose of learning. For whatever their aims and political allegiances these examples demonstrate how scholar activists were critical in developing history and historical thinking in the struggles of immigrant and minority communities in post 1945 Britain; they helped to make those communities ‘history minded’. It can be difficult to trace this kind of activity and its influence because it cannot always be measured simply in terms of scholarly publications, numbers of college courses and students. Yet there is enough evidence to suggest that post 1945 Britain was a culture in which immigrant and minority communities were interested and engaged in historical research, debate and discussion. Those communities looked to the past to explain their circumstances, to work through historical narratives, and to develop a sense of the past or a shared heritage that was usable in the present. That meant claiming a heritage of struggle but developing it in new ways to suit new circumstances.

This heritage was frequently recovered in the midst of other issues that usually concerned the education of and young people, and which might be considered local and parochial. However, debates about the availability of good schools, reliable text books, racism, or the behaviour of young
people were transformed by communities of effort and interpretation. They became demands not just about resources but about the development of both national and cultural identities and, at their most radical, were formulated as struggles for social liberation. Educational campaigns of this kind often looked locally to explain the weaknesses of state education, but drew inspiration and argument from a global perspective, looking outwards to newly independent states in Africa and Latin America, to civil rights struggles in the USA and working to develop Diaspora and class solidarities. Thus black educators could develop some very diverse pedagogical interests ranging from, for example, L. R. Hubbard’s study technology, to the innovative but short-lived Centre for Urban Education in New York City under the directorship of Robert A. Dentler, to the writings of Freire whose work for the revolutionary and anti-colonial Cabral government in Guinea-Bissau ensured that they became popular reading. 77 Similarly, one strand of thinking for Irish activists concerned the celebration of a cultural Irishness, another engaged with the writings of James Connolly and still others were influenced by Marxist theories of imperialism and/or the attempt to foster an identity as an Irish Diaspora. 78 What this demonstrates is that though these learning communities were formed to address local grievances they typically developed pan-national and/or global perspectives. In their publications, newsletters, pamphlets, images and films they provided some of the imaginative resources for new sites of identification and new, and apparently more authentic, modes of identity. History, in other words, provided the resources for identity, consciousness and dignity – and the basis for a new confidence. But these activities were not simply defensive and they did not simply preserve some essentialised identity. Instead the educational and supplementary projects reviewed here promoted, sometimes unwittingly, the kinds of transnational and postcolonial identities that have become a source of major political and educational debate in recent decades across Europe and other parts of the world.

77 Claims about the attraction of Hubbard’s study technology are in LMA 4462/D/01/311, J, Ramlal, Draft manuscript ‘West Indians’ Alternative Supplementary Education’ (n.d., 1981?): 10. John La Rose’s archive at the George Padmore Institute (GPI) demonstrates a wide range of educational interests. See, for example, GPI, Black Education Movement 4/6/1/1: Reports, Fact Sheets and publications on education and play centres 1956-1971 for La Rose’s undated annotations on an Urban Education Centre Brochure.


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In stressing the postcolonial orientation of these supplementary education projects, it is important not to ignore the continued importance of class and gender in explaining their origins and development. This is a third key argument. The original impulse for the Afro-Caribbean supplementary schools in London came out of a class analysis of schooling that attempted to unite the Greek Parents Association and the Haringey Parents Group.\(^7^9\) Over a decade later the same class analysis is evident in the pamphlet *The Key to Change in Education and Schooling* that recognised the specific problem of racism for black children, but maintained that working class families – white and black – were failed by the education system.\(^8^0\) As Avtar Brah has argued, these campaigns around education were a campaign in the ‘interests of civil liberties, freedom from oppression, and for social justice for everyone’\(^8^1\). Moreover those struggles were informed and practised by the kinds of political and educational commitments that emerged out of the feminist movement in the 1970s. In particular, feminists were crucial participants in the debates around the provision and practices of supplementary education projects.

If these were activities that aimed for social justice they seemed to have been frustrated not only by internal dissension and debate, but also by the absence of any critical white working class educational movement. Indeed, in developments such as ‘School above the Pub’ – where a group of white parents in Dewsbury, Yorkshire removed children from a mixed ethnicity school in order to maintain their own ‘culture’ – it is possible to detect a significant failure in the education and the imagination of white working class movements.\(^8^2\) For in this critical period the internationalist aspirations of left wing political movements, and the educational capital that they relied on, seem to have failed. Working class notions of community not only found little room for immigrants,

\(^7^9\) GPI, London. BEM, 4/7/1/6: correspondence on education issues. La Rose to Mr Chapple, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Edward Short, Minister for Education, no date. Short was Minister of Education 1968-70.


\(^8^2\) See, Fred Naylor, *Dewsbury: The School above the Pub* (London: Claridge Press) 1989; This is an electronic preprint of an article whose final and definitive form has been published in History of Education © 2011 Copyright Taylor & Francis; History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society is available online at: [http://www.tandfonline.com/thed20](http://www.tandfonline.com/thed20).
especially those from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia, but developed a powerful sentimental and reactionary strand that blamed newcomers for economic, social and educational problems.83