

1988

Training Educational Psychologists for Working in Multicultural Communities:

What are Training Courses in England and Wales doing?

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Introduction

This survey of initial training courses which took place in 1987, formed part of the brief of the Working Party whose remit is described in full detail in the article by Sheila Wolfendale in this issue.

The purpose of the study was to learn from the tutors to each of the twelve courses for the initial training of educational psychologists in England and Wales how they prepared their trainees for working in multi-cultural communities. Two members of the Working Party therefore designed a questionnaire which covered course contributors, course planning/content and fieldwork experiences; presented it to the remainder of the Working Party for critical comment; revised it in the light of those observations and sent it to the tutors. All twelve questionnaires were completed and returned during February/April 1987. With respect to the results that follow, no reference is made to specific courses because the focus of the study is the overall pattern across courses and consequently tutors were not asked to identify their own courses.

Findings

(A) Course contributors from ethnic minority groups (e.m.gs.)

None of the courses has either a tutor or associate tutor from any e.m.g., though three courses each has the benefit of the involvement of up to two fieldwork supervisors from e.m.gs. For seven of the courses educational psychologists from e.m.gs. (to be referred to subsequently as ethnic minority E.Ps.) contribute in other ways to courses, e.g. as occasional guest speakers. Finally, in the case of four courses, ethnic minority E.Ps do not make any kind of contribution. Given that a number of the courses are located in L.E.A's which employ ethnic minority E.Ps, e.g. one tutor indicated that the course is in an authority with one Chinese/S.African and one Asian E.P., and given that, across England and Wales, Sheila Wolfendale reveals in this publication that there are ethnic minority E.Ps, it is surprising that such E.Ps play only a very small part in training.

(B) Course policies with respect to the identification and/or selection of trainees from e.m.gs.

These range from two courses which select purely on merit and take no account of ethnicity to one course which aims to train up to ten percent ethnic minority E.Ps and which identifies such trainees by means of a 'monitoring' sheet. Between these extremes are three courses which are on the look out for and encourage teachers with the necessary qualifications and who are from e.m.gs to apply for entry to their respective courses, and seven which operate what they refer to variously as 'positive discrimination', 'reverse discrimination' and 'affirmative action', though in at least two cases such an approach is operated in a cautious manner. It would seem, therefore, that most course tutors are keen to take on their courses people from e.m.gs.

(C) Involvement of ethnic minority E.Ps in the selection of trainees

Only two courses have such an involvement and in each it is an Afro-Caribbean who participates in the selection procedure.

(D) The keeping of records of ethnic minority applicants

Only two courses (and not the same two referred to in section C) keep such records, though the tutors to three courses mentioned that they could, if they wished to, identify ethnic minority applicants. One of the three indicated that it would to some extent be possible because applicants are required to provide a self-photograph.

(E) The ethnic background of course members for the academic years 1981/2 to 1985/6.

The results presented in the table are based on eleven of the twelve courses.

Ethnic group/Year	1981/2		1982/3		1983/4		1984/5		1985/6		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
(a) Afro-Caribbean	1	1.0	0	0	2	2.1	0	0	1	0.9	4	0.8
(b) Asian	3	2.9	2	2.3	2	2.1	1	0.9	0	0	10	2.0
(c) Other e.m.groups	4+	3.9	2	2.3	1	1.0	2*	1.8	0	0	9	1.8
Groups other than a,b or c	94	92.2	84	95.4	92	94.8	106	97.3	108	99.1	480	95.4
Total trained (TT)	102		88		97		109		107		503	
$[(a+b+c)/TT] \times 100$	7.8		4.6		5.2		2.7		0.9		4.6	
+includes 2 Mexicans *1 from China and 1 from Gibraltar												

In not one of the years does the percentage of ethnic minority Educational Psychologists in training exceed eight and it was below three percent for the last two years in question. Furthermore, for the academic years 1983/4 to 1985/6, the proportion appears to have been declining consistently year by year. Finally, over the five year period, more than twice as many Asian as Afro-Caribbean Educational Psychologists were trained. As quoted by Pearn (1985) the Commission for Racial Equality estimates the Black population for Great Britain to be approximately 5%, with marked regional variations. The figures for course members need to be set in that context.

(F) The contribution of ethnic minority Educational Psychologists to various aspects of training.

None of the courses appears to involve ethnic minority Educational Psychologists in any of the following:

- (1) the design and planning of the total course;
- (2) the preparation of materials sent out to prospective applicants; and
- (3) course publicity

In view of the results described in section A, these results are not so surprising.

With respect to contributing to certain theoretical components of the course, ethnic minority Educational Psychologists are involved in five of the twelve courses. All their contributions relate to multi-cultural issues and range from a lecture on the nature of racism and its implications for the Educational Psychologist, to a 2.5 day workshop spread over the year which covers racial awareness (dealt with both theoretically and by means of exercises), bilingualism and the trainees' experiences of multi-cultural issues.

(G) The nature of fieldwork experience as it relates to ethnic minority children/families.

For only three of the courses is it a requirement that all trainees have experience working with ethnic minority children and families, though on at least two other courses it is strongly encouraged. For nine of the courses, however, there is an expectation that most trainees will have experience working with children/families from ethnic minority backgrounds. Furthermore, on ten of the courses opportunities are provided for one or more of the trainees on each course to work with ethnic minority children/families, e.g. on one course approximately one trainee per year undertakes a special placement in a school or service providing for ethnic minority children. On this course such opportunities are actively sought and recommended to trainees even though there is only a small proportion of people from ethnic minority backgrounds in the region.

(H) General comments on what the training courses are doing

Only three of the courses have a definite policy on such training and one which is reflected in what actually happens at both the theoretical and practical levels. The tutors to all the other courses would like to do more, though those whose courses are located in areas where there are few people from ethnic minority backgrounds find it more difficult to provide trainees with the right kind of experience and have therefore to rely on the trainees gaining it during their long fieldwork placements in other parts of Britain.

Discussion points

This particular study took the form of a snapshot, and like most snapshots, is constrained by the quality of the instrument used, and the inevitable compromises involved in maintaining a balance between the need for sharp focus on particular points as well as a broad perspective against which to judge them. Amongst the compromises, we omitted questions about the content of any curriculum coverage of multicultural issues (e.g. assessment, child rearing practices), nor did we ask about those course contributors from ethnic minority backgrounds who did not happen to be psychologists (e.g. social workers, mother tongue co-ordinators, parents, community workers) nor from psychologists other than educational psychologists (e.g. clinical, community, research). With hindsight these, and other, questions would have made a more comprehensive - if longer - questionnaire. Despite these caveats, a number of important and useful findings did emerge, and have been summarised above in paragraphs (A) to (H). For instance, our findings indicated that courses in general did not seem to be addressing multicultural issues adequately. Whilst two courses did report that they tackled racism, there was no clear evidence that this was covered by the other ten. The absence of agreed guidelines to courses on the role, place and possible content of the coverage of multicultural issues is a major shortcoming at a time when courses are struggling to squeeze existing core curriculum requirements within a one year framework. We therefore propose that the Tutors Group/D.E.C.P. Training Committee Core Curriculum document be revised to include a more specific statement on the place of multicultural issues within initial training courses. There was not sufficient opportunity within the questionnaire for tutors to elaborate fully on whether multicultural issues should be a clearly demarcated course component, or whether they should be a continuous theme embedded within virtually every aspect of course content. These positions, of course, are not mutually exclusive, and many other specific course elements or modules are continuously interlinked via seminars and tutorials. In view of the importance of multicultural issues, is there not now a compelling case for them informing virtually every aspect of course content, as well as receiving specific curriculum attention?

Absence of
evidence
is not
evidence
of absence.
→ yes!
+ five
others!

Whilst we did ask about the contribution of ethnic minority educational psychologists to initial training (see (F) above) we did not collect information about whether this contribution mirrored - or distorted - their representation within the profession. For instance, do they encounter further barriers to being involved with training? If so, from what source, and how can they be overcome? Is any involvement in curriculum topics solely or primarily focussed on ethnic minority issues? If so, is such a specific identification desirable?

The findings presented in (G) above relate to one aspect of fieldwork placements for trainees. However, they do raise questions about the desirability of educational psychologists completing their initial training without experience of working with black families, or co-professionals. In our view, this point seems to underpin a number of issues quite apart from the professional training of the particular educational psychologist. For instance, to what extent is course curriculum coverage validated (or not) by the practical experiences afforded to the trainee? What are the opportunities for practical experiences to be fed back into the course and its successive development? The regional distribution of courses imposes particular constraints on some, but it is not clear whether affirmative policy or chance opportunity determines what happens in even those courses located in more culturally diverse areas.

Recruitment of trainees from ethnic minority backgrounds to courses of initial training has not proved satisfactory, and paragraph (E) above summarises the position over a five year period. The slight evidence of a slight decline - from an admittedly low baseline - in incidence over this period suggests that a critical situation is becoming worse. A number of reasons for this might relate to the attractiveness of the teaching component in training, or to subsequent difficulties in obtaining teaching posts, but it also raises questions about how (or whether) educational psychology is perceived as a potential profession by members of ethnic minority communities. We were not aware at the time of the study, of the existence of any figures on the proportion of black undergraduates as a whole, nor on the percentage of those students who were studying psychology as opposed to other subjects, nor on the proportion going on to study for a P.G.C.E. Such a survey was beyond the aims of this study, but figures could possibly be collated via the B.P.S. or its Group of Teachers of Psychology.

More importantly, the views of black pupils and their parents should be sought about psychology as a subject of study, its applications, and about its relevance as a potential career.

Some information has already been provided on the apparent under-representation of black trainees by Pearn's (1985) survey of training departments in Great Britain on behalf of the B.P.S. Standing Committee On Equal Opportunities. One of his respondents commented on "the 'hazardous' qualification process which was probably discouraging to potential applicants who, for the most part, needed to set out on the trail when making 'A' level choices." He also reported suggestions that the successive selection points (undergraduate, P.G.C.E., teaching posts, secondment) offered "amplified scope for covert discrimination and denial of equal opportunities by those people in society who are consciously or unconsciously racist." The introduction of GRIST to replace the pooling arrangements current at the time of Pearn's survey has further complicated the already 'hazardous' training route.

The returns from course tutors underlined their concerns about the issues covered by the questionnaire, and the steps they were taking and planning to take to revise their own practice and arrangements. As stated earlier, this was a snapshot, and from the additional comments attached to the questionnaire, it is likely that a repeat survey would identify changes that courses have made. Our original intention was to provide some basic information as a starting point to enable the profession as a whole - not just the working group - to address training and related issues. The proposals and suggestions we have made above are our own and should be seen as such. The findings - and the issues embedded within them - are now available for public debate to provide an opportunity for a re-appraisal of thinking and practice in respect of preparing - and recruiting - educational psychologists for working in a multicultural society.

References

Pearn, M.A. 1985. "Are we training enough black educational psychologists?" Standing Committee for Equal Opportunities of the B.P.S.