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BOOK REVIEW :

Racism in Children Lives : A Study of mainly white Primary Schools
By Barry Troyna and Richard Hatcher,
Published by Routledge in association with The National Children's Bureau.
(1992) London - Great Britain.

Casual visitors to the schools studied by Barry Troyna and Richard Hatcher could doubtless claim that cross-culturalism was alive and well; that the children were mixing harmoniously together, and all was well on the racial front. But Barry and Richard found this was far from being so.

Their book, *Racism in Children's Lives*, could be the book that Asian parents of bullied children have been waiting for. A book that the bullied children themselves have been waiting for.

The authors maintain that in England, Teachers' Unions and individual schools do not respond to complaints; head teachers and staff refuse to face them; politicians resolutely stick to the theory that cases of racism are individual aberrations from the fundamental fairness of British society, therefore anti-racist programs are 'spurious'.

Consequently, at most British primary schools, and at many high schools, creeping to school in terror of the waiting bullies shadows the education of too many children. Those who could make a difference choose to pretend it is not happening; shamefully deny what is going on in the classroom and playground; or, when forced to take notice, blame the victim. 'Learning in Terror', therefore, with racial harassment, inevitably become frightening daily realities for Asian children.

Barry Troyna and Richard Hatcher study this fearsome question qualitatively. It would have been comparatively easy to deal with the subject quantitatively - there is, apparently, almost endless exotic, even spine-chilling, material to be gathered from many more schools than the three they studied. Probably sales would have been higher, and film rights sought! But these authors avoided this trap and, whilst gathering instances of racial terrorising, cared more to seek the root, the cause, the reason, why some students settle down to determined hegemony over others, apparently unaware of, or uncaring about, or even enjoying, the intense misery and fear they cause.

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Full marks for trying to discover these roots. Maybe the human heart is expert at eluding the real issues, and kidding even itself.

So the authors probed to seek what lay behind children's racism. Full marks also to those children who were perceptive, or honest, enough to admit that when 'white' persons went to non-white societies, they were happily received, yet when non-white persons arrive in 'white' countries violence along a continuum of name-calling ('Paki' is a favourite) to murder is their 'welcome'. This was considered unfair.

It was cheering for the authors to find that children have a way of seeking after equality and fairness - even the most 'vicious' of bullies gave these lip service. That was a revelation which should surely be exploited!

The authors persuasively show us that children must pick their way through a positive jungle of contradictions: There are parents' belligerent views that 'Asians shouldn't be here', and that 'they are crowding up our country'; a fact of life for the children is Asian corner shops where 'whites' are not trusted; the children hear neighbourhood views that 'blacks are taking us over'; they watch TV news displaying dirt, beggars, and mass starvation in the third world, with the backlash of 'white' children taking a superior attitude to Asian fellow students; they watch white boys taking pride in acting brutally; they experience anxiety when hatred and fear lead to black students setting up their own power base; they know that teaching staff frequently refuse to deal with racial problems.

Over against all this, some parents tell their children that Asians 'are just the same inside ... it doesn't matter what they're like on the outside'; there are shared local working class struggles, and the daily social interaction at school - sometimes leading to close friendships - all this contradictory pull and push come together to enmesh the 'white' children, and the outcomes mean either fear or security for the Asians.

What was extremely interesting and potentially important was that the children frequently maintained their own egalitarian views in spite of parents and neighbourhood, reaching out for fairness among all children.

The book ends with three mutually dependent elements:

British schools need:

1. **A clear and firm policy regarding bullying of Asian students.**
2. **Similar policies to deal with other forms of bullying.**
3. **A curriculum that addresses race, and related forms of inequality, and justice within schools and in the wider society.**

Determined principals can contain bullying in their schools, but their influence only goes so far as the school gates. Instilling the above three ideals could take us beyond them.

This book has ripped aside the stolid curtain of hypocrisy veiling blatant racism in British schools, and has exposed as a lie the vaunted claim of the 'fundamental fairness of the British system'.

It would be neat and tidy to end the review at this point. But we too, in Australia, must cry: 'Mea culpa'. Daily, Asian students must openly suffer name-calling, ('Gooks' and 'Slants' are favourite taunts). A governmental policy of social justice and equity now being promulgated in Australia, which schools are required to implement, could lighten the burden many children carry.

We also sorely need qualitative answers as to why children of Aboriginal descent find themselves alienated in the Australian educational system, and drop out far too soon.

Maybe, but only maybe, a curriculum addressing social justice and equity in our schools and wider society would be a start. Then who knows to what enlightenment both ends of the globe could travel.....
