

Why a Conference for Mixed Race Young People is a Great Idea.

My Father is Black Caribbean of Jamaican Heritage and my mother is White British. When I was younger I had an experience that went something like this....

My parents split up when I was quite young and I would visit my Dad at weekends and take holidays with him and his second family. During one holiday I was called names and got into a fight with some boys. After the fight my Dad asked what all the fuss was about. I told him the boys had called me a "nigger" and "blackie". He responded by saying: "...Well, you are not Black, so what are you worrying about"? This statement left me feeling slightly confused but I soon pushed the incident to the back of my mind. A similar experience happened a few months later when I was at home with my mother. I got into another argument with some boys and they made similar racist remarks. I told my Mum and she said: "Tell them you're Black and proud." This again left me feeling a little confused, yet able to recognise that my parents' 'monoheritage' perspective was very different to my own 'mixed heritage'.

On reflection, I can see this moment in my life representing a sense of 'nowhereness' – a feeling of not completely fitting in or belonging. So, I looked to my teachers to demystify some of what troubled me and tried to find a place of 'somewhereness' – a place where I belonged and was



represented – only to discover that Mixed Race people were invisible within the curriculum local and national policy or negatively stereotyped. Eventually, I decided that it was important to give *myself* permission to create my own sense of 'groundedness' which is about having confidence in my 'mixedness' and pride in being Mixed Race, despite the fact some people may never, ever appreciate that confidence.

There may be many young people across the country who have had similar experiences to me. But actually, whether the story is the same or different, it doesn't really matter. The important thing is that the 'lived' experience of Mixed Race young people is heard, listened to and understood. With an older and slightly wiser head on, I am now able to see my 'confusion' during those tender and vulnerable years as not being mine, but a condition that was imposed on me by others.

Platforms like this conference for young people of Mixed Race are crucial for a number of reasons. For example, young people of Mixed Race tend to be subsumed under a 'Black identity' where their specific concerns are rarely raised. They are often forced to choose one racial identity at the exclusion of another. Mixed Race young people tell me they no longer want to be ignored and whilst their cultural heritage is only a part of who they actually are, it is still significant. They see their 'mixedness' as being 'just normal' and want services for young people to find a balance between being invisible and being stereotyped

I believe that this first Young People's Multiple Heritage Conference for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire has already begun to fashion this movement and I continue to meet many people across the country who encourage my efforts to make a difference. In any case, the energy and vibrancy with which the young people approach this subject motivates my work on the Project to the highest degree. It is to them that I am greatly indebted and why I continue to document their 'journeys' from a place of 'nowhereness' through to 'groundedness'.

Bradley Lincoln, Project Manager

OUR CONFERENCE DAY

Over 50 young people of Mixed Race attended the event held at Colwick Racecourse in Nottingham on 17th July 2007. It brought together young people aged between 13 – 16 years from five different secondary schools and colleges in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

The aims of the conference were as follows:

- To encourage an open debate on Mixed Race issues.
- To establish a sense of 'groundedness' in and around Mixed Race issues.
- To make recommendations to schools, local authority services and central government on Mixed Race issues.

The conference was opened by Denise Williams (an Education Consultant specialising in Black and Mixed Heritage Achievement) who reminded everyone present that this was indeed a landmark event and a space for young people of Mixed Race to have their voices heard. The title of her brief address was: "You are making history, but you're still the future."



Project Manager, Bradley Lincoln then spoke about *'his journey'* from 'nowhereness' to 'somewhereness' to eventually launching the Project and establishing a sense of 'groundedness'. He aims to capture some of the optimism he now sees in today's Mixed Race youth as a means to encourage others who have had similar experiences to his own.

It was great fun testing people's knowledge of 'Mixed Race Issues' and attendees openly admitted that many of the answers were surprising to them. They were encouraged to research the information they had gleaned and not take anything for granted.

Two Youth Facilitators reminded all present that issues of Mixed Race were *everyone's* concern by reading the poem 'Good News, Bad News'.

The main conference activities were workshops that had been themed and designed by Youth Facilitators who underwent two days of training.

The morning workshops – in mixed school groups - were led by two Youth Facilitators and one Scribe with experience in this area of work. Each Scribe carefully noted the thoughts and opinions of the young people in relation to issues of Mixed Race that were raised. In the afternoon workshop, the young people were organised into their school groups and they devised an action plan for improvement on Mixed Race issues in their school. The workshops concluded with each group feeding back their points for action to the entire group of young people.

FINDINGS: **WHAT YOU HAD TO SAY**

What do you prefer to be called?

The range of terms you used to self-identify was as diverse as the different backgrounds you represented on the day.

The most popular term was Mixed Race. You said this was the term you felt most comfortable with and the term you were most likely to use with your friends. Some of you use 'Black' to describe yourselves whilst others feel that 'Black' disregards the 'White side' of your family. (This was a particular issue for those of you who live in extended White families and rarely, if ever, see your 'Black side'.) Many more of you, however, recognise that you are a 'mixture' of ethnic groups where 'Black' does not even feature, so you also felt that 'Black' was an inaccurate term to describe your identity.

Most of you considered the terms 'Dual/Mixed/Multiple Heritage' to be appropriate, but expressions that you would be unlikely to use because you thought they were "too posh" or awkward.

The vast majority of you considered 'Coloured' and 'Half-caste' to be terms that



were outdated and unacceptable. You also said you found it difficult to challenge older family members who still used these terms because they often came from a generation where those terms were considered acceptable and you did not want your challenge to be perceived as being disrespectful.

What's positive about Mixed Race?

You cited a number of positive aspects to being Mixed Race. The rate at which the population was increasing and more and more people were choosing to identify as 'mixed' was just one. Some of you felt very comfortable about interacting with two (or more) ethnic groups, whilst some of you stated that you felt more at ease in a Black group. You also felt that a *positive* outcome of the 'racism from both sides' helped some of you to develop a "tougher mentality" towards life.

What's negative about Mixed Race?

Negative assumptions about Mixed Race people and the discrimination you face were the main points you raised. Some of you expressed that levels of discrimination were dependent on where you lived and what school you went to and added that memories of negative experiences were more likely to stay with you than positive ones.

What is school like?

(Please see School Action Plans later.)

You spent lots of time in your workshops discussing what life is like for you in school. Some of you described feeling quite isolated in your setting because there were few Black or Mixed Race students. Empathy with this feeling was expressed by the young man who said that at his old school:

"The teachers treated us the same.....because there were so many people of diversity in the school."

On the whole, your feelings about school were negative. Most of your criticism centred on relationships with teaching staff and the curriculum.

You clearly felt that unsupportive teachers' attitudes had a huge impact on how you achieved at school.



*"Teachers don't find the time or willingness to help change young people's attitudes. You **can** change a person's attitude."*

"Teachers don't help – they are getting paid anyway, they aren't bothered."

"Teachers don't like me. I'm different; people don't like what's different. They are afraid of people who are different."

You felt that some learning mentors were successfully filling a gap that teachers left in school but that building good relationships with adults in school was more about them having the 'right' personality than the 'right' position.

"It would have to be the right teacher. There aren't any mentors in school anymore but when there was, it was ok."

"I want someone to understand me like I understand them. Mixed Race and 'Black' people are good listeners. It's hard to find good listeners nowadays. New mentors tend to give answers out of a text book, this isn't what I need."

When trying to unpick reasons for high exclusion rates amongst Mixed Race students, there was a roughly equal split between those of you who felt teacher attitude was to blame whilst the rest of you considered student attitude to be at fault. Some of you were torn and could not decide:

"I don't know if exclusions happen more to Black males because of the teachers or the young person's bad attitude."



It is clear that some of you feel badly let down by teachers.

"I'm scared to try to make a difference. I've tried it and then the teachers leave."

"All the good teachers leave; the school is changing. We are getting inexperienced teachers replacing them."

"We have had lots of teachers. It messes us up – they teach us all different things"

The content of the curriculum was severely criticised. Many of you wanted to see 'Black History' in the curriculum and currently had none whatsoever. You said that any 'Black History' that *was* taught in school was about slavery and just dealing with slavery as a topic was not good enough. It was felt that learning 'Black History' helps teach young people about their identity and that it should not just be taught to Black and Mixed Race students but to all people regardless of their ethnicity. You felt that it was also important for teachers to learn about 'Black History' too.



"Why do we only get one month for 'Black History'? We have history as well as White people."

"Henry 8th may need to be learnt, but 'Black History' needs to be taught. Black History Month is no favour to us like they try to make it seem - it's ONE month in the year!"

"Don't think we got anything on Black History taught to us."

"Got something but not much, maybe a quiz."

"I think it should be a GCSE."

"It should be in the history curriculum."

"It's always to do with slavery."

Some of you who had no access to 'Black History' in school felt that teaching about the Slave Trade was very important because it helps everyone make sense of why the UK is the way it is today.

"Black and White people both need to know more history, especially about the Slave Trade."

What's it like at home?

Some of you felt that the impact of home life was significantly affecting life in school.

"My step father messed me and my family up – I don't need the same thing happening at school"

"I'm 15 and I feel I'm carrying the world on my shoulders. I've never had anyone behind me acting as support."

"My dad told me that I'd have to work harder to get on (as I'm not white) so you believe teachers are going to be racist from the beginning".

"Some parents need educating."

"Extended families interfere too much."

However, some of the stuff that concerns you is, apparently, just "young people's stuff" that teenagers of any ethnicity would feel concerned about:

“As you get older, you start worrying about yourself....you become more self-conscious when you hit puberty.”

How do you see your identity?

There was lots of discussion about identity and how you perceive yourselves. Some of you had not considered it before, some of you saw yourselves as more ‘Black’ than ‘White’, others more ‘White’ than ‘Black’, some of you ‘neither’, some of you ‘both’, some of you felt you were forced to choose and could not decide. You were also quick to point out that people of Mixed Race are often picked on to make statements about racial identity whilst people who do not identify as ‘mixed’, are not. In addition, when some of you spoke about acting ‘Black’ or acting ‘White’ others of you quickly recognised that the ‘Black behaviour’ and ‘White behaviour’ that was being discussed was stereotypical.



There was also lots of interesting discussion around your identity being connected with how other people viewed you and how that was closely linked to physical appearance. A number of you were sick and tired of having to ‘explain’ being Mixed Race to people who thought you did not look Mixed Race and felt the burden of constantly having to challenge what Mixed Race looks like. Many of you felt that people saw colour first (even if when they claimed not to) and that meant people (of all ethnicities) automatically made assumptions.

The issue of being defined by other people was something you had strong feelings about, especially as people tend to use very weak criteria to define you, like the music you listen to or your dress sense.

“I grew up listening to country and western music since I was young - because of my family influence - and I also listen to rap.”

“I don’t mind what I listen to, as long as I like it.”

Completing ethnic monitoring forms was a topic that got you quite agitated. We know the UK has been ‘mixing’ for centuries, but it seems the more sophisticated we get in collecting data on different ethnic groups in this country, the more issues it raises.

“I don’t tick ethnic monitoring boxes - there are too many categories.”



"Other" – everyone is 'other'."

"I just found out last week I'm part Irish – should I start putting this on my forms now?"

"Many 'White' people if they traced their ancestors back far enough, they would find 'Black' people in their background."

Generally though, you felt that definitions of Mixed Race was a job for *you*.

"We can choose how we identify ourselves."

CONCLUSIONS

Several of you admitted that you were not sure if the conference would be 'your kind of thing', but were pleasantly surprised at how much you enjoyed the day. You said you enjoyed being treated like adults and appreciated being given 'a voice' that was taken seriously. You, apparently, found a day to reflect on what *you* considered important an invaluable opportunity. For some of you it was the first time you had had a space to discuss what it is like to be of Mixed Race with other individuals.

You said you enjoyed meeting new people and thought that a consultation exercise such as this one should be carried out for other young people of Mixed Race across the country and some of you felt strongly that young people of 'monoheritage' should be involved, so they could learn more about 'Mixed Race experiences.'

One of the facts that surprised some of you on the day was that according to official census data people of Mixed Race are the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the country. We are talking about a very youthful and diverse group of people. 55% of Mixed Race people are under the age of 16* and whilst some young people in this group get good results at GCSE (ie 5+ A*-C) others do not do as well, despite starting school achieving similar or better results to other ethnic groups. There is clearly work to be done with schools and other agencies on this issue, but as a young person of Mixed Race what are you doing to help yourself? Are you making plans and working hard to achieve them? Are you giving yourself permission to be the best you can be?



Step up to the challenge, take responsibility and put your words into action!

* Office for National Statistics, 2006

SCHOOL ACTION PLANS

SCHOOL: A		
GOAL: To raise awareness of Multiple Heritage issues in school		
WHAT: Training providers supply 'education' on school curriculum	WHEN: Ongoing	WHO: School staff, school governors, teachers, Mixed Race young people in school, senior management, <i>anyone!</i>

SCHOOL:			B
GOAL: "History in school"			
WHAT: Positive 'Black & Mixed Race history' to run throughout the year – not just one month of the year – not just slavery	WHEN:	WHO: Headteacher, Head of History, Ms B----, Ms V----, L----, J----, S----	
GOAL: Apply less 'pressures' to Mixed Race pupils			
WHAT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For expectations to be set that are the same for <i>all</i> pupils. • Not for Mixed Race pupils to be singled out as the 'experts' on 'black and mixed topics'. 	WHEN: Starting from next term	WHO: Ms B----, Ms V----, mentors	

SCHOOL:			C		
GOAL:					
To raise awareness of cultural diversity from a historical perspective.					
WHAT:		WHEN:		WHO:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach Mr R---- about student consultation exercise • Produce questionnaire to distribute to pupils in all year groups • Analyse results and report to SMT (with support from Mr H----) • Deliver assembly to every year group 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 2007 • During October (Black History Season) – in BFL sessions -> visit tutor groups • November 2007 • Early December 2007 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S----, E----, A----, S---- • 'Steering group' (from group today + new recruits) • Steering group • Steering group 	

SCHOOL: D		
GOAL: To have positive role models lead assembly		
WHAT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask Bradley Lincoln to lead an assembly • Ask other people who they would want to lead assembly • Speak to Mr C---- and Mr S---- 	WHEN: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After conference • September 2007 • 20th July – end of academic year (2007) 	WHO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • C---- • Mr C---- • T----
GOAL: Black/Multicultural history lesson twice a week (1 hour)		
WHAT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for <i>all</i> teachers • ‘Providers’ from outside school to deliver sessions • Speak to Mr C---- and Mr S---- set a time to have discussions and debate 	WHEN: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • September 2007 • September 2007 • from December 2008 – twice a week for 1 hour 	WHO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone from university – students or lecturers • T----, C----, C----, C---- (& students from other schools)

SCHOOL: E		
GOAL: To allow Mixed Race young people a 'voice' in our school		
WHAT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To have a Black/Mixed Race young person on the student committee To invite speakers in and organise our own school assemblies about us 	WHEN: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> From September 2007 From September 2007 	WHO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr K---- M---- to approach him Mr K---- G---- to speak to him (M----, M----, N--- to support G----)

The aim of the following exercise is for individuals or organisations to reflect on their own current activities related to issues of Mixed Race. This personalises the action that needs to be taken by all parties involved in improving outcomes for young people of Mixed Race and the individual or organisation in arriving at a unique list of recommendations. Where more than one person is involved (eg parents/carers/schools) it is important to ask some hard questions and have a discussion about the issues raised in this reflection exercise.

TIME TO REFLECT: TIME TO ACT

MIXED RACE YOUNG PEOPLE	ALWAYS	MOSTLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
I make an effort to find out about icons of Mixed Race and their 'journeys' to individual success.				
I try to find out about icons of Mixed Race who are famous for more than sports and entertainment.				
I take responsibility for my own learning.				
I can resist pressure from my peers to act like I don't care about schoolwork.				
I can confidently challenge authority where appropriate without losing my temper.				
I feel good about being a person of Mixed Race.				
I know what qualifications I need to achieve my goals				
I have a career plan and clear goals for my life				
I am a good role model for other young people.				

SCHOOLS	ALWAYS	MOSTLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
We are aware of the issues affecting Mixed Race young people in wider society				
We are aware of the range of Mixed Race identities in our school.				
We deal confidently with students of Mixed Race by supporting them where necessary.				
We challenge Mixed Race students' inappropriate behaviour.				
We challenge students in a way that does not escalate into direct confrontation and/or exclusion.				
Mixed Race students feel listened to and understood in our school.				

SCHOOLS (cont)	ALWAYS	MOSTLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
We feel confident in identifying racist incidents.				
Racist incidents are effectively dealt with.				
We discuss issues of race and identity when we analyse achievement data.				
We survey our students to monitor levels of satisfaction by ethnicity.				
We undergo training in issues specifically related to Black & Mixed Race achievement.				
Our Race Equality Policy gives clear guidance on appropriate terminology for students of Mixed Race.				
We use language and terminology to refer to people of Mixed Race that is appropriate.				
Mixed Race students are set by ability and not behaviour.				
Our curriculum positively reflects the lives and aspirations of Mixed Race students.				
We issue sanctions and rewards fairly and consistently.				
Students of Mixed Race are proportionately represented in school rewards.				
Images used in school reflect the diversity of wider society.				
Our School Council reflects the ethnic make-up of wider society.				
Students of Mixed Race are attaining levels on par with the national average (for all groups).				
(Recorded) exclusion rates for Mixed Race students are proportionate.				
Exclusion rates for Mixed Race students are monitored by 'reason'.				
Mixed Race students' 'exclusion' rates (where they remain on the premises) are proportionate.				
We are keen to seek the opinion of parents/carers of Mixed Race students on issues relating to students' school careers.				
We put strategies in place for parents of Mixed Race young people to articulate their fears and expectations.				

LOCAL AUTHORITY	ALWAYS	MOSTLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
We ensure training is offered to schools on Mixed Race issues.				
The EMAG Service supports and challenges schools on Mixed Race issues (see 'SCHOOLS').				
Other School Improvement Professionals support and challenge schools on Mixed Race issues apart from EMAG staff.				
School Improvement Professionals are aware of local levels of achievement/rates of exclusion for Mixed Race students as set against national ones				

PARENTS & CARERS OF MIXED RACE YOUNG PEOPLE	ALWAYS	MOSTLY	SOMETIMES	NEVER
I make a point of finding out how my child is performing at school or college.				
I try to find out about icons of Mixed Race who are famous for more than sports and entertainment.				
I challenge my child's behaviour appropriately.				
I provide academic and vocational challenges for my child.				
I can confidently challenge authority where appropriate without losing my temper.				
I am a good role model for my child.				
I know what is expected of my child at his/her school or college.				
I know how to support my child with their homework or where to go for support.				
I know the correct procedures to follow if I need to speak to someone at my child's school or college.				
I discuss/negotiate career plans with my child.				
I request that the school provides resources reflecting Mixed Race issues.				
I know what is included in my child's curricular or where I could find out.				
I know what qualifications are necessary for my child to achieve his/her goals.				
I feel confident about attending my child's school or college.				

If you are an individual or organisation who would like to discuss this reflection exercise,
please contact the Multiple Heritage Project.

The Multiple Heritage Project wishes to express sincere
thanks to the schools that supported students in
attending this event.

They were:

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Haywood Comprehensive School
Arnold Hill School
The Nottingham Emmanuel School

Many thanks to staff who accompanied students on the day.

**Report prepared by Bradley Lincoln & Denise Williams
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