



Aspirations and Engagement- strategies for working with Young Black Men

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Introduction and context

This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of the Taking Part? Capacity Building Cluster (CBC) at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). The research took place during January - April 2011 and was aimed at soliciting the views of community members on issues relating to young Black ¹ men's aspirations through exploring their participation attitudes towards education, employment, and training as well as opportunities for volunteering. The research also sought to identify strategies for enabling the effective participation of young Black men aged 14-19 in culturally specific personal development programmes in areas of masculinity, racial identity, emotional literacy community and citizenship. The focus of the research was specifically linked to the work of community and voluntary organisations working in the Moss Side community and surrounding areas particularly the Louise Da-Cocodia Education Trust. This Trust was established to provide education support services to disadvantaged sections of the community in particular young people of African-Caribbean heritage. One of the key areas of provision is the Saturday Supplementary School which was established in 2007.

The rationale for this research was based on the findings of the Trust's previous research into 'Understanding the educational needs of African Caribbean young men and developing pathways for action.' Edwards-Kerr (2005) found that although most African-Caribbean heritage pupils held positive beliefs about the importance of schooling, negative experiences of participation and belonging were likely to impact adversely on their levels of achievement.

Of the 93 Black pupils from five secondary schools in Manchester that participated in Edwards-Kerr's study, 26% reported that they have had fixed term exclusions. Black boys were also more likely to be in detention than any of the other groups. Edwards-Kerr (2005) further argues that this combination of exclusion and under attainment often leads to Black men entering university at an older age. They were also likely to be under-represented in some career areas and over-represented in youth and community related courses. This research also enabled the Trust to work collaboratively with other service providers in Moss Side.

¹ The term Black is adopted throughout this report to connote what Edwards-Kerr terms a 'wider imagined community' (2005), particularly relevant for the research focus on culture and identity.

The CBC research aimed to explore contributing factors in relation to young Black men's engagement particularly in relation to their aspirations and the role that community, voluntary and youth organisations and workers play. Particularly such organisations as the Louise Da-Cocodia Trust.

The research used participatory research methods, these included focus groups and one-to-one interviews. Using participatory research methodology ensured participants had a direct voice in their representation - the research acknowledged them as social actors competent to comment on their own lives (Moules, 2005). The aim was to engage participants in dialogue and conversation, in an environment in which they could work together to effect change for and with the community.

The participants were drawn from a diverse group including volunteers, community workers and activists. In addition, there were focus group sessions with young people aged 13-19 living in Moss Side and the surrounding areas. All the young people are regular users of the facilities and services on offer. They also attended college and secondary schools in the area. The aim was to solicit the views of a wide cross section of the community. A total of 33 participants took part in the research, 17 young people and 16 adults.

Summary of Findings

This research has built on recent studies exploring raising the aspirations, and the opportunities of engagement of young Black men. This research has shown that peers, and agencies such as youth clubs, community and voluntary organisations such as Supplementary schools (such as that run by the Trust) have an important role in supporting and encouraging young people's aspirations.

This is particularly the case when aspirations may differ from those suggested through formal education, and when there is not already a history of positive educational experience within the home. The participants identified that cultural difference between schools and young people and their families, in relation to class and culture could still act as a barrier to attainment.

Additionally the research shows that, counter to some negative stereotypes of young Black men, that many are involved in volunteering within their communities, not as result of citizenship education within school, but more to 'give something back' to projects and communities that they have been part of, and also as a way of enhancing their future job prospects.

All the participants believed that parents should be at the forefront of instilling an education mindset in their children. However, it was also stressed that there is still a cultural barrier in schools that is preventing young people from achieving. One group of participants also felt that if schools showed greater interest in understanding the cultural identity of young Black men, this would

in turn positively impact on their level of attainment. The young people also acknowledged that they valued education as a result of those values that were instilled in them at an early age.

The research further established that young Black males posit very high educational and career aspirations in comparison to some of their peers. However, these aspirations are affected by changes in their lives that are sometimes related to conditions around them. This included peer pressure, gang culture and the relevance of service provision to the needs of young people. The findings highlighted the positive contributions of youth workers and programmes such as the Louise Da-Cocodia Education Trust's Saturday Supplementary school in helping young people to fulfil their aspirations.

However, in the belief that this will enhance their employment opportunities, there was a preference for short-term courses by young people. As a result a number of them were pursuing short courses which were often unrelated to work. Although on the one hand this situation does demonstrate a willingness on the part of the young people to participate in education and training, on the other hand a number of them are doing courses that are unrelated to their aspirations. Ultimately this is a waste of both their resources and time.

The participants' views confirmed documented insights regarding prejudices in school on Black identity and masculinity (e.g. Sewell 1997). They believed that reactions from young Black people, in particular males, is in response to the negative perception from some teachers and other authorities. They also stated that the stereotypical views by those in authority have had a negative impact on young Black people's aspirations especially in areas of education, training, job opportunities and career development. Despite these barriers, most of the young people that participated in the study were involved in a range of voluntary activities aimed at addressing issues in relation to social justice and social change.

Background

This report is an exploration of some of the factors that affect young Black men's aspirations and as such the relationship between this and their levels of engagement in employment, education, training and community and volunteering opportunities. The focus of the report relates to the experiences of both African-Caribbean and Somali heritage young men aged 14-19 living in Moss Side and surrounding areas. It is also informed by the findings of a community audit as to the reasons why some young people choose not to attend Saturday supplementary schools. The audit was also aimed at examining new and more effective ways of promoting and reaching out to families who were already accessing the service. A total of 47 school pupils age 11-16 participated in the audit and of the 30 non white pupils, 75% did not know what a Saturday school is and 70% had never heard or attended a Saturday school.

In response to the question, "Would you attend a school for 2-3 hours on Saturdays"? Pollard (2011) stated that:

The boys were all adamant that this was too much work and school in the week is more than enough. The girls seemed to like the idea of doing work and two felt it would help them improve their work in school...(2011:40)

Based on the findings of the audit, Pollard (2011) concluded that Saturday schools can be of benefit both in terms of developing a greater interest in education and raising the aspirations of young people through their participation in this specific form of community based initiative. A strategy which Mirza (2009) argues has been 'used by parents to side step the perpetual hum of racism '(2009:57)

Moss Side

The area of Moss Side is a diverse and multi-ethnic community and has the largest African-Caribbean heritage community in Greater Manchester. The estimated ethnicity of Moss Side in 2007 is as shown on the pie chart below. (See Manchester City Council, Moss Side ward profile V201)

Estimated Ethnicity 2007



In 2009 the number of people living in Moss Side was 18560. In addition Moss Side has a relatively young age profile compared to the population of England and Wales, in particular, there are proportionally more people aged 0 to 34, but fewer residents over the age of 35.

Phillips (1975) argues in his essay: *The Black Masses & the Political Economy of Manchester*, that historically, the development of the Black community in Moss Side during the 1950's onwards was in part linked to its proximity to Trafford Park; one of the then largest industrial complexes in Europe and the main place of employment for a large number of early black migrants. Phillips further argues that as elsewhere in the country, Manchester's Black population formed a replacement for White workers refusing to do dirty or low paid jobs (2000:293).

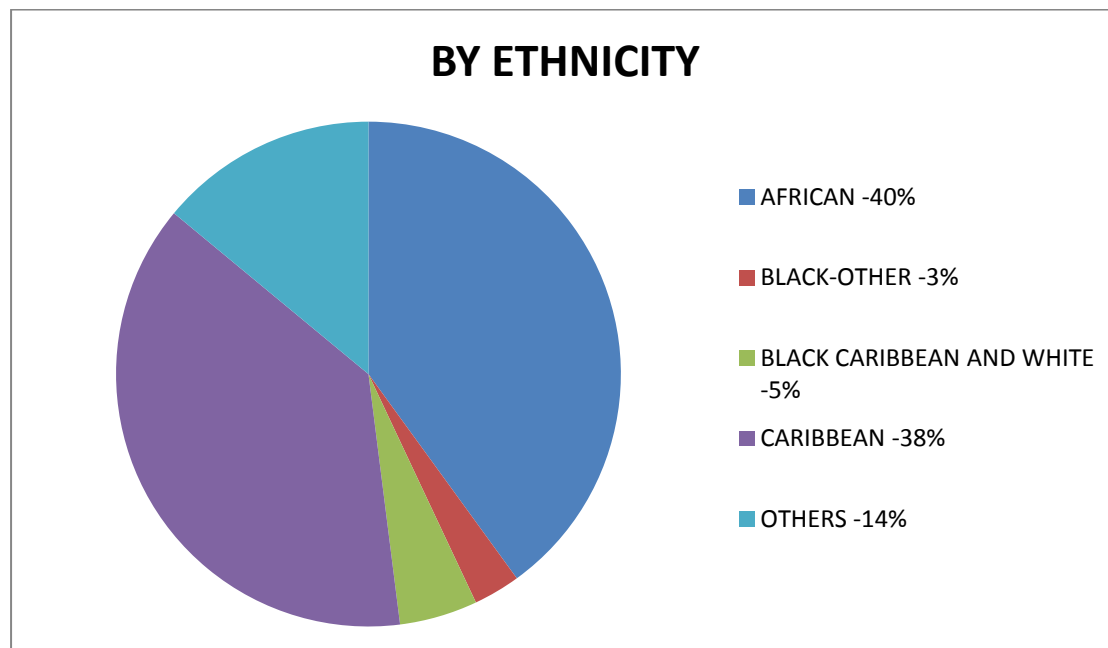
In the field of education this was described as the period of assimilation and was characterised by a series of ad hoc responses to the educational needs of immigrant pupils. These responses were designed to compensate for their assumed deficiencies with the minimum of disruption to the educational needs of indigenous children. The language of the Caribbean child was considered to be one of the major areas of deficiency. Bourdieu and Passerson (1977) argued that schools serve as a vehicle through which the cultural capital and languages of subordinate classes are devalued. The emphasis is on the use of language that reflects the interest and values of the dominant social class.

The publication of Bernard Coard's book, "*How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British Educational System*", book was thus seen as the trigger for what Sivinandan (1993) describes as 'communities of resistance'. Ledwith (2005) in her discussion on collective action argues that this is a process by which people come together to bring about change. This form of action is strengthened through the formation of groups, the development of projects and the establishment of alliances which in turn have the potential of becoming social movement.

Saturday Supplementary School -The Louise Da-Cocodia Education Trust

One of the most notable responses to Coard's book during the 1970's was the establishment by Black parents of Saturday supplementary schools; although supplementary schools have existed in the UK since the 19th century. The term 'supplementary school' was initially coined to illustrate that these schools were organised for, and by, minority ethnic communities and provided education which was outside, in addition to, or as a supplement to mainstream schooling (Reay and Mirza 1997). Currently there are at least 1,500 supplementary and Saturday schools in England and Wales, 300 of which are in London (John 2006:209) These schools are usually attended by children and young people of similar ethnic, cultural and in some cases linguistic background. They usually take place in the evenings, weekends and during the school holidays. As in the case of the Louise Da-Cocodia Education Trust, supplementary schools can be described as community inspired education initiatives.

Although the target group for the Louise Da-Cocodia Education Trust Saturday school is Black children of both African and African-Caribbean, heritage children, children from other ethnic groups that are based within the surrounding areas also attend, as indicated on the chart below. The Saturday school has 52 children and young people on its books, 28 in its primary and 24 in secondary school, 31 girls and 21 boys. (See Louise Da-Cocodia Supplementary School Annual report, 2011)



In addition to the Saturday school the Trust is involved in a range of educational and partnership initiatives such as Manchester Conference for Black Parents, Children and Young People. This was organised as part of the Public Engagement Fellowship scheme at Manchester Metropolitan University. This scheme presented an opportunity for two Public Engagement Fellows, Peter Hick and Diane Watt to work collaboratively to address some of the

concerns of Manchester's African-Caribbean community on issues in relation to the educational experiences of their children and young people. The rationale for this conference was based on the fact that:

In the 21st century it is still the case that pupils from some Black and minority ethnic communities face a disproportionately high rate of permanent exclusion from school; and are likely to achieve disproportionately low educational outcomes. There is an urgent need to mobilise parental support for collaboration with teachers in addressing these issues. (Hick 2009:1)

Accordingly, the aim of the conference was to:

build an alliance of parents, teachers and communities to take positive steps in addressing the lower qualifications and disproportionate exclusions experienced by children from some Black and minority ethnic communities in Manchester (Hick 2009:1).

Since the conference, a number of significant outcomes have already been achieved and this includes successful funding applications for the Rites of Passage and the 'Barriers, Aspiration, Access & Gaps' project. The Rites of Passage pilot project was developed to address issues in relation to racial/cultural identity, masculinity, self-esteem and negative peer group influences. The Barriers, Aspiration, Access and Gaps project was based on new collaborative partnerships between MMU, the Louise Da-Cocodia Education Trust and the Zion Arts Centre. The children and young people that participated in the project were aged between 13-25. Drawing upon their own experiences of the education system, the use of poetry and storytelling in this project was an effective strategy for enabling self-expression especially on issues of concern to the participants. The series of parents and carers' workshops which was organised in collaboration with the Chrysalis Family Support Project was in direct response to parents' requests for ongoing community based events. These workshops addressed issues in relation to school exclusion, special educational needs, (SEN) school governorship and strategies for success

Methodology

The research used participatory, qualitative research. According to Kumar (2010:10), "participatory research is based upon the principle of minimizing the 'gap' between researcher and the research participants and increasing community involvement and participation to enhance the relevance of the research findings'. The participatory process was thus designed to enable community involvement. In addition a number of community members acted as gatekeepers in enabling the researcher to gain access to young people. This approach includes the dissemination of the research findings in a format that is readily accessible for use by the community.

Carter and Little (2007) define qualitative research: 'as social research in which the researcher relies on text data rather than numerical data, analyse those data in their textual form rather than converting them to numbers for analysis and aims to understand the meaning of human action.' (2007:1316). To obtain such text the researcher held seven focus group sessions and two interviews. The same questions were addressed in both the one-to-one interviews and focus group sessions. All sessions were recorded and then transcribed; the researcher then identified recurring themes and this included information from the notes which a research student took during the focus group sessions.

The young people's participation was originally planned to include training in participative research methodology and for them to be actively involved in all stages of the research process as co-researchers. However, this was not achieved because a number of the youth clubs where they were based closed as a result of the new austerity measures taken by Manchester City Council.

In doing this research, the researcher had to be mindful of the contribution of the participants and how they will benefit from the research process and indeed the findings. During the course of this research some of the youth workers stated that as well as feeling 'over-researched', the benefits of the research to the community had to be evident. As such, it was important that participants were given regular feedback, the opportunity to give suggestions throughout the process as well as an accessible copy of the report at the end of the research.

Focus Group Sessions

The focus group method was chosen as the most appropriate as it encouraged participants to express themselves more freely and provide detailed explanations. Gates and McDaniel (1998) posit that: 'the interaction among respondents can stimulate new ideas and thoughts that might not arise during one-to-one interviews' (1998:53). The researcher as moderator was able to encourage discussions among participants which were not rigidly controlled. There were a total of seven focus group sessions.

Interviews

One-to-one interviews were undertaken with participants who were not available to participate in the focus group sessions. According to Fontana and Frey (2000):

Interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in interactions with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place (2000:663)

These semi structured approaches were chosen because it gave participants, especially young people a voice in a subject that was based on their willingness to participate in a range of local community based projects. The other

participants in the research came from a number of organisations in South Manchester, in particularly Moss Side. They included youth and community workers, community activist, volunteers and teachers.

Participating Organisations

The organisations that were involved in the research included the **Chrysalis Family Support Centre** which provides nursery facilities for low income and single parent families, parenting advice on school exclusions and a homework club are amongst the services on offer.

The Windrush Millennium Centre is an organisation that was set up to provide a holistic service to the community and includes ESOL classes for non-English speakers, employment/job search advice, training/skills development and workspaces for local small businesses.

The Hideaway, which had been providing services for young people in the community for over 40 Years. The project's core provision is linked to the development of initiatives aimed at enhancing the life chances of black boys and young men age 13-25.

Proctors Youth Centre is located in Hulme and provides young people with a variety of sports related activities as well as information and advice on a range of issues.

Participants

Focus groups sessions were undertaken in youth clubs and community organisations across Moss Side and Hulme (as listed above). The young people took part in focus groups in youth centres they attended in the area. Two of the focus groups took place at The Hideaway Project; and one session at Proctors. The Chrysalis Family Support Centre was used for the focus group sessions involving community workers and activists.

All the young people that took part in the focus groups are currently in education. This included six secondary school pupils comprising of three boys and three girls plus eleven young men who were students at one of the local colleges.

In addition, there were three focus groups and two interview sessions with adults in the community. One group of participants identified themselves as community activists and volunteers represented by three West African and two African- Caribbean women. The researcher also conducted an interview with a female who identified herself as a community activist and teacher. There were two focus group sessions with youth workers, one at The Hideaway project which included two women and three men from diverse racial, cultural and religious backgrounds. The Proctors Youth Centre group included two Black

female and two White male youth workers In addition, an interview was carried out with an African-Caribbean male youth worker based in adjoining area. The following are some of the key themes which emerged from the research.

Research Findings and Analysis²

Parental Involvement

The community activists and volunteers strongly stressed the importance of parental responsibility in instilling the value of education in their children at an early age.

...education is very, very important because it should be the way of life. It determines our future...The further educated our young people become the further stance they have in our community (CAVT)

One participant explained the approach she took to ensure that her children realised the importance of education.

Personally and as a parent from year one, I seek to educate my children to realise that education is really important. It's for the future and basically they need to do their best (CAVT)

In addition, it was seen as the responsibility of parents to continue to prepare their children to be life long and confident learners.

Well right from the beginning, ... at all levels, your parents must be involved, I was born in Africa and my parents were interested in what I did, my community was interested; if somebody is successfully it's for the whole community its not just for your family (CAVT).

One of the women stated that she was actively involved with her son's education up to university level and this involved meeting with his lecturers from time-to-time. Although it was important for parents to understand the educational system, expectations and attitude was regarded as equally important.

going back to our parents when they came to this country they knew nothing about the British educational system and some of them were illiterate... just having that expectation, not necessarily the skills or the knowledge but the expectations and the attitude can make a significant difference (CAVT).

Historically, the education of their children has been of primary concern to both African and African-Caribbean parents

² Key: CAVT = Community Activist /volunteer; YW = Youth worker; YP= Young Person

I think our parents have always wanted us to go to school a lot of the times, and even when we were facing difficulties in the school our parents used to say shut up and go to school and do what the teacher says (YW).

Some of the participants whose children have accomplished educational success stress that in their resolve to see their children succeed, they emphasised to them that they can be anything they put their mind to. They also drew upon their own accomplishments and the determination of their parents to motivate their children.

From an early age I let my children know that they are equally deserving of going to university, and while I was at university studying I took them along with me to show them that you too can go to university, and I am pleased to say that my children and all my nieces and nephews have gone to university (YW).

Edwards-Kerr (2005) note however, that based on their own experience of the education system a significant number of British Black parents found it difficult to engage with teachers and schools. At the same time the community activist group maintained that:

...we need to positively share our experience of racial discrimination with our children ... we heard stories that sometimes when children are disillusioned at school they are also taking on board some of their parents' discontentment. So their parents have shared their experience with them but not in a way which empowers them (CAVT).

This group believed that whilst it is important to share experiences, parents need to share their experiences of schooling, and career aspirations in a positive way. They need to share with their children how they were able to succeed against all the odds.

I tell my son that... but at the same time I let him know that teachers may treat you differently, it's important to me that he has that understanding (CAVT).

The community activist and volunteers also felt that it was the role of parents to raise the awareness of their children and to equip them with the relevant information for dealing with discriminatory practices.

I make my children aware of our past, but focus with them on the new legislation like Every Child Matters and ask them to challenge maltreatment with these new principles (CAVT).

This is a key message as it advocates using the principles of government policy for professionals working with children and young people in family settings. Participants stated, however, that it is the influence of the parents as opposed to these policies that result in children and young people's improved

performance. Therefore, parents' awareness of such government legislation equips them with resources to help enable their children to achieve.

The community activist further pointed to the fact that there are now second and third generation of Black young people who are not only achieving academically but are engaging positively with the education system.

In families where children have gone on to higher education, others follow in their footsteps (CAVT).

This was the experience of the young person who stated:

My sister and my uncle went to university, so they expect me to also go to university (YP).

The research also established that in families where education is valued and there is high parental involvement in school work, good relationships with schools and teachers, the young people have a higher probability of achieving academically. The confidence of the young people is further boosted by the fact that if they are having problems at schools, their parents are prepared to go in and discuss the matter with the teachers. In the words of one of the community activist, "mum or dad will be there for them."

A Black male youth worker also explained that it is through re-engaging with education that he has achieved. He recognised that he was a late achiever because he was so disillusioned with British education in particular its failure of young Black people such as him. Based on the findings of her research, Edwards-Kerr (2005) argued that the decision of these men to stay on or return to education was:

A strategy for improving their life chances as well as for self-development. In particular, obtaining qualifications was for most of the participants the only way to obtain jobs in the 'mainstream'. Positioning themselves as "outsiders", they indicated that in order to "get in" or access these opportunities they needed to be reasonably qualified (2005:32)

Similar to Edwards-Kerr's findings, the worker in this study stated that education enabled him to improve his socio-economic position and he is now taking steps to ensure that his children successfully complete their studies.

... People like myself and my age group, lots of us want the best for our child. So we are encouraging our child to go to school, so I have seen the benefit of that approach is that the children are now going to school and want to engage and when they see some of their friends succeed they want to succeed (YW)

One of the community workers also pointed to work commitments as a possibly reason for some parents disengagement from the day-to-day activities of their children's education. These findings concur with other studies such as

Edwards-Kerr (2005) and Byfield (2008) who argue that this has had profound implications for the education attainment of young Black people and in particular Black males. It is perceived that some parents stop engaging in helping with homework, school activities, parents' evenings, as the child gets older. Byfield (2008) points out however, that the circumstances around Black parenting, such as working single mother households might be a contributing factor to non-involvement in their child's education.

In some cases young people are also faced with the dilemma of balancing parental expectations, schools' expectation and their choices. One of the community activists gave an example of a boy whose parents wanted him to be an engineer but he was advised by the school to pursue a career in sports. This created a conflict between the school and the parents, thus creating a dilemma for the young person. The young person opted to go with the school's advice on the premise that the school was in a better position to assess his abilities. In this case the young person conforms to the traditional institutional influence and belief that the schools are better placed in determining the future of its pupils.

Furthermore schools' widely held stereotypical view of black pupils being good at sports when compared to academic work was not unlike the experiences of the poet Benjamin Zephaniah during the 1960's. In the book, *Tell It Like It Is, How Schools Fail Black Children* (2005) he writes:

...in assembly one morning our headmaster told the school that because the school now had an Afro-Caribbean that the school was to have a cricket team and that I was to be the Captain. In 2004 it may seem obvious that not all Black people love cricket but back then in 1960 something, this headmaster just failed to believe that I couldn't stand the game, he insisted that I was a 'born cricketer'...Every time I repeated my hatred of the game people smiled, when I told my fellow pupils that I had never handled a cricket bat I was told to 'stop messing about', I felt well and truly stereotyped.

As in the case of Benjamin Zephaniah, the young person decided in the end to enrol on an accounting course at college.

Young People's Aspirations

The lack of aspiration amongst young people was one of the issues highlighted by the youth workers.

... now a days a lot of the young people do not have any aspirations... they go to school ... I don't want to engage with the school, education is not for me, so they don't have no dreams about what they want to be when they leave school(YW).

In addition to the perceived lack of aspirations, the youth workers also cited the desire of a number of young people to be part of the entertainment industry.

Going back a couple of years ago everybody wanted to be a MC. How many of those people achieve standing around a microphone MC-ing? How many of them go on to becoming a MC? Probably none, probably just a few, nobody is looking at computing, nobody is looking at I'll be sound engineers; everybody wanted to be a MC or probably a footballer (YW).

In analysing the comments above one can argue that it is not lack of aspiration as in the case of the young person that stated *My father was a policeman, and I want to do something important too*, but rather the lack of a coherent approach to preparing young people for future careers and training opportunities. Strand (2008) argues that young black people start secondary school with aspirations of wanting to become doctors, pilots and lawyers. Furthermore aspirations are not static, but are dynamic and consequently young people often change aspirations in the light of new experiences, maturity and sometimes-parental influence.

Some of the youth workers were of the opinion that young people relied more on advice that they get from their peers and mass media about how to 'make it' as a DJ/ Rapper, musician or footballer. These "get rich quick schemes", fuelled by the need for "instant gratification" was according to one of the youth workers seen by the young people as an easy way out of poverty.

So they tend not to want to use those services and some people think that the careers advice is a waste of time...as they reach 16-17 and they realise that they don't have a job, they are not going to get a job and they see other people working, going to college, and they see others working that have engaged with the service then they will want to engage (YW).

During one of the youth workers' focus group sessions it was felt that this attitude sometimes affected the ways in which young people engaged with schools. In the light of their aspirations, academic qualifications did not appear sufficiently rewarding. However, the youth workers did state that at a later stage these young people begin to re-engage with the system. This is largely due to the observed success of their peers who are either in employment or attending college. Furthermore, it would appear that the career services are not putting young people's aspiration at the centre of the decision making process. Instead they are using expected outcomes as projected by the tier system of education as the basis to assess career aspirations. As such, a number of young people are leaving school without attaining the necessary qualifications to fulfil their career aspirations.

In school I studied science, because I wanted to be a doctor, but now at college I choose ICT because of future work opportunity (YP).

There are also those young people whose college courses do not reflect their career aspirations whilst at secondary school.

I'm not doing what I did in school; I'm doing BTEC in Sports (YP)

This was similarly the case with three of the boys that are enrolled on an ICT course at college and who contend that whilst at secondary school this was not one of their core subject area. ICT was done as a last option when they had not achieved their aspired choices at GCSE.

From discussions with the young people it is evident that they are investing a lot of time and effort in studying subjects that is of no relevance to their future career aspirations and existing employment opportunities. In addition, young people's aspirations are influenced by parental expectations, cultural values, teachers, mass media and peers.

I was expected to go to college and further education because my parents went on to further education and they encouraged me to (YP).

One of the youth workers also spoke about the ways in which he has influenced younger members of his family.

I have nieces and nephews they all look up to me because I was the first in the family to go to university and I always say to them you can go too (YW).

Some of the youth workers made reference to the ways in which they have influenced young people's educational and career aspirations. One youth worker spoke about the impact of Charlie Moore a Black pioneering youth worker in the 1980s and his influence on her and other young people in pursuing higher education:

This man Charlie Moore was a great inspiration for a lot of Black youths that comes through Moss Side and Hulme, Charlie Moore, was the first black youth worker in this area... and he said that we need people to go to university, we need to get qualified and we all went (YW)

Another youth worker stated that:

It's only recently that we [youth workers] are saying to our Black young people you can now go and compete, go to college, go to school, you can also go abroad and get educated, and also compete for the jobs that are there. (YW)

In one of the focus groups three of the young people, who are college students stated that their present studies were influenced by their gym trainer and a boxing coach. All three are enrolled on the BTEC Sports Science. The youth workers also commented on the success of the programme.

...a number of young males have successfully received accreditation as fitness instructors and gone on to gainful employment from courses run at Proctors youth club (YW).

The young men were nevertheless concerned that closure of the service will negatively impact on their ability to continue with their studies. They were not only losing access to the advice and guidance of the fitness instructor but also the sports equipment.

Celebrating Success

In one of the focus groups participants argued that there was a tendency for researchers and those in authority to ignore success stories particularly in relation to Black boys.

We need to give a balance, we talk about education and community we always talk about what hasn't happened but we never celebrate the achievements, however, we really beat ourselves up about what's not been achieved (CAVT).

This issue of success was one of the themes that were addressed at the Manchester Black Parent's Children and Young People's conference. Stirling (2009) stated that the workshop on *Building a Culture of Success*:

...Offered insights and understandings about educational 'successful' minority ethnic pupils who are often ignored and overlooked within the prevalent concerns with 'under-achievement'. The recognition and 'celebration' of BME success provides an important challenge to the constant tirade of negative images and associations of BME young people as 'problem' and 'failing pupils'.

Another example of strategies aimed at acknowledging and celebrating success within the black community was cited in Byfield's (2008) study of forty young men in the UK and the USA who have defied all odds to succeed.

The research also identified the need for the Saturday Supplementary School to develop cultural specific programmes as in the use of Anansi stories in the teaching of literacy. There should be opportunities for young people who have successfully completed their GCSE and 'A' level examinations to be volunteers and peer mentors at the Saturday school. The young people should also have access to black people from a range of professional backgrounds.

In celebrating success this may also involve acknowledging and supporting young people who have chosen to do short courses that are within a time frame of twelve to six months.

*I think with a lot of young people time doesn't make sense to them, so when you think you spend three years to get a degree you thinking s***, if you say to somebody it's a six months course it's a five months course, its a 12 weeks course you can see its smarter in terms of being realistic, do a twelve week ... they sit down and think three years I have to study for a degree then have to apply for a job and then I can only really earn money, six months course then I'm qualified to do this and I*

can apply for a job in twelve weeks I'll get a certificate to say I'm qualified in this and they can see, but three years you can do three years and never reach (YW).

Some of young people were also engaging in these short courses to enhance their CV for college and the job market.

The more qualifications you get the more you can put on your CV for experience. So if you are applying for any job it's what is on you CV that will get you that job. If you have loads of qualifications on the CV then you are most likely to get the job and that's what I'm interested in (YP).

In addition, the knowledge and experiences gained from doing short courses can be an incentive for young people to continue with further studies. For example, one of the young people that participated in the research has successfully completed a number of short courses and is now hoping to pursue a university degree in youth and community work.

On the other hand, the young people are doing courses that are not necessarily linked to their desired employment outcomes. Whilst this may broaden their social and life skills, it is vital that advice is available to ensure that young people pursue courses which are of relevance to their employment aspirations and personal development.

I don't think nobody is actively listening to the young people and finding out what they are interested in. They are doing what they think is best for them, finding out what they are interested in and putting those into place might be a key element in education, employment and training and getting them involved (YW).

Identity and Aspiration

Woodward (1997) argues that 'Identity gives us an idea of who we are and how we relate to others and the world in which we live' (1997:1). When asked about their views on identity one of the community activists stated:

...when you talk about identity you should look at the cultural values as well. The way we match them together when we bring up these children to let them know that they belong to a particular culture and that culture is what should determine their way of life and their behaviour (CAVT).

Sewell (1997) points out that it is the school culture that makes teachers often unintentionally reinforce certain norms on race, culture and identity.

Some of the young people stated that whilst at school they felt they were being judged by people who did not understand their history or where they were

coming from. One of the youth workers suggested that many teachers are from working class backgrounds, but choose to adopt the dominant discourse that imposes White middle class values on Black and working class young people

so you ... you stand up before a teacher who is predominantly gonna be white, who comes in with a preconceived idea about working class people, teachers come with a particular view about Black people (YW).

Schools are thus described as closed institutions designed to produce conformists (Sewell (1997)). In order to be appreciated in school, Black young males are expected to assimilate the dominant societal values and norms. In turn many Black young people use peer relationships as a means of solidarity or to become a 'member of the pack':

I think that what young people are used to is moving in and dressing like everyone in the pack and acting a certain way in that pack and doing things in the same way (YP)

One of the community activist stated that a possible negative consequence of being a 'member of the pack' is that this can lead to involvement in gang related activities.

Without identity you are lost, I think some of them are aware to a point where it is detrimental. Like the boys dropped out of school and get into gangs (CAVT).

However, there was evidence of positive peer relationships resulting in young people continuing in further education.

I registered on the BTEC Sport science course and told my friends about it and they registered also. Now it's three of us from here that's doing the course (YP).

The young people stated that it is this sense of camaraderie that helps them to maintain their studies. During college breaks, they spend most of their time together at the local youth club. This sense of identity helps them in maintaining regular attendance, and they support each other on the course.

We are all doing the same ICT course so we help other (YP)

The different influences on the lives of young people can be a determinant factor both in terms of aspirations and attainments. For some young people this is part of the process of growing up.

At first it was my peers, I did look to see how my elders, I used to want to be like them, I thought they were cool they have everything, so I said right when I grow I want to be like them. But now it's more ... who I want to be, I'm trying to be who I want to be now, I'm finding me for me, what do I want to do what makes me a happy person not what

everyone think happy is. I feel like it's a process that we have to go through in life again (YP).

Citizenship and Participation

Citizenship is a core subject in schools and included in its objectives is the need for young people to be given the opportunity to make a positive contribution to society as in one of the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters* (ECM). According to Packham (2008):

Citizens should be given more opportunity and support to become actively involved in defining and tackling the problems of their communities and improving their quality of life (2008:30)

The hope is that young people will become involved in a range of volunteering work within their community and as Packham goes on to argue that:

Voluntary activity in the community is associated with better health, lower crime, improved educational performance and greater life satisfaction. Active involvement can give greater depth to citizenship (2008:31)

However, the young people in the study, especially those that are involved in community initiatives did not necessarily make the link between what they learn in school in citizenship and what they do in the community. The young people attributed their participation in the community as wanting to be involved in the decision making process. Edwards-Kerr (2005) also found that the narratives on young Black men and citizenship were:

reflective of their connections with local area communities and 'Black; as representative of a wider 'imagined community' in particular, they were concerned about 'giving back' to the Black community as a way of empowering other young Black men and as an investment towards future capacity building (2005:33).

In terms of 'giving back' some of the young men in this study stated that they were influenced by the activities of their parents, peers, youth workers, religious organisations or their involvement in community outreach programmes. One group of young people that participated in the study were also involved with the leadership programme at the Hideaway Youth Centre. This programme is in partnership with City South Housing and Groundwork Association.

The programme is designed to encourage young people to have a voice and understand they can challenge and change things in their own lives, communities and possibly society (YW).

Programmes such as this are instrumental in young people's personal development.

We go into the community and do videos, and then talk about them in groups (YP)

Through participating in the leadership programme young people are able to contribute to issues that are of concern not only to themselves but to the wider community.

We went to the House of Commons to talk to MPs about environmental issues in our community (YP).

In turn these young people can also be role models for other young people by demonstrating the rewards of positive engagement. As well as the programme at the Hideaway, at the Chrysalis Family Support Centre, there is a group of young people who meet on a regular basis to plan themed activities as well as participate in a range of community programmes.

I am involved in the community because I love to socialise, I love to meet new people (YP)

The young people are also involved with initiatives that are aimed at raising awareness about issues that affect the community. During the annual Peace Week which is held in March, they had the opportunity to produce plays and to deliver speeches on racism awareness and gang culture.

Through our play on racism; we create awareness to show that everyone is equal (YP).

These programmes that the young people are involved in act as a vehicle for change and the development of the young people's confidence, leadership skills, decision making capabilities, teamwork as well as their sense of personal and social responsibility.

The young men that come here, we encourage them to give back to the youth club through volunteering (YW)

One of the young men who participated in the focus group said:

I have achieved a lot from coming to Hideaway, and now I'm giving back... In addition I can put my experience here on my CV (YW)

In addition, The Hideaway project promotes a volunteering opportunities to young people interested in pursuing a career in youth and community work.

I volunteer here, and this will help my application into university (YP)

From the above, it is evident that a number of Black young people are actively and positively engaged in activities within their communities both as participants and volunteers. The young people's involvement in their community was also linked to their perception of education. Some of them were nevertheless of the

opinion that education is often perceived as going to university but based on their experiences this was not necessarily the case:

Education for me is a big word it doesn't mean a piece of paper with qualification, it means skills, knowledge, changing your attitude, creating awareness it's a range of things so, it is important. (YP)

The young person is thus referring to an education system which is designed primarily for those who are deemed academically able:

It's not everyone who is academic when it comes to maths or science. They may have very good skills in other areas but it's what is valued by society (YW).

There were also young people who experienced anxiety at the end of year 8 as that is when the results of their examination will determine the set that they will be in.

It is very difficult for me, my teachers told me I am very good in doing my work in class and getting them correct, but I get really nervous in exams and usually not do very well... (YP)

This not only puts those students who are not confident at passing examination in a disadvantaged position in the job market, and entry to colleges and universities it also raises questions in relation to citizenship. Edwards-Kerr (2005) further argues that Black young men's experiences of racism and inequality contribute to definitions of citizenship that contradicts mainstream perception of what it means to be a citizen.

Challenges to participation in education

It is yet to be seen how new measures to increase tuition fees in England will impact on the number of young Black people applying for university places. The general view amongst participants is that the increase in tuition fees is likely to make going to University unaffordable for a lot of Black families. Similarly, the reduction and in some cases the loss of Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) will greatly affect the ability of some young people to attend further education. A number of the young people in this study regarded EMA as more than a means to help them in education; it was also used to supplement the family income. However, the participants attending college say they will continue with their education regardless of whether or not EMA is available.

Although the youth workers were confident that young people already in further education are likely to continue with their education, they were nevertheless concerned that there will not be any incentives for secondary school leavers to engage with further education. At the same time, they welcomed initiatives to increase the number of apprenticeship schemes advertised by the government.

They stated however, that they did not have enough information on the types of programmes and criteria for eligibility.

The youth workers were also concerned that the closure of youth clubs will inevitably lead to some young people 'falling through the net'. This is in part due to the young people's fear of crossing community boundaries.

At the moment one of the issues we have with young people is the issue of crossing boundaries. And what we are trying ... to do is get a minibus that goes over to Moss Side, picks them up and take them over here (YW).

From the discussions with young people some of these fears may be perceived but at the same time this fear will limit their access to services. Three of the young men admitted that they have not personally received threats, but think they will be at risk if they go into other communities. For one of the young people the basis of his fear was linked to his association with a gang that is not allowed go to Alexander Park, Withington and Longsight:

I cannot go to Withington, Longsight and Alexander Park, and the Powerhouse (YP).

Whether the fear is perceived or real, the restrictions on young people's movements mean that they are not able to access some services. For example, with the closure of the youth club in Hulme young people who are members of that youth club will find it difficult accessing other youth clubs in neighbouring communities.

Conclusion

The discussions with young people, community activists/volunteers and youth workers, (some of whom were also parents/carers) have reinforced the important role of families and the home for reinforcement of positive messages of high aspirations, particularly in relation to educational opportunities. This was felt to be required in relation to what was perceived as continuing often negative and stereotyped cultural expectations perpetuated by some schools, peers (e.g. being a 'pack member') and unrealistic and limiting media images.

Community and voluntary organisations, such as the groups involved in the research and the Trust, were found to be important to counter these negative trends and help raise young Black men's aspirations. This was being carried out through positive role models, advice and guidance in relation to education and training opportunities, culturally specific activities, and providing volunteering opportunities. The importance of praise, encouragement and the celebration of the achievements of young people were viewed as crucial, by parents/carers and those who worked with young people.

The research showed that many young people, supported by the community, voluntary and youth projects, were involved in a range of volunteering activities within their communities, to enable them to 'give back' to the groups that had helped them and provide them with valuable skills and knowledge to enhance their future opportunities.

Community and voluntary organisations were also shown to be important to engender a sense of community, and had a valuable role to play in relation to developing cultural identities for young people e.g. young Black men, whose cultural identities are not represented elsewhere for example in school. This work is being carried out by such organisations as the Louise Da-Cocodia Trust supplementary, Saturday school. The research showed how valuable this sector is within communities and the impact of funding cuts on the reduction of services, and so opportunities, particularly for young people who operate in perceived geographical territories and are not willing to travel to services outside of their community.

Recommendations

- a) Parents sometimes do not understand the teaching methods being used in schools hence they are not confident about helping their children. Schools should therefore support parents in developing their understanding of the methods and techniques that are being used.
- b) There is a need for young people age 16 upwards, and youth workers to work in partnership in the development of relevant programmes of learning. These should include short, precise and meaningful courses or apprenticeships that tap into the existing skills, needs and interest of the young people.
- c) There is a need for stakeholders to work in partnership with other organisations that have established core services in the delivery of youth work provisions, so save resources and to avoid duplication
- d) Young people should be introduced at an early age to a diverse set of career choices. Whilst the idea of 'quick fix' short vocational courses may be teaching young people a number of life skills, it is a very disjointed approach as providers are not matching the young people's existing skills and knowledge when offering courses in the community.
- e) Continue to encourage and celebrate young people's success
- f) There is a need for community based provisions such as the Saturday Supplementary School where the focus is on the development of a more holistic experience which makes learning more relevant, engaging and culturally specific.
- g) Young people should be provided with opportunities to respond to challenges where they are given decision making responsibilities.
- h) The participation of young people, particularly young Black men, in community activities is central to their sense of inclusion, and to increase their life and social skills, self esteem, self-confidence and aspirations. Such involvement can also counteract the stereotypical view that young Black men are not positively contributing to the development of their community.
- i) The projection from the Manchester City council is that there will be a significant increase in the population of young people in Moss Side over the next ten years. Therefore, investments in local facilities and services for young people are essential for the future development of this community.

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