

Stress and Struggle

—reminders for everyone

The final destruction of the DPRE came in summer 1990 when Brent Council, now under Conservative control, axed the programme without a formal report on the matter, and without a public record of debate and rationale. This came as a shock to many people. Yet also it was entirely predictable, in view of the way the DPRE had been treated by critics and opponents from its very first days. It had been all but strangled at birth by the Race Spies hysteria, and it was perhaps inevitable that it would be killed off in a casual and brutal way, with scant regard for the normal rules and customs of informed debate and rational decision-making. The values, concepts and ideals underlying the programme were not, however, so easily killed off.

The key ideas and ideals animating the DPRE were expressed in the opening words of the borough's 1987 curriculum statement, *Equality and Excellence*, reprinted and redistributed in 1994. They were and are a succinct and bold reminder of what the DPRE was all about, and why it was inevitably met in some quarters by hostility and opposition:

'All learners are of equal value and have unlimited potential for development.'

'There is inequality in wider society. The education service has a vital role to play in helping to combat, reduce and eliminate inequality and unjust discrimination, and in improving the opportunities, achievements and life-changes of all learners.'

Amongst many other things, the DPRE involved enabling pupils and students to describe their own experiences of living in unequal Britain, and their own individual and collective endeavours to create strong and dignified personal identities. As part of a unit of work at a secondary school, a student wrote a poem which began as follows:

Oi! Paki! Wotcha doin' in our country?

I hold up my head high and proud

And walk on with dignity.

How long can I walk on?

How long can I ignore?

The anger inside me burns red, dark red.

How I'd like to tear them apart,

But instead I hold my anger.

The attacks on the DPRE were similar, in their effects and motivation, on the attacks made on that young person. The long-term task is to educate against, and to eradicate, racial harassment and abuse, within the wider political task of

building and maintaining a society in which all people can — as the poem puts it — hold up their heads high and proud, and walk with dignity.

These are tasks in the outer world. In the immediate short term, one task amongst others is in the inner world. It is to hold the anger: to acknowledge and name one's feelings ('How I'd like to tear them apart'), but not to be broken by them. And to walk, describe and narrate — bear witness, tell tales with dignity.

I want it to be known, said the tortoise in the African folktale, that people struggled here.

Remembering and marking the struggle is one side, but only one side, of the coin. The other is to hope.

The sense of boundless possibilities and confidence at the start of *Equality and Excellence* — 'All learners are of equal value and have unlimited potential for development' — was expressed well in a brief poem written by a child at a local primary school just over the road from Brent Town Hall, in summer 1990:

I am rich and pure and full of fresh thoughts

Ready to take on the world

I'm full of action

Smart as anything

And full of quality

I am an egg ready to hatch.

I bring with me life.

That, yes, was what it was all about.

It was for the sake of unlimited potential — hope, fresh thoughts, action, life — that they struggled here.

Source: These are the closing paragraphs of an essay whose full text can be read at <https://www.patience-and-passion.org/pdfs/They%20struggled%20here%20revised%204%20September.pdf>