

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN SCOTLAND

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INTRODUCTION

Education and equality, as has been seen in earlier issues of **Scottish Affairs**, are currently areas of interest and concern in Scotland (MacInally (1993); Brown (1993); Macintosh (1993)). In fact, they are of course areas that have long been of interest and concern. In this article I will take a look at 'equality of opportunity' over time in Scotland, arguing that there has been a shift from a traditional concept that was more or less exclusively concerned with equal opportunity in terms of socio-economic status, or social background, to a modern-day concept that emphasises equal opportunity in terms of race and gender. The first sections of this article draw on the literature about the traditional concept of 'equality of opportunity'. I will then go on to look firstly at literature on the more recent form of the concept, and secondly to present some findings from my own research into the attitudes of pupils towards equal opportunities policies, covering race and gender, in a contemporary school. In the course of the article, it will become apparent that while there have been many developments and changes in ideas about an equal educational opportunity 'for all', a common thread can be traced over the centuries, enduring until the present day. This 'thread' is an underlying emphasis on individualism, rather than a truly collective or structural concept of 'equality of opportunity'. I conclude by arguing that achieving a structural understanding of 'equal opportunities' is still a considerable way off, although this is not necessarily cause for undue pessimism.

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A DEMOCRATIC TRADITION: THE NATURE OF THE MYTH

In Scotland, there is a quite widely held idea that we have a valuable educational tradition. Visitors to Scotland are often proudly told that, historically, relatively large numbers of Scots were able to write, or went to University even from humble backgrounds. Ideas about the basically democratic character of Scottish education have long roots reaching back through the present and the previous century. I want to begin this article by looking more closely at the nature of the stories we tell ourselves and others about Scottish education. To what extent are they 'true', to what extent 'myth', and to what extent does this matter? How do accounts of Scottish education relate to wider Scottish values, or the stories we tell ourselves about our values?

A popular history of Scottish education in 1912 described 'the sons of the laird, the minister and the ploughman, seated at the same bench, taught the same lessons, and disciplined with the same strip of leather' (quoted by Anderson 1985a, p.82). This quote points to some of the main issues involved when looking at the concept of 'equal opportunities' in education over the last two centuries: ideas about social mix and social mobility; the very gendered nature of the myth; and its portrayal principally of small town or rural schools. A further issue to note is that the self-supporting, self-improving individual is highly valued in Scotland, as will be seen in the discussion of the lad o' pairs myth below. Collectivism, in the sense of an identification with public systems, has also been highly valued. McPherson argues that, taken together, these types of individualism and collectivism result in the arguably very Scottish idea that everyone should have a formal 'first chance' and thereafter be left to fend for themselves (McPherson 1973).

This seemingly paradoxical co-existence of individualism and collectivism has also been noticed by Hamish Paterson. Paterson argues that the centuries-long domination of Scottish society by poverty accounts for the drives towards both egalitarianism and elitism. 'In conditions of severe scarcity, winning a share of the few rewards available produces *both* competition *and* co-operation' (Paterson 1983, p.198). Thus, the effects of poverty on Scottish society help account for the high value placed on meritocracy in Scotland. In a meritocratic society, positions in the occupational and social structure are filled on the basis of merit (measured by society-wide criteria of achievement) not on ascribed criteria such as wealth, race, sex, class, etc. Paterson points out that, despite this high value placed on meritocracy, while 'access to [the educational system] was formally open, success within it was closely defined and therefore, of necessity, restricted to a few. The system's

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close definition of both "success" and "talent" ensured that its formal openness was contradicted by its substantive selectivity' (1983, p.200). I will discuss below just how open access was. Before doing so, however, it is helpful to take a brief look at the substantial academic debate over the nature and significance of tradition and myths.

'Tradition' is one of Raymond Williams' keywords (1976) - from a general word for matters handed down, it became specialised and survives in English to denote a process of handing down with a strong and often predominant sense of this entailing respect and duty. Crucially, only some traditions or parts of traditions are selected for our respect and duty. While it often only takes two generations to make anything 'traditional', the word has strong implications of age-old ceremony.

Similarly, myths/stories do tend to be based on past realities, even if only tenuously. They are usually a selective interpretation of the past and present, that expresses the shared values and purposes of a society thereby facilitating future action, and influencing the form this action takes. Thus, myths are dynamic despite being in many respects backward-looking stories. Moreover, by highlighting what are viewed as a society's values, myths often serve to define the boundaries between that society and others. In Scotland's case, the implicit or explicit comparison is usually with England.

Something that is mythical then is not necessarily false, although it is likely to be simplified and idealised. It tends to have an inspirational function, and helps maintain social or national identity. In Scotland, education fits into a wider context of supposed democratic Scottish virtues and values, such as respect for merit and ability rather than social status, and an absence of rigid class division. This is a good example of comparison with England: 'As a small country living in the shadow of a larger neighbour, Scotland has prized its educational system as part of the cluster of institutions and values by which its separate national identity has been maintained, and when the democratic tradition has been invoked, it has often been against the persistent threat of assimilation and "anglicization"' (Anderson 1985a, p.83).

McCrone *et al* (1982) write that central to the Scottish myth is the idea that the Scots are more egalitarian (than the English) and education plays an important part in this egalitarianism. A supposedly wider opportunity for social mobility in Scotland was illustrated in the 'lad o' pairs' tradition. The lad o' pairs story told how, by dint of discipline, hard work, frugality and the support of the Dominie and local community, the gifted son of poor parents

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could 'make it' up through University to a successful career, particularly in teaching or the ministry.

A DEMOCRATIC TRADITION: THE FACTS

All that said, how different 'in fact' *was* Scottish education? Anderson (1985b) argues that the educational traditions of Scotland have always been distinct from those of England. Mass literacy was achieved early - since the 17th century (in principle at least) there had been a public school in every parish, established by statute and maintained by a rate on the land. England was notable for the absence, and then the late development, of a state system of education. Scotland, however, was closer to the continental European pattern, with a relatively uniform national system enjoying legal and financial support from the state, although no centralised bureaucratic organisation such as many other countries had.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the four Scottish universities were noted not only for their dynamism but also for their popular base. The English system, on the other hand, was characterised by privilege - the ancient universities were exclusive and expensive and this perhaps even increased as they became more closely linked to the growing number of public schools. Rigid social divisions were, in Anderson's view, relatively absent in Scotland: parish and burgh schools 'were expected to serve the whole local community and meet a wide range of educational needs' (1985b, p.460). During the 1860s, the Scottish universities took students from the age of 15 or 16 upwards. There was no formal entrance exam until 1892 and this, combined with low fees and the wide availability of bursaries, resulted in an unusually 'progressive' student body. In the 1860s, 33% of students were the sons of professionals, 16% the sons of the commercial and industrial middle classes, 15% the sons of farmers, 6% the sons of shopkeepers and white collar workers and a substantial 23% were the sons of the skilled working classes.

However, very few were the sons of crofters, shepherds, fishermen, farm servants or labourers. Working class students were also typically mature men, not 'lads'. Clearly, although the Scottish education system in general did contain high proportions of students from working class backgrounds, the much cherished myth of the 'lad o' pairts' was not commonly experienced in reality. While the number of working class students was significant in percentage terms, the working class was of course far larger than the middle class - Anderson calculates that a minister's son was about a hundred times

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more likely to go to university than a miner's son, and that the sons of artisans had five or six times the chance of university attendance than labourers' sons.

In terms of schooling, Anderson states that 'the inclusiveness of Scottish secondary education was at a high but not exceptional level within the essentially elitist norms common to all European countries at the time' (1985b, p.466) - even in 1912, barely 10% of Scottish children went to secondary school. Nevertheless, there were significant meritocratic features, such as the low costs of education, the large number of scholarships, and the widespread geographical distribution of schools. Scottish schools were particularly effective at feeding pupils into the universities, but, for those not aiming at university, the system failed to deliver socially and intellectually attractive alternatives. 'The Scottish democratic tradition was really a meritocratic one, which laid great emphasis on the right of individuals to climb the social ladder; but it showed much less interest in those who failed to make this upward journey' (Anderson 1985b, p.478).

So, the idea of 'equality of opportunity' enshrined in Scottish education was a highly meritocratic one. Clearly, it was also very gendered. Girls don't even appear in the traditional account: there is never a 'lass o' pairts', and educational access for girls beyond the elementary level was not an issue for consideration. Fewell and Paterson (1990) argue that this is not simply neglectful, but rather that the reality of deeply institutionalised sexism in the school and in society has been concealed by the mythology of the excellence and egalitarianism of Scottish education, and that, until recently, the existence of such sexism was not even identified as a problem.

In addition to being narrowly meritocratic and gendered, the notion of 'equality of opportunity' was also individualistic. As has been seen, it is a very personalised account of the potential for social mobility, with the result that failing to 'make it' was easily attributed to individual worthlessness rather than to faults of the education system itself, or to wider societal constraints. According to Hamish Paterson, 'the school's narrow definitions of "talent" and "success" corresponded to a Calvinistic view of an elite with god-given ability and, together, these two ideologies were sufficiently powerful to convince the unfortunate lad without "pairts" that it was all his own fault and that he had no option but to rest content with second or third place' (1983, p.200). Moreover, it was a view of Scottish education clearly linked to rural paternalism and to a social identity of community rather than class. The Dominie persuaded well-off locals to sponsor lads o' pairts through their education - boys who 'made it' were portrayed as a source of community pride in stories by the likes of Kailyard novelists such as Ian MacLaren. The

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community described and celebrated in the 'lad o' pairts' tradition was an organic, pre-industrial one in a rural or small-town setting. This was a bias increasingly at odds with reality, as by the early 19th century Scotland ranked second in the world to England in terms of urbanisation and industrialisation. Anderson argues that the emphasis on continuity and the rural/small town image acted as a brake on any re-evaluation of what educational democracy in an urban and industrial society might mean.

It can be seen, then, that Scottish education was not so very democratic. Rather, it offered a very limited amount of social mobility for talented and dedicated male individuals from humble (but not *very* poor) backgrounds. In fact, it was an 'equality of opportunity' that could serve inequality by acting as a safety valve preserving social stability - a view held openly by many in power earlier this century as well as last. Paterson sums this up well when he says 'if Scottish schools were ever democratic, they were democratic in a particular way which emphasised social division, competitive liberalism and individual achievement at the expense of others' (1983, p.205).

I now want to take a look at social inequality in education in more recent times, and the attempts that have been made to deal with this inequality. To what extent is there continuity between current ideas on equal opportunities and the traditional concept? Have there been any positive or negative effects resulting from the stories we tell ourselves about Scottish education's history? Can the myth be used positively, and, conversely, are there any pitfalls to be wary of? I will attempt to answer these questions firstly by looking at the development of the Scottish education system this century, and then by drawing upon my own research in a contemporary secondary school.

DEVELOPMENTS THIS CENTURY: CERTIFICATION, EXPANSION, COMPREHENSIVISATION

In 1888, the Leaving Certificate was set up by the Secretary of the Scotch Education Department, Sir Henry Craik. Paterson argues that, as a result, the academic type of child was firmly reinstated as the dominant consideration in the thinking of Scottish educational policy-makers. He goes on to describe certification as 'a resurrection of a very old Scottish meritocratic tradition in a new guise' (Paterson 1983, p.213).

By 1900, elementary schooling for the majority, funded by the state, became accepted as the norm. The 1918 Education Act consolidated the growing state commitment to public education, by extending compulsory attendance,

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but implementation was delayed by financial crises and war. The leaving age was finally raised to 15 in 1947, and to 16 in 1973. The obligation of the state to provide free secondary schooling for all was acknowledged in the Act of 1936, wherein it was stated that no 'duly qualified' child should be debarred from any school because of expense - thus revealing the existence of some kind of underlying notion of equality of opportunity.

However, during the early 20th century, there was a growth in the use of intelligence tests for allocation to post-elementary schooling, and issues of access to and content of the post-elementary sector remained controversial. The system of secondary schooling that was built from 1900 until 1939 was characterised by the division of children and schools into two types - the academic and the non-academic. This was originally expressed quite openly in terms of social class - the background of pupils and appropriate future occupations for them depending on this background - but as this became unacceptable, the division was couched in terms such as 'natural ability'.

The bipartite post-elementary schooling system condemned the majority of the school population to the failure of early leaving, and the 'O' Grade was introduced in 1962 to counteract this 'wastage'. This heralded the start of rising levels of participation and attainment, reinforced by comprehensivisation in 1965. McPherson (1992) describes the earlier instrument of equal opportunities as the bursary, and the later equivalent as the area comprehensive school, which boosted the attainment of girls and of working class pupils. The 1960s and 1970s saw moves towards a more child-centred model of education, emphasising equality of treatment, not just of opportunity or access. In 1965, only 30% of school leavers had passed at least one 'O' or 'H' Grade - today, this figure is virtually reversed, with two thirds of pupils achieving the same results. In 1965, only 18% of school leavers had one or more Highers, while now this figure is 33% (McPherson 1990). There has been all round improvement but also equalisation: between working and middle class pupils, but more markedly between girls and boys. The principle of the same type of course for all pupils in compulsory schooling was first recommended in 1977, but delivery of common courses through the Standard Grade exam started only in the mid-1980s.

However, it is important not to simply swallow whole an equating of more exams with more success. The arguably unhealthy dominance of meritocracy was to some extent increased as a result of the ever-growing emphasis on passing exams. Gray, McPherson and Raffe (1983) point out, moreover, that inherited ideas about curricular breadth are only realised for a small minority - very few pupils successfully sit nine 'O' Grades and five Highers. Thus the

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actual breadth of study does not correspond to the aspirations or assertions of the Scottish myth.

It is worth emphasising again here that, in general, myths are a society's widely shared stories about itself. As such, they are also subscribed to by those with influence, and can therefore be called upon and have considerable effect in times of decision-making and change. People like Sir Henry Craik and other officials of the SED, the HMI, and teachers, are steeped in the Scottish tradition. Particularly earlier in this century, many would themselves have followed the type of career identified with the lad o' pairs myth: coming from relatively humble small town backgrounds, achieving success in the education system, and then often progressing upwards in their career through teaching at the respected academies of various other small Scottish towns. This background must have had some influence on the development of Scottish education, and it is worthwhile remembering that, even now, Scottish tradition is relevant to those with different cultural origins, precisely through the influence that teachers, school boards, the HMI and so on have.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES TODAY

The concept of 'equality of opportunity' today covers a far larger range than the lad o' pairs tradition. It no longer means that all 'respectable' white boys should have a chance to 'make it'. Rather, all pupils irrespective of race, gender and class (although the latter has been relatively neglected) should have access to the same opportunities, and thus have the same chance of success in selection and examination. 'Equality of opportunity' is sometimes used interchangeably with the terms 'anti-racism' and 'anti-sexism' (for example, in the media, in the school I carried out my research in, and so on). In fact, anti-racism and anti-sexism imply a more fundamental programme of action: calling for the moral and political education of staff and pupils and for a reconsideration of teaching practices and material which might propagate racism and sexism. From this standpoint, sexism and racism are regarded as having a structural, institutionalised nature. 'Equality of opportunity', on the other hand, has typically emphasised 'access', for example encouraging girls into non-traditional subjects.

Riddell (Brown and Riddell 1992) cautions that this dichotomy should not be overstated, as in practice many teachers and educational policy makers take an 'equal opportunities' approach on a day to day basis (eg regarding subject choice) but still hold to an ultimate goal of more fundamental change. Nevertheless, I would argue that the distinction between 'equality of

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opportunity' and anti-discriminatory action is a significant one. For example, Kelly (in Weiner and Arnot 1987) found that while it is now well accepted by teachers that boys and girls are basically equal and should have the same opportunities in education, the idea that informal barriers to this exist is still controversial. Riddell (1992) herself found in the process of her research that teachers are often suspicious of positive action programmes, and would make comments like 'I teach individuals, not sexes' (p.49). Riddell suggests that by concentrating on providing the best education possible for individuals, teachers tended to ignore the implications of their actions for groups. Pupils were characterised as free-floating individuals making choices in a social vacuum, and accepting the future consequences of their actions. She concluded that while 'equality of opportunity' is now an acceptable rhetoric, 'to go beyond matters of access to question social structures and institutions in a more profound way is extremely difficult' (1992, p.52).

Whether allowing open access to all types of education is sufficient to result in 'equality' for all pupils regardless of their class, race or sex, is an important and much debated issue (see for example: Dunn 1984; Weiner and Arnot 1987; Halson 1991; Troyna and Williams 1986). Studies have demonstrated that pupil-teacher interaction, discipline, subject choice, teacher expectations and so on can be very different depending on whether the pupil is white or black, male or female, working or middle class - so that a formal equality of opportunity does not mean an equal chance of success.

It is clearly important to know more about whether staff and pupils in schools feel that it is sufficient to provide formal equality of opportunity, and what their attitudes are to further positive action against discrimination. Some potential issues of interest can be illustrated from my own experience of researching pupils' knowledge of and attitudes towards the equal opportunities policies of their school.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

My research was carried out from the beginning of April to the end of June in 1992 in a city-centre comprehensive in the central belt of Scotland. The school roll is only slightly over 400 pupils, which is one of the reasons for the relatively informal and friendly atmosphere prevailing there. Approximately 15% of the school's pupils are bilingual, compared to 2.5% in the region's schools as a whole. Punjabi is spoken by half of the bilingual pupils, and the remainder speak a large variety of languages including Urdu, Cantonese and Turkish. The school has been developing its Equal Opportunities policies

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since the early 1980s, and is still in the process of extending them, to include class as well as race and gender. There is therefore a strong history of positive action, which makes the school an interesting case study - it has built on the opportunities existing within the educational system to promote equality of opportunity, but remains constrained by other structural factors, such as exams. On the Regional Council level, Equal Opportunities began as anti-racist education for a multi-cultural society, and then anti-sexism was also incorporated.

Clearly, race, gender and class cannot be treated as mutually exclusive categories. They overlap and interlink in complex ways and the experiences of school pupils are structured by all three factors. Schools within the region have responded to regional policy guidelines to greatly different extents. In the school I worked in, race, gender and class have been tackled separately, but there has been staff awareness that leaving class to last can have the consequence of appearing to deal with race and gender in a social vacuum. Attempts to unify the different aspects have been made through the guidelines leaflets produced for pupils. In this school, *active* policies - rather than just ensuring that no formal barriers to opportunities existed - have been developed, largely because of the commitment of the school management and a core group of staff working on the policies, and to wider staff consensus. The bottom line of school policy is that racism and sexism are institutionalised and unacceptable, and it is recognised that more work needs to be done to make sure that pupils understand that racism and sexism are phenomena of the wider society, and not just a matter of individual fault or blame.

As the school management and teachers were interested to get feedback, and thought that pupils might express their opinions more freely to me, my work focused particularly on the pupils' knowledge of and attitudes towards the anti-racist and anti-sexist guidelines promoted by the school. Since I was working on my own, I chose to do a fairly small scale and qualitative study. After pilot interviews with nine pupils, I conducted more detailed interviews with 24 male and female pupils of various ages and ethnic origins. I wanted to discover what pupils thought racism and sexism were; what they would describe as racist or sexist behaviour; and whether they thought this type of behaviour was prevalent in the school. In addition, I wished to find out if pupils knew the reporting procedure for racist or sexist incidents, and whether they would use this procedure; and lastly I wanted to know what pupils' opinions were of both the guidelines leaflets and other school initiatives in the area of Equal Opportunities. Thus it can be seen that my work involved finding out what pupils' concepts of 'equality of opportunity'

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were - what was counted as 'inequality'? What constituted an 'equality of opportunity'? To what extent should inequality be challenged or changed?

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The interviews began by asking pupils to define racism and sexism, followed by a list of specific examples which I asked interviewees to give me their opinion on - were they racist or not, serious or just a joke? For example, in the section on racism I asked 'Is it racist to call an Asian person a Paki?' and in the section on sexism I asked 'If a teacher comes in and says they want four strong boys to carry a table, is that sexist?'. I also asked why they thought the school had introduced the guidelines, whether it was good or bad to have them, and whether they thought the school did enough/too little/too much about racism and sexism. The answers to these questions and to those on the procedure for reporting sexist or racist incidents in the school (which raised the controversial issue of discipline which will be looked at below) gave me quite a clear picture of the extent to which pupils understood 'equality of opportunity' as to do with equal access and equal treatment, and the extent of more radical beliefs, eg about positive anti-discriminatory action.

The majority of interviewees thought it was good to have pupil guidelines on racism and sexism, although this was often qualified by saying this was only the case if they were implemented correctly, by which was meant 'treating everyone the same'. Only 17% of pupils felt that the school did too little about racism and sexism, and at the other extreme only 11% felt that it did too much. Most (72%, n = 18) felt that the school had hit a balance that was about right. A few mentioned that, if the school did more, there was a danger that people would get bored with it.

In terms of access, there was very strong support for the idea that such things as sports, school subjects and jobs should be open to everyone. Nearly all the interviewees felt that it was sexist to say that cooking and sewing were women's jobs; all but one boy thought it was sexist to say that football was a man's game; and the vast majority thought that boys could and should if they wanted to take Home Economics and girls could and should take Craft and Design if they wanted to. However, to a considerable extent this seemed to be a theoretical acceptance of equality of access - in practice, few girls played football, and subject choice was gendered. The issue of girls playing football has been frequently aired in the school, and obviously with some success given the pupils' attitudes, but as girls have usually not had much experience

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of playing the game, they are caught in a trap where their lack of experience makes it difficult for them to get experience:

Shona (13): I just like watching it, I can't play it. A lot of the boys go to other clubs.

Mhairi (13): A lot of the girls in PE stand at the side...when we're playing football, the boys always pass to other boys.

In terms of what pupils thought of as racism and sexism, it was clear from their responses to the specific examples I gave them that they classified the seriousness of remarks and situations very much by looking at the context in which they occurred. For example, it was okay to tell Irish jokes to somebody Irish if s/he was your friend and knew you were only teasing, but not okay to imply to someone that you didn't know that they were thick because they were Irish. While this is a realistic attitude given that people do interact differently with strangers than with people they know, it seemed to me potentially indicative of a very individualised way of looking at things, one which might work against the school's attempt to impart an understanding of discrimination as institutionalised and deeply embedded within society, rather than being a matter of individual fault or blame.

This issue came across clearly in the section on sexism. I had expected more girls than boys to think it was sexist to wolf whistle at women, but this was not at all the case. Only 22% of pupils thought it was sexist, and most of them qualified this by saying some women 'ask for it' or like it. An extremely common response was to say 'It depends how the woman feels about it'. 9% of pupils said they didn't know if it was sexist or not, and around 69% felt that it was not sexist ($n = 23$). The most common viewpoint was that it was not really sexist, but it *could* be on occasion. The pattern of answers was similar for the question on physical sexual harassment, although more pupils thought this was sexist. I feel that the attitudes revealed here are very significant, as it is potentially extremely serious to regard actions as neutral until there is a reaction to them. At a logical extreme, this could result in, for example, believing that it is okay to go around physically and sexually assaulting women because you won't know until after you've done it whether it is right or wrong. Pupils' responses to these questions had revealed an understanding of such situations as individual behaviour, not as taking place in and reinforcing a situation of systematic inequality, as it would be seen in the more radical view, linked with positive action.

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I did discover that pupils were deeply concerned with and repeatedly emphasised the notion of 'fairness' and equal treatment. This came up particularly in discussion of two issues of tension in the school: language and discipline.

The Equal Opportunities policy and guidelines state clearly that pupils should be encouraged to use their home language wherever possible, both when writing and when speaking, and that everyone's language should be valued and freely accepted. In practice, I found that people seem to feel quite threatened when faced with a group of people speaking a language they do not know. Many white pupils certainly felt strongly about the use of languages they could not understand - they seemed to view it as an unfair advantage, to the point that they seemed quite defensive and paranoid. A typical example of this from one white boy is as follows:

Cameron (14): They should speak the same language 'cause it's not fair if they speak their language in front of us, is it? They could be talking about us.

This was clearly something that staff would need to work on if the stated policy is to become acceptable in practice.

An even more emotive issue was that of whether the person you reported a racist or sexist incident to would listen to you and take action on what you said. While 68% (n = 22) of pupils said the staff would take a reported incident seriously and *try* to do something about it, there was also quite a lot of resentment expressed by male or white pupils. For example:

Lynn (14): We always get the blame and they never do.

Mandy (16): Because they think we're being racist. I'd say the Pakistanis get better treatment from the teachers.

Mark (13): They listen more to girls. They don't believe that a girl would grope a boy.

John (14): Because boys are supposed to be macho and all that. It's a load of crap.

As far as I could see, while most of the school's staff had little sympathy for racist or sexist behaviour, they were attempting to be wholly impartial in their treatment of conflicts, disciplining both sides if their behaviour was

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unacceptable. With regard to racism, white pupils' grievances turned on the belief that they are punished more strictly - principally that they might be suspended. However, at other points during my interviews with them, several of the same pupils volunteered the information that they themselves had sparked off conflict in the first place - so it would seem reasonable that they were disciplined more severely. All in all, it was clearly a sensitive issue that the school would have to treat with great care, making sure that discipline was seen to be consistent and fair, or the success of the whole Equal Opportunities programme would be jeopardised.

As I have mentioned above, I found that most pupils held strong beliefs about 'fairness' which centred round equal treatment. Pupils viewed sexism and racism very much as two-way processes. Many (white) pupils said that black people could be just as racist, and many (boys, but some girls too) responded to questions about teachers being sexist by giving examples involving preferential treatment of girls in terms of classroom discipline. While the strong sense of justice and fair play felt by pupils was in many respects encouraging, it also involved a lack of recognition or understanding that treating people 'the same' may not be enough when some start off from disadvantaged positions. Pupils saw their remarks or behaviour only in the immediate context of the face-to-face interactions in which they participated: therefore, it is as nasty for you to call me a 'white bastard' as it is for me to call you a 'black bastard'. They lacked a sense of how their own actions fitted within oppressive structures of racism and sexism. For most, it was enough that the school had a policy stating that everyone was entitled to the same opportunities and treatment. There was a tendency to view positive action to ensure that informal constraints to equal opportunity were removed as unfair preferential treatment of girls or Asian pupils. It was clear that while the majority of pupils were very accepting of the idea of 'equality of opportunity', in practice this had to be handled very sensitively if pupils were not to jump to the conclusion that some were being treated better than others.

Thus, the concept that pupils had of 'equality of opportunity' was very much to do with the removing of formal barriers and providing access for all people to the subjects, sports and jobs that they want to do. However, this should not necessarily be viewed in a wholly negative light. It must be remembered that the school's Equal Opportunities policies had only been in place for a few years, and the guidelines given to pupils had only been launched a few months before my interviews with pupils took place. Moreover, the policies and the attitude of the staff had given female and Asian pupils a level of confidence to challenge racism or sexism notably lacking in many other studies (eg Halson 1991; Wood in Weiner and Arnot 1987; MacIntosh in

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Fewell and Paterson 1990). I found little evidence of resignation or acceptance on the part of Asian girls, the group who seemed to come in for most racist and sexist abuse, and a group that have often traditionally been thought of as very low profile and passive. Amongst pupils in general, even those who were avowedly racist, I found what seemed to me quite high levels of awareness of issues to do with racism and sexism. It would be interesting firstly to compare this school with one that has only a 'paper policy', or with one where there is no stated policy at all, and secondly, to look at the same school over time to monitor any changes in pupils' knowledge and attitudes as the policies become more established.

CONCLUSION

The concept of a Scottish 'equality of opportunity' provided through education has come a long way from its origins in the limited opportunities available to working class Scottish boys to the all-embracing concept of today. Despite the shift from a traditional emphasis on socio-economic status to a concept today that is often equated with race and gender only, there are certain similarities: the idea of removing formal barriers then leaving it up to the individual lingers; and there is considerable reluctance as regards more wide-ranging positive discrimination to ensure a real 'equality of opportunity'. We have a strong heritage emphasising the importance of individual hard graft and achievement in a competitive atmosphere, which may make it harder to accept any need for programmes of positive action. More optimistically, the fact that people in Scotland have pride in the idea of a democratic educational heritage - open to all, and of a high standard - indicates that there should be an underlying sympathy towards providing quality, discrimination-free education today. This would seem to be backed up by the emphasis placed upon fairness and equal treatment by the pupils that I interviewed. Clearly, we still have a very meritocracy-dominated system of education, centring around exam passes, and there seems little likelihood of this changing in a society where employment is scarce and qualifications of some sort a prerequisite for most jobs. Nevertheless, 'equality of opportunity' is a concept widely subscribed to, and given its relatively recent appearance in its modern guise, I see no reason why there should not be a gradual movement towards more radical action than simply removing formal barriers to access. Despite the problems and tensions experienced in the school I studied, their policies had moved pupils' (and staffs') knowledge of and attitudes towards Equal Opportunities far beyond anything I had ever experienced when I was at school, and presumably far beyond what many children still experience at other schools. There may still

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be a long way to go before a true 'equality of opportunity' can be reached, but that does not need to mean that it is impossible to get there.

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