

# European Research Based Anti-racist Curriculum Action on the Web<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

In the second half of the twentieth century, the European countries with former empires - Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain - experienced shifts in populations and consequent questioning of perceptions of 'nationhood'. The first key change in their populations was made up of migrant and settler labour from former colonial possessions. Because of other economic and socio-political processes other European countries – specifically Sweden in this case - have more recently begun to experience something similar (Gaine, 2000; Hällgren & Weiner, 2001; Goulbourne, 1998; Santos Rego & Perez Dominguez, 2001).

The challenge to nationhood has been perceived and articulated in terms of both 'race' and culture, though these have proved to be slippery notions readily substituted for each other in political and public discourse, especially to avoid the accusation of racism. We take the view that the issue, the problem, in our societies is best defined as one of inequality and injustice rather than the less threatening concept of 'diversity' (Runnymede Trust, 2000; Modood et al, 1997). Whether expressed in terms of crude biology or in terms of cultural incompatibility, we regard the educational problem as being one of learned antagonism towards 'the Other' and we regard the duty of schools as being to challenge and deconstruct this. The research and its pedagogical outcomes were therefore not intended to enquire into cultural difference, they were not rooted in conceptions of newcomers and hosts, they sought rather to research and represent people's experiences of being 'the Other', to portray resistance and survival, and to challenge taken for granted assumptions about national identity and individual belonging.

This is the context in which a series of websites has been developed in the UK, Sweden, Spain, the Netherlands (and initially Italy) to counter racist myths and stereotyping. They are aimed at younger secondary school students, are connected together through a portal site, and available in the home languages and English.

The paper will explore the key decisions inherent in the production of particularly the Swedish and British sites. The focus will primarily be upon the research decisions in

- targeting an area in which teachers are known to feel insecure (Jones, 1999).
- gathering data
- transforming research data into usable pedagogic materials
- validating the materials with potential user feedback
- launching the websites to the specific (and different) educational communities in both countries
- evaluating their use.

## Teacher confidence

We suggest teachers feel insecure about dealing with 'race', though the reasons differ in Britain and Sweden.

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Britain has experienced change in its population since the late 1940s and is widely regarded in Europe as a 'multicultural' society. Two things may be said about this. First, 'multicultural' Britain is not yet at ease with itself. In aspects of education, in many spheres of employment, in the provision of public services such as health and the police, we know there is still an 'ethnic penalty' being paid most markedly by people distinguishable by colour, whether or not they are British-born (Home Office, 2005). This frequently features in media and political discourse, racism in the police service being highlighted at the same time as 'immigration' ranking third in public concerns in the 2005 general election. The second observation to be made is to stress that Britain is not uniformly multicultural, almost 50% of its minorities living in London and many parts of the country not yet substantially different demographically to decades ago. A consequence of both these factors is that the predominantly white teaching force have had little to support them in engaging with racism, and this applies to public discourse, political agendas, in curriculum regulations, and in teacher education.

Sweden is a different case. Despite its international reputation for human rights and democratic values, its recognition of racism, not least amongst the young, is a relatively new issue, generally being regarded as something that occurs *outside* Sweden. This was not challenged in the immediate post-war era since immigrant labour came mainly from the Nordic countries, in particular from Finland, resulting in 44% of immigrants being white. During the 1980s and 1990s the picture changed with new immigrants, mainly asylum seekers from Eastern Europe and countries outside Europe. Some were people of colour (Kaplan, 2001).

One consequence of the changed pattern of immigration was a heightened visibility of racist groups opposed to the 'new' Swedes<sup>1</sup> such that racism became of national concern (Lange, Löw, Bruchfeld and Hedlund, 1997). Yet, there was little concerted action despite repeated requests from, for example, municipalities, schools and trade unions for guidance, advice and support, on how to fight racism.

The shortage of public information or research findings related to racism in Sweden led to a general lack of knowledge about the nature of racism, or what motivates perpetrators (Integrationsverket, 2001). This is also the conclusion of a recent research overview of multicultural and antiracist issues connected to Swedish classrooms (Hällgren et al, 2003). Compared to Britain, debates and research about racism and its different forms, and in particular understandings of the nature of everyday racism, were relatively scarce. According to Pred (2000) the concept of everyday racism only came into public discourse and 'antiracist proclamation' in 1997 (Pred, 2000: 83). One reason for the slow recognition of racism has been the tendency to define racism as historically connected to Nazism and anti-Semitism. As Lindström (2002) points out, racism tends to be seen in Sweden as something not only located in another time but also another place, for example, South Africa or the USA. In addition, racism in Sweden is often associated with extremist groups such as neo-nazis or 'confused, unemployed boys living in small rural communities' (Sawyer, 2002: 17). This is understood by Sawyer as a discursive 'strategy to protect the national story of Sweden and Swedes as moral, united (solidarisk) and antiracist' (Sawyer, 2002: 17; 2001; 2000). Pred (2000) similarly notes Sweden's self image as the 'champion of the elsewhere oppressed', and also the difficulties Swedes have in accepting that they are capable of racism because of their self-perception as 'deeply committed to Social Democratic notions of solidarity and social justice' (Pred, 2000: 83).

In both societies, therefore, teachers lack confidence in their own knowledge, in framing the issues, in their ability to handle an explosive subject, and indeed on quite where they stand themselves (Gaine, 2001; Parzyk, 1999; Skolverket, 2000; Jones, 1999).

## **Gathering data**

In the British case, the data took in literal terms a few months to gather and write, but less literally took about twenty years. In other words, the material was based upon the author's immersion in the field over a long period and through a thorough knowledge of relevant British research, of which there has been a large and growing amount to inform and with which to critically engage. In this sense the experience of minorities has been accessible for those willing to read about it, and key struggles and persisting problems are well documented. One of the persisting problems involves majority perceptions of minorities and this was clearly something that needed to be addressed in the website. This therefore informed the specific research that was referred to, and the following table shows something of the decisions involved in which topics appear on the site and their research base.

<i>Topic included because a priority for minorities</i>	<i>Topic salient to both</i>	<i>Topic included because key part of frame of reference of majority</i>
Relations with the police (Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, 1999)		Black people as criminals (NOP, 1997)
	Supposed natural superiority in sport (Cashmore, 1982; Entine, 2000; Sewell, 1997)	
Arranged marriages not necessarily seen as objectionable (Modood, 1997)		Arranged marriages seen as inevitably oppressive (NOP, 1997)
Islam as private personal faith (Parker-Jenkins, 1995)		Islam as fundamentalist (Runnymede, 1997)
Lack of appreciation of importance of roots, culture (Modood, 1994 & 1997)		Sense of threat to 'British culture' (NOP, 1997; Donald & Rattansi, 1992)
	Unfamiliarity with minorities' religious faiths & practices (NOP, 1997; Modood, 1997)	
Racist jokes (Alibhai-Brown, 1994, Troyna & Hatcher, 1992, Gaine, 1995)		not significant
Annoyance at persistence of rejected terms of description (Gaine, 1987)		Discomfort and uncertainty about acceptable terminology (Gaine, 1987)
Racial harassment (Modood, 1997, Gordon, 1990)		not significant
Employment discrimination (Bryan et al, 1985; Modood, 1997)		'Too many' minorities in employment (NOP, 1997; Cohen, 1992)
Oppressive discriminatory immigration law (Gordon & Klug, 1985; Modood, 1997)		Immigration numbers as a problem (Van Dijk, 1993)
	Widespread white beliefs and repeated clichés about culture, being parasitic, general hostility (Halstead, 1988; Van Dijk,	

	1993; NOP, 1997)	
	Housing patterns, choice and segregation (Modood, 1997)	

In Sweden on the other hand, as we have already said, there was almost no research data on the experiences of minorities (other than statistics), so it was specifically gathered for the project. 30 interviews were carried out, mainly of young people between the ages of 14 and 30 from minority as well as majority ethnic backgrounds. Some 'purposeful' sampling involved inviting young people from specific ethnicities to participate in the study. Individuals were approached in the street, in shops, on the way to work etc. 'Snowball' or 'chain' sampling was also used to gain access to the target population (teenagers to young adults) through word of mouth recommendation. 'Variation' sampling widened the range of interviewees in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, geographic location etc. 'Extreme' or 'deviant' case sampling involved identifying potential interviews with specific experiences, e.g. being excluded from an activity on racist grounds (Seidman, 1998; Patton, 1990). Only one refusal was received of all the individuals approached to participate and several interviewees themselves contacted the project. We were aware that such methods of selection/sampling raise the questions that by selecting interviewees on the basis of skin colour or ethnicity, the research itself might contribute to the process of social or educational exclusion.

The aim of the interviews was to understand individual experiences and the meaning given to those experiences, rather than to gain answers to specific questions (Seidman, 1998). The interview was thus used to explore opinions, attitudes, stories and life histories, and also as a means of illustrating and animating theoretical understandings (Kvale, 1997, Seidman, 1998). Rubin and Rubin (1995) usefully compare the interview to a window on time where the social world is experienced by one person in time, by means of one episode at a time. The interviewees were asked to reflect on their family life, language, culture and religion, as well as on their experiences as young people growing up in Sweden. Additionally they were encouraged to reflect on the most common issues connected to their ethnicity.

The main themes raised in the interview study were overt and hidden aspects of racism, the need to be watchful at all times, needing to work hard to 'adapt' to society, the importance of language and having the 'right' name, being let down by adults, the complexity of 'us' and 'them', needing to be strongly motivated to become successful and having to learn different strategies to survive. (See Hällgren, 2003 for a detailed discussion).

### **Transforming research data into useful pedagogical materials**

This was the particular challenge facing the websites. We did not want to preach, we did not want to have pages of descriptive or explanatory text, we wanted to engage readers without presenting issues as necessarily closed and unambiguous. The way we chose to do this marks the key feature of the websites: they consist of fictionalised characters rooted in our research, who engage in debate and dialogue with each other. To take one example from the table above showing issues on the British site, 'widespread white beliefs and repeated clichés about culture, being parasitic, general hostility', this is featured on the website in the imaginary location of the school computer room, with the following dialogue:

*'Sometimes I think it's really hard to speak out'*

*David:* It's really weird for me sometimes, like I feel like I can't say anything if someone says stuff about Jews, even though I'm Jewish. Like I've got a chip on my shoulder or something. But usually I don't hear it really.

*John:* Neither do I, to be honest - I guess people know we're mates. What do you reckon Tzu Lee? If people are going to say things you're going to hear them more than me, since me and David go around together....

*Tzu Lee:* I don't hear anything about David in particular, but, yeah, I do reckon people have bad ideas about Jews. But it's all mixed up, 'cos they know about the Nazis trying to wipe out the Jews and everything.

*John:* I reckon it's nothing to what people say about black and Asian people. It's not just about jobs and that, there's stuff about blacks being primitive, and needing civilising, and not as brainy as white people....

*Tzu Lee:* I dunno how many people still believe it, but it really gets up my nose when they go on about Britain ruling other places as if they couldn't rule themselves. I mean, when Britain ruled Hong Kong, they didn't even give the Chinese people the vote. My Gran says when she was a girl there was a park with a notice saying 'No dogs or Chinese'.

*David:* Sounds like the Nazis with the Jews.

*Visiting computer engineer:* It's all right for people your age, you've grown up with all different kinds. But a lot of us older folk aren't used to it. I've seen the whole area I live in change.

*John:* What do you mean?

*Computer engineer:* Well, like a place I went to church in as a boy is some kind of funny temple now. It doesn't feel right.

*John:* It's only a temple because people stopped using it as a church. Whose fault is that?

*Computer engineer:* Well, it wasn't mine! And there are all these shops.

*Tzu Lee:* And Chinese takeaways I suppose? Who do you think our customers are? How come we get the blame for English people's taste in food? I bet you don't object to home delivery pizzas as well, but I don't suppose you had those when you were young either?

*Computer engineer:* There's no need to be like that. You're not giving a very good impression of your race, if I may say so...

*Tzu Lee:* I'm not trying to actually. Why do you treat me as if I represent all Chinese people? I wouldn't judge all white people by what you say.

*Computer engineer:* Well, perhaps you should. Perhaps there are more people like me than you think. It's no use pretending. You can call it prejudice if you like, but I think most white people would give a job to someone of their own kind if they could... it's only natural. Well, I've finished this job, I'd better go

Another related device is to 'meet' characters' relatives who give brief accounts of events in their lives, so parents and grandparents talk about their original motives and expectations in migrating, their experiences of immigration control, harassment in the street and at home, discrimination they have had to endure in housing and in employment, and getting established in work or business<sup>2</sup>. The Pakistani character's father tells a story typical of many:

*... I came from a place in northern Pakistan in 1955, because there had been political troubles there for a long time. A lot of people got moved about and the land we had was not big enough to support all of us.*

*My father came to Britain in the war and was killed fighting the Germans, so all we brothers had to look after my mother. We knew there was work in Britain because there were adverts in Pakistani newspapers about it - factories that had big orders but didn't have enough workers.*

Another father reflects upon a family history of being refugees:

*My father told me where he used to live in Austria - the Nazis just took all Jewish people's houses in the end and gave them to other people. I went to look at the house once, but it didn't mean anything to me. He's never been able to go back - he says there are too many ghosts, too many sad memories. He has always felt grateful to Britain for taking him in. I think refugees must often feel like that, even though life can be hard for them in their new country. I don't feel the same way, I mean I don't feel grateful, since I was born here.*

While these brief vignettes were sometimes culled from formal research accounts, sometimes they were not, or at least not explicitly. Not all such knowledge is gained from reading and researching, some being acquired by the author's personal involvement with local minority groups and engagement with housing discrimination, with racial assaults, with monitoring the activities of an extremist right wing party activists and with campaigns about specific deportations and the more general racial element of immigration laws. This generated a considerable amount of experiential knowledge. For instance, one of the well-trodden paths of research and concern in Britain has been about second-generation minorities and their potential tensions about where they culturally belong. This is played out in the *Britkid* scenes in the park where various contrary views are put – one from a Sikh opposed to an arranged marriage and one from a Muslim more accepting of it. It is not possible to say what proportions of which community would line up on one side or the other in this debate, but they are genuine views which represent divergences within British south Asian communities.

Another example is to be found in the account from the Sikh's mother of problems she encountered gaining re-entry to Britain:

*... I have had some terrible times with the immigration people. The worst was when my husband died in 1990 and I took his ashes back to India. When I came back to Heathrow they held me up... asked me all these questions. I have a house here, I have a good job here, I have lived here over 20 years, but they treated me like a spy, as if they couldn't believe anything I said.*

*I think they thought I might really be an illegal immigrant. Where do they think I got my passport and my address from? I was there for hours. In the end I think it was the head of my school who convinced them that they should let me go. I didn't want to phone her - it was embarrassing, as if I'd done something wrong, I felt like I'd been arrested, treated like a criminal. But I had no choice in the end, I had to find someone white and respectable who would tell them I really was a teacher and I had a right to be here.*

The author cannot recall exactly where the components of this story came from when it was written, or how the different elements permeated into the narrative as it took shape, though Wilson (1978) contains more harrowing accounts by far. While showing the finished website to a group of south Asian teachers and classroom assistants in 1999 one said something very similar had happened to her. In one sense we were both surprised at this first hand meeting of a 'fictional' story with a real one, but in another sense we were not.

Thus none of the stories related by the characters are true in the literal sense, no *one* person recounted them, but they are all, nevertheless, 'true'. The composite creative synthesis through which they appeared is part of a research process, but a longer one which involves implicit research as well as experiential involvement and extensive knowledge of secondary sources – others' research, novels, newspaper reports and TV documentaries.

But why not use real words, real accounts? In part the reason in Britain was that the material exists and people experiencing oppression are known to express exasperation with continual visits from researchers, wondering when something will actually come of it. Since there was

ample existing research about the experiences of minorities, why not put it to additional use? It also needs to be remembered that writing fiction allows one license. Real people do not always sum up what they mean in a brief and cogent form, and with learning materials the pressure for ‘authenticity’ is countered by the pressure for pithiness and brevity.

The Swedish process of collating data was different, for the reasons we have explained, but the creative reworking of material into something potentially effective on a website for young people had many similarities. The interviews contributed both to the narrative of the character and to the dialogues, with patterns/themes interlaced into nine interactive, semi-fictional dialogues between the characters and connected to a main character on the website. The dialogues concerns the following main topics:

1. *The complexity of “we and them”.*
2. *Is it always OK for someone to ask “Where do you come from?” Other questions are explored such as “when do you actually become a Swede?” and “what do you have to do to become Swedish?”*
3. *Are people able to joke about absolutely anything? Or are some things just not funny?*
4. *Just a word? Who decides how somebody else should be described?*
5. *Are you allowed to fall in love with anyone? Different viewpoints.*
6. *About prejudices. Why does Fredrik feel that people sometimes look at him in a strange way?*
7. *Does it matter what people are called? Should you have to change your name in order to fit in?*
8. *Comments about people’s appearance and what they look like. What is or is not acceptable?*
9. *Who decides what you are or what you should be? Do you have to be one thing or the other?*

Some of the interviewees emerged as having more personal stories than others and therefore contributed more to the core content to the characters, while some interviewees contributed more to certain issues and themes discussed in the dialogues.

Narratives of eleven characters were transferred to the website: Brahanne – a refugee from Eritrea, Viecka born in Sweden with a Swedish mother and a father from Iran, Rashid from Somalia, Jonas, adopted from South Korea, Emma born in Sweden with two ‘Swedish’ parents, Maria with a father from Sweden and a mother from South Africa, Jennifer with both parents from ex Yugoslavia, Ella from a Sámi background, Nasrin from Iran, Fredrik from a Finnish-Roma background and Eric whose parents were Jewish and from Poland.

The key themes that emerged from the interviews were listed above. The dialogue illustrating the theme of ‘people’s appearance and what they look like’ takes as its starting point Brahanne’s experiences of getting comments on the way he looks. In this story, a small boy comes up to Brahanne and asks why he is so ‘black’ and whether he is a robber. Brahanne explains to the boy that except from having a different skin colour, they are both exactly the same. In the interview the real ‘Brahanne’ reflects on how to respond to this kind of question:

*... and little kids can ask ‘why are you black, are you dirty’ (...) and then you must find an answer (...) it is hard to find a good answer they understand, so you do not frighten them. But it is things their parents should have told them, they are their role models and they have to tell them that there are different people. Some can look like this and others like that. (Brahanne).*

The story on the website continues to build on the interview with Brahanne and shows his strategy when dealing with the question about the way he looks. The story also raises the idea about where children get their ideas from and moreover adults' responsibility as role models:

*Brahanne: And I said back to him: "Are you a robber?" The kid replied: -"No!" I said: "I'm exactly the same as you are except that I have a different colour of skin. I came to Sweden and learned Swedish, and I have Swedish friends and so, I am exactly the same as you." "OK", he said back and then ran off.*

*You hope that he will not run to the next person and say the same thing, because somebody might get upset. He is just a kid but you don't know who he'll do it to next time.*

*It is difficult. You must find a good answer that they understand so that you don't frighten them. This is something that they must have got from their parents, their parents who are their role models. Perhaps they talk about different kinds of people - some look like this and some look like that. When I was a kid and lived in Eritrea, before I came to Sweden, I didn't know why some people were white. I thought that they had melted in the sun...*

*Question to site user: What do you think? Did Brahanne do the right thing or are there other ways he might have dealt with this situation?*

*Question to site user: Do you think some people think the same way as the kid – they just don't say it loud?*

*Question to site user: Has anything like that happened to you?*

Another example is the dialogue concerning the complexity of 'us and them'. The character Maria tells about when she and her family lived in small, Swedish community and how it was seen as different having a parent from another country – in this case from South Africa. In the end, the situation in the small Swedish town where she lived became so bad that the family could not go anywhere without harassment. Eventually, the whole family decided to move, not just to a new town but also to a new country, England. Maria really looked forward to beginning at a new school with new friends. Unfortunately, the people around her continued to see her as 'different' in the new country too – she was considered too 'white'. The story draws on the experience of Maria, who reported in the interview:

*But what Sweden did I have to go back to? I was upset when someone called me fair and pretty because I didn't want to listen to that identity connected to Sweden. I felt like Sweden had slapped me right in my face; 'You don't belong to us' But nevertheless, that was what I got to hear, and yet, again, I was a minority and different. The black kids didn't welcome me either, as I'd hoped. (Maria)*

Still building on what the 'real' Maria reported, the story on the site continues:

*Maria: But one day everything changed. It was during a lesson on Apartheid when I said that my mum was from South Africa. Then I got to hear "How cool, why didn't you say that before?" - and all of a sudden I had lots of friends just because of that. It is totally sick!*

*But then I felt even worse, because I realised no-one had bothered to see ME at all. They had never asked: "Who are you?" "Who is Maria?"*

Question to site user: *What do you think Maria means when she says that the people around her didn't "see her". What did they see instead?*

Question to site user: *Have you had the experience of people not seeing YOU?*

a) *Yes*

b) *No*

c) *If yes, can you describe what happened?*

### **Validating the materials**

A good deal of post-production validation took place, with many individuals and organisations being contacted to review the draft written text and many changes implemented as a result before anything went on line. These changes were as much to do with dilemmas about representation as they were about 'factual truth', but they indicated whether readers felt their own experiences were echoed in some way. In the British case it felt rather like giving analyses of interview transcripts to research subjects and asking whether the overall analysis rang true. In the Swedish case they were able to do just this, with each interviewee who contributed to the core content being asked to check the manuscript for errors and misrepresentation.

In Britain an argument ensued in the feedback about the occupation of the Chinese girl's family. This was created as being in the restaurant trade since that is indeed the dominant occupational sector of British Chinese people, but here the 'facts' of research could not simply speak for themselves in the light of other considerations about representation. In the first extract below, the bold font was added following feedback, and the strikethrough text was deleted:

*I'm Tzu Lee, though people usually call me Soozie. I prefer my proper Chinese name, but Soozie is close enough **for people who don't know me. I do expect my friends and my teachers to get it right.** My family and I live here, and that includes my Gran.*

*Religion at home*

*It's hard to really explain about our family's religion, 'cos it's not like something we really learn like I think Muslims and Christians do, and there's no special building we go to. We're sort of Buddhists, but I know there are lots of other kinds **of Buddhists too.** We have special meals at certain times, and celebrate new year, but ~~that's really I'm not sure if that's~~ a Chinese thing rather than a Buddhist thing.*

The same convention applies in the next extract, in which much more was altered in response to some Chinese girls' comments:

*I'm Tzu Lee's grandmother. My husband and I came here from Hong Kong in 1958, because we knew there were **better work opportunities here.** **As it turned out we started up in the restaurant trade because we had a cousin who knew something about it, though after a while it was only my husband doing it and I went to work in a chemists.** ~~to work in take-away food shops and maybe to get one of our own. The thing about take-aways is that if you live above the shop and work very long hours, never have holidays, you can live very cheaply and you don't have to worry about being unemployed as long as English people come and buy the fish and chips! It seems to me that a lot of English people who used to run fish and chip shops got tired of the long hours and wanted more time off and more money, so gave us a chance.~~ One of our children now runs a **big proper** Chinese restaurant, and the other two work in business. For us it was worth coming all this way and changing our whole*

*lives. We've worked hard and given our customers what they wanted, and all our children got a good education. We hope Tzu Lee becomes a lawyer or something like that.*

Now, it is not in dispute that over ninety percent of British Chinese adults work in the restaurant trade. Nevertheless, the feedback from the girls said 'that may be true, but you're stereotyping us, we don't want everyone to read the site and think that all Chinese work in restaurants'. The response could have been 'but actually, most do, so it's not stereotyping' but the point was that that was not how they wished to be represented.

During one of the early trialling of the Swedish website it became obvious that the illustration of the Sami girl (Ella) was not done carefully or sensitively enough. Even though the illustrator had left out the 'typical Sami iconography' (the Sami are often pictured in a rather cruel, exotifying and caricatured way) and we thought we were aware and careful about avoiding this, a spontaneous comment revealed to us that we had failed. Ella was portrayed with slightly slanted eyes. This was received as unacceptable and we immediately changed the illustration after this response.

These examples of the difficulty of representation, the imaginary young people on the sites are all in a sense carrying the burden of representing their entire ethnic group, which is dangerous. The point is, this is not just a teaching device, it is a media product, and a responsible media product has got to be very conscious of the risks it runs.

#### **Use and evaluation: *Britkid***

The British site was launched in 1998, the Swedish one in 2001, so *Britkid* has had the longest period of time in which to accumulate evaluative outcomes. We know the number of hits per year to be about 10,000, though not all of these are from the UK (see Gaine, 1999). In terms of public recognition, awards, invitations to present and discuss the site and press coverage the response has been highly positive. Responses from teachers when shown the sites at conferences and meetings have been equally so, with almost no negative feedback in any form, strongly suggesting they would use the site in their own work. The approval of and interest by teachers is crucial towards such a 'product's' success. If they 'like' it and believe that it meets a need then it is certain to be used.

Data from observations of young people using the sites has been gathered by two researchers associated with the project, in a Scottish city, in the north east of England, and in a rural southern county. These confirm detailed results derived from questionnaires (some of which follow) and can be summarised as:

- pupils find the characters credible
- they do not feel 'preached at'
- they find the site an engaging way of learning.

The reaction of minority ethnic young people has been especially marked where it has been observed, with an identification with characters from their own group especially evident. This is not to say that they do not contest the representations, but they have done so from a starting point of being generally positive about the site.

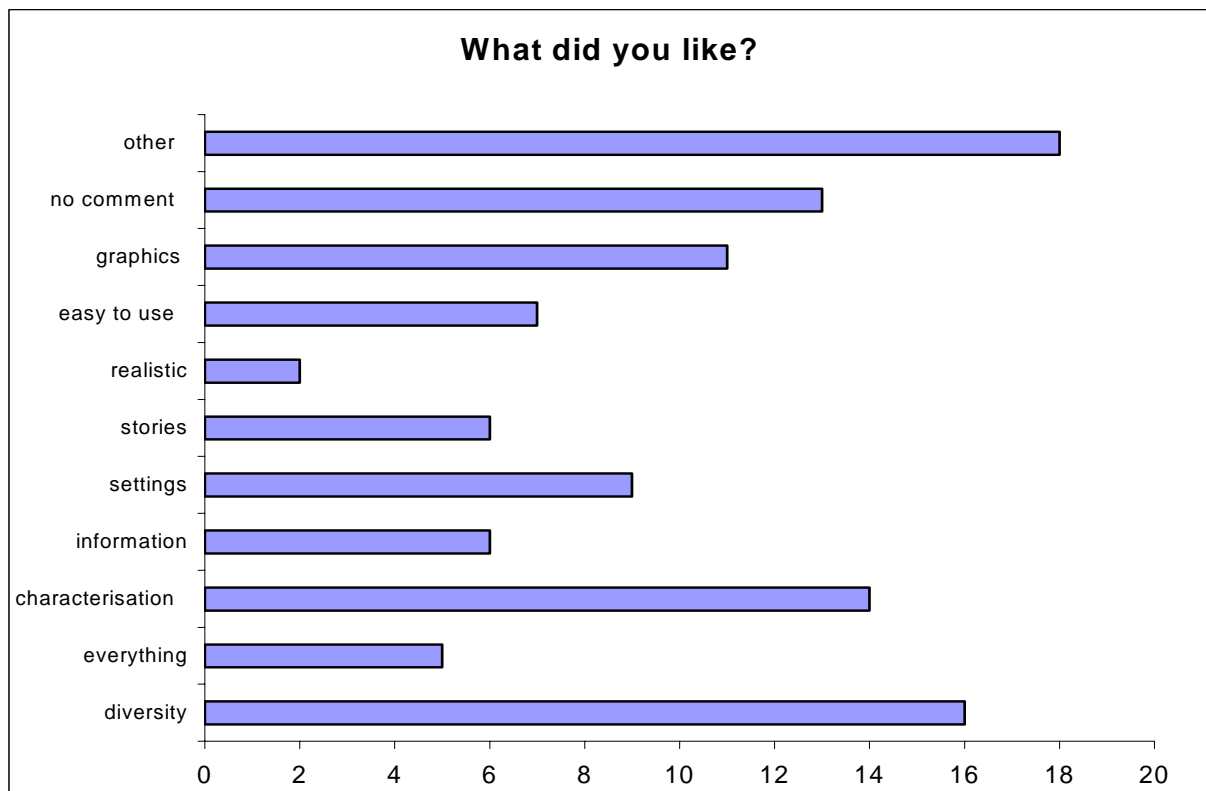
Unsolicited emails from young people and other users have been, with one exception from a far right organisation and another from one London-based teacher, positive.

The core items in questionnaires given to classes which used the sites sought information on which parts of the site were visited, what might be changed, anything particularly

liked/disliked, anything particularly remembered and whether it had changed their ideas. We also sought information about navigation and graphics, and the level of textual difficulty. This indicates something of the complexity of evaluating this work and the potential blurring of positivist, pragmatic, interpretivist, and critical approaches (ref): we might *analytically* separate different aspects but in use the websites would be experienced seamlessly, with graphics, navigation and content merging in their effects. Thus, no simple answer was being sought in these questionnaires: the evaluation of curriculum materials is not a mere input-output process with easily measurable gains. We aimed at challenging and stimulating our users, and did not expect results on a simple measure of attitude change.

The questionnaires were completed by six classes, in different schools with very little ethnic diversity in a rural county in the south of England<sup>3</sup>. With 107 responses to 25 questions, a great deal of data could be presented so we propose to concentrate on some general reactions with some reference to an element we think are key to our goals: did the characterisation seem credible, realistic and engaging enough to make the issues real?

When asked what they liked about the site, only five in effect said 'everything' and only two specifically complemented its realism. On the other hand, fourteen mentioned characterisation as a positive feature and when asked what they would remember about the site, ten mentioned the characters and eight a specific character. Sixteen valued the diversity represented, six valued the extent of information given, nine mentioned the settings of the story lines, and six the stories themselves.



On the way the site looks and functions, only fifteen praised aspects of the interactivity (rather more thought it should be more interactive), eleven liked the page layout and graphics, and seven said they found it easy to use. On their own, none of these numbers signifies any great degree of success, but combined with the comments on characterisation, 89 of 107 pupils asked wrote that they were attracted a key element of the site. Some gave no answer and only two were explicitly negative. When asked for one thing they did not like, seven were more explicit, most indicating boredom. Four were unhappy about the characterisation and four,

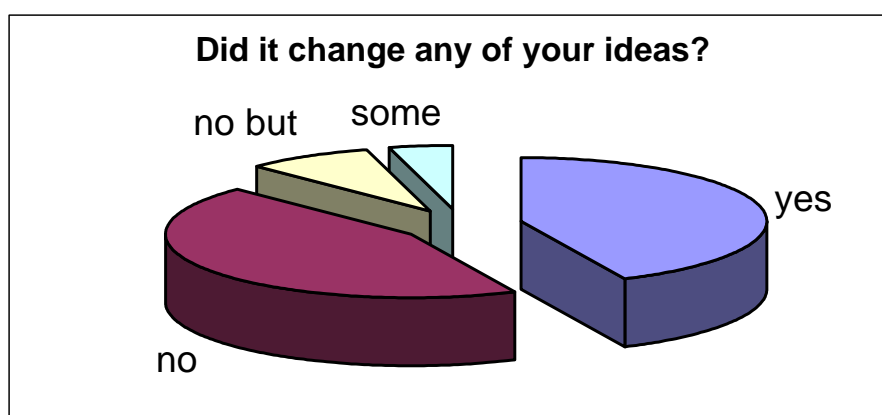
with regard to specific characters. Only three said they found the website unrealistic. The most unpopular aspect of the site was the quantity of text (14) while three thought the text too difficult overall. The level of interactivity was viewed negatively by six, an equal number disliking the graphics and four the navigation (there was some correlation between these dislikes and the suggested changes).

29 pupils left blank the question, 'what did you not like?' and eleven - ten of them girls - wrote 'nothing'. Six others, in a way, misunderstood the question, stating what they did not like about the site was the racism portrayed. Overall, therefore, 46 out of 107 had no specific criticism to make.

Other general reactions can be gathered from the answers to the question 'what would you change?' Two wrote 'everything', five wanted more interest/excitement while eleven said they would change 'nothing'. Eleven would change something about the characters and three mentioned the need for more realism. The largest number suggested changes in the graphics (15) or the navigation (11) and in terms of increased interactivity, games and activities (16). Only five prioritised reducing the text lengths, (although seven asked for more!).

At the end of the questionnaire, questions were put on rating the site in relation to its purpose and whether it inclined them to look at related sites. Their responses at least suggest a degree of success, and a reasonable level of interest/approval from the target audience:

The most important question, of course, is about the pupils' perception of any changes in their ideas or attitudes after using the site ('no but...' refers here to those who indicated in some way or other that they had been positive about anti-racism before seeing the site):



Asking whether the site had changed attitudes or ideas is of course loaded in the sense that it depends on prior ideas and viewpoints, but the results are nevertheless worth noting. The responses have to be taken in conjunction with others from the same individuals, which confirm (or otherwise) that the ideas and attitudes referred to have shifted in the direction we hoped for. For the moment, in conjunction with the other measures, the figures allow us to feel reasonably confident that the site has had at least some of the anticipated effect and influence.

### **Use and evaluation: Swedkid**

The evaluation of the Swedish website was better resourced than in Britain in one way in particular: a member of the Swedish team (Camilla Hällgren) had time allocated in her post to carry out a range of evaluation activities. More details of this may be found in Hällgren, (2005), though in summary the paper draws principally on her three evaluation sub-studies:

1. Responses following the launch of *Swedkid* in October 2002; i.e. media coverage, immediate contacts, and emails.
2. Ongoing evaluation of the use of content and graphics; viz. website hits, logins and patterns of use.
3. In-depth evaluation case-studies of:
  - Questionnaire responses
  - Web-design evaluation
  - Feedback from teacher educators
  - Antiracist work in classroom settings.

The last of these - Antiracist work in classroom settings will be detailed here.

#### *Background details*

It was decided to focus on one classroom and one set of 13-14 year old students over a four lesson period, three on the computers and one in classroom discussion. Data were collected by the means of questionnaire<sup>ii</sup>, participatory classroom observation, website logging, and teacher interview. The main themes raised during this part of the evaluation were: utilization of website, communicating and interacting with identities, features of the characters and dialogues, and general reflections on using the website for learning more about racism and antiracism. Further meetings took place with the teacher, before and after each of the classroom sessions, followed by an interview focusing on the teacher's experiences and reflections on the classroom activity, the observations and questionnaire outcomes.

There were fourteen girls and ten boys in the class. Four of the students described themselves as 'non-Swedish' i.e. Finnish, Chilean-Lebanese, Russian-Lithuanian and Russian-Belarusian. One student wrote 'No' to the question about ethnicity and the rest (eighteen) described themselves as 'Swedish'. The teacher herself self-identified as belonging to a minority, while the researcher/evaluator had a majority Swedish background.

#### *Initial likes and dislikes*

Both positive and negative aspects were reported. On the positive side, most students indicated that there were 'no things' they actively disliked, and that 'nothing needed to be changed'. For example, students from a minority background remarked that 'there was nothing that wasn't good' because 'people get to know how you react and so on'. On the negative side there were some students (as in Britain) who seemed disappointed that the website did not offer more inter-activities and possibilities to communicate with each other. A common criticism (mainly from the boys) was the absence of 'games', 'quiz', 'competitions' and 'chats'. The girls tended to ask for 'more things to do', e.g. 'sending mail to friends'. This was also evident from spontaneous remarks and questions during classroom observations. The library function seemed least popular with the students. The few who reported visiting it mentioned the wordlist and other parts of the library 'as an aid to work with the assignments'. When asked what they thought about working with the assignments on the site the most common response was 'good'. However, no student used the most positive category (very good), and one boy described the activities as 'boring'. There were some students who said they could recall *Swedkid* in detail two weeks after their last session, while some students claimed not remembering 'anything in particular' from the website.

#### *Semiotics*

Both girls and boys were generally approving of the design and character of the illustrations and made positive comments about the diversity of ethnicities offered; for example, 'I like that there is not just Swedish people', 'all the colours made me happy, they [the characters] looked good, nothing was wrong'. Some characters were mentioned more often than others. Brahanne, a refugee from Eritrea, was for example described as 'good, pictures like that are cool' while Jonas, adopted from South Korea, was assumed to have been 'given a bad camera

angle'. In parallel to appreciating the visuals because they contained 'a lot of features', however, the students, particularly the girls, claimed not to be aware of the importance of appearance of the characters, e.g. 'I guess everyone looks the same, it doesn't matter how you look'.



### *Identity*

The students appeared attracted to the possibility of interacting with and sharing identities. This was done via the forum and the backpack, but also through engaging with the characters on the website. Nevertheless, when analysing the communications within the discussion-forum, only a few comments were received which connected to content<sup>iiii</sup>. The teacher reflected on the popularity of the forum and suggested it lay in the opportunity it gave the students to express themselves, rather than to work on the content directly; they 'use it as an arena for themselves as individuals'.

Possibilities of expressing identity were also provided in the backpack (digital portfolio). Students found it 'good', 'easy', and 'fun to write about oneself in different categories and read about others'. Engaging with identity was also suggested in students' interest in sharing characters' identity and experiences in dialogues and the characters personal pages; 'it was good to meet so many people from different countries', 'to share their experiences', 'get to know how people behave' and 'talk to the characters'. This also corresponds to the data from the classroom observations and website loggings.

The students mainly interacted with the content through identification and empathy with the characters. They seemed to relate to them as people and spontaneously referred to the characters as 'him' or 'she', 'how could he do like that', 'she was bullied' or 'he obviously didn't like my answer, I better change it' or (to a friend sitting next) 'be quiet, I am talking to him now' (Rashid). Students seemed to enter into the experiences of characters, wanting to interact with the characters in the dialogues in order 'to understand how it feels'.

### *Different strategies for following characters*

Gender seemed a factor in the strategies chosen for interacting with the characters. The girls tended to visit as many characters as possible; 'I went to everyone because I wanted to check out everyone'. The boys seemed more selective, picking fewer characters, most often Brahanne and Rashid (from Somalia). Reasons given for choosing the characters were: 'because he (Rashid) had a cool name', and 'looked nice'. The teacher thought that one reason for the popularity of these two characters, could be that there was a 'black' boy in ninth grade who was especially hero-worshiped by the younger boys. Nevertheless, there were also students who did not adopt a particular strategy for visiting the characters but 'just clicked on someone'. Only two students reported that they did not visit any of the characters, one of them going 'straight to the dialogues instead'. Some students complained that the dialogues were too long, though the majority thought them to be just about the right length.

### *Contradictions in user perceptions*

Most students claimed that they understood the content and did not find any of the words 'too hard'. When asked if there were something they might want to ask the characters, student responses included 'nothing, it was all clear in the dialogues. Asking Brahanne how he 'did his hair' or 'how were things with him', were mentioned by the boys, while students from minority backgrounds were interested to know 'how they [the characters] react' and why Emma 'told that joke' (about Brahanne and Banana trees).

### *'Misrepresentation of the Swedes'*

Some students claimed to have learned nothing at all and it was also these who tended to comment on Swedes being misrepresented. Perhaps their denials were refusal to engage, rather than just boredom. They were part of the group who expressed the view that parts of the website misrepresented and pathologized 'ordinary' Swedes, suggesting also that the characters were 'over sensitive'. A girl from a majority Swedish background remarked 'everyone, except Emma [the 'Swedish' character] had experienced something offensive related to their background'. She argued that this aspect was over emphasised; 'it is not that everyone from a foreign background has been bullied or abused'. Other comments were that 'everyone exaggerated, it was like everybody did not like them because they were foreigners', and 'that it was the Swedes who did the wrong things'. Characters were criticised for taking issues too seriously. One girl criticized the discussion associated with the 'Banana tree joke'; 'you shouldn't care so much if you know each other and it's just fun.' A similar comment occurred when related to the 'Café dialogue' (involving a discussion of terminology). The student suggested that the character 'was too sensitive – why can't they just be satisfied with being called 'black' or 'coloured', they care too much'.

### *What did they learn?*

When asked if they had learned anything particular from any of the characters, general responses were 'don't remember' or learning 'nothing'. Nevertheless there were students from a Swedish majority background who said that they now understood that it is possible to 'come from Sweden' even if 'you look like an immigrant' For example they argued that [Nasrin, Swedish-born, with parents from Iran] 'really comes from Sweden'. Students from a Swedish majority background reported gaining new perspectives for example on 'what people think about things' and understanding that there is more prejudice than they had thought. As a consequence they said they understood that there could be problems coming from a foreign background, and 'that everything isn't as great as you think' if you are seen as not belonging to Swedish majority. Students from a minority background had a slightly different response; for example they claimed a different understanding of the characters' experiences and the content of the website. They argued that the website was important because 'people get to know how you react' and that 'you should not judge someone from appearances, think about what you say'.

The students were also asked if *Swedkid* had changed their viewpoints. Nearly half said 'no', or 'no, don't think so' and 'it was a little bit exaggerated sometimes'. There were however positive responses to the antiracist perspective adopted by the website. One boy reported liking 'the meaning of the site', and one girl said 'I think the site is good because you learn how stupid racism is'. Additionally, students claimed that their awareness had been raised about the in-appropriateness of jokes. One boy stated that 'before I thought the world 'neger'<sup>iv</sup> was normal to use, but that has changed a bit'. During the final session, when the outcomes of the student responses to the website (the log-ins) were printed out and discussed, a girl from a minority background stood up and moved from the back to the front of the classroom while the 'Cafeteria dialogue' was being discussed. The teacher recalled this in the interview and interpreted this as a usually 'difficult' student being 'gripped by the message'.

### ***Results and conclusions***

While wishing to avoid a victory narrative, we want to argue that the websites have provided an authoritative source for teachers and individual students, one which is both accessible in terms of readability and graphics but also counter- stereotypical in its representations and challenging in its content. One of the key elements in the sites is creative 'fictional' characterisation based on research findings, and we make the claim that this is an effective means of helping young people approach and grapple with the issues, problems and dilemmas of societal and personal racism.

The *educational importance* of this work in Europe is considerable. Given the context referred to earlier, an active engagement with what it means to be a citizen of a European state is crucial for anyone now growing up in one. The potential for misunderstanding at least, and conflict at worst, is immense. The expertise and courage of educators to tackle the issue is not secure. The existence of a growing group of tailor-made web-based materials rooted in different societies has the potential to develop pedagogy across different educational systems, support and extend teachers, challenge users (of all ages), and offer some means of support and identification for minority ethnic users.

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## Endnotes

i. For example, in the 1980s, Bevara Sverige Svenskt, (BSS) meaning 'Keep Sweden Swedish', the first known, active neo-nazi group coordinated the burning of crosses in different parts of the country. In addition several small extreme-right political parties came into existence from the mid-1980 onwards such as Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD), The Sjöbo Party (Sjöbopartiet), Progressive Party (Framstegspartiet), and New Democracy (Ny Demokrat).

2 There are also so-called *Serious Issues* pages (Britkid) or *Library and Discover* pages (Swedkid) of plain factual text, covering such things as immigration law, religious groupings, definitions of Islamophobia, countries of origin of asylum seekers and census data about numbers of different minorities. Some new research was done to compile these pages in addition to rewriting existing studies in a form appropriate for secondary school users.

3 The conditions under which we wanted the questionnaires to be completed were carefully explained to the teachers (and students), and the administration of the questionnaires was shared between the teachers and a member of the research team. The classes ranged in age from 10 years old to 15 years old, with one aged 10-11 (n=18); one aged 11-12 (n=28); three aged 12-13 (n=13/15/18); and one aged 13-14 (n=15). There were almost exactly equal numbers of girls and boys in this group of 107. With two exceptions all were white, with a further five identifying mixed roots in North America, Europe, and other countries of the UK. The area in which the schools are set is not notable in terms of wealth or poverty.

ii. The same questionnaire used in May 2003, essentially the same as the British questionnaire

iii. The forum is pre-structured by discussions on what has been said in the dialogues on the website.

iv. The word is a Swedish derogatory term meaning 'a black person' (Sawyer, 2002)

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