

# Ted Cante

Chair of the Institute of Community Cohesion and associate director of IDeA, Ted Cante chaired the government's community cohesion review team following the Oldham and Bradford riots in 2001. Their report has since been recognised as the starting point for a renewed debate about the nature of British society. Here he tells *Schools ETC* how the debate around community cohesion has moved on, and how much remains to be done.

**Schools ETC: Can you first tell us a bit about the work of the Institute of Community Cohesion?**

**Ted Cante:** Our role is to try and build capacity, improve techniques, develop a wider understanding of what community cohesion is all about and how to improve it; not just in schools, but in housing organisations, councils, local strategic partnerships, health authorities – we work right across the board.

**The 2001 report produced by the review team, which you chaired, stated that there are areas of Britain where people live separate but parallel lives. It questions whether our ideas about multiculturalism are workable...**

There is a model of multiculturalism which I think is now past its sell-by date; the particular model that emphasised separateness and difference to the point where there was no meeting of minds and no shared experiences between different communities. But I would advocate a new model ... which, whilst it respects difference and diversity, also builds interaction and understanding between different communities. I see it as multiculturalism moving on to new circumstances ... we're entering an era of super-diversity that will be impacting on some rural areas as well, so we need new approaches to cope with different situations.

Rural areas, and those areas that have a predominantly monocultural white population, really do need to take this very seriously as well. It's important that children growing up in those areas do have some understanding of the multicultural society in which they'll end up at some point.

**And presumably this requires a reappraisal of our shared sense of 'Britishness', something advocated by the community cohesion panel. But you emphasised at the time that this vision should not be imposed from the top down. Where, then, do you envisage it coming from? Should it be the responsibility of schools?**

The burden is not just on schools. Schools have a duty to teach citizenship, rather than 'Britishness' and I think that's absolutely right. As Sir Keith Agjebo puts it, it's about 'learning to live with each other' ... the problem at the moment is that there is relatively little interaction between some communities, and in some areas relatively few shared spaces, so there is less opportunity for those sorts of negotiations, those sorts of shared values to develop. You really need to get people discussing the issues ... rather than imposing a view upon them.

**So you'd advocate more open debate within schools... because sometimes people will edge around issues of culture and of race for fear they're going to offend.**

Absolutely; I advocate very strongly a much more open discussion,



not just within schools but within the community around them, within council chambers, within all other areas where we'd expect discourse to take place and not be in any way constrained. We have tiptoed around some of these issues and I think that's meant that some of the concerns, anxieties and prejudices have been driven underground. What we really need to do is to be much more open and to engage with those debates and give people a chance to come to terms with change.

**But this requires that children and young people are able to contribute to the dialogue about citizenship in a meaningful, and not tokenistic, way. And can we hold out much hope of young people buying into this process, given the manner in which the debate is conducted within the media and in parliament?**

I have slightly ambivalent views about that. I think there's a danger that we force young people to engage in politics in the way that older people see it – 'Come to the Houses of Parliament, come to the council chamber, engage with that!' Well, I've spent a lot of time in council meetings myself over the years, and in some instances it's pretty unedifying stuff. I'm not sure we should say to young people: 'That's our model of democracy, that's our model of participation, you should accept that.' I think you should go to where young people are and talk to them on their terms, not on our terms ... they are actually interested in debates about politics, about global warming, climate change and multiculturalism. But they're not very interested [when it's] on our terms and on our territory and I think that's important to remember.

**And are you optimistic about the future?**

Things like the Youth Parliament and school councils have helped. There have been various attempts to bring young faith leaders together – organisations such as Peacemaker have developed more of a national profile. But, in my view, the investment we put into youth services generally and the engagement with young people is just not adequate for the sort of turbulence that they experience. They have the normal turbulence of just growing up – the intergenerational conflict – and added to that they've got very much more dynamic communities with a lot of population movement; new forms of identity and faith emerging in the public sphere. A whole range of experiences that they need time to talk through, to debate, and at the moment what we do is inadequate. There are some good signs but it's just not adequate.

The 2001 report from the community cohesion review and the follow-up report *The end of parallel lives* can be downloaded from [www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/icoco](http://www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/icoco) – click on 'recommended reading'.