

David Ruddell, 1944-1990

A brave pioneer

David Ruddell was a brave pioneer.

He was one of the first white people in this country to take into his own thinking and understanding what black people were saying about structural and institutional racism: that is, about the ways in which racist beliefs and attitudes are the product as well as the producer and reinforcement of unequal structures and relations of power, and of discriminatory practices and rules. He gave form to his insights through his many writings and educational materials. Outside Birmingham the best-known of these were the *Race Relations Teaching Pack*, the *Recognising Racism* slideshow, and *Multicultural Education Review*. Further, he was known through the workshops and training events which he organised, and the Multicultural Development Unit in Birmingham which he helped to design, and of which he was the leader.

The clarity of his insights and the force of his analysis inevitably meant that he caused discomfort amongst white people, for he found fault with schools and other mainstream institutions, and strenuously confronted the deficit assumptions which many schools have about black and ethnic minority people. But he doggedly and courageously persevered, considerably more committed to justice and to truth, as he saw and spoke them, than to a quiet and easy life for himself.

David was a loyal and listening friend. He gave practical assistance and moral support to very large numbers of people and there are now many people, both in Birmingham and elsewhere, whose personal and professional lives would have been very different – much narrower and much poorer – had it not been for David's influence and inspiration. Many of the staff he appointed, supervised, supported and developed in the Multicultural Development Unit were later in positions of responsibility in schools throughout Birmingham and beyond. He lives on through his friends and comrades, those to whom he used to listen, those whose growth he cared for and cherished, those whose courage and helpfulness he nurtured and strengthened.

Third, David was a committed and caring traveller. By traveller I mean someone who had many homes, and who was known and welcomed in many places; who had sufficient strength to cross and criss-cross boundaries, and to encounter and live with newness, dislocation and uncertainty, and who stood and worked at the edges of institutions and organisations, as distinct from being swallowed or absorbed by them. I do not, of course, mean someone who was casual, aloof, touristy, lonesome: on the contrary, David was caring and committed.

In his childhood, he travelled from Ireland to Handsworth; for several years at the onset of his professional career he travelled from Birmingham to Ghana, and to Nigeria for a year in the late 1970s; then, when back in Birmingham, between the local authority and the university, and between schools and the support service, and of course in and through his business, Zip Travel.

It takes great strength to be a traveller not a tourist, a migrant not a stay-at-home, a visitor not a yes-person. The Multicultural Development Unit was a reminder of the importance of work at the boundaries between inside and outside. Work for justice requires that certain people, certain very strong and caring people, will stand and work and live at those boundaries. David Ruddell was such a person.

Source: this is an extract from *Accounts and Agendas: race equality in education in the 1990s*, a lecture in memory of David Ruddell by Robin Richardson in the Library Theatre, Birmingham, September 1991. It was published in 1992 by the Development Education Centre, Birmingham, a national charity which worked in partnership with teachers to introduce a development perspective and global dimension in the school curriculum. Later, DEC's name was changed to Teachers in Development Education (TIDE).