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# Colour-evasive racial ideologies underpinning the hidden curriculum of a majority-minority occupational therapy school in London, England: an analysis of minoritised undergraduate students' experiences

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of ethnoracial 'majority-minority' was introduced to describe changing population demographics where racial or ethnic groups traditionally in the majority have become a numerical minority. Despite their increase in recent years, very little is known of how hidden curricula manifests in these settings. Hence, this study sought to interrogate the hidden curriculum of race at an Occupational Therapy school with a majority-minority student-educator population in London, England. We conducted a secondary analysis of qualitative data from a larger action research project. The main data source was derived from two group interviews involving 11 racially minoritised student participants, and thematically analysed through a hidden curriculum lens. Trustworthiness of the analysis was enforced through crystallisation. The hidden curriculum of race was identified as embedded within (1) formal learning, (2) the null curriculum, (3) the informal curriculum, and (4) administrative structure and functioning. It is underpinned by pervasive colour-evasive racial ideologies which perpetuate health and workforce inequities. This paper concludes that majority-minority population demographics are insufficient to mitigate the impact of wider societal norms of oppression on hidden curricula. Thus, concerted and collective efforts involving all professional stakeholders are needed to embed intersectional, critical race-conscious approaches throughout formal learning across the academic curriculum.

## KEYWORDS



Implicit curriculum; hidden curriculum; health professions education; professional learning

## Sustainable Development Goals

SDG 10: Reduced inequalities; SDG 4: Quality education

## Introduction

Educational literature in the health and care professions has highlighted that environments in which learning occurs can reinforce or undermine the intended outcomes of academic curricula (Bowl, 2005; Council on Social Work Education, 2022; Murphy, 2018; Webb et al., 2021). Furthermore, incongruence between what is learnt and what is

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taught has implications on future health and care professionals' capabilities to work with diverse client populations (Bowl, 2005; Keyes et al., 2023; Lempp & Seale, 2006; McMahon et al., 2019; Murphy, 2018; Webb et al., 2021). Scholars have used the term 'hidden curriculum' to describe these incongruences relevant to issues of diversity in occupational therapy education (Grenier, 2021; Teoh, 2021; Toon, 2021). However, empirical interrogation of educational inequities in occupational therapy through the hidden curriculum as an analytical lens remains limited. This paper seeks to address this gap through an investigation of the hidden curriculum of race at an Occupational Therapy school with a majority-minority population in London, the United Kingdom.

The Office for National Statistics 2021 Census for England unveiled the country's first 'majority-minority' cities: Birmingham, and Leicester. Simultaneously, the number of London boroughs with majority-minority populations have increased to 14 from six in the 2011 Census. The concept of ethnoracial 'majority-minority' has been used in the USA and various European countries including Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Belgium to describe populations where racial or ethnic groups traditionally in the majority have now become a numerical minority (Crul, 2016; Lazëri, 2023; Sotto-Santiago, 2019). In such circumstances, there could be a possibility that there is no group with numerical dominance as opposed to any single group emerging as a 'new' majority. Scholars reflecting on these changes have recognised that power differentials can be impacted by more than numbers and have suggested that the term 'minoritised' be used in lieu of 'minority' (Sotto-Santiago, 2019; Wingrove-Haugland & McLeod, 2021). Thus, minoritised persons can be numerically in the majority but continue to face systemic disadvantage and disempowerment in relation to former-majority demographic groups which enjoy historic privilege and dominant status. Minoritisation is limited not only to ethnoracial aspects of identity but can also extend to other elements, including, but not exclusive to, gender, sexuality, religion, and language.

Very little is known about the impact of occupational therapy education on learner populations with majority-minority demographics. Occupational therapy is a health and care profession primarily concerned with the link between health and well-being to the context-dependent ways people participate in the activities, roles and processes that occupy their lives (Teoh & Iwama, 2015; Turpin et al., 2023). This unique focus developed from roots in both biomedicine and humanism, paving the way for the subsequent formal incorporation of human rights and social justice as part of its professional commitments (Hocking et al., 2022; Turpin et al., 2023; World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2006). Despite well-intentioned efforts to value diversity and inculcate the development of cultural competence into occupational therapy education since the 1980s, as well as the explicit requirement for academic curricula in this profession to include issues of diversity, inclusion, and culture (World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2016), recent critical analyses indicate that most of these efforts continue to uphold existing patterns of dominance and perpetuate ideological supremacy from Western, Educated, Industrial, Democratic (WEIRD) societies as opposed to facilitating true justice, equity, and inclusion (Grenier, 2020; Grenier et al., 2020). Hence, curricular incongruence around diversity-related issues in occupational therapy education persists with the potential to perpetuate various ongoing inequities at the expense of diverse individuals and communities around the globe – including in the areas intersecting health and education (Hammell, 2021; Mahoney & Kiraly-Alvarez, 2019).

## The hidden curriculum in the context of health and care professions

Studies across professions in health and care indicate a lack of consensus around the use of the term ‘hidden curriculum’. Seminal work by Hafferty (1998, p. 404) describes it as one of the three curricular dimensions: the official formal curriculum which is ‘stated, intended (...), and endorsed’; the informal curriculum which is transmitted through ‘unscripted, predominantly ad hoc, and highly interpersonal’ interactions, and the hidden curriculum that is ‘a set of influences that function at the level of organizational structure and culture’. Scholars have identified an evolution in its use over time. For some, it has become a scapegoat term to describe negative environmental influences on learning in general (Lawrence et al., 2018; MacLeod, 2014; Martimianakis et al., 2015); for others, an umbrella term to encompass all learning external to the formal and explicit curriculum which can include conflation between Hafferty’s descriptions of the informal and hidden curriculum (Park et al., 2022; Sarikhani et al., 2020). Through reviews of the literature, some scholars have suggested that it could be more critically used to describe unintended learning gained from curricular gaps, the awareness of which could then be harnessed to mobilise learners towards desired learning outcomes (Martimianakis et al., 2015; Raso et al., 2019).

In occupational therapy and social work, learning outside the scope of the formal and explicit curriculum is represented by the term ‘implicit curriculum’ (Ashby & Chandler, 2010; Council on Social Work Education, 2022; Hooper, 2008; Keyes et al., 2023; McMahan et al., 2019; Towns & Ashby, 2014). While these works acknowledge the existence of unintentional discrepancies between the implicit and explicit curriculum, they have not used a specific term to conceptualise these misalignments. This suggests that the existing use of ‘hidden curriculum’ in occupational therapy to describe curricular incongruencies (Grenier, 2021; Teoh, 2021; Toon, 2021) is compatible with the usage proposed by Martimianakis et al. (2015) in medicine as well as Raso et al. (2019) in nursing.

The work by Raso et al. (2019) has identified elements of curricular misalignment at both interpersonal as well as institutional-organisational levels. This extends the scope of the original definition by Hafferty (1998) beyond that of the organisation and has also been reinforced by studies in medical education (Lawrence et al., 2018; Murphy, 2018; Sarikhani et al., 2020). It is important to distinguish between conflation of the hidden and informal curriculum and the identification of the hidden curriculum as embedded in the informal curriculum; with the latter indicating that the hidden curriculum only manifests under circumstances where incoherence exists between informal and formal curricula. To illustrate the nuances, an example has been provided in the findings. As such, we have used the term ‘hidden curriculum’ in this paper to represent learning gained through curricular discrepancies (between implicit/explicit or formal/informal curricula) identified via interactions at interpersonal and institutional-organisational levels.

## Methods

### *Research design*

We conducted a secondary analysis of data from a larger action research project addressing race-based educational inequities in Occupational Therapy and Psychology at

a university in London, United Kingdom. Ethical approval for this project was received in March 2022 (Ref.: 33227-LR-Mar/2022-38794-1).

The original project consisted of an evaluative phase and a co-production phase. The former was focused on examining the impact of interventions to address race-based educational inequities in both disciplines which were developed independently but concurrently implemented. Participants were invited from two undergraduate student cohorts: one that commenced studies before intervention implementation and one from the year after. At the time of data collection, the participating student cohorts were completing the final and second year of their studies, respectively. Evaluative data were collected through a survey open to all students regardless of racial background, followed by group interviews involving racially minoritised participants only. A subset of the latter dataset focused specifically on Occupational Therapy formed the basis of this secondary data analysis – consisting of data derived from transcripts of two group interviews conducted over summer 2022 involving 11 participants.

This analysis was conducted through a hidden curriculum lens, which emerged as a post-hoc matter of interest during the co-production phase, involving the incorporation of initial findings into pedagogical application. The co-production phase also served to enhance the researchers' contextual understanding of the data, enabling our analysis to be reinforced through a process of crystallisation (Ellingson, 2009).

## **Context**

Specific to Occupational Therapy, the student-educator demographics reflected what is known as a 'majority-minority' population with racial diversity of educator demographics mirroring that of students. Institutional demographic data indicated that more than 60 per cent of the population from each participating cohort identified as racially minoritised, having selected ethnicity categories outside of those officially categorised as 'white'. Student demographics at the field site have been consistently maintained for more than five years, are representative of the wider London borough population, and can be attributed to the consistent implementation of inclusive admissions practices. However, it was only following the establishment of our Racial and Cultural Equity (RACE) Working Group in 2020 that learning and teaching practices began to receive wider scrutiny through the lens of race.

This working group was initiated as a response to student demands following critical incidents occurring early in the Covid-19 pandemic such as the murder of George Floyd in the USA; and the Black Lives Matter/Racial Justice Movements in Healthcare of 2020 (Council of Deans of Health, 2023; Sobo et al., 2020). While management initially suggested the creation of a position with the title 'BAME' (Table 1), racially minoritised academics and students rejected this for the following reasons: (1) a working group structure was perceived as more conducive towards facilitating sustainable change with responsibility redistributed across a collective; (2) the decision to focus on 'race' as opposed to 'ethnicity' was deliberate as institutional data indicated that Black and Asian students were disproportionately affected by educational inequalities over their colleagues of white minoritised ethnic backgrounds. The overarching goal of the working group was to facilitate anti-racist classroom and curricula reforms via educational interventions delivered across the Occupational Therapy Division.

**Table 1.** Glossary of keywords.

Keywords	Description
BAME	<p>An acronym originating from the UK used as an umbrella term to represent people from minoritised/minority ethnic backgrounds. The expanded version of this umbrella term can vary depending on the intent of its user.</p> <p>When expanded into ‘Black and Asian Minority/Minoritised Ethnic’, the term excludes people belonging to minority/minoritised groups in the UK that do not identify as Black or Asian; whereas the alternative of ‘Black, Asian, and Minority/Minoritised Ethnic’ would include them.</p> <p>Due to this ambiguity, we have only used it in quotes to ensure the original intention of the individual cited is retained.</p>
Colour-evasive racial ideology	<p>An updated version of the term originally known as ‘colour-blind racial ideology’, which has been critiqued for ableist connotations. Although some might associate the original term with intentions to facilitate equality regardless of race, many have consequently interpreted it to mean racial inequalities should be ignored.</p>
Formal/explicit curriculum	<p>Official programme specifications and module outlines which are consistent across all educators.</p>
Formal learning	<p>Learning directed by educators which are accounted for as part of the university’s contact hours. It can consist of both formal/explicit and implicit curricula.</p>
Hidden curriculum	<p>Curricular incongruencies, discrepancies and misalignments which produce learning that was not originally intended by educators.</p> <p>These incongruencies, discrepancies and misalignments can exist between formal and informal curricula, as well as between explicit and implicit curricula.</p> <p>Alternatively, formal/informal, or explicit/implicit curricula can be congruent and there is no hidden curriculum.</p>
Implicit curriculum	<p>All other elements of the curriculum not expressed in the formal/explicit academic curriculum which also contribute towards learning. This can include learning gained through interactions with other persons (informal curriculum) or with other environmental factors such as institutional structures and processes.</p> <p>The hidden curriculum emerges when inconsistencies between implicit and explicit/formal curricula exist. Where the implicit curriculum is consistent with the explicit/formal curriculum, there will be no hidden curriculum.</p>
Informal curriculum	<p>Informal curricula are a subset of implicit curricula. It is specific to learning which is transmitted through interpersonal interactions; these are usually unscripted and predominantly ad hoc.</p> <p>An example of misalignment between formal and informal curricula could be a ‘do as I say, not do as I do’ scenario between educator and learner.</p>
Null curriculum	<p>The null curriculum is a subset of the hidden curriculum and covers aspects of that are ‘not taught and not learnt’. It is not addressed in the formal/explicit curriculum or informal and implicit curricula.</p>

Prior to its launch, academic content relevant to social justice and cultural diversity in the curriculum were primarily underpinned by education standards required for recognition by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) as well as seminal works intended to advance culturally responsive practice (Iwama, 2003, 2006). Nonetheless, baseline evaluations found that racially minoritised students reported feeling invisible, whereas white students also reported feeling ill-equipped to work with client populations from racially and culturally diverse backgrounds (Occupational Therapy Racial and Cultural Equity Working Group, 2020). In the immediate two years post-formation, the following interventions were implemented: (1) earlier introduction of health inequalities into academic curriculum; (2) revision of learning materials to feature case studies that were ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse; (3) diversification of educator demographics to be more representative of the student body; (4) incorporation of anti-racist and anti-oppressive elements into administrative processes such as admissions, first-year induction, placement monitoring and classroom management to normalise discussions and engagement around race and other systemic issues

as well as to minimise racial self-segregation among students; (5) extracurricular activities conducted with the student-led Occupational Therapy Society, as well as monthly newsletters co-produced between students and educators featuring various cultural festivals celebrated among members of our community.

Through the evaluative process, we hoped to gain insights around the effectiveness of the interventions described above for further refinement via the co-production process. Our definition of 'co-production' is aligned with the Allied Health Professions Strategy for England (National Health Service, 2022) and encompasses co-planning, co-design, co-implementation, and co-evaluation. Co-produced outputs generated included, but were not exclusive to, module and lesson delivery, learning materials, virtual learning environments, as well as reports and presentations to various stakeholders.

### ***Sample, ethical considerations, data collection and management***

Of the 11 participants, six identified as Asian and five as Black; four as men and seven as women. Each group interview was conducted over the duration of approximately 60 minutes, with seven participants in the final year group and four in the second-year group. While both were originally intended to have the same number of participants ( $n = 6$ ), two withdrew from the second-year group due to scheduling clashes whereas a higher-than-expected number presented themselves at the final year group.

Ethical considerations relevant to this project include accounting for racial dynamics as well as power differentials between academic researchers, student researchers, and student participants, with consideration for the potential influence of ingroup-outgroup researcher identities on researcher-participant dynamics (Uluğ et al., 2021). To mitigate these challenges, we used a collaborative, participatory approach to underpin methodological decision-making. Participant recruitment was led by racially minoritised postgraduate student researchers supported by academic staff, whereas group interviews were led by academic researchers external to the participants' discipline. As the lead facilitator for student occupational therapists' group interviews belonged to the wider racial majority and identified as white, these sessions were co-facilitated by the same postgraduate student researchers involved in recruitment who were of Black and Asian backgrounds. Acknowledging that racially minoritised persons are not a monolith, we attempted to analyse the data for each racial group separately. However, no significant differences were identified; hence the decision to present the findings below collectively.

The interview schedules were collaboratively developed by academics from each discipline who were involved in the design and implementation of the interventions under evaluation. As their primary purpose was to evaluate the impact of educational interventions from the perspective of race, the questions were designed to initiate discussions around student experiences and perspectives that could inform further improvement of teaching and learning. The Participant Information Sheet stated that the anonymised research data may also be subject to further secondary analysis, and this option was also reflected in the consent form. Both textual and verbal consent to record were obtained at the start of group interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams. Transcripts were auto generated from the recordings, reviewed by student co-facilitators for accuracy and de-identified. In reviewing the transcripts, we determined that the data were



sufficiently rich to support an exploration of research questions that sought to make explicit the hidden curriculum.

### ***Analysis, reflexivity, and trustworthiness***

To gain insight into the hidden curriculum, we decided on a social constructionist approach to secondary data analysis. This process was led by the first author and supported by the second author. As the hidden curriculum includes structural and cultural influences at organisational and institutional levels (Hafferty, 1998), our analysis seeks to generate descriptions and understandings of the hidden curriculum as collectively constructed through the experiences of participants and researchers who identify as racially minoritised members of the academic community at the field site. We reviewed clean, uncoded group interview transcripts using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2022).

Both first and second authors are of racially minoritised (Asian) backgrounds which enable some degree of shared experience with group interview participants. Neither were directly involved in the data collection process as facilitator or participant. However, both were involved in various aspects of the co-production phase which necessitated further in-depth engagement with existing material relevant to learning in relation to the group interview data. The second author brought perspective as a learner who was part of one of the cohorts involved in this project, whereas the first author contributed the viewpoint of an educator who designed and implemented interventions alongside leading the Occupational Therapy RACE Working Group.

To enhance trustworthiness of the secondary data analysis, we utilised a crystallisation process which enables researchers to offer 'deep, thickly described, complexly rendered interpretations of meanings about a phenomenon or group' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 10) through contrasting ways of knowing. Crystallisation is facilitated through the following principles: (1) reflexive consideration of researchers' selves and roles throughout the process; (2) deep, thick descriptions and complex interpretations; (3) utilising a combination of analytical methods, at least one typical and one creative; (4) the generation of byproducts in more than one genre, such as a report or journal article alongside other forms of creative output; and (5) embracing knowledge as 'situated, partial, constructed, multiple, embodied, and enmeshed in power relations' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 10). The reflexive thematic analysis process we used to generate themes from group interview data was further enhanced by the following elements of our involvement in the co-production process: (1) constantly revisiting and reflecting on the data alongside applying a critical analytical lens towards existing academic curricula, content and presentation of learning materials, virtual learning environments, and modes of delivery to synthesise outputs informed by overall findings from the larger study; and (2) regular in-depth critical discussion and engagement with each other as well as other community members at the field site – both educators and student co-producers – pertaining to applications of the data in relation to existing archival materials and practices, as well as the synthesis of outputs. Engaging in these elements contributed towards developing complex, multi-faceted understandings of the data which has helped to influence our interpretation aligned with the principles of crystallisation (Ellingson, 2009). As some student co-producers were also participants in the group interviews, outputs and the



process of co-producing them were regarded as 'creative representations of participants' experiences' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 23) and were used to inform the analysis, serving as a collectively generated 'audit trail' of sorts.

## Findings

Four key themes were generated from the data: (1) the hidden curriculum of formal learning; (2) the hidden curriculum within the null curriculum; (3) the hidden curriculum in the informal curriculum; and (4) the hidden curriculum embedded into administrative structure and functioning (see Table 1).

### ***Theme 1: The hidden curriculum of formal learning***

Overall, participants reported dissonance between the intended learning and its applicability to practice.

Most of our lectures and seminars we do were aware of, like addressing all those cultural differences. Especially I think in our course we kind of always mentioned that because we want to tailor made to different cultures and ethnicity and some kind of being well aware of like treating people with different background with respect. (Participant 1, Final Year)

In the context of this theme, formal learning refers to learning directed by educators which are accounted for as part of the university's contact hours. While the explicit or formal curriculum plays a key part in shaping the boundaries of formal learning through official programme specifications and module outlines, some elements of formal learning are left to the discretion of educators such as decisions about what to include in case descriptions or which reading materials to feature. Hooper (2008) noted that these decisions can form part of the implicit curriculum experienced by students. Participants identified two key elements of formal learning where elements of race and culture were featured: case studies (Participants 1, 3, 8, 9, 10) and introduction to legislation and policy as preparation for practice-based learning (Participants 3, 4, 5, 7, 10).

As far as race and culture are concerned, existing research of formal learning in the health and care professions indicates a lack of diversity as well as negative representation (Kattari et al., 2019; Turbes et al., 2002; Webb et al., 2021; Wilby et al., 2022). While there was a consensus among participants that the diverse representation was positive, elements specific to race and culture were perceived more as a backdrop to biomedical learning rather than integrated to facilitate holistic understanding of the case.

So sometimes we do case studies. It's like, you know, from a diverse background and some may attach different religions. So maybe so we see that in our work and in case studies I guess ... It does help to sort of mirror what is in society, which is a diverse culture. (Participant 8, Second Year)

However, in depth, I don't think it's there as much, because yes, you'll have the profile of the person (in the case study). Their background and that. And then what we focus more is on their condition, which, you know, is what you have to think about when it comes to, you know, treating a patient. (Participant 10, Second Year)

Similar sentiments were also expressed towards the teaching of legislation and policy pertaining to race and culture (specifically religion) were presented as protected characteristics.

They only present things such as, like, oh the Equality Act and the other, you know other legislations, basically quite very formal. Rather than actual lessons that we need to know about for the future of our development. (Participant 3, Final Year)

### ***Theme 2: The hidden curriculum as a by-product of the null curriculum***

Three participants from the final year cohort highlighted their experiences of the null curriculum through the discussion excerpt below. The ‘null curriculum’ represents omissions from the explicit aspects of the curriculum that are ‘not taught and not learnt’, which scholars have suggested contributes towards the hidden curriculum (Cahapay, 2021; Eisner, 1979; Hafferty & O’Donnell, 2014). Aspects of the null curriculum discussed include that of intersectionality pertaining to gender and sexuality, as well as navigating workplace inequities.

**Participant 6:** I think there’s lots of nuances in terms of race and gender ... There’s some nuances that are not addressed and that may be because lecturers are not from a certain background, they may not be familiar and I’m not really sure what it is, but I personally wouldn’t say that race itself and racial equality has been fully addressed on the course.

**Participant 3:** There wasn’t anything at all about sexuality such as, like, transgender and LGBTQIA+ and things like that. (Participant 5 nods in agreement)

**Participant 6:** What I would have liked to see as well from the courses and you know, never once was I told or were we told that there’s a lack of BAME OT in general, there’s like a need for BAME OTs because, you know, we make up, like, less than 5% of all OT, things like that. You know, you’re not being told that on this course, which I find really, really strange.

**Participant 5:** In terms of the academic side of things like OT and, like, helping us to transition into placement, I don’t remember it being addressed or being spoken about as a thing, like, all we need to know.

The concept of ‘intersectionality’ is relatively new to the occupational therapy profession with very limited and tangential engagement in the literature prior to the commencement of this study; hence, its identification as part of the null curriculum should not be unexpected. Although the term was first used to describe the unique experiences of workplace injustices experienced by Black women in the USA consequent to the overlap between their racial and gender identities (Crenshaw, 2018), the comment by Participant 6 highlights its applicability in the context of occupational therapy education in the UK. Its application as a lens through which to scrutinise power dynamics has since been expanded to include other social categories beyond race and gender (Cho et al., 2013; Edwards & Esposito, 2020); hence, the comment by Participant 3 is also pertinent.

### ***Theme 3: The hidden curriculum of the informal curriculum***

The informal curriculum refers to learning gained through the various interpersonal interactions between educators, students and other persons situated within professional learning environments. Informal curricula can either complement and reinforce the formal curriculum or contradict it as part of the hidden curriculum (Murphy, 2018).

### *Informal curriculum of practice-based learning*

Based on participants' experiences, the informal curriculum of practice-based learning has been particularly impactful in highlighting inadequacies in their formal learning. Several participants attributed developing awareness towards workplace inequities through interpersonal interactions with practice placement educators and other members of the team, as well as service users (Participants 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10).

A few (Participants 8, 9, 10, 11) also reported feeling unprepared to work with service users from minoritised backgrounds despite having engaged with case-based learning with a diverse representation of race and culture, as highlighted in the exchange below.

**Facilitator:** So at the moment, just for me to maybe understand, put a bit of context, how are you prepared for dealing with different types of patients that you may encounter when you go onto your placement setting?

**Participant 8:** To be honest, I don't think there is any preparation for it. Like well, maybe I missed something I might have been asleep. Is there any preparation?

**Participant 10:** Not that I've encountered myself, no.

**Participant 9:** Yeah, yeah, same.

These participants went on to discuss how their perceptions were shaped by experiences working with service users from Jewish, Japanese, and African heritage backgrounds.

### *Extracurricular efforts as informal curriculum*

Scholars have regarded extracurricular activities as part of the informal curriculum (Stango & Carter, 2017). Participants reported mixed sentiments about extracurricular efforts in the form of promoting events with a racial justice focus, and email newsletters celebrating cultural festivities. Five participants expressed scepticism (Participants 3, 5, 6, 7, 8), while two (Participants 4, 11) suggested that more events were needed.

A few (Participants 8, 9, 10) perceived these extracurricular efforts as specific to individual university educators rather than representative of School academics as a whole, and discussed the impact on educator-student relationships.

What Participant 8 said is actually, like, gave us a feeling that they actually like doing something that cares about you instead of, sometimes you have to like e-mail them to ask them to raise up your own issues instead of like they are coming with concerns about you . . . The two members of staff were, like, always sending out, like, emails for concern and engaging religious and cultural things. It makes me . . . like giving the character they gave us, like a more caring character. So in academic daily module, we are, like, easier to get in touch with them. And, like, for example, we got questions, we are like easier to approach them, instead of compared to other members of staff. (Participant 9)

### *Theme 4: The hidden curriculum embedded into administrative structure and functioning*

Administrative structure and functioning represent institutional policies and bureaucratic processes that fall outside the scope of the formal curriculum. They are recognised in the

literature as a crucial part of the hidden curriculum at structural levels (Bowl, 2005; Council on Social Work Education, 2022; McMahon et al., 2019; Murphy, 2018; Webb et al., 2021), and can include a variety of processes including, but not restricted to, late submissions of assessment and access to reasonable accommodations for disability and student support services. Quantitative work by McMahon et al. (2019) suggests that administrative structure and functioning impact racially minoritised students differently to those from the wider racial majority. The sharing below from Participant 6 may provide insight into how this could be the case:

It's a little bit of an assumption, but I'm gonna make it anyway. So I think generally students from BAME backgrounds are more likely to be, you know, from a bit more poorer socio-economic status and more like to have jobs be working alongside their degree, supporting family members, supporting friends. They might have children, but generally going to be a bit more busy. All the ones that I know anyway generally have these extra commitments, maybe that their white counterparts don't have just naturally because, you know, I guess we're almost migrants. I guess that's probably why I'm not sure what the reason is. Well, I do find that the university is very, very unsupportive to anything like this. You're expected to basically not having such commitments, and you're expected to, you know, it's very inflexible. You know, if you do, if you say to them, I can't make this training or you're just very inflexible. And I found that on multiple occasions, you know. And that I was expected to just almost drop everything for these very last-minute trainings. I always continuously have or just I'm just trying to make my point really clear. But I just feel like that they don't take that into account.

Participant 10 also highlighted the impact of administrative demands on educator-student relationships, producing a task-oriented focus where educators are unable to dedicate time to addressing issues relevant to minoritised students. Bowl (2005) reinforces this perspective, which is particularly noteworthy as McMahon et al. (2019) have identified that educator-student relationships can be the most significant determinant of professional empowerment for racially minoritised students.

Among students, administrative structure and functioning can be influential in terms of encouraging mixing as opposed to segregation and can be key towards encouraging exposure to diverse perspectives (Murphy, 2018; Webb et al., 2021). Three participants (Participants 6, 8, 11) successfully identified elements of administrative structure and functioning intended to enhance racial and cultural inclusion including the RACE working group, as well as diverse cohort and team demographics, but did not elaborate on the impact.

## Discussion

The findings indicate that the hidden curriculum of the chosen field site remains underpinned by colour-evasive racial ideology (see Table 1; Annamma et al., 2017; Madriaga, 2023) despite student-educator demographics where individuals of racially minoritised backgrounds are numerically the majority, as well as efforts to implement educational interventions to facilitate racial and cultural inclusion. Participants felt disempowered in practice-based learning and were concerned about navigating workplace inequities as well as a lack of preparation to work with minoritised service users. The pervasiveness of colour-evasive racial ideology in this field site is of particular interest as examinations of the hidden curriculum from an ethnoracial perspective tend to be conducted in settings

where racially minoritised individuals are in the numerical minority (Bowl, 2005; Lempp & Seale, 2006; Keyes et al., 2023; McMahon et al., 2019). Only one study has been identified to date which investigates racially minoritised learners' experiences as part of a majority-minority student population (Webb et al., 2021), although educator demographics in that field site were reportedly not representative of its students.

While some studies have proposed increasing minoritised representation among educators as an intervention (Murphy, 2018; Webb et al., 2021), very little is known about the actual impact of this strategy on the hidden curriculum. While participants did not directly discuss the impact of diverse educator demographics, it was noteworthy that the educators who were explicitly named as contributing towards inclusion efforts were all from racially minoritised backgrounds. Furthermore, participants perceived their efforts to be individual initiatives rather than representative of the School, when that was not the intention. These findings emphasise the need for concerted and collective efforts involving educators of all racial backgrounds.

Scholars have emphasised that discussion of the hidden curriculum in terms of relational aspects should not be divorced from the systemic aspects at organisational and institutional levels, as the latter has been found to have a significant influence over interpersonal interactions (Martimianakis et al., 2015; Sarikhani et al., 2020). While efforts have been made to implement systems-level interventions which require engagement from all students as described in Themes 1 and 4, the potential for these interventions to impact the hidden curriculum and replace colour-evasive racial ideologies with race-conscious ones (Madriaga, 2023) remains unrealised. Our findings suggest that these systems-level interventions require focus on practical application beyond generating awareness. However, realistic implementation demands a critical approach which accurately reflects the complex and multifaceted dimensions of human lives. The work of Crul (2016) examining integration in majority-minority contexts suggests that intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 2018) used alongside the descriptive concept of superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007, 2023) might be helpful to facilitate this. While both are similar in their appreciation of the intricacies that manifest as a byproduct of interactions between multiple social categories, superdiversity literature regards these categories as structural dimensions as opposed to interrelated identities embodied by individuals. Additionally, intersectionality interrogates the relationship between power and the complex identities of the individual, whereas superdiversity is concerned with the collective impact of multiple and varying structural dimensions at the population level. Combining both can enable scrutiny of power relations impacting individuals situated in environments with fluid and fast-shifting social configurations, which can generate insights into the unique demands of hidden curricula in majority-minority educational contexts at both micro and macro levels.

Besides gender and sexuality as explicitly highlighted by participants, the impact of socio-economic and cultural influences on the hidden curriculum should also be considered in the development of systems-level interventions as implied through the quote from Participant 6. Participant 6 refers to supporting family members and friends as 'extra commitments' that white counterparts from the wider racial majority do not have, suggesting a collectivist orientation among racially minoritised learners which is incompatible with systems designed for people from individualistic cultural backgrounds. Research in migration studies has suggested that in majority-minority

contexts, it is possible for subsequent generations descended from migrants to be less assimilated into historically dominant cultural norms (Crul, 2016). Hence, consideration for the retention of collectivist cultural norms among racially minoritised local students in a majority-minority area should be incorporated into institutional system design.

Some adverse impacts of the hidden curriculum embedded into administrative structure and functioning are outside of individual educators' control, as highlighted in Theme 4. With the increase of majority-minority population areas in England, UK-based PSRBs have a role to play through incorporating consideration for the impact of the hidden and implicit curriculum into their standards for professional accreditation and recognition of educational programmes, as implemented by some North American counterparts (Keyes et al., 2023; McMahon et al., 2019; Razack et al., 2013; Stango & Carter, 2017). Razack et al. (2013) provide recommendations for PSRBs seeking to implement this, particularly in terms of critical considerations in the use of terminology.

Thus, we argue that the hidden curriculum highlights the need for intersectional, critical race-conscious approaches to academic curricula that are embedded into systems of formal learning with an emphasis on practical application. We perceive this strategy to be more sustainable in the long-term as it would be accounted into existing workloads for both educators and students, and would require collective engagement from all professional stakeholders, including, but not exclusively, learners, educators, institutions, and PSRBs. We would also like to emphasise that the hidden curriculum should not be seen as a threat to be thwarted, and to recognise its value as an avenue through which change can be mobilised to enforce our professional ideals (Martimianakis et al., 2015; Raso et al., 2019).

## **Methodological considerations and limitations**

As hidden curricula and their impact are context-dependent (Lawrence et al., 2018), caution should be exercised when applying our findings to other contexts. While narratives from racially minoritised students were privileged in the original study in line with anti-racist principles (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), the extent to which the hidden curriculum of race is perceived differently by their counterparts from the wider racial majority remains to be seen. The research questions guiding our analysis in this paper were not the same as the original study; neither researcher was directly involved in the data collection process; and we were working from an anonymised dataset. As such, there were elements of our research questions which remained unanswered, such as the impact of peer relationships on the hidden curriculum, which were absent from participant narratives. Furthermore, there is also a risk of misinterpretation and misrepresentation as we would not have had the opportunity to clarify uncertainties and ambiguities (Ruggiano & Perry, 2017). We have sought to mitigate these risks using crystallisation to enhance rigour, as our positionality as field site 'insiders' involved in the larger project contributed towards enhanced comprehension of the context needed to support the interpretation of the study findings. Despite these limitations, we believe we have nevertheless succeeded in our aim to generate a robust description and understanding of the hidden curriculum of race specific to the field site. Recommendations may be useful beyond the limitations of this study.

## Conclusion

This study provided a description of the hidden curriculum of race situated within an Occupational Therapy school in England with a majority-minority population, as experienced by minoritised learners. Despite racially diverse student-educator demographics, learners continue to feel minoritised by the colour-evasive racial ideology entrenched into the hidden curriculum. To challenge this, we recommend intersectional, critical race-conscious approaches to academic curricula that are embedded into systems of formal learning, oriented towards practical application. As racial demographics in England continue to evolve and majority-minority populations increase, it is crucial for all relevant professional stakeholders in occupational therapy education to be aware of the hidden curricula underpinning educational contexts and to harness the potential towards realising our professional ideals.

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## Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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