Critical Social Policy

Commentary

Police–school partnerships and the war on black youth

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Abstract
This article discusses the growing presence of police officers in British schools, under a resurgent police-school partnerships policy agenda in the 'war on gangs' and serious youth violence. It argues that while efforts to coordinate law enforcement and education implicate schools in general, evidence on race and policing raises concerns about the disproportionate impact of such strategies on black students. Police-school partnerships enhance existing and escalating forms of multi-agency police surveillance and profiling, while also giving officers a greater role in everyday schooling matters. Thus, grassroots anti-racist movements face a developing and dynamic challenge to resist not only the militarised policing of black youth, but also the corresponding weaponization of schools and the wider welfare state.

Key words
Black youth, education, gangs, police-school partnerships, surveillance

> All of us live . . . in an age of unrivaled and unprecedented police power, where an arm of the state dictates public policy and directs public discourse along the lines of the expansion of its influence (Mumia Abu-Jamal, 2000: 22).

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Critical Social Policy 2021, Vol. 41(3): 491–501

DOI: 10.1177/0261018320964655 journals.sagepub.com/home/csp

This article comments on, and interrogates, the renewed drive among senior police officers, policy makers and wider government in Britain to increase the number of police officers in schools. I discuss how *race* remains a key construct in determining and directing police–school partnerships that are premised on risk identification, assessment and management. While growing calls for more school-based officers raise general concerns, my intention is to unpack what these arrangements may mean for young black people, who have long been subject to institutional processes of criminalisation, surveillance, profiling, and other forms of over-policing. I situate this discussion in the context of the police's 'war on gangs.' This is because the policing of 'gang' crime in Britain is widely acknowledged among academics and activists as a highly racialised endeavour, *and* as relying on multi-agency strategies that see police working closely with various non-police agencies, not least schools and colleges (see Amnesty International, 2018; Williams, 2018).

A key moment in the resurgence of police–school partnerships is the nationwide riots that England experienced in August 2011, which occurred after Mark Duggan, a young black Londoner from Tottenham, was killed by police. Former Prime Minister David Cameron conveniently divorced the disorder from a broader politics and history of police brutality, institutional racism, unemployment, poverty, and government spending cuts by declaring an 'all-out war on gangs and gang culture' (Amnesty International, 2018: 5). He would then launch the Ending Gang and Youth Violence strategy in November 2011, which established the placement of police officers in schools as key to 'identifying potential 'at risk' young people, and referring them for further intervention to address their behaviour' (HM Government, 2011: 30).

April 2018 saw renewed calls for more police on London's streets, tougher police powers, and more funding for law enforcement (rather than social services curtailed by a decade of austerity) to tackle 'gang' violence. This law-and-order agenda re-emerged after a string of incidents that have seen young people in London killed or injured by knives and guns. In response to these tragedies, the conservative government launched its Serious Violence Strategy (SVS). At the heart of the SVS is a 'total policing' agenda which coordinates police with non-police agencies for the purpose of elaborate data collection, sharing and analysis, and which aims to tackle 'gang' crime through 'a multiple strand approach involving a range of partners across different sectors' (HM Government, 2018: 14).

A critical, but under-scrutinised, feature of the government's anti-gang strategy is its fixation with increasing the presence of police in schools. The SVS (HM Government, 2018: 58) explicitly looks 'to build on models of police–school partnerships that exist in England,' where officers are integrated into schools, with a view to regulating young people through early intervention strategies that aim to prevent 'gang' and serious youth violence. In 2014, 182 schools in London had officers working in them either full or

part-time, mirroring similar arrangements in the United States (Henshall, 2018). Figures reported in March 2019 reveal that 420 officers have full-time roles in schools across the capital, compared to 280 in 2017. Worse still, the Deputy Assistant Commissioner of London's Metropolitan Police, Mark Simmons, stated that 'our ambition is to get to just under 600' (Weale, 2019). This obsession with having more police in schools is again obvious in a report on serious youth violence by the Home Affairs Committee, which suggests that by April 2020, 'all schools in areas with an above average risk of serious youth violence should have a dedicated school police officer' (Home Affairs Committee, 2019: 52).

Guidance on integrating officers into spaces of learning has been issued in the past by local police forces. The now dissolved Department for Education and Skills (DfES) also published a report, *Mainstreaming Safer School Partnerships*, which stated that such procedures are most successful when 'fully integrated into school policies' (2006: 12). This 'strong partnership approach' is said to work best in accordance with the 'characteristics and needs' of each area. More generally, officers are involved with everything from the day-to-day running of schools to decisions on whether students should face exclusion or even criminal sanctions. Among the purported benefits of police–school partnerships are reduced rates of truancy and exclusions, lesser instances of anti-social behaviour, greater safeguarding, a coordinated approach to risk management, improvements in academic performance, and better relations between young people and police, parents and teachers (DfES, 2006).

There have also been combined efforts to link demands for more school-based officers with strategies of community policing and the principle of policing by consent. Research jointly commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Police and the ten Greater Manchester local authorities presents teachers and parents as generally supportive of police–school partnerships. For instance, a teacher was quoted as saying that 'school, police and youth services need to demonstrate or provide more on the ground services that allow students to follow the lawful path.' Another teacher stated that having officers in schools is an important step towards building 'positive relationships between pupils and police' (Innovation Unit, 2019: 37).

The backdrop to these growing calls for more school-based officers is a political climate driven by a law-and-order agenda. Britain's Conservative Home Secretary, Priti Patel, promised in the summer of 2019 to focus on restating the government's commitment to not only 'law and order', but also 'the people on the frontline, the police' (Gayle, 2019). Prime Minister, Boris Johnson built on Patel's 'tough on crime' discourse by pledging to recruit 20,000 more police officers in England and Wales by March 2023 (Dearden, 2019a). The government has set aside around £750 million for this recruitment drive. The flipside of heavy investment in policing is the continued

underfunding of education, that has resulted in cuts to teaching staff, a reduction in speech and language support and music lessons, schools struggling to provide basic necessities like food, toiletries and stationary, and the introduction of 'dark days' where classroom lights are turned off (Harris, 2019).

Before outlining some of the dangers that police–school partnerships pose, it is important to situate these developments in a broader political and historical context. This is because the special attention given by police to young people, and the synthesis of law enforcement with non-police agencies and priorities, in going back decades, offer vital clues about similar moves today. For example, in the 1950s and 60s, the introduction of juvenile liaison officers in Britain meant that police became heavily involved with youth work, social services and education departments (Gordon, 1984). Such arrangements were based on multi-agency intelligence-sharing strategies, and, not dissimilar to policing today, were driven by logics of pre-emption and intervention. They also marked the beginnings of 'an expansion of police involvement with other agencies on a range of other subjects and the development of an overall strategy of community policing' (Gordon, 1984: 42; Bridges, 1981).

In relation to police in schools, until the 1970s, few police forces had school liaison officers (Webber, 1983), with Sussex Police the first to appoint such officers in 1966 (Gordon, 1984). But, the mid-70s saw moral panic over race, youth and crime legitimise a popular and political turn towards authoritarianism, in which young black and Asian people were targets of robust policing strategies (Hall et al., 1978; Sivanandan, 1981). It was also then that links between police and schools expanded rapidly, with schools in Devon and Cornwall, London, Hampshire, the Midlands, South Yorkshire and Durham all harbouring a police presence (Gordon, 1984). In addition to running seemingly cordial consent-building programmes, school-based officers sought to gather information from pupils about suspected criminal activity, and 'from the staff about the pupils and their relatives outside the school' (Gordon, 1984: 44). Such arrangements would be endorsed by the Scarman Report, thus ensuring that police involvement in and with schools escalated in the 1980s (Webber, 1983), before continuing into the new millennium, as evidenced by the *Mainstreaming Safer School Partnerships* report of 2006.

As a broader approach to law enforcement, community policing was (and remains) an iron fist in a velvet glove. It gave the impression of greater public consent, police accountability and a generally 'softer' approach to police work, while serving as an elaborate police-led multi-agency surveillance strategy (Bridges, 1981; Gilroy, 1987). The long history of police–school partnerships reveals not only the inseparability of these 'hard' and 'soft' styles of policing, but also their expression as a strategy of state racism. Reports of officers assaulting and racially abusing black pupils, and of children being questioned and arrested on school premises, pointed to some of the dangers of having police in schools (Webber, 1983; Gordon, 1984). Concerns over such

incidents, meanwhile, were reflected in the resistance that emerged. Some of the fightbacks involved groups like the All London Teachers Against Racism and Fascism, and the Socialist Education Association, working to oppose and prevent the growing trend of police–school cooperation (Webber, 1983).

This brief historical outline shows us that today, police–school partnerships continue a long-standing and larger trend of combining police with non-police services. Youth workers and teachers have long been expected to be 'the eyes and ears of the police' (Kundnani, 2016), thus broadly making contemporary links between police and schools neither unique nor unprecedented, as concerning as they are. Yet, at the same time, there feels a growing sense of urgency among politicians and senior police personnel to have more school-based officers, an urgency that speaks to the 'evolutionary dynamic' (Amin, 2010) of such policing strategies. Put simply, concerted efforts to place police in educational settings appear to be springing back into view, with growing force. While this re-emergence implicates schools across Britain, existing evidence warns us that in certain circumstances, black students will bear the brunt of a greater presence of police in schools.

In terms of policing, stop and search increased in England and Wales by 32 percent in 2018–2019, with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people four times more likely to face such powers than white people. That disproportionality rises to 9.7 when black or black British people are specifically considered (Walker, 2019). Government measures to tackle knife crime have also included relaxing restrictions on the use of section 60 orders, which authorise stop and search without 'reasonable suspicion' in a specific time and place. This has led to the use of such powers soaring from 1,836 in 2017–2018 to 9,599 in 2018–2019, while 62 percent of people subject to section 60 measures in 2018–2019 were black (Dearden, 2019b). As for racial disparities in school disciplinary procedures, the government's own Racial Disparity Audit found that 'Black Caribbean pupils were around three times as likely to be permanently excluded than white British pupils' (HM Government, 2018: 23). School uniform policies that punish black students for their hair, a 'narrow and insular' curriculum that needs decolonising, and an overwhelmingly white workforce also reveal how race and racism shape school experience in Britain (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020).

Regarding the specific challenges posed by police–school partnerships, placing police officers in schools would appear to supplement and enhance existing forms of multi-agency police surveillance. Reports by Amnesty International (2018), the Monitoring Group (Scott, 2018) and StopWatch (Williams, 2018) all reveal how, in the 'war on gangs', education, health, employment, immigration and housing bodies share intelligence with anti-gang police units. Concerning the role of education, Amnesty International interviewed officers in London and found that 'working with local schools had become an increasing priority for Gang Units, with information being shared both ways' (2018: 29).

The racial element of these intense data-gathering activities becomes clear through the Metropolitan Police's highly controversial Gangs Matrix database, which stores intelligence and conducts risk-assessments on individuals suspected of 'gang' involvement. In May 2018, 3,362 people were in the database, with 89 percent from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups, compared to 87 percent in October 2016 (Gayle, 2018). The deeply problematic composition of the Matrix database is also evidenced by the fact that, as a result of community pressure, the Metropolitan Police recently removed more than 370 individuals from it. Prior to this, campaign work had led the Information Commissioner's Office to investigate the Matrix and find that the database was breaking data protection laws (Dodd, 2020).

Growing efforts to put more police in schools mean that spaces of learning, development and self-expression will have another layer of surveillance added to them. But, under conditions such as the police's racialised 'war on gangs', school-based officers will inevitably become extra sources of information about young black people, with that intelligence stored in policing tools like the Gangs Matrix. Such arrangements will not only re-institutionalise the fabricated association between race and 'gangs,' but also contribute towards forging 'a direct link between students and the criminal justice system' (Taylor, 2013: 27). That link threatens the targeted application of additional policing and punishment measures, which range from armed policing to stop and search, 'gang' injunctions and collective incarceration via joint enterprise. As Lee Bridges (2015) notes, 'these databases feed directly into the ways in which policing policies and priorities are being targeted on particular groups.'

The surveillance of young black people through school-based officers also speaks to the issue of racial profiling in educational spaces. Writing about the profiling of school children in the United States, Emmeline Taylor (2013: 28) notes that 'onsite police have been found to compile files on those students that they thought were potentially 'at risk.'' In Britain, the SVS frames everything from where someone lives, to their family relationships, economic circumstances, friendship circles, school behaviour and academic performance, social media activity, dress sense, tastes in music, and many other factors ontologically unrelated to lawlessness and disorder, as indicators of a potential drift towards 'gang' involvement. Broadly, this criminalises the various complex factors that might comprise the lifeworlds of black youth. But, in relation to police–school partnerships, it raises concerns over the possibility for officers *within* schools to strip students of their privacy by producing profiles and conducting (and acting upon) risk-assessments, before passing information onto anti-gang units.

While police–school partnerships facilitate greater police surveillance and profiling, schools also risk becoming sites of police power, intrusion and harm in other ways. Take, for instance, the troubling testimonies provided by black

children to Kids of Colour, a Greater Manchester based charity which supports young people to resist racism and inequality. Kids of Colour has heard about incidents such as a young person 'being stopped and searched for merely fitting the description of a 'Black high schooler in a hoodie.'' Other episodes have left students traumatised after being interviewed without parental consent or subject to physical restraint. Police have even been called into school to settle incidents as benign as an altercation over a £1 coin, leading to officers telling a young black child 'that they would 'lock him up'' (Joseph-Salisbury and Legane, 2019).

Concerns over similar incidents have prompted a review by the Metropolitan Police into the impact of police–school partnerships on 'black and minority ethnic' children. This comes after the high court granted permission for a judicial review, following a legal challenge by the family of a 14-year-old black student with autism. This step was taken after the boy was investigated by the Crown Prosecution Service (who dropped the case) for a verbal altercation with a school staff member, that was reported to the school police officer. The case between the boy's family and the Metropolitan Police was settled when the latter agreed to 'consider any equality implications' that officers in schools may have (Weale, 2020).

Far from ensuring safer schools, better relations between black youth and police, and generally a brighter future for students, the synchronisation of policing and education forms part of what Lisa Marie Cacho (2012) calls a state of 'racialized rightlessness.' Under the police's racially-coded 'war on gangs,' police–school partnerships have been shown to violate the basic rights of young black people to attend school and college and qualify for their preferred careers. For instance, the 'gang nominals' that Patrick Williams (2018: 42) interviewed (all of whom self-defined as black, mixed or Asian) highlighted how the Gangs Matrix, along with officers in schools and colleges, 'conspired to exclude them from formal education.' One individual recalled being excluded from college, denied the chance of pursuing a career as a fireman, and losing a year of study, after an officer on campus told college staff that the young person was 'living a double life' as a 'gang' member.

In broader terms, police–school partnerships point towards the militarised policing of black youth being more than a matter of using lethal force or other heavy-handed measures. This is not to trivialise the police's capacity to unleash extreme violence on racialised bodies through, say, firearms, tasers, CS/pepper spray, batons, spit hoods, physical restraint techniques and other weapons and tactics that can kill instantly and spectacularly. Rather, my point is that racism, as a formal strategy of waging war on 'gangs,' also materialises in and through a wider range of everyday relations of power. In other words, police–school partnerships mean that educational spaces which should be free of police intrusion, and which ought to offer safety, learning

and guidance, are further reduced to sites of surveillance, profiling and managing the purported risks posed by young black peer groups to law and order. This everyday social struggle signifies a mode of police militarism which is more measured and subtle, than it is spectacular, since it rests on *welfare* being weaponised as an extended instrument of police war power.

In response to these developments, campaigns in and beyond Britain challenging police–school partnerships have made significant progress. For instance, following the killing of George Floyd in the United States by Minneapolis police in May 2020, the Minneapolis school board voted to terminate its contract with the city's police department, with similar measures reportedly being considered by other school boards across the US. Furthermore, the University of Minnesota stated that it would stop working with police to provide security for football games, concerts and other large events (Beckett, 2020). In Britain, Kids of Colour and Northern Police Monitoring Project have coordinated the No Police in Schools campaign, to challenge 'the growing normalisation of a police presence in schools' (Connelly et al., 2020: 3).

To conclude, police–school partnerships across Britain present serious challenges that are in some ways different from, but in other ways related to, struggles from previous decades. What should be the sole aims of schooling – providing education, support and safety, and promoting critical thinking, curiosity and confidence – are subsumed by policing strategies of surveillance, profiling and social control. While support for Black Lives Matter, calls to defund the police and a sense of possibility have grown, grassroots anti-racist movements in Britain face a developing and dynamic challenge to resist not only the militarised policing of black youth, but also the corresponding weaponization of schools and the wider welfare state. That resistance includes continuing to call for the abolition of official police knowledge structures like the Gangs Matrix, that formalises the dubious link between 'blackness' and 'gang' crime. It also involves fighting back against police–school partnerships that drive and are driven by 'gang' databases, and that reduce education to a space where black students are subject to punitive interventions that seriously hinder future life prospects and deny inclusive, informed, and compassionate citizenship.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Jaspreet Nijjar and Remi Joseph-Salisbury for assisting with the writing. Thanks also to the three anonymous reviewers for their useful feedback on some of the points made in this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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