Race, Ethnicity and Education – Special Issue 2025

Editorial

This special issue curated by the Race, Ethnicity, and Education Special Interest Group (SIG) includes 12 articles that examine educational debates around race and ethnicity. The BERA Race, Ethnicity and Education SIG has been making an impact for 14 years as part of the BERA family of SIGs (Race, Ethnicity and Education | BERA). It has nearly 400 members that span the four countries of the UK and worldwide. The SIG supports the ethos of BERA, that encompasses, upholds and acts as a visionary body in educational research.

> [It is] committed to advancing research quality, building research capacity and fostering research engagement…Our vision is for educational research to have a profound and positive influence on society. (BERA a)

As a SIG, we offer a distinct and important voice in that vision through a discrete and unapologetic focus on race in education. We work against racism, in its many forms, to show that colour, culture and experiences for Brown, Black and minoritised peoples are vast, varied and real. Race research needs continuous development to challenge pervasive racisms within schools, higher education and government policy. Mirza (2015:27) believes these racisms to be "lodged deep within our institutional walls", revealing how identity and culture are habitually questioned and suppressed. This SIG is dedicated to and aims to further its research and praxis-orientated approach in the way it educates, exposes and mobilises educators to address Whiteness, promote decolonialism and support race-sensitive approaches. Racism is a shapeshifter that adapts to silence minoritised ethnic voices, unless it is continually made visible. Writing, presenting, sharing knowledge and learning together are vital for race researchers to challenge unjust structures and curricula in order to establish new knowledge and equity (Solórzano & Yosso, 2016; Arday, Belluigi & Thomas, 2021).

Race research can be easily and conveniently overlooked as the idea of 'post-race' takes root, but there is always hope. The rise of interest in race matters across the World, following the murder of George Floyd, provides a rare time to capitalise on people's genuine interests and race theories such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality approaches, foregrounds the experiences of racialised peoples (Taylor, 2016). Their stories are valued as vital, redirecting the gaze of the dominant culture to see hidden discriminations and difficult truths. The challenge for race research

then, is always how to mobilise and mainstream these incontrovertible insights and raise them above the doldrums of good intentions and well-wishers, so that race is seen as perennially important. As part of this endeavour race researchers and allies should keep anti-racism and decolonialism high on the agenda and be aware of current challenges. The first challenge is to recognise how colonialism can re-form itself into other guises such as social, moral and ethical justice agendas. Domínguez (2019) and Pashby & Sund (2020) argue that these give the illusion of promoting equity but can perpetuate it further. A second challenge is that political signalling continues to divert and subvert the existence of race. In English schools, 'Extremism' and cultural identity are conflated, and caution is advised by the Department for Education (Gov.UK, 2022) and teaching for racial and cultural understanding are not requirements in teacher training (Gov.UK, 2024). A third challenge is the lack of teachers and student teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds (Gov.UK, 2020). This means that voicing race issues in educational research also emerges from a lack of mass.

With these challenges in mind and with a keen knowledge and awareness of the necessity of race research for academia and in BERA's repertoire of research areas, this special issue is an overview of recent scholarship that highlight trends and the evolution of epistemologies and ontologies pertaining to race. We have selected 12 articles published between 2020 and 2024 in BERA's four international journals: British Educational Research Journal, British Journal of Educational Technology, Curriculum Journal and Review of Education. The articles discuss the: use of social media in establishing academic identities; absence of race in teacher training; neutralising of race in education and society; cultural pressures of studying as a minority ethnic student; distortion of assessment outcomes, by AI; and exclusionary techniques in educational institutions. The topics are categorised into these broad areas: Curriculum and Diversity; Racism and Anti-racist Practices; Teacher Training and Higher Education.

Curriculum and Diversity in question

Baykut, S., Erbil, C., Ozbilgin, M., Kamasak, R., & Bağlama, S. H. (2021). The impact of the hidden curriculum on international students in the context of a country with a toxic triangle of diversity. The Curriculum Journal, 33(2), 156-177.
https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/curj.135

The hidden curriculum has evolved over the years to encompass the impact of this curriculum on different forms of oppressions at macro-, meso- and micro-levels. In this vein, Sibel Baykut, and colleagues employed an abductive research approach to conduct in-depth interviews with nineteen 18-28-year-old international students in Turkey. The authors showcased their participants' hidden curriculum implied experiences, representing three interconnected corners of a triangle as a "toxic triangle of diversity". The first corner iterates that Muslim international students have a "colonial ambition" towards studying in Turkey, and second, encompassing a "normative order" in ethnicity, race, gender, and social class, where international students are expected to "fit in". Third corner entails that the hidden curriculum acts as a "silent aggressor" and a source of exclusion and loneliness due to the lack of insider knowledge of the unspoken assumptions and biases related to religion, ethnicity, and nationality. Authors criticised that the educational content/system in Turkey has a powerful macro-national level establishment, mostly insensitive to gender, race, or social class attributes, shaping the micro-level identities of international students rather than celebrating their individual identities.

Mangal, M. & Pardos Z.A. (2024) 'Implementing equitable and intersectionality-aware ML in education: A practical guide.' in British Journal of Educational Technology. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13484

Along with the rise of AI in Education there is an equal rise in concern about the necessity of ensuring its systems include and support a diversity of peoples, including those who are inequitably treated. Mudit Mangal and Zachary Pardos recognise how current AI systems in educational institutions, reflect established and powerful groups because they are based on historical data. The authors present a powerful case study, examining a university's grade prediction database system and noting how the specific social and cultural characteristics of minoritised groups of students, are not routinely incorporated into it. The article discusses the efficacy of re-mapping this university's system to build-in greater equity to its AI analysis base. The authors offer a practical guide where social protected characteristics, such as ethnicity, gender, income and age, are included as part of the analysis base. They also strongly advise that Intersectionality factors should be part of the programming to recognise the reality of lived experiences and to close further gaps in grade outcomes. These mitigations aim to check and moderate biases and discrimination to promote fairness and equity in the process. The paper aims to expose and bridge the gap of a lack of practical guidance that contributes to grade disparity for minoritised students.

Smith, H. & Lander, V. (2022) Finding 'pockets of possibility' for anti-racism in a curriculum for student teachers: From absence to action. The Curriculum Journal 34(1). https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.177

Exposing and addressing, systemic racism in education, particularly in teacher education, is fore fronted in Heather Smith's and Vini Lander's article. The authors base their arguments on examining current developments in teacher training, across the World, that reveal the necessity of re-looking at how race is addressed. They argue that naming and exposing racial issues should be seen as a hopeful and positive exercise that benefits students, institutions and wider society. Despite the current climate of standardisation and deracialisation in teacher training, Smith and Lander suggest that ITE institutions can find the strength to identify how systemic racism adversely affects the curriculum and surrounding practices of how all, minority ethnic and White, student teachers are trained. Their rationale is based on a global literature review and analysis of a survey for ITE providers in England, leading to a call for an embedded approach to anti-racism in their curricula and practices. Their work, which closely listens to ideas and needs of those working and managing teacher training, is informed by critical understandings of whiteness and racism, and leads to a clear statement of intent for the future.

Xiang Hu, Haode Zuo, Chun Lai, Gaoxia Zhu, Jiesi Guo, Huiling Tan (2024). 'Is social media use for math learning beneficial for ethnic minority students' math identity? A socialization perspective'. British Journal of Educational Technology, 55(1). https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13359

This study, from Chinese colleagues, invites us to consider how high school students' Maths identity may be shaped through the use of social media. The authorial team, draw on a theoretical socialization framework and use quantitative modelling to analyse the survey of 571 minority ethnic students in a large urban secondary school. The students, from disadvantaged, rural backgrounds, were originally selected for a government programme and constitute a demographic identified as achieving lower outcomes in Mathematics. The paper examines the relationship between the use of different social media platforms, such as WeChat, TikTok and Weibo, personal ethnic beliefs and identity, and the integration of those identity beliefs into Maths learning. Findings showed that social media had a positive effect on their ethnic identity, integrating their identity into Maths belief and

academic achievement. This was due to the online activities being low-risk, supportive and learner-centred and controlled. The platforms also allowed them to mask and safeguard their identity. The platforms provided a venue and socialization opportunities for less confident students which positively changed self-belief, behaviour and performance. However, the study also found that students with higher levels of cultural identity integration were less likely to engage in social media usage for academic purposes.

Racism and Anti-Racist Practices

Tikly, L. P. (2022). 'Racism and the future of antiracism in education: A critical analysis of the Sewell Report'. British Educational Research Journal, 48(3). https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3776

Leon Tikly's article appeared at a timely juncture in the history of how the UK attempted to rationalise itself as a fair and open set of nations. Tikly's paper is a clear-headed analysis of the 'Sewell Report', also known as The report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, a government-commissioned report, published in 2021, following the murder of George Floyd in the US and riots in the UK. Its publication came as a shock to all those engaged in anti-racist work. It caused bemusement and incredulity because it appeared to overlook or even deny racism as the factor leading to the suppression for racially-minoritised peoples in social, political and economic life. Tikly's article provides an analysis and critique of the education component of the Report with his arguments focusing on the Report's claims to objectivity and its claims of the erasure of racism in modern society. Tikly voiced the inadequacy of its recommendations for individuals and institutions and the dangers it posed is suggesting that structural and ongoing racism does not exist. The article concludes by setting out a vision for a new progressive project aimed at advancing racial and cultural justice that, it is suggested, can begin to address these challenges.

Le Grange, L. (2022). 'Decolonisation and anti-racism: Challenges and opportunities for (teacher) education'. The Curriculum Journal, 34(1). https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.193
In this study, Lesley Le Grange tracks the evolution of decolonisation from the early 19th century to post-World War II, discussing the resistance and struggles experienced by colonised peoples from both the Global North and South, as well as their movements against foreign power elites. Focusing on the decolonisation of teacher education, Le Grange evaluated the pros and cons of performing education curriculum work employing: (i) "currere", an autobiographical and subjective reconstructive method, (ii) engaging with "complicated conversations" involving criticisms of self

and hierarchical power relations and (iii) L/land education immersion in the teacher education programmes. L/land education honours existing indigenous peoples' rights to land and decentres incomers historical 'settling' as the accepted norm. Le Grange challenges the epistemic racism and sexism within decolonial work, simultaneously recommending that anti-racism scholarship in teacher education should not be "subsumed under the banner of decolonisation" and thus requires an appropriate theorising of anti-racism in conjunction with decolonisation. This requires some hard thinking to not conflate these two, but recognise their inherent, separate, but both important values.

Walker, S., Bennett, I., Kettory, P, Pike, C., & Walker, L. (2022) ''Deep understanding' for anti-racist school transformation: School leaders' professional development in the context of Black Lives Matter'. The Curriculum Journal, 34(1). https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.189

Around the world, the need for understanding racism and anti-racist practices gained momentum in 2020 with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations. Sharon Walker and colleagues, with the aim of "transforming" schools through anti-racist educational approaches, conducted a series of workshops between 2020 to 2021. These BLM-inspired professional development-focused workshops brought together 15-20 school leaders from a number of London primary and secondary schools. The project involved focus group interviews with the leaders that were facilitated by discussions during the workshops and post-workshop evaluations and analysed using an inductive approach and guided by thematic analysis processes. The authors gained considerable insight from their research and identified it as a precursor to an ongoing endeavour to deepen school leaders' understanding about race and racism, providing guidance and confidence to work as a reflective community of practice and being agents of change for their schools and wider communities.

Teaching, training, and Higher Education

Bhopal, K. (2020). 'For whose benefit? Black and Minority Ethnic training programmes in higher education institutions in England, UK'. British Educational Research Journal, 46(3). https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3589

The thorny issue of (lack of) career progression and (lack of) support for Black academics is carefully examined in Bhopal's article. Bhopal notes that inequalities continue to exist in higher education, despite high-profile efforts by universities, with Black and minority ethnic academics less likely to be professors or occupy senior decision-making roles compared to their White colleagues. Currently

the Higher Education Statistics Agency reports that just 1% of UK professors are Black. Bhopal's article draws on research carried out on two programmes in England specifically devised to increase racial representation in senior decision-making roles. She uses the principles of Critical Race Theory to argue that despite these targeted programmes, racism continues to play a key role in the lack of racial representation in senior leadership roles and that such programmes benefit universities' reputations and statistics, rather than contributing to a deeper commitment to inclusion, equity and creating a diverse workforce. Furthermore, such programmes can provide a climate that perpetuates and reinforces White privilege, rather than addressing structural inequalities.

Callender, C. (2020). 'Black male teachers, white education spaces: Troubling school practices of othering and surveillance'. British Educational Research Journal, 46(5). https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3614

Diversity in the Teachers' workforce is crucial to reflect the ethnically diverse communities in the primary schools. Christine Callender, however, highlights the facts and figures from England's Department for Education, which underscore the underrepresentation of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff compared to the BME school population. Adopting a Critical Race Theory approach of counter-narrative, the author presents the case study of a male black teacher, illustrating the teacher's "transformation from a pupil to student to teacher, recasting him as the racialised and gendered other" (p.1094). Callender, depicting primary schools as "white education spaces", associates the ongoing practices of "othering, scrutiny and surveillance" of black male teachers in English schools. To shift the negative racial and gendered stereotyping, black male teachers "deploy agentic strategies" to navigate in these white spaces, but some of which can be misread, "rendering their deployment counterproductive" (p.1095) and contributing to the silencing of black male teachers' voices.

Davis, S., Haughton, C., Chapman, S., Okeke, R., Yafele, A., Yu, K., & Smith, M. (2022). 'The recruitment and retention of teachers of colour in Wales. An ongoing conundrum?'. The Curriculum Journal, 34(1), 118-137. https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/curj.175

The focus on increasing the recruitment and retention of "teachers of colour (ToC)" in Wales has become one of the priorities of the General Teaching Council for Wales. Susan Davis and colleagues,

grounded in the 'lived experiences' approach to data collection and presentation, showcase the voices of 68 ethnically-diverse educators, including students who aspire to become teachers, student teachers, and teachers at various stages of their careers. This study highlights and affirms findings from other countries on: the lack of role modelling and representation of ethnically-minoritised teachers, the impacts of racism and micro-aggressions on mental health, and the anticipated rejection from the glass ceiling effect. All of these, the article maintains, negatively impacts on recruitment, retention and progression of ToC in the teaching professions in Wales.

Islam, M. & Mercer-Mapstone, L. (2021). 'University is a non-Muslim experience, you know? The experience is as good as it can be': Satisfied settling in Muslim students' experiences and implications for Muslim student voice'. British Educational Research Journal, 47(5). https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3733

Understanding how the UK university experience turns out to be less than supportive and inadequate for Muslim students is the topic of Islam's and Mercer-Mapstone's article. Listening to the 'counter stories' told by 19 Muslim students, from semi-structured interviews, the authors pursue the concept of 'satisfied settling'. They believe it is a critical area which has received little previous focus. It describes how students unconsciously 'settl[e] for less' in terms of their university experiences. The results of their research show a staged cognitive process, undertaken by students, to subconsciously excuse institutional failures to support their religious and cultural needs by settling for lower levels of demand and satisfaction. The authors detail how the students' voices are heard or silenced around the deep importance of religious provisions in their university experiences. Satisfied settling was ultimately found to translate across different institutions' contexts, and the applicability of the concept is also discussed in extending to other marginalised student groups, not just those with religious needs.

Warner, D. (2022). 'Black and minority ethnic student teachers' stories as empirical documents of hidden oppressions: Using the personal to turn towards the structural'. British Educational Research Journal, 48(6). https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3819

Racism, as a covert but pervasive presence in teacher education in England is argued by Diane Warner to be a major structural issue with its effects on student teachers who are Black and Asian. The paper focuses on the stories of three Black and Asian primary student teachers and argues that

it is important to see these personal accounts as empirical documents of hidden oppressions because they are significant pointers towards larger, structural and unacknowledged fissures in teacher education. The Critical Race Theory concept of 'counter story' is used to analyse the stories and show how hidden racism in teacher education can silence and disempower them. The stories show that these student teachers portray nuance, confusion, wonder, and loss of direction in the process of becoming teachers. Alongside, runs a portrayal of their fluctuating identities due to the complex and contested discourses with which they are required to engage as racialised 'others'. This study has important implications for teacher education and presents a challenge for active and sensitive anti-racist cultures to develop.

Some concluding thoughts

This journal curation reflects BERA's commitment to recognising and resourcing race research, alongside the knowledge and expertise of the members of the Race, Ethnicity and Education SIG. Challenging racialised inequality and discrimination in education is embodied in the organisation and race research is a necessary site to problematise and ameliorate racial power differentials.

We extend our gratitude to all researchers working in the area of race, ethnicity and education – those selected for this issue and the many more not represented on this occasion. Also to those exploring ways to make their spaces and places equitable, decolonised and anti-racist. Learning from the presented articles and adhering to BERA's Race Equity Policy (BERA b) we recommend that educational systems, institutions, and associated staff should:

- Showcase, acknowledge and appreciate the unheard voices of racially-minoritised people in educational settings.
- Develop safe spaces for people to reflect on how their positionality impacts what and how they practice the issues of race and racism, and gender and social discrimination, national identity, etc. without fear of repercussion.
- Work to dismantle racialised power differentials within educational establishments that inherently diminish the identities of children, adolescents, and adults.
- Teach explicitly about the colonial matrix power and how, as individuals and groups, we can move from hierarchical classification of diverse groups by race.

- Empower academics, teachers and students from diverse backgrounds, through funding and mentoring, to research and extend their work via knowledge exchange activities.

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