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# **Working through whiteness, race and (anti) racism in Physical Education teacher education**

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## **Abstract:**

### **Working through whiteness, race and (anti) racism in Physical Education teacher education**

#### Background

The persistent gaps between a largely white profession and ethnically diverse school populations have brought renewed calls to support teachers' critical engagement with race. Programmes examining the effects of racism have had limited impact on practice, with student teachers responding with either denial, guilt or fear; they also contribute to a deficit view of racialised students in relation to an accepted white 'norm', and position white teachers 'outside' of race. Recent calls argue for a shift in focus towards an examination of the workings of the dominant culture through a critical engagement with whiteness, positioning white teachers within the processes of racialisation. Teacher educators' roles are central, and yet, whilst we routinely expect student teachers to reflect critically on issues of social justice, we have been less willing to engage in such work ourselves. This is particularly the case within physical education teacher education (PETE), an overwhelmingly white, embodied space, and where race and racism as professional issues are largely invisible.

#### Purpose

This paper examines the operation of whiteness within PETE through a critical reflection on the three co-authors' careers and experiences working for social justice. The research questions were two-fold: How are race, (anti) racism and whiteness constructed through everyday experiences of families, schooling and teacher education? How can collective biography be used to excavate discourses of race, racism and whiteness as a first step towards challenging them? In beginning the process of reflecting on what it means for us 'to do own

work' in relation to (anti) racism, we examine some of the tensions and challenges for teacher educators in PE attempting to work to dismantle whiteness.

### Methodology

As co-authors, we engaged in collective biography work - a process in which we reflected upon, wrote about and shared our embodied experiences and memories about race, racism and whiteness as educators working for social justice. Using a critical whiteness lens, these narratives were examined for what they reveal about the collective practices and discourses about whiteness and (anti)racism within PETE.

### Results

The narratives reveal the ways in which whiteness operates within PETE through processes of naturalisation, ex-denomination and universalisation. We have been educated, and now work within, teacher education contexts where professional discourse about race at best focuses on understanding the racialised 'other', and at worse, is invisible. By drawing on a 'racialised other', deficit discourse in our pedagogy, and by ignoring race in own research on inequalities in PETE, we have failed to disrupt universalised discourses of 'white-as-norm', or addressed our own privileged racialised positioning. Reflecting critically on our biographies and careers has been a first step in recognising how whiteness works in order that we can begin to work to disrupt it.

### Conclusion

The study highlights some of the challenges of addressing (anti)racism within PETE, and argues that a focus on whiteness might offer a productive starting point. White teacher educators must critically examine their own role within these processes if they are to expect student teachers to engage seriously in doing the same.

Keywords: whiteness, teacher educators, physical education, racism, narrative

## **Working through whiteness<sup>i</sup>, race and (anti) racism in Physical Education teacher education**

### **Schooling the other**

The imposing dark brick building still had separate Boys' and Girls' entrances etched into the stone lintels above the doors. I couldn't fail to notice the peeling paintwork and the noise and dust of passing traffic. My new, regulation 'teaching trousers' felt alien on my skin, and were a little too short – I feel like a new girl arriving for school on her first day, rather than a teacher in the making.

Inside we were met by a hue of colour. The walls were adorned with 'Welcome' signs in a host of different languages. Apart from the English positioned at the top, I could only understand one more, 'Bienvenue'. We filed into the cool, slightly tatty gymnasium and squeezed onto the bench set out for us at the side, and waited in anticipation. Thirty, barefoot children entered and quickly found a space, and then, sitting cross-legged on the floor, looked inquisitively at 'the visitors'. The children's white tee shirts contrasted with their black and brown skin; some of the girls wore headscarves and one boy had his hair tied up in black cloth making a small knot on the top of his head; another whispered something to his neighbour in a language foreign to my ear.

Aside from the teacher, and Betty<sup>ii</sup>, our university tutor, we were the only white people in the room, and I shifted uneasily, the bench cold and hard beneath me. My fairly comfortable teacher identity (I know how to teach PE after all!) suddenly didn't seem that secure after all. And it wasn't just about dance. 'Could I teach here?' 'What if I got a school like this for TP?'<sup>iii</sup>, I thought to myself, feeling inadequate, out of place. Thirty five minutes later, our applause was loud – we were in awe of the teacher, the quality of the dances, the learning we've witnessed: this was excellent teaching! On the bus home, Betty tried to draw us out, but it wasn't until we crossed back into Headingley with its familiar shops and restaurants, that we

began to talk about the lesson: ‘It was great, yeah, but I couldn’t do that...!’; ‘Yes, but she was a really unusual teacher, though, wasn’t she?’ ‘She’s probably worked in that school with those kids for ages to be able to do that!’ Our excuses tumbled out. By the time we were back on campus and clambering off the bus, business-as-usual had been restored: our insecurities and dance packed away until next week, safely back in the campus studio. Karen banged me playfully on the arm, reminding me of tonight’s training. The match on Wednesday was away, against our rivals Loughborough - it was one we really needed to win!

## **Introduction**

This article is about whiteness, race and (anti) racism in teacher education and emanates from a wider project in which we, as co-authors, have been engaged in collective biography work (Davies and Gannon 2006) around the challenges of working for social justice in physical education teacher education (PETE) (see Dowling, Fitzgerald & Flintoff 2014). In this paper, we focus specifically on race and racism. The narrative above is one of the stories that emanated from a part of our discussions focusing on how we learnt (or not) about race and racism within our own teacher education programmes and the ways in which whiteness was, (and still is) taken for granted in our educational experiences. This story reflects the general invisibility of race and (anti)racism as professional issues in PETE in the late 1970s in England, a situation that arguably has changed little (Flintoff 2012). This remembered visit to a school in a ‘black’ area of town in 1977 was never explicitly intended to be anything other than an exposure to high quality dance teaching and since antiracism formed no part of the formal PETE curriculum one of us (Anne) was left free to choose *not* to reflect about racialisation, racism and whiteness and their significance for teaching. As McKinney (2005, 73) argues, this is how whiteness works: the privilege and luxury of whiteness involves ‘the option [for white people] to confront race or to avoid it’. In this paper, we explore how it is that, although we have each come to position ourselves under the umbrella of ‘critical’ scholars in PE/TE<sup>iv</sup>, we have been able to maintain considerable contradictions and silences

in our engagement with social justice agendas (see Dowling, Fitzgerald & Flintoff 2014), and specifically around race and racism. We do this through an examination of shared narratives of our careers drawing on a critical whiteness lens<sup>v</sup>, and explore what this means for our and others' social justice work in teacher education.

The impetus for our collective biography work arose during the completion of our recent book arguing for the use of narrative or storytelling in engaging student teachers in issues of equity and diversity (see Dowling, Fitzgerald & Flintoff 2012). Whilst recommending the book, the colleague who wrote its Foreword suggested that he would have liked to have known more about our biographies, and where our 'rage against social justice comes from' (xvi) - that our *own* positioning as editors is largely absent from the book. Although committed and working with issues of social justice for many years, like many teacher educators, whilst we have routinely expected such critical reflection from our student teachers in their professional development journeys, it seems we have been less willing to engage in such work ourselves. However, as Johnson Lackuk and Mosley (2012, 2) stress, we are also very much 'part of the parade' – 'part of the processes by which our student teachers become committed (or not) to social justice and anti-biased teaching'.

We therefore have used narrative inquiry and storytelling to explore our biographies and life histories in relation to notions of privilege and power, and specifically, the operation of whiteness. Although more prevalent in North America (e.g. Leonardo 2009; Levine-Rasky 2000), critical engagement in whiteness<sup>vi</sup> is still a relatively new perspective for educationalists in Europe (but see Gillborn 2006; Gillborn 2008; Lander 2011; Pearce 2003; Preston, 2013). Such engagement is not without tensions, not least that in focusing on whiteness we risk simply re-centring white people rather examining the social effects and

processes of whiteness, in order that they can be dismantled. In agreement with Frankenberg (1993:10), however, we share the assumption that knowledge about a situation is a ‘critical tool’ in steps towards dismantling it. Our purpose is therefore to analyse fragmentary stories, some of which are presented here, to reveal the work of discourses, relations and structures of whiteness, and to show how white teachers and racialised<sup>vii</sup> others are positioned within and by them. Our research questions were twofold: How is race, (anti) racism and whiteness constructed through everyday experiences of families, schooling and teacher education? How can collective biography be used to excavate discourses of race, racism and whiteness as a first step towards challenging them?

However, importantly, like Aveling (2001:36) whilst we seek to ‘foreground whiteness and explicate the power positions that are embedded within that concept, a subtext of [our] narratives [is] that racialised positions are always gendered and located within specific historical, cultural and class-based realities’. PE and PETE are gendered, classed and racialised spaces (although teacher educators/researchers in our field have not always acknowledged the complexities and contradictions of these intersecting social relations – see Flintoff, et al, 2008). PE and PETE are also places where disabled bodies are positioned as out of place (Fitzgerald 2006). By centralising our experiences as white, middle class, non-disabled women, the paper also makes a contribution to extending intersectional analyses that have, to date, focused on the experiences of oppressed groups rather than ‘studying up’ on the powerful, including whites and the middle classes (Levine-Rasky 2011). Our collective biography work is, then, one attempt to reveal the workings of whiteness within PETE, and through it we hope to encourage others to examine their own experiences in order to work towards opening up spaces for more equitable work in the future.



## **A ‘good’ school to practice teaching**

I remember going on TP in Leicester and the kids would turn up without their kit. We’d have very low expectations of what we could achieve, so if they had kit that was great! We had a fear of ...oh god what if we get *that* school for TP – everyone would ask, have you got a good school? You were just happy that they turned up and you did something - just get through it and survive - although it wasn’t as bad as you thought....And I spent hours planning group work in history [my second teaching subject] and remember how the teacher said ‘don’t expect to use that with them’! Management, classroom management, that’s all that was expected of us. There was no expectation at all. ....there were a lot of disillusioned staff, a huge amount of smoking, a place where I didn’t feel at home - not least I didn’t feel at home amongst the teachers. Working class in as much as ...[the ethnic diversity amongst the pupils]. If you looked at recruitment to teaching then, a lot of them came through teacher colleges and in terms of their ages, were really old, and they had tried. It was a bit like a Ken Loach<sup>viii</sup> film - it was ‘Just get through the day love!’. I was so excited about this history stuff but it just confirmed that we were those students coming from university and not knowing what was really going on in the real world...

## **Race equality and teacher education – invisible, marginal, or excluded?**

The two narratives above illustrate the dominant storylines of race of ‘normalised absence/pathologised presence’ (Phoenix, 2009) within Anne and Fiona’s initial teacher education in the late 1970s/early 1980s in England. Although invisible in our formal PETE curriculum, race (and class and gender) nevertheless formed part of the hidden curriculum. For example, our shared if not necessarily vocalised conceptions of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ schools for teaching practice, reflected our stereotypical (racist) assumptions that children from ethnically diverse schools would be ‘less able’ in PE, or ‘more difficult’ to teach. Although situated in large cities, both with sizable communities of ethnic minorities, much of our education took place on white university campuses, segregated from these poorer, ethnically

diverse areas. Whilst the latter could have offered important contexts for our education, the allocation of an ethnically diverse school for teaching placement was (in our student eyes) the bad ‘luck of the draw’, rather than part of a planned process of preparing us to teach for diversity. These ‘colour blind’ teacher education experiences reflected the inconsistencies and contradictions around race evident in UK educational policy at that time (Tomlinson, 2008). Colour blind practices are those that draw on liberal notions of meritocracy and equal treatment, but fail to address the impact of structural inequalities of racism for educational experiences. As a result, despite often being well intentioned, many argue they are, at best, ineffectual in challenging racism, and worse, *contribute* to its reproduction (Lander, 2010). So whilst ethnically diverse schools were included within our teacher education programmes in the late 1970s, there is little evidence to suggest that this was part of a planned strategy of embedding a critical analysis of structural racism into our professional preparation as teachers.

How has Initial Teacher Education (ITE) policy and practice in relation to race equality shifted since our own experiences? Whilst a detailed analysis of the shifting positioning of race equality within ITE policy since the early 1980s is outside the scope of this paper, it is worth highlighting three salient features. Whilst we draw heavily on the English/UK context here, like Gillborn (2006), we argue that the wider lessons from our analysis might be useful elsewhere. From the little research available, it appears that racialised others are under-represented across PETE in several ‘western’ countries, and PE is not immune to the ‘policy-borrowing’ (the notion that ‘best practice’ from another context is assumed to be able to be introduced, unproblematically, into another) evident more widely in education and schooling systems).

Firstly, race equality has always occupied a marginal position within the professional discourse of teacher education policy (Troyna and Carrington 1990; Tomlinson, 2008).

Whilst it could be argued that the introduction of national teacher standards from 1992 did at least ensure the visibility of race equality within the ITE policy discourse, studies have consistently revealed significant gaps between the policy rhetoric and actual practice (Tomlinson, 2008). Wilkins (2013) has recently concluded that the shift towards a 'standards' discourse within ITE in England has not just been instrumental in the continuing marginalisation of race equality, but, in fact, operates to *reinforce* inequality.

Second, and not surprisingly, given the lack of strong institutional/policy support, teacher educators report the often individualised and exhausting nature of their efforts to engage white students in a critical examination of race, and the challenge of moving them beyond the common responses of guilt, fear or hostility (e.g. Gain 2000). Good practice relies heavily on the efforts of individual teacher educators; rarely does this extend beyond to sessions 'tagged onto' the main curriculum or move beyond the perspective of understanding racialised others to a critique of white institutions. And the fact that teacher educators are themselves overwhelmingly white exacerbates the continuing marginalisation of useful knowledge about racism; this includes those of us adopting a feminist perspective. Black feminist critiques of racism and whiteness have gained little purchase within teacher education (see Siraj-Blatchford 1993). We know little about teacher educators' work around race within the specific context of PETE, but we might surmise that the picture is no more positive than that in relation to gender (see Dowling, 2006).

Third, despite the significant legal changes in the UK<sup>ix</sup> introduced in 2000, where the *institutionalised* nature of racism is explicitly recognised, there is little evidence to show that

this theoretical (re)concepualisation has impacted practice. Whilst schools and universities now have a legal requirement to actively *promote* positive race relations through their policy and practice (Pilkington 2012), Wilkins (2013) concludes that, at an institutional level, key government agencies have been non-compliant, allowing a racialised discourse to persist. It is from (or perhaps because of) this rather unpromising context that Gillborn (2006; 2008), amongst an increasing number of European researchers (e.g. Lander 2011; Pearce 2003; Preston 2013), calls for a more radical approach to anti-racist work. Critical race theory (CRT), he suggests, already well established in the USA, might provide a useful perspective, not least because of its theorisation of racism, and its identification of whiteness as a focus for analysis. In the next section, we address how we have engaged in collective biography as a methodology with which to engage critically with whiteness.

## **Methodology**

Drawing on Davies and Gannon (2006) we have used collective biography work in this research. This has involved each of us in reflecting on and writing about our experiences and memories of working for social justice within PETE and then sharing these with each other, listening and re-telling these in order to get beyond the clichés and usual explanations of what has been experienced. In this way, we are less interested in our *particular* experiences as individual teacher educators, and more in examining the taken for granted *practices and discourses* about race, racism and whiteness as they operate within PETE. As Davies and Gannon (2006) summarise:

Through a very intense, focused gaze on the particularity of our own memories, we hope to arrive at an understanding of the social, of the way individual subjectivities

are created and maintained through specific kinds of discursive practices, with particular historical moments, in particular contexts that in turn afford particular interactions and patterns of meaning-making. We are interested in our research to understand the processes of *selving* rather than to discover particular details about individual selves (Davies and Gannon, 2006, 7)

In adopting such an approach, we aimed to avoid one of the tensions faced by educators ‘working through’ whiteness, noted above - conflating whiteness with whites and white identity (Rasky-Levine, 2000). So whilst drawing on our different biographies and experiences (for example, we differ in age, length of experience, and the countries in which we have worked), our aim was to analyse these narratives for what they tell us about the operation of whiteness, rather than the specifics of our individual lives.

Another advantage of collective biography for this particular project is that the process is not reliant on recruitment of research participants that may or may not be willing to talk openly about the focus of the research. Given the ways in which whiteness works to silence or downplay discussion about racism – for both racialised and white participants, and particularly when the researchers are white (see Archer 2002; Flintoff and Webb 2012; Frankenberg 1993; Rollock 2013), this methodology is useful for our purposes here. Having already worked together for some years, we have developed the level of trust and commitment that Davies and Gannon (2006) argue is necessary if the mutual questioning of each others’ stories involved in the process is to be robust. Nevertheless, as noted above, we are acutely aware of the ‘double bind’ and impossibility of working *through* whiteness. As Rollock (2013, 500) notes, ‘white researchers ...are not neutral enquirers in conversations about race’, so making any such work contentious and characterised by tension.

Like Davies and Gannon (2006) we started our collective biography reflections by first working individually, writing short narratives around a number of orientating questions. These included: our understandings of ourselves racially (How do you define yourself racially? When and how did you become aware of race and/or racism?); our experiences of working with racialised students (in school and university settings), and of teaching about race and racism in PE/TE. These questions emerged out of our engagement with some key literature around the topic area. Once face-to-face, we spent 22 hours together re-sharing and re-creating moments from our pasts, recording our discussions for future analysis. These were then transcribed and analysed systematically by looking for similarities, differences, generalisations and contradictions. In this way we sought to analyse the discourses of ‘our’ biographies, making visible the threads within which we are entangled, and open them up for a broader analysis of discourses of teacher education and social justice in the wider professional field of PETE (see also Dowling, Fitzgerald and Flintoff, 2014). Drawing on theoretical discussions around race, (anti)racism and whiteness, we present some of these multiple levels of reflections in order to start the process of beginning to see (and ultimately untangle) whiteness.

### **Families, schooling and whiteness**

A family friend ...was Asian, we called him uncle [name]; he worked for my Dad. So, from an early age I was aware that his skin colour was different to mine, my family and most people living around us. I vividly remember smelling curry at his house and talking about ‘[Name’s] curry house’ with my sisters. It was unfamiliar ...one we decided we didn’t like. I also remember talking about his children – his wife was white British – and we talked about their fair skin and how you couldn’t tell they had an

Asian Dad. Although none of us said it, it was as if we were relieved they looked white...We were constructing 'white' as in some way better for them to be (Hayley).

Other memories [of my schooling] ...were not about race but about class and gender. We played hockey as our main sport - netball was for working class girls. We risked playing in the leagues in London, and that's where there would be black girls. I don't remember any non white girls I played hockey with, or in the opposition either...I can only think of one Indian girl, that's all through all my secondary school (Fiona).

Our childhood memories reveal the complexity of whiteness and the classed and gendered dimensions of our racialised educational and family experiences. As young children, we learnt to internalise whiteness as the norm, against which racialised others and their lives, were defined as different and inferior. We lived in 'white' neighbourhoods and went to 'white' schools, and struggled to remember any of our school peers who were not white – although we admitted there must have been some. However, regardless of the presence or not of racialised others, whiteness was constructed discursively, for example, in talk about 'good' schools or how 'safe'/'unsafe' neighbourhoods were talked about. Race was never talked about overtly, since, like the white women in Frankenberg's (1993) research, this might risk being seen as racist; far better to not 'see' race, to stress that you see and treat everyone as the 'same'. As Frankenberg argues, this colour blindness is the polite language of race, and even as children we were aware of this and learnt to be fluent in it. A re-reading of our story-sharing for this research shows how we often drifted away from an examination of our racial privilege towards, for example, gender or class, and how we struggled to define ourselves racially, or think about how our white privilege had underpinned for our experiences and advantaged our careers. Whiteness works through being invisible to most whites. So, whilst Anne and Fiona recounted the gendered nature of single sex PE lessons, being introduced to

activities like tennis or hockey deemed 'suitable' for girls at that time, there were very few experiences we remembered as racialised, such as the 'risking' of netball in London where black girls may be in the opposition. Racialised experiences were very much 'other' to 'our' (white) experiences, taking place outside the white spaces of our childhood lives; we were not racialised, others were. As noted above, these limited understandings of race and our own privileged positioning within whiteness, were far from disrupted by Anne and Fiona's move into higher education; our fellow student teachers were mostly white (with the odd exception, students who were quickly constructed as the 'exotic other' -because of their skin colouring and their childhood experiences, so different from our own). Hayley, ten years younger, experienced a different route to university teaching, and engaged academically in issues of race and racism as part of sociology studied at school and in her Leisure Studies university degree. Even then, this introduction was limited to a 'few weeks where we would address the different levels of racism, cultural, institutional, individual racism, stacking and some of the research that was beginning at that time, in early 1990s'. Our own education was, at best, grounded in what Cross (2005) calls the 'soft, safe' codes of multiculturalism and diversity, rather than racism, white privilege and power.

### **The power to choose – challenges and omissions in teaching about race**

Hayley: I'll happily teach about disability, class and gender but I'm so conscious when I am teaching about race and ethnicity - I feel like it's the students from an ethnic minority background that are looking at me, and I feel I don't have enough knowledge.....

Fiona: I haven't thought 'oh I have to teach about race'...but then [when I've taught about race] I've thought, everyone in the room is frightened of not being politically correct. So you get a hyper reaction from students in PE. I'm concerned that these sorts of circumstances just reaffirm white privilege.



Because there aren't other [minority ethnic] people in the room....So people will say, 'oh just give them separate showers', and that's the one answer to the problem of race! Or you get the opposite – 'if they want to live here then they need to fit in' ... 'why should we have single sex sessions?' That's the only time you get people suddenly being interested in gender, and they defend the mixed sex sessions!

Anne: The race sessions I've taught would also be about the 'other' ....but when I reflect on my teaching of gender I think it is important to teach about masculinity and that some male students would be engage positively in critical sessions on masculinity...So that kind of teaching, studying up on gender ...is useful [for thinking about teaching about whiteness]. But when I read about the emotional challenges of teaching whiteness in the literature, I've certainly chosen to ignore whiteness in my teaching...

Fiona: well we can all opt out of addressing equity issues....

Anne: ...sometimes I feel so exhausted and that it's easier to teach about the national curriculum policy or whatever. It's easier to teach about that ... students will give a more positive response to that than some of these sessions....

Hayley: we've always asked a black PhD student to do the session on race and ethnicity, since his research was on that...but then I was thinking, do we then need to get a disabled athlete in to teach about disability? I think it is very problematic....but I do wonder ... if I had conveyed that story would I get the same response?

Frankenburg (1993, 330) suggests that 'White women have to repress, avoid and conceal a great deal in order to maintain a stance of 'not noticing' color'. Unlike racialised others, whites have the power to 'confront race or avoid it..to engage an act of good will' rather than a necessity, and it is often an unusual circumstance, rather than an everyday one, that pushes whites to engage with race. Education, she suggests, is one of these. Yet as our stories

revealed, we have been able to choose to largely ignore race in our own teaching, as it was ignored within our own schooling and teacher education. As researchers too, we have been silent about race and racism, reproducing whiteness through our contributions to new knowledge in PETE (Flintoff, 1993; Dowling, 2006). PE/TE research has some way to go before it can even claim to have mapped the ways in which racial inequalities have impacted on racialised pupils' experiences, evident in the wider educational literature (but see (Azzarito 2009; Benn et al. 2011; Fitzpatrick 2013; Flintoff 2012; 2013; Macdonald et al. 2009, Walseth, 2012). Whiteness is not accountable, and we have, and continue to, indulge in 'harmful inaction' (McKinney, 2005). We reproduce 'white privilege pedagogy' (Levine-Rasky, 2000) through taking white experiences and white knowledge as universal, by continuing to define 'others' experiences of race rather than our own, and through avoiding the naming of whiteness (see Flintoff and Webb, 2012).

### **Challenging racism through critical whiteness studies?**

Analysing our collective biographical stories reveals the deeply engrained nature of racism and racist discourses that have underpinned, shaped and continue to shape our educational experiences as students, teachers and teacher educators. As Gillborn (2008) notes, one of the premises of CRT is this recognition:

that the term 'racism' is used not only in relation to crude, obvious acts of race hatred but also in relation to the more subtle and hidden operations of power that have the *effect* of disadvantaging one or more minority ethnic groups (Gillborn, 2008, 27).

It is such (re) theorisation that has brought with it calls to refocus race equality work towards a critical analysis of whiteness as one means to address the perceived limitations of previous perspectives for addressing race inequalities. Levine-Rasky (2002) argues for critical whiteness studies because of what she calls the previous ‘misidentification of the change object’:

In response to the injunction that whites do their own work to eliminate their complicity in racism, writings are emerging that focus dialogues on racism from the inadequacies of ‘others’ or from the race/d relations between ‘us’ and ‘them’ to whiteness itself. The project initiates a critical, relational and contextual problematisation of whiteness as an active participant in systems of domination rather than of racialised difference as an effect of domination (Levine-Raskey, 2002, 2).

This paper has reported on our initial engagement with critical whiteness analysis through our collective biography work. In analyzing our embodied memories and experiences and drawing on Gabriel (1998), we’ve identified three discursive techniques by which whiteness operates within PETE: naturalisation, ex-nomination, and universalisation. Naturalism - a fundamental mechanism of whiteness whereby race is defined in relation to ‘others’, and where white bodies and perspectives are seen as ‘natural’ and the norm, against which others are viewed and judged (Dyer 1997) - was evident throughout our stories. As children, for example, we constructed race as ‘Other’ in relation to defining neighbours’ mixed race children as ‘different’, or in characterising different types of schools or invasion games as suitable for ‘us’ or ‘them’. Such naturalisation is also evident in our research – for example, Anne’s research on race and PETE focused on how *BME* student teachers’ ethnic and religious identities impacted upon their developing professional identities whilst white

students were not included, leaving them and white ethnicity positioned as the norm (Flintoff, 2008).

As teachers and teacher educators we've also been able to use the so-called technique of ex-nomination – the process by which we have been able to ignore our own ethnicity and fail to acknowledge our racialised selves. Since as McKinney (2005, 4) notes, whiteness is a 'mirrored identity': ...a reflection of everything it is not... we've been able to assume an unmarked, normative position that has allowed us to study the lives and experiences of 'Others' whilst allowing our racialised selves to go unmarked and unexamined. And universalisation, a third discursive technique of whiteness, is evident in the ways in which, in our own teaching and research, we have taken white experience and knowledge to count for the experiences of everyone, and in so doing, denied the presence and impact of racism on the lives of racialised others.

Our collective biography work has also, importantly, revealed the ways in which racialised discourses are always enmeshed with those of class, gender, age and ability. Anne and Fiona's remembered experiences of ethnically diverse schools showed how these were also classed and gendered spaces, where particular conceptions of schooling, education and PE were being practiced and reproduced. Our analysis highlights the significant, and we would argue continuing, disjuncture between student teachers' subjective, embodied experiences of learning to teach, and the disembodied, 'objective' and technocratic discourse that continues to dominate teacher education (see Department for Education 2013). Although recent analyses of racialised discourses and their operation within PE are welcome (e.g. Fitzpatrick 2013) we would argue we have yet, in any sustained way at least, to embrace the critical, relational and contextual problematisation of whiteness that Levine-Rasky calls for.

Our collective biography work has revealed the powerful silences around race that exist within our work. Others working in PETE in 'western' countries elsewhere have voiced similar concerns (e.g. Douglas and Halas, 2011) and call for whiteness to be addressed. However, it is one thing to call for an engagement with whiteness, still another to do so – and particularly in a way that makes a difference to the student teachers with whom we work. Indeed, Rasky-Levine (2000, 19) describes such work as 'always in tension' since the challenge is one of working *through* whiteness. We are attempting to 'struggle against the inequities that whiteness arranges', but at the same time recognise 'the impossibility of that task since commitments to work are always constructed through the epistemological frame of whiteness'. Our collective biography work has been a useful first step to begin to explore how whiteness work within PETE, and how, as teacher educators, we are both positioned and advantaged by its operation. However we remain mindful of Levine-Rasky's (2002) concern that engagement with critical whiteness studies does not retreat into an elitist theoretical engagement, separate from practice. Our next step is to extend this initial work to include school teachers and more teacher educators working within PE in collective biography work, with the ultimate aim of developing pedagogical materials that might prove useful to the task of unpacking and dismantling whiteness more broadly within the profession<sup>x</sup>.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> We have taken this part of the title from Levine-Rasky (2002) who suggests that 'working through' best characterises the tensions that necessarily accompany whites engaging in a critical examination of whiteness.

<sup>ii</sup> All names in the paper are pseudonyms.

<sup>iii</sup> Teaching placement or school practicum.

<sup>iv</sup> We have different biographies and routes into PE/TE. Two of us were educated as secondary PE teachers albeit through different routes, in the late 1970s/early 1980s; the other studied Leisure Studies at university, before moving into community sports development. We are all now teaching and researching in universities in the broad area of PE with a particular focus on issues of social justice.

<sup>v</sup> We include insights drawn from critical race theory, black feminism and critical whiteness studies.

<sup>vi</sup> We are not denying other, useful perspectives on race and racism, e.g. multiculturalism.

<sup>vii</sup> As Levine-Rasky (2002, p.3) we use 'racialised other' here rather than terms such as 'black and minority ethnic' or 'non-white', for example, to refer to those groups that have been regarded as distinct from white. This ensures a link between racialisation and racism, and draws attention to the 'very processes of reifying what should be regarded as social difference...' However, like the use of whiteness, it does risk generalisation that social inequality can be solely attributed to race.

<sup>viii</sup> Ken Loach is an English film and TV director, best known for his critical portrayal of working class lives, including the 1970s film, KES, about a young working class boy and his kestrel.

<sup>ix</sup> The equalities legislation covers the whole of the United Kingdom yet initial teacher education policy is specific to England.

<sup>x</sup> Anne and Fiona have recently been awarded a British Academy research grant to support this work, on which we hope to report in the future.