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Given the focus of this research, my ontological positioning is central to my response as I am a researcher from a mixed race (Black Caribbean and White British) background. My view of racism has been shaped by personal, professional and academic experiences. Within this article the author, Bunce addresses the position of race in the university experiences of Black students undertaking studies in health and social care related subjects. She charts her brief and seemingly recent journey into developing her understanding of the concept of racism and the 'unfairness' of inequality. Through research with her students the author describes their experiences with racism as 'shocking and deeply saddening' and provides a narrative of her reflections and actions in response to her new found knowledge and understanding. This article seeks to 'inform and inspire educational change that promotes racial equality of outcomes both within and beyond [our] classrooms.'

Terminology

As a starting point for research in the area of race, it is important to note that any use of terminology should be underpinned with the belief that 'race' is a socially constructed notion as there is no biological basis for the differences identified by such categorisation. Racial categories are used in settings of popular culture, political discourse, and 'statistical governmentality' (Foucault, 1980). The origin of specific ethnic/racial terms is seen in the process surrounding the census and results in the creation of social categories and group identities. Categories of race and ethnicity may be broad and to some extent, abstract and this creates an opportunity for representations to be characterised by simply their physical appearance. However, the implications of racial categories are indeed significant and impact every aspect of our lives from relationships to career progression. The lived experiences of different communities are both complex and intricate.

Recently, the term BAME (Black, Asian Minority ethnic) has been widely used and indicates that we are one homogenous group with no defining differences. As Aspinall asserts: 'commonly used acronyms are little understood in the wider society, are confusing, and of limited acceptability to those they describe, while other collective terms are offensive and ethnocentric' (Aspinall, 2020:2). The term BAME has been embraced by many educational institutions including schools and

universities. Over the last year (2020-21) nowhere has the use of BAME been more apparent than in the focus by the government and health agencies on the greater risks experienced by Black and Asian groups in Britain during the coronavirus pandemic. In the literature on racial/ethnic disparities and inequities and structural or systematic racism, this language provides a convenient shorthand for those who experience disadvantage or are discriminated against by virtue of their physical appearance or skin colour (Aspinall, 2020)

As Bunce describes in her work, the use of the term 'minority' serves to place people in a deficit position and the more recently used term 'Global Majority' is gaining significance due to its empowering and positive connotations. However, it is important to note that language, particularly that around race, is ever evolving and often fixed to a certain time. One must be prepared to alter or adapt language and we must consider that all terminology currently in use will, in years to come, be outdated and quite possibly inappropriate.

Universities and Race

Never has there been a more important time for research around race and ethnicity in education. Universities in Britain continue to be White and middle-class-dominated institutions (Mirza and Arday 2018). This is despite apparent success in the strategies and policy of Widening Participation in increasing the numbers of students from Black and Global Majority backgrounds going to university (Crozier et al, 2016). Furthermore, even after they get to university, Richardson (2018) concludes that Black and Global Majority students' first-degree attainment is less than their White peers. Advance HE's latest figures from 2020 confirm this by revealing a 22.6% gap in classifications. Questions of why? need to be answered and Bunce's article quite rightly begins with this.

The Aiming Higher report produced by the Runnymede Trust (Alexander and Arday 2015) identified two connected areas of alarm for students and staff of colour within the British higher education system. Firstly, that White privilege lies at the heart of culture in the elite institutions in the UK. And secondly, this results in unequal opportunities and outcomes for academics and students of colour. The odds of a non-White student obtaining a good degree (2:1 or a First) are approximately half

those of a White student (Richardson, 2018). According to Comeaux and Jayakumar (2007) poor attainment in Black and Global Majority students is due to the nature of their interactions with their teachers and other students. Osler's (1999) work argued that students from Black and Global Majority backgrounds experience both discriminatory teaching and assessment practices or more subtle marginalisation attitudes and behaviour from their teachers and classmates. This evidence therefore clearly suggests that the responsibility to address this sit, in part, with the academic. In Ahmet's (2020) work with postgraduate students he asserted that Black and Global Majority students occupy racialised, sexualised, gendered, classed social locations which impact on how they experienced belonging in universities of predominately white space. 'To engage with the physical space of the university is to be reminded of the power space has to make one feel "inside" or "outside," (Ahmet, 2020: 679) It is therefore the responsibility of the institution and its academic staff to address racism in all its forms including in the degree awarding gap.

Within her article Bunce notes the tension between the terms 'Degree Attainment' and 'Degree Awarding' Gap. She quite rightly points out that: 'calling it an awarding gap makes it inherently clear that its root cause is external to the student...'. However, I was concerned to note that Bunce's colleagues 'realised [they] needed to address the awarding gap and explicitly make [their] teaching anti-racist.' This indicates that the notion of addressing racism only arises when addressing outcomes- outcomes it could be said that are detrimental to the institution or indeed their performance as academics. Her colleagues' need to implement anti-racist strategies was more concerned with degree classifications rather than improving the experiences and position of Black and Global Majority students.

It is with this in mind that I argue that Critical Race Theory was, but I believe, cannot be omitted from this work as it provides a lens through which we are able to make sense of the raced social order that is experienced by Black and Global Majority British people.

Critical Race Theory – an essential tool

'Critical race theory (CRT) ... in education...works toward the elimination of racism... [It] is a set of insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to

identify, analyse and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordination and dominant racial narratives in and out of the classroom'. (Yosso, Ceja and Solórzano, 200: 132).

CRT foregrounds and privileges the oppressed minority voice and begins its analysis from the perspective of the oppressed. In some ways Bunce has begun to do this through her research. This analysis allows the CRT theorist to construct an alternative and resisting discourse to the dominant white cultural codes operating in society and its institutions (Ladson Billings, 2004). CRT aims to reveal the way in which racial inequality and injustice is maintained through the operation of structures and assumptions that appear normal and unremarkable by considering similar issues as associated with civil rights. CRT theorists argue that a raced social order exists, and this results in social inequalities. Matters of race therefore become civil rights issues. However, CRT places issues in a broader perspective that addresses history, settings, and White self-interest in addition to the role of emotions and the unconscious. It is in this that I believe Bunce's research could be developed in terms of depth of understanding.

Researcher Positioning

Any research conducted in the area of race, racism and ethnicity within education must be driven by the desire for racial and social justice. This can be a painful process – for both Black and White researchers. Black researchers are often 'triggered' by such work as one is required to possibly recall previous and often traumatic events. Or alternatively they connect with the narrative of the participant and draw similarities in feeling. The participants of this study were students who identified as Black African, Asian or White and Black Caribbean. Bunce does not state how she identifies herself but describes growing up in a 'white family'. One can therefore assume that she is White. According to Mazzei (2011: 659), as whiteness has historically gone unnamed and unnoticed as a hegemonic norm, 'a failure to voice whiteness, or put differently, the choice to articulate one's white identity by not doing so, is a strategy for maintaining power through a move to maintain the normative (and unspoken) presence of whiteness'. A key concept of Critical

whiteness studies is that whiteness itself is unnamed, empty or invisible, at least to white people (Decker, 2013)

It is apparent that the interviews were conducted by Bunce and/or her colleague as no details were offered. Hikido and Murray (2016) indicate, while cross-racial interviews can elicit valuable data, racial matching between researcher and participants can minimise the pressure for 'safe' or 'politically correct' responses that a non-white interviewer might have affected. This may be a consideration for Bunce in future projects in terms of the creation of a safe space for Black and Global Majority students. She describes that the students' accounts were 'upsetting to hear' and that she was 'not prepared for the extent to which their experiences could be so negative'. When any Black person is asked to recall painful events, it is a form of symbolic violence on the self as there is a dive back into the trauma. I was concerned to note that nowhere in this article did Bunce refer to or describe any measures that were taken to minimise the impact of such trauma on her participants. Indeed, their stories benefitted her research, but it was not clear what the students themselves gained from this experience. One must proceed with caution as it is not appropriate for students of colour to 'provide the curriculum for their White counterparts,' (Di Angelo, 2011: 73) or indeed educate their tutors in what racism feels like. Indeed, their stories are powerful, but they should not be the only teaching tool deployed during research in this subject.

Overall Reflections

I would suggest that further consideration with Bunce's work should be given to the British context of racism as currently there are gaps in understanding and potential missed opportunities for the development of her work and indeed practice with students. One example of this misunderstanding is seen in the following quote from the article. When seeking to further categorise her participants, Bunce states that it would have been 'important to establish whether they had spent most of their lives living in Britain or whether they had recently moved to the UK to study.' In this quote it is presumed that none of the students were born in Britain, and this is a common assumption in British society – if you are not White, you were not born here. I have answered to this query countless times during my life. Indeed, Britain has had a

Black population for centuries. Fryer (1984:1) points out that, "there were Africans in Britain before the English came here". He goes on to explain this hypothesis by arguing that:

"They came here as soldiers in the Roman imperial army that occupied the southern part of our island for three and a half centuries. Among the troops defending Hadrian's wall in the third century AD was a division of Moors (numerus Maurorum Aureliianorum) named after Marcus Aurelius or a later known official by the same name...the earliest attested date for this unit's presence here is 253-8AD" (Fryer, 1984: 1).

This understanding should be sought and be firmly in place before any research is undertaken with Black students. The Black presence in Britain is long standing and significant (Olusoga, 2016. Malik, 1996. Ramdin, 1987. Solomos 1996, Frost, 1999) and to assume that this is not the case demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding about the position of race and racism in this country.

The UK has a long relationship with discrimination. By the 1770s it was firmly established in Britain in what one could describe as a principal paradigm to the transatlantic slave trade and slavery. The British slave trade ended in 1807; and slavery in 1833. However, racism did not end with the abolition of slavery, it was far too valuable. Racism had a new purpose; it was set to become the hand maiden to the empire. This clearly can be viewed as the culminating stage in the rise of British racism. The mythology of race became the most vitally important ingredient in the establishment of British imperialism. Throughout this period a furtive seed bed was established for the cultivation of pseudo-scientific racism which clearly fostered the argument that Black people were innately inferior to their White counterparts. This historical template of bigotry and prejudice that acted as a vital catalyst in the formation of empire still permeates British society today.

Prior to the vote for the UK to leave the European Union in 2016, the sense of belonging held by Black and Global Majority communities existed in a permanent state of instability. However, it was further destabilised by the UK government's emphasis on British values and rhetoric in schools and colleges 'to not undermine' (DfE, 2013: 14) and 'actively promote fundamental British values' (DfE, 2014: 3). The murder of George Floyd in 2020 placed racism back into the consciousness of the world. But here in Britain conversations have reflected the fact that we view it as an

American issue – this is not the case. Britain currently sits in the perfect storm for racism to develop. The Sewell report produced by the Conservative government in 2021 denied the existence of structural racism and referred the slave trade as ‘the Caribbean experience.’ This has served to deny and dismiss the lived experiences of Britain’s Black population. Any research undertaken into the experience of Black and Global Majority communities must take this context into consideration.

As Bunce has demonstrated through this research, academics must begin with themselves, place their own pedagogy under scrutiny and reflect upon how their thinking, beliefs and pedagogical approaches play a role in (re)producing racism and or White privilege in its many forms (Crowley and Smith 2015). The development, or reconstruction, of tutor subjectivity that fosters self-reflection is needed in higher education (Dunne et al, 2018). Reflexivity offers an opportunity to challenge the taken for granted assumptions that are often found in popular discourse and practice. This requires a critical recognition of one’s positionality, cultural and political presuppositions, and epistemic position (Rizvi 2013: 273). Only then can educators engage in dialectical thinking. In a dialectical approach, ‘we understand both others in their terms as well as ours, as a way of comprehending how all representations are socially constituted’ (Rizvi, 2013: 272). Lanas (2014: 176) refers to Biesta’s (2003) use of the Levinisian perspective on education to argue that learning is not about the acquisition of knowledge or truth, but about responding (Dunne et al, 2018). Responding, and learning about others necessitates learning about ourselves. Academics need to learn to be reflexive in their thinking and aware of their gaps in understandings. Then the next step should be to *respond* by seeking further understandings through both learning and experiences. As Bunce has demonstrated here, if academics can problematise and deconstruct their own attitudes then they might be in a position to develop effective race equality practice.

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