Chapter 8

Educate and act for antiracism

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The word race is inevitably controversial, and may even appear in quotation marks to show that it is not a scientific category marking real biological differences between people. It is, however, real in the sense that many people perceive some physical and cultural characteristics as a sign of other people's inferiority, even if there are changes over the years in which groups of people are seen as inferior. Race and racism, in various forms, is a central issue for our society and schools.

Many teachers find race and racism difficult topics to engage with and often say that they feel ill-prepared to address the issue (Lander, 2011; Arshad *et al.*, 2005). One reason might be that many student teachers and teachers have not had personal experiences of racism. For many, this is something you hear about via the media. In many teacher preparation programmes, race equality is only discussed in one lecture or workshop over the whole programme (Wilkins and Lall, 2010; Bhopal *et al.*, 2009; Hick *et al.*, 2011). Race is seen as just one aspect of inclusion and is unlikely to be embedded across the teaching programme. The consequence is that many teachers are 'conditioned not to think about race' (Marx, 2006: 21) and they become what we would call 'race evasive'. Paul Gorski (2019: 56), a social justice educator in the USA, insists that pupils experiencing racism cannot wait for schools or teachers to move at their own pace and comfort level.

It is important for teachers to overcome any initial hesitation about race and racism so that they have the confidence and capacity to engage in discussions with their pupils. Young people, both minority and majority ethnic, are aware of racial issues and do want to talk about them (Arshad *et al.*, 2017) but their teachers can be reluctant to open up the space for discussions and debate. Unless teachers become more confident about discussing topics which can be seen as controversial and difficult, phrases like 'Getting It Right For Every Child' (a policy document in Scotland) will be empty slogans, particularly for the pupils who encounter racism or racial discrimination as part of their lives.

Clarifying concepts and debunking false assumptions

Under the Equality Act 2010, the definition of 'race' includes colour, nationality, ethnic origins and national origins and seeks to prevent discrimination from occurring on one or more of those grounds. Robin Richardson, an experienced equalities adviser, suggests that the phrase 'race equality' is generally used in two ways. The first is as a moral value or principle. We believe that all human beings are of equal value and that it would be morally wrong to discriminate because of an aspect of someone's 'race'. The second way, often used by policymakers, is where race equality is viewed as a measurable outcome. Achieving race equality would mean reducing any gaps between people of different 'racial' groups in employment, educational achievement and so on.

It could be argued that, to be effective, both uses of the phrase are necessary. There is a need to educate people to see beyond labels and stereotypes, to explore what people have in common and where they differ, to have opportunities to engage in learning activities that help them think about racism, inequality, prejudice, discrimination and human rights. Equally, to evaluate for equality of opportunity, we need to monitor how the education system is meeting the needs of pupils from different backgrounds, including collecting statistics. However, attainment, attendance and exclusion statistics by themselves are not sufficient indicators of justice.

It might be useful here to pause and consider this term 'race'. This is a term which comes from historical attempts to categorize people according to their skin colour and physical characteristics. Its origins are in the expansion of the British and other empires and involve strong beliefs that 'natives' were inherently inferior. It is a socially constructed term, without scientific basis. We are one human race though we vary. This is why the word 'race' often appears in quotation marks as a contested term. Other writers prefer the term 'ethnicity' as a way of referring to people of different backgrounds. For example, the House of Lords, in passing judgement in the Mandla v Dowell Lee case (24 March 1983), stated that some key criteria for defining an ethnic group would include a long shared history and a common cultural tradition. In addition, there may also be a common geographical origin, language, literature or religion. For example, people who are Jewish or Sikh are defined as specific ethnic groups. The term ethnicity incorporates 'race' as defined by the Equality Act 2010 but also captures aspects of tradition, shared history and cultures.

However, rather than getting caught up in which is the correct term to use, since terminology is always changing, what matters is that teachers

concentrate on developing critical lenses through which they can open up spaces for their pupils to become confident about living and working with diversity. To be able to do this, we must unpack and debunk some basic incorrect assumptions.

We treat everyone the same

This is a very common phrase which is still heard today. The phrase assumes that it is discriminatory to refer to issues of difference, for example someone's colour, culture or ethnicity. So the assumption is that to be against discrimination, you should not see difference but rather treat everyone the same:

> We don't see the colour of the child, we see the child. (Deputy Headteacher, Primary, quoted in Arshad *et al.*, 2005: 67)

> I mean to be honest, I don't classify children by language or race or religion. I just accept the children as they are and we don't enquire closely into what nationality, what religion and so on and that's true of the white population as well ... I think our strength is that we treat them the same. (Teacher, Secondary, quoted in Arshad *et al.*, 2005: 67)

This is fine in principle except that we do not live in an ideal or neutral world. Race has had a historical presence through colonialism and beliefs that civilization and progress spread to the rest of the world from Western Europe. These assumptions of superiority have had an effect on the school curriculum, and tendencies to neglect or underplay the role of other cultures. For example, you may have learned at school that Christopher Columbus discovered America, but weren't there people already living in that part of the world? Of course there were, and in Canada the indigenous people are known as 'First Nations' people. Christopher Columbus did land in a place we know as America but he did not 'discover' it. Along with misconceptions come omissions: for example, the importance of Indian and Islamic cultures in the development of mathematics.

So as educators we need to focus on how to ensure that we give young people as complete and accurate understanding of the world as we can so that we help them become critical and reflective citizens. This is even more important in a world where young people gather information from a range of social media.

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Racism is carried out by bad or ignorant people

Racism is often seen as individual acts of discrimination or prejudice and as committed chiefly by individuals who are irrational or poorly informed. As most of us would not consider ourselves to be bad or ignorant, we assume we play no part in perpetuating racism. This 'race-blind' approach might be a comfortable place to be, especially if you are not on the receiving end, but transformative teachers who are keen on making a difference need to understand that racism goes beyond individual acts. It operates in a more structured way and moves beyond individual acts (see the section on 'Forms of Racism' below). Racism has been absorbed into our culture and survives even when we don't mention it. The concept was based on a belief that the 'white race' was superior. This belief was used to justify slavery and colonialism, and today it continues to be used by groups who want to stop immigration or to justify the mistreatment of minorities.

This belief has also crept into the way we have shaped our knowledge frameworks within the curriculum. For example, the absence of the voices of indigenous people (like the First Nations people in Canada) means the history curriculum takes on the voices and perspectives of the most powerful group. The famous Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe quotes an African saying that 'until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.' The events we consider significant in history and important to teach in school are those which were regarded as important by those who held the power. Transformative teachers need to make sure the lions' story is also heard.

Let's return to Richardson's suggestion that race equality is a moral value or principle. If, as teachers, we wish to educate the citizens of tomorrow not to judge people by the colour of their skin, their ethnicity, faith, language or culture, then we need to establish opportunities within the curriculum and school life that help young people acquire the appropriate knowledge. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry explicitly called on the education system from pre-school upwards to take specific and co-ordinated action to raise awareness about racism and to promote a greater valuing of cultural diversity (Macpherson, 1999: Chapter 6, paras 6.54–6.56).

Race equality only matters in schools with minority ethnic pupils

The view that race equality is only relevant for minority ethnic pupils is erroneous. Race equality work benefits all pupils and teachers. A study of minority ethnic pupils' experiences of going to school in Scotland (Arshad *et al.*, 2005), involving interviews with 82 teachers, found that few teachers saw the benefits for majority ethnic pupils, or themselves as teachers, of

engaging in race equality work. The teachers viewed education for race equality as something that was done to benefit minority ethnic pupils and therefore only necessary and relevant if there are significant numbers of minority ethnic pupils in a school. In schools with few such pupils, race was largely seen as unimportant or irrelevant. Teachers often countered by saying there were more important issues locally such as addressing poverty, sectarianism or homophobia. It is not an either/or: as educators we need to be addressing all these issues.

Schools without ethnic, linguistic, religious or cultural diversities among their pupils have few resources with which to counteract stereotyping or incorrect assumptions about other groups. Research repeatedly provides evidence that mainly white schools do not adequately prepare their pupils for adult life in a society that is culturally and ethnically diverse (Donald *et al.*, 1995; Cline *et al.*, 2002; Arshad *et al.*, 2005). In mainly white schools, racist and discriminatory views often lie hidden beneath the surface, but pupils carry them forward into later life.

But we have done 'race' ... America had a black President

Here, Clare Harker, a headteacher in Scotland, discusses how it is very much still a live issue in her school and for her pupils:

> My school has 98 per cent pupils from visible minority ethnic backgrounds. In thinking about how to contribute to this chapter I have considered (painfully) whether I am diminishing 98 per cent of the pupils in our school by defining them by their ethnicity, simply because I do not define the other 2 per cent (who are white) by theirs, or me by mine. The harsh reality is that black and minority ethnic pupils and their communities are defined by the behaviours, headlines, stares and comments of some of the wider community and this is very much part of the ongoing conversation we have in our school. For us, the ethnicity of the pupils, all 100 per cent, includes aspects of faith, culture, language and aspirations which directly impacts on the school experiences and the shaping of our curriculum.
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> Our children get stared at when we go on excursions. I hope that it is their remarkable behaviour or how engaged and articulate they are that attracts attention, but we know otherwise and so do our children. Recently, while running for a train, passerby shouts of 'they must have stolen something!' were heard by their teacher. Every once in a while someone walks past the playground

> shouting something like 'away back to where you came from!'. Our children have asked their teacher if they could, as a research project, look at why people think 'all Muslims are terrorists'. We use Twitter and some hateful comments about colour, migration and faith have been posted on our feed. These are children, these are Scotland's children and this happens. Personally, I've had joking comments about faith and how 'challenging' our school must be. Actually, it is a comparatively easy place to work as our children and families absolutely value what we do. What makes it challenging are the assumptions, the eye rolling and the blatant insults.
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> As teachers we believe that all children should be valued equally and should get what they need to be included equitably in school and in the wider community. To do this we have to accept the limits put on our children by assumptions and ensure our children are strong, confident in who they are and have resilience to cope with the prejudice they are likely to encounter. We work hard to give them a voice and the confidence to tell their story. Race equality education is so much more than celebrating a cultural festival or learning how to say hello in five different languages. It should be an embedded approach to social justice that protects all of those who are othered. However, in doing this, we must accept that racism exists in a much more mainstream way than we care to admit.

Transformative teachers begin by looking at themselves

In this section, Clare Harker shares why it has been important for her to consider who she is as part of her journey to achieving racial equality and tackling racism and other forms of discrimination:

> Until I came to my current school I had never really considered myself as white. If I heard the word ethnicity my 'think bubble' would be someone who is a different colour from me. I had no practical experience of either overt or subtle racism. At least I didn't think I had, but when I look back at previous jobs I can think of many examples where, in my naivety, I have simply got it wrong. Or worse, not challenged or confronted some of the language or assumptions made by others.

There are small things: as a white Scottish person no one ever asks me where I'm from, they assume Scotland. And if they do ask, they don't follow it up with 'no, what I mean is where are you really from?' No one worries about whether they've pronounced my name correctly or clumsily apologizes for offending my assumed beliefs or faith. No one speaks slowly to make sure I understand. I can join in, I know what the jokes are, the cultural references. I can explain myself clearly and share who I am. I expect to be trusted and to trust and to be treated fairly, kindly and with humanity. I don't even think about it, I expect it, and on the rare occasions when it doesn't happen I am furious.

There are big things: I have never been pulled over by the police. No one comments on my skin or hates me because of how I look. I've been successful at interviews, got the job. I am a Headteacher. No one looks twice at me if I carry a backpack on the underground, or shuffles along the row if I sit beside them. No one asks to move away from me on a plane or stares at me if I wear something that covers my hair. No one questions my choice of clothes and suggests that my choices are not my own. I feel safe.

I never considered any of this before and now I am so grateful that I do.

It is ironic to me that some teachers would suggest that race equality is not an issue in schools where the children are all white. All equalities are issues for us all. We need to create strong, cohesive, harmonious and understanding communities and we can only do this through confronting what might be some very uncomfortable truths. If we believe that the current hierarchies should be challenged and a sense of balance and fairness brought to our communities, then we can only do this by ensuring all our children, in all schools, learn how.

From assimilation to multicultural education to antiracist education

There have been different approaches to race in education over the decades (Troyna, 1993; Gillborn, 2008; Arshad, 2017). The dominant approach from the 1950s to the late 1970s was an *assimilationist* model. In this model, minority ethnic people were expected to leave behind their distinctive

identities in order to fit in with the values, attitudes and behaviours of the dominant group or culture. The assumption was that immigrants should simply fit into their new country by adopting all its customs and habits – 'when in Rome do as the Romans do'. In schools, this involved discouraging pupils from speaking any language other than English and to adopt the customs and values of their host country.

The assimilationist approach was eventually recognized to be a deficit approach and policymakers and teachers began to adopt the multicultural model. It was hoped that this might foster greater interaction, integration and harmony by enabling people to learn about different cultures, faiths, languages and religion. Teachers in the UK were largely comfortable with adopting a multicultural approach, for example, by celebrating different festivals such as Chinese New Year, Eid, Diwali or Hanukkah, wearing different clothes, learning a different cuisine, and trying out the dance and music and lifestyles of those the majority group considered to be 'other'.

However, multicultural education also had its critics. Barry Troyna called this the 3 Ss approach – saris, steelbands and samosas. For Troyna, the multicultural approach, though well-intentioned, tokenistically sprinkled ethnic diversity onto an otherwise unchanged curriculum. Such an approach also avoided discussions of racism or racial discrimination (Troyna and Williams, 1986). Another weakness was that multicultural education tended to essentialize and reify cultures, presuming each culture to be static, a fixed thing you can teach about. It was often quite superficial, focusing, for example, on religious ritual and sacred objects rather than understanding the complexity of ways of life and social beliefs as people moved from one part of the world to another. Multiculturalism assumes that individuals have to choose which particular culture to adopt. In reality, cultures evolve and change all the time, and many people enjoy a fusion of cultures, languages and identities (see Chapter 11).

Those who saw the limitations of multicultural education argued for *antiracist* education, which would challenge racism more directly. Such an approach would help pupils understand and deal with racism, prejudice and stereotyping. Unlike *multicultural education* it would engage openly with issues of power, justice and inequality and address issues of racism within the formal and hidden curricula. The focus was not on becoming more sensitive towards minority cultures, but on the processes and effects of racism, including how everyday racism manifested within school-level education.

Antiracist education was never taken up with the same enthusiasm as multicultural education, and teachers in many instances actively resisted this

approach. Sometimes antiracist training was carried out in an intimidatory manner, which was counterproductive. The antiracist approach shifted the focus away from minorities to a spotlight on the attitudes and actions of the majority. It directly questioned the adequacy of the mainstream curriculum in meeting the needs of a diverse pupil population. Therefore, for many teachers, it seemed easier and safer to stick to celebrating cultural diversity.

Others have claimed that the divide between multicultural and antiracist education is unhelpful and that both approaches are needed. For example, a multicultural approach might be appropriate with younger children, so that they begin to understand diversity to be the norm. As they grow older, they can be introduced to antiracist education and learn to recognize racism and be confident at challenging it. Those who advocate this mixed approach argue that if you are to start with multiculturalism, it should be done as *critical multiculturalism* (May, 1999) and move into antiracist activities as learners get older.

Critical multiculturalism 'gives priority to structural analysis of unequal power relationships, analysing the role of institutionalized inequities, including but not necessarily limited to racism' (May and Sleeter, 2010: 17). In other words, it highlights and challenges various kinds of prejudice and power, and relates the experience of 'race' to issues of gender, class and other characteristics that are used to categorize people. These authors suggest a range of methods for raising teachers' awareness of discrimination and structural inequalities, for example, organizing for student teachers to work with families from marginalized communities so that they can develop greater understanding of the issues that families face. It suggests critically examining the dominant ideologies in the education system. For example, a physical education teacher might discuss the 'racialized constructions of thin, white bodies', or a music specialist critique 'Eurocentric structures and assumptions that are embodied in school music programs' (May and Sleeter, 2010: 20). In science, the teacher could apply a post-colonial lens to critically examine how indigenous knowledge from different parts of the world has been interpreted or silenced.

It is important to appreciate the differences between these approaches in order to reflect on everyday practice in schools and classrooms and to bring about worthwhile change.

Forms of racism

Effective teachers working in diverse classrooms need to understand how racism plays out on a day-to-day basis. Racism can appear in several, often

interrelated, forms. Thompson (2011) suggests we can consider this at three different levels – personal, cultural and institutional.

Personal racism comes from 'our thoughts, feelings and actions at an individual level' (Thompson, 2011: 25). It can have a significant effect on reproducing inequalities, particularly if the individual holding such views is in a position of power. Examples of personal racism include:

- being racially abusive/harassing
- engaging in physical attacks
- allowing personal assumptions, prejudices or stereotypes on racial issues to influence decisions regarding recruitment and selection of staff or students
- condoning a culture that tolerates racist language and jokes in the workplace.

Open and explicit personal racism is exemplified by a teacher who doesn't like Gypsy Travellers, viewing them as scroungers and treating Traveller pupils disrespectfully. Most people who engage in personal racism do so without realizing what they are doing. For example, if you are surprised that some Asian parents speak 'good English', this suggests a degree of unacknowledged racial prejudice, which might affect how you relate to the pupils and their families.

Cultural racism arises when a particular culture perceives itself as superior to others.

Systematic cultural racism can take place when one culture is dominant. The dominant culture imposes its patterns, assumptions and values on others, often in a manner that many people do not even notice. This becomes the 'common-sense culture' taken for granted as part of everyday life. An example is the casual use of derogatory language; it is a way in which one cultural group asserts its power over another, with discriminatory outcomes. You might hear it argued that using words like 'Paki' or 'Chinky' is just a colloquial way of speaking, yet these words are offensive as well as discriminatory.

Institutional racism in the UK became a recognized term as a result of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report. Macpherson (1999: Chapter 6, para 6.34) highlights the way in which established practices in an organization can have racist effects:

> The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes,

> attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. It persists because of the failure of the organization openly and adequately to recognize and address its existence and causes by policy, example and leadership.

Institutional racism would be illustrated by a school that doesn't notice how pupils of certain ethnic groups are more likely than their peers to be placed in lower sets or excluded. The failure of the school curriculum to consider the value of languages spoken by pupils at home, say, Polish or Arabic, is another instance of institutional racism.

Transforming practice

Teachers who seriously want to be inclusive and transformative can begin by engaging in what Howard calls the 'three sides of the Achievement Triangle' (Howard, 2006: 128): (a) to know yourself; (b) to know your pupils; and (c) to know your practice. All should be familiar to many teachers who aspire to be reflective and reflexive practitioners. Teachers interested in pursuing race equality should also pay attention to Gloria Ladson-Billings's discussions on culturally-relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995). She defines such pedagogies as including students' cultural backgrounds, interests and lived experiences in all aspects of learning and teaching in the classroom and across the school.

Clare discusses here how she has tried to engage in culturally relevant pedagogies as a school leader:

> In shaping our curriculum we have had some brave conversations around prejudice, tensions between outside and inside ideologies, faith, language and culture. Also accepted is that, in our profession, very few teachers from black and minority ethnic groups are promoted. Through these conversations we have developed a strong narrative around how to attempt to create an inclusive school. It is our responsibility to find the tools to ensure that all our children access learning that is relevant to them. Equally important is the sincere approach to parents as partners in learning and creating safe spaces for deep conversations around what we need to do to meet the needs of our families.
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> Firstly, we don't hide. Over the years we have found ways of promoting our community locally, nationally and internationally,

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> not as a minority group but as children who have something to contribute.
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> An obvious example of what we need to understand is language acquisition. Access to the totality of the curriculum is not a gift to be given once English is mastered. Statistics tell us that it will pan out for our children and they will attain well so we have to be patient and give them the resilience and efficacy to dig deep when the learning is tough. I speak no other languages, but I would still carry my knowledge and understanding of the world to a place where people did not speak the same language as me. Our staff have looked at ways of bypassing language or finding ways to communicate the skills and knowledge within a lesson that is not wholly language dependent. This is hard but has resulted in our children learning English faster because they learn the language alongside the actual skills and knowledge within the lesson. The children are not held back. We understand that there are some aspects of the English language that they will not master for many years but don't let this prevent them from moving forward.
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> We looked at the pupils' experiences and found, for example, that none of our children were engaging with arts-based learning outside school, so we have developed strong partnerships with some arts-based groups. Our children are not reflected in the arts but we are presenting them with the option of experiencing creative industries. They work alongside professional organizations to tell their stories through arts. Among other things, this has improved their confidence, vocabulary and understanding of the world around them.
>
> Rights-based education is crucial but rather than simply learning what our rights are, we look at the rights of all through engaging with socially conscious learning like social entrepreneurship. All our pupils have now linked with social entrepreneurs to understand what this means and how to create sustainable businesses that fulfil a community need.
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> Underpinning all of this is our ethos, which is palpably full of love. We are a faith-based school where almost all of the children are from a different faith to the one that is designated, and some of the families have no faith. The essence of our practice is the way we treat and value others.

We don't assume that we get it right all the time but the incredible staff I work with are questioning and focused on ensuring our children's voice is represented in the wider community. This takes guts.

Finally, we both want to remind you that challenging inequalities is a marathon and not a sprint. To prepare yourself for a marathon, you need to train, build up your stamina (knowledge), rest and recover, but also to keep going.

Recommended reading

For more resources about the different issues discussed in this book, go to http://www.ceres.education.ed.ac.uk/social-justice-re-examined/

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