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Education Studies

A Personal Philosophy of Education

Abstract

In this paper, the author presents a personal philosophy of education. Consideration is given to critical race theory and the relationship with Fundamental British Values (FBV). The author concludes that FBV must be considered to reflect how Britain has moved on from a white male and heterosexual dominated society. A recommendation is made to implement mentorship programmes in educational settings, whereby older students are assigned a role to mentor younger children. The author argues that the forming of trusting friendships would be a valuable way of removing the 'them' and 'us' from conversations, instead instilling trust, respect and friendship.

Key words: Anti-racist; Critical Race Theory; Education; Fundamental British Values; Multiculturalism

Introduction

In 1985 the then Secretary of State for Education and Science published The Swan Report: Education for all. This was a step forward in the education system and the government evidently were "committed to the principle that all children, irrespective of race, colour or ethnic origin, should have a good education" (Department for Education, 1985). However, thirty-five years on from this publication, the discussion surrounding the educational attainment of ethnic minority pupils continues to linger in the United Kingdom, with little progress occurring. Strand (2011, p. 197) states that the educational attainment gap between ethnic minority pupils and their White British

peers has “decreased somewhat in more recent data”, but understands it persists. The Schools, Pupils, and their Characteristics January (Department for Education, 2019) report found 33.5% of children in primary schools and 31.3% of children in secondary schools came from an ethnic minority background. Furthermore, 21.2% of children in primary school and 16.9% of children in secondary school are subjected to English as an additional language in their home (Department for Education, 2019). These figures are consistently rising. It is vital to highlight that the educational attainment between ethnic minority pupils themselves is disparate. In 2015/2017, research found Black Caribbean, Pakistani and Gypsy Roma and Traveller pupils were least likely to attain an A* to C grade in GCSE Maths and English, whereas Chinese and Indian pupils were most likely to attain an A* to C grade in GCSE Maths and English (Byrne et al., 2020). Nevertheless, ethnic minority families and their children have somewhat become “lumped together and associated with the notions of educational ‘failures’” (Archer, 2008, p. 90). The education system fails to acknowledge different ethnicities and cultures found in British society and schools. This outdated system predominately caters to White British individuals. Instead of expanding the education system to welcome ethnic minority pupils, they are expected to fit into an outdated structure that lacks inclusion and diversity.

On May 25th 2020, George Floyd, a 46-year-old African American man died at the hands of four white police officers in Minneapolis USA. George Floyd’s dying words “I can’t breathe” were quickly posted over social and world media (The New York Times, 2020). Anger, disgust, and uproar was felt across the world, reigniting The Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement. The BLM movement was first introduced in 2013 following the not guilty verdict of George Zimmerman, for the shooting and death of an unarmed African American teenager, Trayvon Martin. Three black women; Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi and Alicia Garza created a movement centering around removing the oppression of

Black Lives in the United States. This was first introduced as the #blacklivesmatter slogan, used on the social media platform Facebook, following Trayvon Martin's death and court trial (Anderson-Carpenter, 2020). Subsequently, in 2014 Michael Brown an eighteen-year-old unarmed Black man, was shot and killed by Ferguson Missouri police officer, Darren Wilson. Following the death of Michael Brown protests began in Ferguson and #blacklivesmatter became a national movement (Ilchi & Frank, 2021). The core values of the BLM movement are diversity; restorative justice; collective value; unapologetically black; loving engagement; queer affirming; transgender affirming; globalism; black families; empathy; black villages; black women; and intergenerational inclusivity (Black Lives Matter, 2017). The aim of the BLM movement is to transform a society where "black lives are brought to the front", equally and just (Black Lives Matter, n.d.). Unfortunately, the fear of police brutality is all too known for Black people and people of colour living in the United States. Although it is extremely seldom to see horrific deaths at the hands of police on streets in the United Kingdom, this country is not innocent from racist occurrences. In the education system, the government, health care, employment, and criminal law; people of ethnic minority backgrounds are not given the same opportunities as White British citizens in the United Kingdom. For example, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there are currently no "black, Asian and minority ethnic MPs" (BBC News, 2019).

Critical Race Theory and the relationship with Fundamental British Values

During the 1980s, Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed in the USA. It is an analytical framework, tackling the endemic existence of racism within society. It has since travelled worldwide, becoming implanted into various fields including sociology, education, philosophy, and religion (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). In the United

Kingdom, CRT is viewed as merely emerging. However, it continues to expand, incorporating itself into the education system (Roberts et al., 2014). Gillborn (2006, p. 26) understands racism as “complex, contradictory and fast-changing” and that there is no one size fits all solution. CRT is a viewpoint that focuses on the “association between race and racism at the intersection of power”, specifically allowing the identification and opposition of “the routine but devastating racism that saturates the everyday world of ‘business-as-usual’” (Crawford, 2017, p. 198). A basic perception highlighted by CRT is that racism is not viewed as aberrant but rather common in society (Gillborn, 2005). Following the death of George Floyd, protests began around the United Kingdom in support of the BLM movement. In Bristol, during protests, the statue of Edward Colston, a 17th Century slave merchant, was pulled down (Guardian, 2020). The statue had been the subject of criticism for several years in Bristol, as Colston was a member of the Royal African Company. Following the removal of the statue there was a divide in opinion from the British public, politicians, and media. There were multiple condemnations of Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s remarks that this was an act of “thuggery” (BBC News, 2020). Olusoga, a Professor of History, stated that instead of accepting colonialism as a part of British history, Colston should be declared as he was “a slave trader and a murderer” (BBC News, 2020). More recently, a public interview with Oprah Winfrey featuring The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, sparked outrage in the United Kingdom and the world. Oprah Winfrey was astounded by Megan Markle’s claims that a senior member of the royal family had raised questions over how dark their first child would be (Forbes, 2021). The British Media’s racist and misogynist publications were a leading force in the couple’s choice to step down as senior royals and move to the United States. Prince Harry stated that multiple reports on his wife had undertones of colonialism, and the commonwealth’s history of this practice must be acknowledged (The Irish Independent, 2020).

The idea of multiculturalism in the education system has recently been foreshadowed by Fundamental British Values (FBV). Under the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, Prevent Duty was introduced. FBV became entwined into Prevent Duty and was declared compulsory in the national curriculum. The purpose of FBV intended to teach children “democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs” (Crawford, 2017, p. 198). The Ofsted School Inspection Handbook recognised the “promotion of fundamental British values at the heart of the school’s work” (Ofsted, 2015, p. 41). The government used FBV as an anti-extremist strategy, which is undoubtedly crucial. However, their approach is problematic, creating a gateway for Islamophobia. The main issue with FBV debated by many scholars, is the notion of these values being solely British (Germaine Buckley, 2020; Panjwani, 2015). Instead, they are “universal human values that are theoretically upheld in many countries” (Tomlinson, 2015, p. 2210). The idea of “Britishness” becoming instilled in the education system carried disputes regarding race, identity, and colonisation (Panjwani, 2015). FBV took superiority within the curriculum and therefore little opportunity was given to teachers to incorporate multiculturalism into their daily lessons. This could be seen as no fault of educators but rather the system they must work around. Ethnic minority children were not exposed to their cultures in the classroom as the education system discredits them. This enables segregation between minority groups and white British children to occur, as Britishness is seen as superior in the classroom, and ultimately society (Maylor, 2016). Crawford (2017, p. 202), states that these “white hegemonic discourse of British values” must be adapted, allowing society to accept an “inclusive notion of Britishness”, encouraging a “multicultural, multilingual, and multi-ethnic Britain”.

Following the emergence of CRT in the USA during the 1980's, Crenshaw, a critical race scholar and black feminist, brought forward her theory of intersectionality in 1989. Her theory was inspired by the oppression faced by Black women and women of colour during the feminist and civil rights movements. Bhopal (2020, p. 808), understands intersectionality as analysing "how overlapping or competing identities affect the experiences of individuals in society". In the education system, intersectionality is associated with addressing "diversity, social equity, and inclusion in the classroom" (Johnson & Rivera, 2015, p. 511). It unravels the negative synergy layers that are found in society which include but are not limited to: social class; gender; race; ethnicity; sexuality; disability and nationality. Research concerning the impact of inequalities in the education system particularly the educational achievement of ethnic minority pupils, often fails to cross-examine intersecting identities (Bhopal, 2020). The issues surrounding the underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils, particularly Black Caribbean boys, in the education system has been a worrying problem dating back to the 1985 Swann Report. As stated by one mother "it's African Caribbean males-there is war against them" (Crozier, 2005, p. 586). The issue is perpetually being flagged by education theorists yet the root to the issue struggles to be proclaimed. Black Caribbean students roughly make up 1% of the student population in England, yet they are persistently the lowest performing group in the country and are one of the highest ethnic groups excluded from school. A report published in 2017 found the levels of improvement in narrowing the gap between Black Caribbean pupils and white British pupils inadequate in comparison to progress made by other ethnic groups (Demie & Mclean, 2017). In England, the underachievement of boys in comparison to girls in the education system can be viewed across the system regardless of ethnicity (Younger & Warrington, 2007). Black Caribbean pupils have the highest gap in performance between boys and girls. Additionally, socio-economic disadvantages and effects of

poverty are prevalent among Black Caribbean families. A Bishop of Pentecostal Church who moved to the UK from Jamaica in 1964 concludes that “Black Caribbean pupils are underachieving because of poverty” (Demie & McLean, 2017, p. 82). Therefore, the intersecting issue of race, gender and social class places a greater barrier on Black Caribbean boys obtaining an education. The education system must be challenged to ensure these issues are broken down collectively. Ultimately, intersectionality identifies and exposes the intersecting inequalities that are found in the education system.

During the late 1950s and 1960s, there was a focus on the issue of social class in the education system, post introduction of tripartite system established by the 1944 Education Act. There was a slight shift during the 1970s and 1980s, as racial inequalities in the education system came to light (Williams, 1986). These issues surrounding the inequity found in the education system due to social class and race continue to prevail. Recent researchers (Tichavakunda, 2019; Stahl et al, 2018 and Yosso, 2005) have explored the ideas of CRT and Bourdieu’s theory of capital, studying the linkages between the two. Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital provides an analytical framework for studying the social and educational inequalities found in society. Cultural capital relates to “an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society” (Yosso, 2005, p. 9). Wallace (2018) studied these privileged groups in the education system and determined that the accumulation of wealth by dominant groups in society, the white middle or upper class, can maintain power. Furthermore, children from dominant groups have a shared knowledge of norms and values alongside linguistic ability in the home, found in the education system. Ultimately, these norms and values can be seen as “rituals”, studied by Emile Durkheim. He viewed rituals as a tool used by societies “to maintain its cohesion” (Hicks, 2010, p. 115). These dominant forms of cultural capital, presented by

white; middle; and upper-class students, are commemorated and acknowledged in school. Consequently, non-dominant culture forms are unidentified, undervalued and more often shunned upon. As stated by Tichavakunda (2019, p. 8), "CRT and Bourdieu are united in bringing to light the ways in which privilege and domination work in society". As "British" culture and rituals are highly exhibited in the education system, children who are exposed to diverse cultures, religions, languages etc. fall short of the knowledge taught by parents from a young age. There are no equal opportunities from the beginning for children of ethnic minority. Therefore, we cannot continue to compare them, assuming they had a level playing field from the get-go. The education system was not built to include diversity, yet ethnic minority children are expected to adapt to it.

Racism is a much greater issue on its own. However, the education system is a significant platform that we are in control of changing. The education system is a "global phenomena" and must "develop, evolve and go further" (Race, 2015, p. 7). Teachers have a duty to implement positive reform in multiculturalism. For change to occur, students must see their teachers encouraging and supporting change. Crozier (2005) reiterates the stereotyping attitudes teachers often project onto Black pupils; alongside the low academic expectations they have for these pupils. Teachers must be educated on the stereotypical attitudes experienced by ethnic minority children, and the impact it can have on their self-esteem and education. The underachievement of minority ethnic groups is described as a "tragedy" and therefore standards must be continually raised with extra resources put in place for children who are struggling (Crozier, 2005, p. 596). Secondly, the incorporation of different cultures in the national curriculum is vital when supporting multiculturalism. Ensuring there is a diverse range of authors, scholars, and literature from an array of cultures, especially those of ethnic minority backgrounds, would provide children from similar

backgrounds with a chance to learn about their own heritage, providing a sense of belonging within the classroom.

Showcasing a wide variety of topics and cultures within the school curriculum would showcase an anti-racist attitude to British pupils, providing them with the educational structure that is required in fighting against the racism so evident within our schools and society today. This will create a welcoming purpose in classrooms, where children feel comfortable to discuss their cultures and backgrounds. Although it has become statutory for school to promote FBV, they must also ensure to incorporate multiculturalism into their lessons (McGhee & Zhang, 2017). Lastly, the encouragement of peer learning can be a key turning point for racism. Allowing children to learn from each other's cultures, religions, race etc. paves the way for inclusion in society. Martin et al (2014, p. 4), state that "children become more interested in other children" and they "initiate or join in play with other children" from the ages three to four years. Children learn best through play, where they are encouraged to ask questions and interact with one another in a monitored and respectful environment.

Conclusion

The BLM movement focuses on inclusivity whereby Black people are brought forward as opposed to being left on the side-line. CRT has helped highlight the systemic racism prevalent in British society. However, there is a long way to go before we can claim that Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals are free from oppression, namely in the education system. The use of FBV must be reconsidered as Britain has moved on from a white male and heterosexual dominated society. The idea of an education system that includes and supports ethnic minority children has been debated for a number of years in the United Kingdom. The publication of The Swann Report: Education for all in 1985 was a true depiction of ethnic minority children in the education system. A lack of understanding, support and

awareness was found, yet no meaningful adaptations were made to the education system for ethnic minority children and their families. A duty of care lies at the heart of schools as “schools (as institutions) and schooling (as a practice) lie at the heart of the pursuit of a successful future for an equal multi-ethnic Britain” (Byrne et al., 2020).

Recommendations

Mentorship programmes whereby older students are assigned a role in mentoring and looking out for younger children could be a valuable way of allowing interaction to occur between those of different ethnic backgrounds. The forming of trusting friendships would be a valuable way of removing the ‘them’ and ‘us’ from conversations, instead instilling a natural flow of trust, respect and friendship. This would remove the stature of the classroom and encourage friendships beyond the school gates. Another valuable method would be creating seating plans where children are encouraged to mingle irrespective of their colour, race, or ethnicity.

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