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‘I love a curry’: student-teacher discourse around ‘race’ and ethnicity at a UK university.

Abstract

This paper presents aspects of a small-scale study that considered student teachers’ language and discourse around race and ethnicity at a university in the northwest of England. The first part of the paper critiques current education-related policy, context and practice to situate the research and then draws upon aspects of critical race theory and whiteness theory as frames of reference. In the research, 250 student-teachers completed questionnaires that invited responses to statements about race and ethnicity and this was followed by two semi-structured group interviews. A discourse analysis approach was taken to analyse the language used in the questionnaire responses and, in particular, the group interviews. Recurrent discursive configurations were characterised by language that signified othering, correct knowledge, personalisation and discomfort. Hesitations and silences during group discussions perhaps intimated thinking time and also maybe a reluctance to talk about aspects of race and ethnicity, and what was not said remains significant. It is suggested that a reconstruction of a teacher/educator subjectivity that fosters self-reflection on values and racial positioning, is needed in teacher education, alongside critical examination of the silences and discomfort surrounding race and ethnicity.

Key words: student-teacher, discourse, race, ethnicity

Introduction

The social construct of ‘race’ is circumscribed by political and ideological considerations and is a contested term (Crozier 2017) and the same may be said for ethnicity (Lander 2016). For the purpose of this paper, ‘race’ is taken to mean identity and ‘ethnicity’ to be an expression of social and cultural influences. Time and attention given to race, ethnicity and equality in Initial Teacher Education programmes varies considerably across the world and issues around racial justice

are often conflated with other equality-related concerns under 'culture and diversity' titles (Milner and Howard 2013; Sian 2015). Race and ethnicity is not an area that is compulsory or formally taught to student teachers in England (DfE 2013; Sian 2015) and the side-lining, and potential silencing, of race equality during training may leave student teachers unsure how to talk about it; and also perhaps less able to understand their position as teachers in dealing with the inequalities that schools, as public institutions, perpetuate (Lander 2014).

One of the aims of the research presented here was to draw upon aspects of critical race theory in education (Taylor et al. 2016) and more heavily on whiteness studies (Frankenberg 1993) to explore a group of primary school student teachers' perceptions of, and discourses around, race and ethnicity. It was felt that this would help to inform the course content of future education programmes and add to a growing body of research that considers student responses to issues around race and ethnicity in the UK (for example, Lander 2011, 2014; Bhopal and Rhamie 2014; Farrell 2016) and globally (for example, Milner and Howard 2013; Hikido and Murray 2016; Matias 2016).

The second-year, predominantly white student teachers who participated in the study were training under the guidance of the England Standards for Teachers (DfE 2012) and had some teaching experience in primary schools working alongside children aged 5-11. A questionnaire invited responses to statements about race and ethnicity and this was followed by two group interviews. A discourse approach (Kendall and Wickham 1999; Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2008) was taken to analyse the data and to address the research questions: how are the student-teacher discourses

around race and ethnicity constructed? What do the discourses evoke and what might be the potential effects? These questions were of interest to the research team who felt that if education, as a fundamental good, is a dialogical praxis, then teacher educators are placed to nurture student-teacher forms of conscientization (Freire 1986) that involves raising (self) awareness, reflection, dialogue, change and transformation. Further, in teacher education, the operation of structures and practices that appear normal and unremarkable are infused by assumptions and can create and maintain injustices, especially in relation to race and ethnicity (Rollock and Gillborn 2011; Matias 2016). Assumptions, inherent in language, can be revealed via language and discourse, and revealing them can open the field for analysis, helping to locate and address less obvious mechanisms of inequality (Rogers and Mosley 2006). Challenge, and critique, of structural inequalities embedded throughout the education and schooling system are constrained, and sometimes silenced, by inter-related factors that include policy, the socio-political context and practice, and these three particular ‘silencers’ are briefly considered in the next section.

Silencers: policy, context and practice.

In England, an emphasis on generic inequalities and social exclusions has replaced policy concerns linked specifically to race and ethnicity. What appear to be ‘race-neutral’ policies in England and in other countries such as the USA, arguably serve to *deny* the existence of racial justice (Bonilla-Silva 2002; Lander 2014). It could be argued that by dilution or erasure, policy makers aim to diminish and silence ‘race’ debates to signify that race has been ‘dealt with’ in a post-racial era. Parallel

watered-down changes may be seen in education policy in England and in 2010 the government-driven Ofsted (Inspectorate) framework removed the requirement to inspect schools for race equality. This was followed in 2012 by the new Teachers' Standards which no longer contained reference to race or ethnicity but referred, instead, to 'cultural diversity' only as part of a 'range of factors which can inhibit pupils' ability to learn' (DfE 2012, 11).

In a critical analysis of state-prescribed teaching standards, Smith (2013) signifies that the prevailing socio-political ideology of the state - the second 'silencer'- influences the content of teacher standards, which serves mainly to maintain a status quo of inequality. The prevailing socio-political climate may be defined as a neoliberal one characterized by self-orientated, managerialist notions of performativity and accountability that permeate the language, practice, ethos and culture of educational institutions across the world, and discourage critical questioning and debate (Ball and Olmedo 2013; Connell 2013). It has been argued that the standardisation agenda and associated cultural homogenisation of learners has resulted in further white privilege and an ensuing effect of this has been to render any real discussion of race virtually invisible in teacher education (Weilbacher 2012). Teachers are frequently handed 'scripted, standardised curricula often authored by the dominant group and grounded in a white dominant perspective' (Weilbacher 2012, 2), and against such a performative contextual backdrop, race and ethnicity is merged within a generalized 'cultural diversity' curriculum which has implications for the third silencer - practice.

In England there has been an ideological and political shift from race equality to issues around fundamentalism and Islamophobia and in 2014, the government published advice for schools on Promoting Fundamental British Values as part of children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which may be regarded as an instrument to promote cultural homogeneity and nationalism (Farrell 2016; Lander 2016, Smith 2016). This was followed by further changes to governmental requirements for school inspection, where to be graded as 'outstanding', schools needed to demonstrate that 'the promotion of fundamental British values, is at the heart of the school's work' (DfE 2014a). These relatively recent developments are somewhat removed from concerns relating to education and racial justice.

The inter-related silencers of education policy, context and practice, are threaded throughout, and underpin, this study as they have implications for teacher education. In the next section, critical race theory, whiteness and discourse are considered as further frames of reference for the research grounding and subsequent analysis.

Whiteness and Discourse

Critical race theory originated in American legal studies and aims to work towards exposing, disrupting and eliminating racism and racial oppression (Taylor et al. 2016). In relation to education, it provides tools or a set of insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seek to identify, analyse and transform structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordination and dominant racial

narratives (Gillborn 2013). The social construct of whiteness, as a signifier of privilege, is central to a critical race theory analysis and, as a dominant social norm, whiteness is connected to institutionalised power and privilege (Giroux 1997). Critical whiteness studies offers a conceptual tool to examine the persistence of racism through shifting the gaze to the concept of white privilege and to the set of power relations and mechanisms that maintain and sustain the dominance of whiteness (Leonardo 2009). A key precept is that whiteness itself is unnamed, empty or invisible, at least to white people, and that (white) identities are constructed via racial othering (Decker 2013). White discourse and dominance is not always obvious but can be found in the taken-for-granted and routine, normalised, societal privileging of white interests that often appear to go unnoticed by white people in the maintenance of racial hierarchies (McIntyre 1997). Whiteness itself derives much of its power from its normalizing function and serves as an 'unmarked marker of others' (Frankenberg 1993, 198) that manifests and affects schooling in tangible ways; such as setting standards for 'normal' and 'acceptable' actions; and since whiteness, as a descriptor for white, invariably goes unnamed, unnoticed, and unspoken, 'the silence or absence (that which is not spoken) of this racial identity continues to provide a framework for analysis' (Mazzei 2008, 1129).

Discourse may be seen as the crucial interface between the social, linguistic and cognitive dimensions of race, as it can be drawn upon to construct and represent whiteness as normalized and privileged (Rogers and Mosley 2006; Foster 2013). At a fundamental level, discourse is the study of language in use and meaning making (Wetherall et al. 2001). It is conceptualized as language *and* social practice that constructs and reflects the social world. Social phenomena, such as white privilege,

is encoded through language and discourse, (van Dijk 1987) and racial injustice is perpetuated in subtle, symbolic, and discursive ways; for example, through everyday talk, texts and the media. An aim of discourse theories (of whiteness) is to reveal and denaturalize the socially constructed nature of race and white privilege, so it can be named, deconstructed, and reconstructed (Rogers and Mosley 2006). Discursive frameworks can illuminate the ways in which social and cognitive models related to racial inequality have material consequences and can help to reveal how we learn, or unlearn, attitudes towards race (Smitherman and van Dijk 1998; Rogers and Mosely 2006). Discourse analysis can demonstrate *how* the use of particular techniques in the production of meaning enable statements to present a particular view of the world and prepare the ground for the 'practices that derive from them' (Foucault 1972, 139). It connects the structures and strategies of talk and text to context and practice, and an aim of the research presented here was to attempt to untangle and investigate student teacher discourses around race and ethnicity, against a 'silencing' policy, context and practice backdrop as outlined earlier, and to interrogate the discourse foundations and effects.

Research Approach

The student teachers who participated in the study were in the second year of a three year undergraduate pre-service teacher programme, located in a predominantly white region in the northwest of England, with a white, female majority; reflecting the demographic of primary school teachers in the UK (DfE 2014b). Following institutional ethical approval and informed consent, there were two phases to data collection. In the first phase a questionnaire was distributed to 250

student teachers at the end of a school professional practice lecture. The questionnaire asked questions about reasons for wanting to teach and then invited responses via a Likert-style tick box (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) and this was followed by an open response to a series of statements around race and ethnicity. The statements included: 'Britain benefits from having a diverse society'; 'Children ought to be treated the same regardless of their ethnicity'; 'My own ethnicity will impact upon the children in my classroom'; 'I feel prepared to teach children from diverse ethnic backgrounds' and 'White is a position of privilege'. It is the open (qualitative) responses to the statements that informs this paper. 227 members of the cohort identified as white British and 23 identified as mixed heritage, and as the questionnaire distribution followed a cohort lecture, there was a 100% response rate.

Respondents were invited to participate in a group interview discussion session at a later date and this formed the second phase of the research. Two sessions were subsequently held with five students in each group (3 males and 7 females). Nine participants self-identified as white British and one as mixed heritage, and they ranged in age from 21 to 25. Although the questionnaire data set is potentially large (n=250), it is limited to one institution and indeed to one part of one country and eventually became as small as 10 and the research cannot claim to be representative of a university student population.

The group interviews, considered to be phenomenological as they involved a blend of observation and interviewing (Morgan 1997), were conducted by the two white female researchers; mainly because there was unfamiliarity, but also because, as

Hikido and Murray (2016) indicate, while cross-racial interviews can elicit valuable data, racial matching between researcher and participants can minimize the pressure for 'safe' or 'politically correct' responses that a non-white interviewer might have effected. The kinds of prompt discussion questions asked in the audio-recorded group sessions stemmed from analysis of the questionnaires the themes that emerged, and largely related to notions of equality, privilege and teacher training course provision. For example: 'What is racial inequality? Where does it come from? What is white privilege? What might the content of a race and ethnicity course look like'? There were also other questions that followed on from the natural flow of discussion, around fundamentalism, the effects of media and political correctness. The dynamics of group discussions allowed an exploration of the nature of interactional social discourse and consideration of multiple perspectives (Wilkinson 2004).

Analysis of the two data sets (questionnaires and the group interviews) was conducted by the research team. Although the questionnaire yielded interesting quantitative data, in relation to Likert responses to the statements, it was the open, qualitative responses on the questionnaire and comments made, alongside the group interview transcripts that are the focus of this paper. Principles of discourse analysis were drawn upon that involved reading and re-reading the data sets (which were regarded as a whole), paying careful attention to implications, presuppositions, word choice, and other elements of language (DiAngelo and Allen 2006) in both the written and spoken texts. The analysed data from the two data sets was regarded as a whole as it was language and, in particular, language patterns that were being identified and analysed, and not individual views, opinions or identity. Recurrent

language patterns and repeated statements – that were regarded as discursive regularities- were identified, colour-coded and counted. The coding process enabled the prevailing patterns to be identified. Analysis of discursive data, is not so much staged or sequential as it is an iterative process that is systematic in the sense that it involves careful sorting to ensure that all the research material is considered. Both ‘big’ discourses (the broader normative framework) at a macro-level, and ‘small’ micro-level discourses (the rhetorical functions of text and talk in specific interactional settings) were identified (Gee 1990).

Discourse and language is out there to be drawn upon. Educators and student-teachers are caught up in discourse and knowledges developed in schools and are partially influenced by meanings that come from, amongst other things, whiteness, and the silencers referred to earlier - policy, context and practice. The student-teachers spoke from a specific racial location that shaped their engagement with ‘race’ (Crowley and Smith 2015). Further to this, teachers’ reflections are not necessarily authentic ‘voices’, but are effects or reflections of a reasoning that is formed socially and historically (Foucault 1972) and it is intended to point to this way of reasoning in the following interpretation. The discourses around race and ethnicity appeared to be constructed around notions of othering and otherness, exoticism and desires for ‘correct’ knowledge and these are considered in the following section.

Findings

Othering and exoticism

Othering, a term originating in post-colonial theory as a theoretical concept that concerns the consequences of racism in terms of symbolic degradation (Spivak 1985), emerged quite powerfully from the analysed data. Jensen (2011, 65) defines othering as ‘discursive processes by which powerful groups define subordinate groups into existence in a reductionist way which ascribes problematic and/or inferior characteristics to these groups’. A proliferation of pronouns such as I / we / us/ they/ them and their, and the reiterated phrase ‘these people’, created a sense of othering, and there were statements that illustrated an us / them dichotomy, for example, in relation to the questionnaire statement: ‘Children ought to be treated the same regardless of their ethnicity’; ‘race is an important part of *their* history’ (R7¹) and during discussion: ‘I find ‘coloured’ offensive. Are *they* pink? Are *they* blue? *I’m* coloured – *I’m* white’ (Amy). (Italics are used henceforth in data examples, to illustrate this particularly recurrent language form). The use of the pronoun “we” conveys a close relationship and affiliation with a group, whereas the use of the pronoun “they” suggests a contrasting, lesser affiliation. Particularly interesting was the lack of a name attached to ‘them’ or ‘their’ or ‘these people’, and the ‘other’ remained nameless; replicating political and media representations of race and ethnicity, and also signifying that student teachers are perhaps in the midst of an ‘othering maelstrom’, created in part via the media, press and policy (Smith 2016).

In addition to the avoidance of naming there were also deficit representations and a potential pathologising of the other in relation to *them* needing extra input and the frequent association with special educational needs and English as an additional language that emerged during discussion added to this: ‘if we are being prepared to

¹ R= Respondent

teach special needs and English as an Additional Language (EAL) children, then we should be prepared to teach children from minority ethnic backgrounds' (Tom), 'we are given loads of books on special needs but not on race' (Jess) and 'in an EAL module we looked at refugees and where *they* come from' (Gwen) . This is representative of what Walton et al (2016) identify as a cultural essentialism approach, which reinforces white normativity by automatically associating a white ~~Anglo~~-identity with national identity, which cultural 'others' must identify with in order to be 'included'.

Imperatives were very evident throughout the data, especially in the written responses and statements, with much use of the word 'should'. Alongside this, a homogenising, totalising language was characterised by a marked recurrent use of 'all', for example: 'all children'; 'all ethnic populations' and 'all colours'. Where specific sections of society were mentioned, through the use of words such as 'people' and 'children', these were used as synecdoche for whiteness. For example, when discussing diverse-provision schools: 'it makes children more accepting of different ethnicities and religions' (Sam); 'it gives children an insight into other backgrounds other than their own' (Zoe), and when discussing racist attitudes: 'I feel this is because people are uneducated of ethnic minorities' (Amy); 'it's not the ethnic diversities, it's people reactions that are the problem' (Lou) and 'people are too worried about saying the wrong thing' (Sue). What was perhaps intended in these examples (and there were many similar examples in the written and spoken data) was 'white children' and 'white people', yet the word 'white' was conspicuous by its absence. The above examples read quite differently if the word 'white' is inserted: 'it makes *white* children more accepting of different ethnicities and religions'; 'it gives

white children an insight into other backgrounds other than their own'; 'I feel this is because *white* people are uneducated of ethnic minorities', and so on. 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'. The persistent removal of race words from discourse is regarded as a ~~well-~~ ~~recognised~~ feature of white-talk (McIntyre 1997) or 'white diss-course' (Matias et al. 2014, 292), and is a familiar or recognisable discourse 'that is often academically and emotionally debilitating to the 'racial other' (Solomon et al. 2005, 147).

References to a racial other were prevalent in the form of difference, the exotic and the enigmatic. This was evident throughout the data, but especially so in relation to the questionnaire statement 'Teachers need to be aware of the ethnic background of the children in their class' where responses included: 'different cultures ought to be celebrated or embraced' (R175); 'other cultures should be celebrated and learned from' (R8); 'diverse ethnicity should be celebrated not hidden away' (R13); 'different ethnicities should be celebrated because everyone is different' (R12) and 'different races and ethnicities add a richness' (R72). A complex blend of celebratory, egalitarian yet discriminatory discourse operated that strengthened evocations of 'the other'. In relation to this, social signifiers of difference (to a white norm) reverberated around clothes and fashion, and in particular headwear: 'if *they* want to wear headscarves that's fine.' (Gwen), and food: 'I love a curry' (Tom), which resonates with Troyna's, (1993; cited in Solomon et al. 2005, 158) observation that there is a reduction of the histories of other groups to the traditional multicultural fare of the

three 'S', 'saris, samosas and steel bands', and suggests that the fog of illusion within (white) perceptions of other cultures (Mazzei, 2008) might still persist. In maintaining the exoticised other, the discourse serves to atomise the belonging of those referred to as 'these people', and de-personalises.

It has been suggested that white people personalise analysis of structural race inequities and perceive arguments about white privilege to be about themselves personally and this restricts conversations relating to wider societal racial injustices (Marx 2006). Personalisation can limit the possibility of interrogating ideological assumptions and distances personal implications in the maintenance of systemic inequities. Findings in this study showed a personalisation associated with a neoliberal, self-oriented 'I' or 'me' context and the words 'I' / 'me' were re-iterated many times: for example, when discussing how race is portrayed in the media and society: 'it's just what I am...it shouldn't change things I have no control over it [race]' (Jess); 'it does not matter about the colour of *my* skin, I feel privileged in different ways and all humans probably feel the same' (Tom) and 'I don't see colour; everyone is a person' (Sue). However, personalisation was noticeably absent and disappeared in responses to the questionnaire statement 'Being white is a privilege', where there was a disassociation or reluctance to express a personal view either way: 'some may think this' (R187); 'people believe it is' (R34); 'some have a different view' (R45) and 'in society this is how it's viewed' (R56). This disassociation, or fear, of self-exposure was illustrated by deflective comments such as 'I am not prejudiced, but...some of my friends are' (R81). During group discussion, the frequent use of anecdotes and the narration of stories or incidents relating to others (that sometimes

attributed inequitable views of the racial 'other' to older white people), also had a depersonalising effect that may be seen as a discursive move that is an unconscious tool of whiteness (Di Angelo 2011).

Correct knowledge

Earlier, it was suggested that the ideas and messages within current race and ethnicity education policy in England appear to be vague or, indeed, non-existent and that although the messages may fail to specify who or what is being talked about, they are difficult to refute because they seem to embody common sense, or white, values (Gillborn 2013). In relation to a discussion around teacher training there were requests for 'further instruction' around race and ethnicity and a regular recurrence of 'equip', for example: 'the institution should *equip* me' (Sam); 'there is a responsibility to *equip* us' (Pete) and 'I need to feel *equipped* to deal with racial issues in the classroom' (Amy). 'Equip' has connotations with tools, readiness and preparedness for teaching (DfE 2012) and was linked to 'what works', 'tips' and 'top tips'. The responsibility lay firmly with the university to 'equip' and 'give *me* resources, ideas, support, experience to deal with such issues' (Pete). Families of statements emerged from the written and spoken data that were heavily influenced by neoliberal approaches to teaching, characterised once again by imperative and totalising language, for example: '*I'm* paying for the university's services and preparation *should* be given to me, by them, to ensure that *I* can *immediately* educate children to the *highest standards*' (Pete), and in response to the questionnaire statement 'My own ethnicity will impact upon the children in my classroom': 'you can use your own ethnic identity to enhance learning as an *expert*'

(R53). There was an evocation that a body of knowledge 'out there' – a fundamental truth - will equip student teachers to address 'issues' around race and ethnicity in the classroom, and provide the 'correct' answer that will 'make life easier'.

A sense of a will for a particular truth or knowledge was created partly by a powerful sense of 'not knowing' about race and ethnicity and teaching, or addressing it in the classroom. Comments around the statement 'I feel prepared to teach children from diverse ethnic backgrounds' yielded '*I don't know much about it*' (R6); '*I don't know. I need more knowledge about this*' (R167); '*I'm not very aware of the difficulties I will face*' (R178); '*I don't know enough*' (R180); '*I need further information*' (R189) and '*more support is needed*' (R267). The following group discussion extract once again illustrates both the use of 'people' as synecdoche for whiteness and 'correctness', and also signifies fear, difficulty and avoidance:

'...it's just not knowing. How do you expect people to know things [relating to race and ethnicity] without being told? They don't discuss it because they think it's an awkward conversation but people need to be told what's right and wrong' (Tom).

Coupled with a desire for the correct knowledge there was a concern during discussion about a lack of (correct) terminology and there was a desire for a language that does not inadvertently cause offence: 'terminology is confusing. There's no right answer' (Pete); 'we can't say this is the right language to use because what is acceptable changes' (Gwen). There was also a desire for the correct knowledge in the recurrent phrase 'dealing with parents', where, to some

extent, racial tension was seen to originate: '*I* need to know how to deal with parents' (Zoe); 'some parents can be quite aggressive when it comes to race' (Jess) and '*I'd* feel uncomfortable dealing with parents if *their* child was racist' (Sam).

Discomfort

A sense of caution or discomfort emerged, signified via repetition of 'careful' during discussion around political correctness and terminology: for example: '*you* have to be really careful what you say' (Gill) , and via 'walking' or 'treading' metaphors: '*we're* walking on egg shells' (Gwen); '*you* have be careful not to tread on toes' (Sam). Apprehension and fear was also evident: '*people* aren't so scared about saying things about disabled people because disability has become a norm. It's not the same for race' (Zoe); '*people* skirt around it...it's an awkward topic' (Gwen) and '*we* don't want to offend people or be accused of racism' (Tom). There was an avoidance of particular words; '*I* can't find the right words for this...'; '*I'm* not sure what to say...' (Gwen) and hesitations when explaining feelings about situations involving racial issues or incidents. The group talk was sometimes guarded and faltered, and there appeared to be a struggle for the correct language or script, with rhetorical incoherence and truncations: '*I, I, I, I* don't mean, you know, but...' and utterances were frequently interspersed with 'erms'. Bonilla-Silva (2002, 62) suggests that incoherent talk is the result of talking about race in a world that insists race does not matter. Pauses and silences may have been due many things, including fear of offending or of being wrong (Mazzei 2011); a refusal to engage (Segal and Garret (2013) or thinking time. Linked to hesitations, pauses and silence was nervousness and uncertainty, especially in relation to the questionnaire statement about teaching children from

multi-ethnic backgrounds: '*I'm* a bit nervous but obviously willing' (R5) and '*I'm* fearful of getting it [teaching] wrong (R103)', the latter example recalling that there is a 'right way'. The frequent use of diminutives in written and spoken data, such as 'it makes me *a little* angry' (Sam) and 'I get *a bit* sad by the media' (Tom) resonates with Bonilla-Silva's (2002, 63) suggestion that students may use diminutives to soften their views.

Concluding reflections

Discourse-based research can help reveal how less-obvious injustices are at work via language practices and commonly-used phrases that reproduce and legitimise relations of power and dominance (Augoustinos 2007). This study aimed to critically examine some of the discourses that were drawn upon by student teachers, via written and spoken language, to address the research questions: how are the discourses around race and ethnicity constructed? What do the discourses evoke and what might be the potential effects? The emergent discursive themes were imbued with whiteness and reverberated around othering, correct knowledge, personalisation and discomfort.

As stated earlier, a global neoliberal context, with associated policies and standardised practices, is not necessarily conducive to the advancement of racial justice. As Gilroy (2014, 629) indicates, England has a 'centrally imposed, policy-driven teacher education system obsessed with specifying content and teaching methods' and is not holistic. Policy makers would benefit from recognising the effects of the historical, cultural and sociological dimensions of schooling, as in other

countries, such as Finland, where education is regarded as more holistic (Tirri 2014) and less target-driven or instrumental. In relation to practice, race and ethnicity is frequently placed within inclusion and diversity components of teacher education courses, as add-on 'how-to' courses or modules that 'cover' race and ethnicity, gender and disability. Findings in this study reflected this practice as race and ethnicity was frequently aligned or compared with concepts and practices associated with special education, such as 'meeting needs'. Approaches within diversity courses that 'celebrate' or exoticise racial and ethnic diversity, as if the two are static and discrete, reinforce 'otherness' in relation to the dominant white socio-political context (Walton et al. 2016). The glossing over, and dilution, of race and ethnicity to several lectures or short seminars, within time constraints, does not acknowledge or give credence to underlying systemic issues surrounding racial injustice nor does it leave room for any further, much needed theorisation of race (Milner and Howard 2013).

This study signifies that a shift is required from neo-liberalist content 'coverage' and 'how to' approaches that reflect current policy as practice in England and elsewhere (Ball 2015), to criticality, engagement and open dialogue. This requires that teacher education courses, so often constrained, offer wider pedagogical and curricular opportunities for students to interrogate particular ways of thinking that homogenise and normalise, and to deconstruct discourses and ideological sets that maintain social and racial injustices in and out of the classroom. Teacher educators may foster greater alertness to taken-for-granted language patterns and discourses across the curriculum, and raise questions about the use of language and what it signifies and does. For example, in relation to language patterns that create a sense of othering, questions (such as 'Who are *they*'? and 'Who are *these people*'?) may explicate that 'they' are the (unnamed) others, not 'us' (the dominant social group).

Teacher educators may encourage student-teachers to acknowledge that language can sustain and create forms of injustice and to also recognise that knowledge is not fixed, standardised or uniformly structured but fluid, ever changing and linked to experiences. Lanas (2014, 176) refers to Biesta's (2003) use of the Levinasian perspective on education to argue that learning is not about the acquisition of units of knowledge or truth, but about responding. Responding, thoughtfulness and learning about others necessitates learning about ourselves. In this respect, it is not so much about course duration or even content as it is about *how* teacher educators engage prospective teachers in learning about race and racism, as they are placed to nurture student teacher conscientization (Freire, 1970), (self) awareness, reflection, change and transformation. The development, or reconstruction, of a teacher subjectivity that fosters self-reflection on values and wider societal positioning in relation to a collective, could enable more reflexive teacher education. Reflexivity invites us to challenge the taken for granted assumptions that are often found in popular discourse and practice by situating ourselves within rather than outside an analysis of race (Sleeter 2016). It requires reflexive anti-racism (Kowal et al., 2013) and critical recognition of teacher-educator positionality, cultural and political presuppositions, and epistemic position (Rizvi 2015, 273) within racialised social systems. 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 2015, 272). In critically reviewing self-knowledge teacher educators may seek to probe understandings, especially when the subject matter creates discomfort (Zembylas, 2015). The silences that surround race and ethnicity may represent thought and reflection, or discomfort or self-protection, but they can also be seen as spaces for future exploration of the structural and personal dimensions of whiteness.

As teacher educators we must begin with ourselves, place our own pedagogy under scrutiny and reflect upon how our thinking, beliefs, values and approaches play a role in reproducing racial inequality in its many forms (Crowley and Smith 2015), especially when the majority of those who educate teachers in the UK are white (HESA 2016).

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