

# Promoting and Advancing Multicultural Dialogues in Education

Richard Race

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This article addresses debates around current multicultural dialogues in education. It also plots the journey of the promotion of an edited collection on this area which has been supported by The Dialogue Society (Race 2018). The article begins with contextual sections on the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism in education. Contemporary and relevant events such as Brexit, Prevent and the Shamima Begum case are considered. Several academic events, one organised by The Dialogue Society, are examined to see how dialogues are promoted within the academy to underline the continued importance of multicultural dialogues in education.

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## Multiculturalism and Education

In 2019 it seems that it is becoming harder to see where multiculturalism resides in English education, despite the fact that society is becoming even more culturally diverse. The disconnect, as it has been called, between what is actually going on socially or educationally, and the unknown consequences of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union at the end of 2019 is a major issue (UN 2018). It is interesting to note that Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, visited a primary school on his visit to the UK and highlighted, ‘... Brexit will have serious consequences in this domain and the challenges need to be dealt with head on. A lack of clarity is preventing families at risk of poverty from planning for its impact. People feel their homes, jobs, and communities are at risk.’ It would be unproductive to speculate about Brexit at the time of writing but there is no doubt that the uncertainty or ‘lack of clarity’ about whatever happens will have consequences for both society, poverty and education.

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What is clear is that Brexit is a monocultural movement towards a more nationalistic interpretation of culture and society. In an educational sense this should not be a surprise as England and Wales have had a national curriculum for over thirty years. Even though programmes of study exist within different core and foundation subjects that have culturally diverse curricula, the issue remains whether professional practitioners have been taught a more multicultural and anti-racist curricular focus. Have colleagues had relevant diversity training within a wider, coherent professional development plan, which gives them the pedagogy to teach in a culturally diverse classroom or lecture theatre? Advocates of multicultural education (Manning et al. 2017; Diangelo 2018) continue to underline what needs to be taught and how to teach to majority and minority cultures in educational settings. This literature on multicultural education, which is not exclusively from the United States and is in fact global (Montero-Sieburth 2018; Phuntsog 2019), needs to continue to highlight the reality of or a re-connection with what professional practitioners face in education. There is a need for more empirical research on aspects of not only Multiculturalism and Education but areas such as Anti-Racism and Education, as well as White Privilege and Fragility, and these need to be focused upon and taught within education practice (Gillborn et al 2017; Arday and Mirza 2018).

## **Interculturalism and Education**

If intercultural education focuses upon different people and cultures and includes how interculturalism is taught in all settings, including the diversity of all communities being the norm rather than exception, then we need, as we do within multicultural education practice, to question what is being delivered in classrooms and lecture theatres. That reorientation of focus is important when we examine majority or minority communities and cultures. 'Inter' is also defined as 'between' which should be seen as a positive opportunity to explore spaces and issues between cultures in society. Shamima Begum, who left London at the age of fifteen to join Islamic State and who reappeared in February 2019 requesting to return home raises many intercultural issues, including her citizenship and whether she can return home or be refused entry to the United Kingdom based on security risks. The complexity of this and other cases like it raises intercultural issues but needs to be considered in relation to how this case and these issues can be taught in education settings. This returns to the issue of how we prepare our professional practitioners for delivering content and the knowledge that can be objectively presented to students.

The Prevent policy is non-statutory in UK schools but the education workforce needs to have an understanding of the government's deradicalisation policy (HO 2015a; DfE 2015). The interesting connection between Prevent and the Begum case is the Channel Duty Guidance (HO: 2015b) which was published the same year Begum left the UK for Turkey and then Syria. Channel was created to protect young people

from radicalisation but what has been created to re-integrate or re-educate people, not only Begum, who want to come home from conflict zones? Within a culturally diverse environment, the notions of relevance and the contemporary nature of this case study raise the question of what is taught in education and, as significantly, what is not taught in classrooms and lecture theatres. This continues to be a systemic problem and the issue is not how teachers are trained and what they teach: the systemic problem remains a content one, that is, what is taught and not taught within the national curriculum and university programmes of study.

## **International Dialogues on Multicultural and Intercultural Education**

In relation to Dialogues, a Newton Fund/British Academy Research Workshop took place in Mahidol University, Thailand in June 2018. A key text for this event was its edited collection. This brought together early career researchers from England and Scotland and Thailand, alongside international mentors, who came together to talk about multicultural and intercultural education (Race 2015; Arphattananon 2018). Particularly interesting were the trips to schools in Thailand to see how majority and minority communities are schooled in both the public and private sectors. When you are informed about the history of Thailand alongside the development of its educational system, you begin to look at the similarities and differences of your own system of education.

Understandings of international influences on Thailand's education also underline the need for evolution and development, but, like the national curriculum in England and Wales, you can see how tradition shapes curricula – what is taught and how it is taught. When reflecting upon the research workshop, there is a strong requirement to reciprocate and bring colleagues from Thailand to the UK. An application for a British Academy Conference grant has been completed and the hope is to bring colleagues from Thailand to London to continue to develop research links and networks which are currently visible on social media. There is also a possibility that Thai colleagues will be attending the British Education Research Association conference in Manchester in September 2019. This brings other elements of the network back together and allows wider dissemination of research findings from British and Thai colleagues. The dialogues created in Thailand in June 2018 will grow and become even more international in Manchester in 2019, and if the conference grant application is successful, in London in 2020.

## **Race Equality and Anti-Racism Practice**

Marlon Moncrieffe, who also contributed to the edited text for the conference and was in the Thailand research workshop, organised a Race Equality Charter event

in Brighton in December 2018 (Moncrieffe and Moncrieffe 2019). Arday was the keynote speaker at this event and he talked eloquently about the issues Black colleagues face in higher education (Arday and Mirza 2018). It was interesting to listen to colleagues talking about issues of race and racism. It is now twenty years since the MacPherson Report into the death of Stephen Lawrence, which defined institutional racism in the Metropolitan Police in London. What is forgotten is that MacPherson also asked for the national curriculum to be amended to value cultural diversity and prevent racism. Local education authorities and school governors were requested to create implementation strategies to do this which were to be inspected by OFSTED (Race 2015: 30–32).

There are wider issues at play in relation to the police and their relationships with Black London youth. Knife murders were higher in London than they were in New York City in 2018. It is debatable whether racial profiling and stop and search, when considering a reduction in the number of police officers since 2010 in London, is working. There are wider social, cultural and educational issues here, and the Shamima Begum case touches on some of them. One of the biggest issues in education is student performance. The continued work of Feyisa Demie and colleagues on achievement and underachievement remains important when examining student performance and racial stereotypes. This work is crucial when teaching anti-racism within a more culturally diverse curriculum. This mixed methods approach needs to be used as part of diversity training within a wider system of continuing professional development for all practitioners (Demie 2019; Demie and McLean 2017; 2018).

## **Reflecting and Advancing Multicultural Dialogues in Education**

The issues above all connect with advancing multicultural dialogues in education. Dialogues are plural and diverse and aim to increase our understandings of educational issues. The edited text seems even more important now than when the initial idea for it was devised in April 2015. As mentioned above, we seem to be moving more towards a national and integrationist state, which is enshrined within the idea of Brexit, rather than a more globalised, international, plural society and culture. The two-way integrationist relationship is even more conditioned by state policy, and the perceived resistance that individuals and community agency offer is controlled even more by the state (Race 2015).

But was this always the case? The integrationist policy processes that the Coalition and Conservative governments have created in England and Wales have become a newer template of conditional control through policy. As already mentioned, integrationist policy shapes education, that is, the national curriculum, which is created by the state and has been implemented in more than 93% of state schools since 1988. Integration

is a more significant concept for policy making when examining state conditions for policy making. Multiculturalism is the more important concept for both policy making and practice in education because of its equity, equality and celebration, rather than an integrationist conditional recognition of cultural diversity. Hence, the aim of the edited book was to bring colleagues from all over the world to reflect upon multicultural dialogues in education. Shirley Steinberg and Leena Robertson have both talked about their research at both The Dialogue Society (March 2018) and Roehampton University (February 2019). They discussed White Supremacy and Patriarchy, as well as Early Childhood Policy and Practice respectively. Both of these papers are applicable to the Shamima Begum and Prevent/Channel cases mentioned earlier. They show how multicultural and anti-racist education can address some of those complex issues and provide a more contemporary pedagogical practice that is ultimately more relevant to children, young adults and mature students.

One of the first reviews of the edited collection was in German (Spieker 2018). Multilingualism is an important part of multicultural education and it is always interesting to reflect on the fact that individuals in culturally diverse communities in London and other urban centres, can speak up to or even more than three or four languages or dialects. All of the issues touched upon in this article highlight the need for reflection and simply more professional development on multicultural and anti-racist dialogues (Race and Lander 2016). It is important to continue to advocate in all education forms and settings for pedagogical practice that challenges practitioners and children to think about the cultural and social issues that affect them both inside and outside of classrooms and lecture theatres. The promotion of multicultural and anti-racist education continues. The next event/project with The Dialogue Society is to arrange another symposium, bringing colleagues together for all levels and settings to continue advancing multicultural dialogues in education.

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