

# Editorial: The Whiteness of Educational Psychology: Colonialism, Post-Colonialism and Racialisation in the Theory, Training and Practice of Educational Psychology

Dr Antony Williams  
University of Sheffield, Sheffield

## History

The Division of Educational Child Psychology (DECP) working party report on anti-racism in 2006 was the culmination of work dating back to the 1980s (Booker et al., 1989; Desforges et al., 1985) and 1990s (Bolton & M'gadzah, 1999; Cline, 1999; Grant & Brooks, 1996; Howitt & Owusu-Bempah, 1999). The report looked back to the 1989 Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) Working Party Report on Racism within the educational system, with particular reference to the work of the educational psychologist. Also referenced is the survey completed in 2000 by the AEP. This survey of its membership explored how services were addressing the issue of race equality (AEP, 2000). At this point, ethnic minority representation within the senior level of the profession was moving towards, but not yet at, the percentages in the general workforce. Advances had been made, but, in looking back at this work in 2006, the DECP Working Party on Anti-Racism concedes “there was sufficient constancy to indicate that there were patterns and comments in response to issues of racial equality that should alert the profession to its shortcomings and point the way to further work” (p. 13).

The DECP Working Party Report on Anti-Racism (April, 2006) *Promoting Racial Equality Within Educational Psychology Services* offers a template for action in its appendix. The performance checklist for promoting racial equality in educational psychology services is a framework covering four areas: policy development; professional practice; induction, supervision and continued professional development; and recruitment and retention. This checklist is presented as a framework for self-assessment, but it seems like it gained little purchase among services. Without any mandatory reporting requirements, the framework for self-assessment, it seems, was largely left to gather dust but may yet be a useful starting point for further work within the profession.

## The Current Context

The timing of this edition of *Educational Psychology Research and Practice* (EPRaP) is in some respects fortuitous. While the idea of this edition dates back to 2019, it is the unfortunate events of 2020 that undoubtedly frame this collection of papers. It was on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2020 that George

Floyd died after being arrested by police officers outside a shop in Minneapolis, Minnesota. George Floyd's death was recorded by multiple mobile phones. The recordings show George Floyd pinned to the ground after being handcuffed, with a police officer's knee between his head and his neck. He is kept in this position for 7 minutes and 46 seconds. During this time, George Floyd says more than twenty times that he could not breathe. It is after six minutes that George becomes silent. He was pronounced dead an hour later. The death of George Floyd, shared on social media, provoked a national (within the USA) and global response. The social media hashtag #BlackLivesMatter became a focal point for a call for racial equality. In the UK there were #BlackLivesMatter protests in towns and cities as people were shocked and enraged by the horror of watching a man — a Black man — being pinned down and killed by police officers. The questions that became much harder to brush aside of “How could this happen?” and “What kind of culture cultivates such acts?” gained traction. The fact the killing was recorded seemed to make it much harder to ignore. The notion of neutrality or ignorance of the facts was challenged as individuals, institutions, groups and professions reflected on “race equality”. Within educational psychology, the Educational Psychology Race and Culture Forum (EPRCF) arranged a webinar<sup>1</sup> to provide space for a conversation about the dual challenges of COVID-19 and #BlackLivesMatter. This webinar sold out in hours, and two subsequent dates also sold out within hours. The webinars engaged hundreds of educational psychologists in a discussion including colleagues from the Black and Ethnic Minority Educational Psychology (BEEP) Network. The discussion resulted in an open letter to the BPS/DECP, National Association Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP) and programme directors of professional training in educational psychology (see Appendix A).

## The Whiteness of Educational Psychology

The call for papers for this special edition was titled *The Whiteness of Educational Psychology: Colonialism, Post-*

<sup>1</sup>The title of the webinar was *The Whiteness of Educational Psychology in Britain: Rethinking EP practice in the context of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter*. The webinar was delivered three times in July 2020.

*Colonialism and Racialisation in the Theory, Training and Practice of Educational Psychology*. This title took as a given that something we might call “Whiteness” is an assumption upon which much of educational psychology has developed. This assumption should be open to interrogation and to do this it is worth taking a moment to understand the meaning of this term: what Whiteness is and what it is not. In Whiteness studies there is a strand of thought equating Whiteness with being White, having a white skin. Lopes and Thomas’s (2006) definition of White is helpful in this respect as they link White (capitalised) to represent people belonging to a dominant group “who enjoy skin privilege in North America, Europe, New Zealand, and anywhere European colonialism has created racial inequity” (p. 272). Here we can see Whiteness described as a “rarely recognised component of White racial identity and domination” (Giroux, 1997, p. 380). This positioning of Whiteness attempts to induce self-consciousness or awareness of privilege afforded on the basis of skin colour. From this understanding of Whiteness, the notion of White privilege (Leonardo, 2004) can be seen to reflect the assumptions of White supremacy, first psychologised in *Natural Inheritance* (Galton, 1894).

This linking of being White and Whiteness is important to note and is one that is often misunderstood and then challenged (Murry, 2020). The misunderstanding (either purposeful or naïve) appears as White privilege is linked solely to White people rather than recognising that while it is most accessible to White people in western post-colonial contexts, White privilege is a function of a racial discourse, which offers a system of categorisation, that organises and shapes human difference. The point is made that White privilege is often unseen by people with a white skin (Eddo-Lodge, 2018). Žižek (2012) explains to us that this can be usefully understood as the effect of ideology. Ideological in the sense that our being-in-the-world and our understanding of others being-in-the-world is structured by language or perhaps more accurately, signs. Signs (which include, but are not restricted to, all language) are made up of a signifier, for example, a black skin, and a signified, that is what is evoked in the mind by the signifier. The signified relies on associations, so the meaning ascribed to the signifier (and hence sign), be it visual (like the black skin), linguistic or auditory, and so forth, will come from associations. With this understanding, we can see that nothing is simply “just what it is” but is always a part of a network of meaning, a network that is historically and socioculturally determined. A key point is that skin colour (along with all other things) becomes implicitly related to expectations. We begin to expect to see certain sorts of people in certain positions. It becomes unremarkable that there are relatively few educational psychologists of colour, unremarkable that there are few senior managers of colour, or perhaps to be expected that the boy at risk of exclusion is Black. This becomes just the way things are,

and expectations of practice and ways-of-being within this community remain narrowly defined. A number of the papers collected for this volume highlight an experience of how these processes play out in different ways as well as offering suggestions of how what has become understood (since the Macpherson report definition, see below) as institutional racism may be challenged.

The collective failure of an organisation 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. (Macpherson, 1999, p. 28)

All the papers in this volume call for a self-awareness that is both personal and professional. In *Narratives of High-Attaining African Caribbean Boys*, we can see the creative engagement in racialised narratives within the family context and peer groups of high-achieving African Caribbean boys. This paper highlights the complex and effortful strategies the young men utilise in performing multiple identities and calls on educational psychologists to challenge thin narratives that contribute towards discriminatory practices, in effect calling on educational psychologists to recognise and challenge the potential of Whiteness (alongside the discourses of masculinity) to structure the subjectivity of these boys. A call echoed in *Black Voices Matter*, with this paper’s recognition of the power of language and the role of educational psychologists in challenging racialised narratives that, at times, structure the thinking around and within the minds of young people of colour.

The paper *Navigating Blackness in Educational Psychology* offers an overview of the way educational psychology is haunted by colonialism. In interrogating the relationship between educational psychology and racialisation, the author offers a sense of the feeling of estrangement the person of colour may feel entering a profession often unaware of how Whiteness shapes it. Indeed, in both the *Visual Art: A Tool for Facilitation of Cultural Competence and Antiracism* and the *Power and Racialisation* papers there are examples of the authors (educational psychologists of colour) reflecting on the early experiences of training. Although quite different in the particulars of the experience, both reflect on an experience of feeling slightly out of place, recognising, or perhaps being brought to recognise, their Blackness in the context of beginning training as an educational psychologist. It is easy to see a link between these experiences and what is named in *Black Voices Matter* as “imposter syndrome”. This paper makes explicit the link between microaggressions and the feelings that can be thought of as imposter syndrome

and, as such, illustrates the psychological impact of Whiteness. *Visual Art: A Tool for Facilitation of Cultural Competence and Antiracism* offers a powerful insight into the influence of what we are calling Whiteness, how the need to conform inherent in any professional training can draw psychologists in training of colour (and indeed all trainee educational psychologists) to distort their own feelings. Dr Kusi offers thoughtful insights and illustrates how art can be used as a deconstructive tool, indeed she notes of the *Fiction in the Space Between* (Kusi, 2020) that it recognises the fictional constructed categories of racialisation have real-world effects. An example of those real-world effects was made available to all through the filming of George Floyd's death. The paper *Black Voices Matter* highlights others, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, alongside a number of UK citizens in highlighting this disproportionate impact on people of colour of police brutality. The paper *Development as a Reflective Practitioner: Race Reflections* explores the intersubjective nature of the real-world effects of racialisation. This paper offers a reflection of entering the profession (as an educational psychologist of colour) and the connection along racialised lines between a young person and a professional. It brought to mind my own professional experiences of being experienced as a Black man who appears in a school as an educational psychologist and the impact that can have on the children and young people who see you, particularly children from racialised minorities. In this paper, skin colour seems an important part of an identification between a young person and a professional, and it seems it is that connection that holds important possibilities for both the young person and for the professional practice of educational psychology. The paper *Black Voices Matter* offers a powerful analysis of the effects of racialisation. The wide-ranging paper introduces the reader to the concept of racial trauma and makes the link to institutional racism.

### Deconstructing "Race"

Michael Rustin, in his 1991 paper, highlights the paradoxical nature of "race". He identifies race as an empty category, whilst, at the same time, recognising it as "one of the most destructive and powerful forms of social categorisation" (p. 57). This, I think, is an important contradiction to hold onto. In this paper, Rustin goes on to warn against the "apparently righteous inversion inherent in the concept of 'anti-racism'" (p. 76), maintaining that antiracism must beware being the "direct antithesis of racism ... also bound by it as the central object of thought and feeling". Seshadri-Crooks (2000) offers a conception of Whiteness which supports the structural understanding proposed here turn she proposes:

By Whiteness, I refer to a master signifier that establishes a structure of relations, a signifying

chain that through a process of inclusions and exclusions constitutes a pattern for organising human difference ... "Race" in other words, is a system of categorisation that once it has been organised shapes human difference in certain seemingly predetermined ways (pp. 3-4).

I see Seshadri-Crooks' definition as helpful in framing the deconstructive impulses evident in the papers in this volume, while recognising the limits of any move towards the deconstruction of "race" and its master signify Whiteness. This can be illustrated in a variety of ways. The paper *Preparing to be an Ethically Minded Educational Psychologist* offers a reflection of the struggle we are all engaged to bear as we enter professional practice as an educational psychologist. The paper offers an example of how theories and principles are drawn upon as we enter the work of educational psychology and also illustrates, via the use of vignettes, the fact that experience so often undoes the apparent clarity offered by theory. In this respect, the paper illustrates the journey into educational psychology and early experiences of ethical dilemmas. The reflexive vignettes reflect the weight carried by self-aware professionals. Linking this paper with the themes of this volume, the paper explores the complexity of culturally competent practice. Using a discussion of ethics as a starting point, the trainee educational psychologist author introduces positionality in exploring how she is related to as both a professional and a person of colour, a member of a particular cultural community. There is a developing sense of identity that draws upon multiple influences. The extra-discursive effects of "race" as a signifier are evident in the reflections, albeit left mostly implicit, but what earns this paper a place in this volume is its illustration of the mobilisation of racial feeling and the reflexive work done by the author to work towards recognising this pull, being moved whilst also resisting. It is this rather complicated double move that recognises racial categories whilst at the same time resisting or reworking. So here I read the concluding statement, "Both the values of my childhood and those that I acquired later in life can and do coexist" (*Preparing to be an Ethically Minded Educational Psychologist*, this volume), as an illustration of Rustin's point that "cultural definitions, those which identify as a symbolic resource a distinctive social history, relations to place and forebears are likely to be a more textured ground of identity than racial definitions per se" (Rustin, 1991, p. 82).

This point having been illustrated, as it is in *Narratives of High-Attaining African Caribbean Boys*, the foundations are laid for an exploration of the complexity of what culturally competent practice may mean. A further creative example of this theme can be found in *Power and Racialisation*. In this paper, racialisation is explored in a phenomenological study which explores the educational experiences of young people who identify as having one Black and one White parent. In this paper, the notion of mixedness is a starting point for a

re-articulation of the value of recognising the pervasive multicultural context in which we all now live.

### A Response from Psychology

Finally, I think it is important to mention the institutional response to #BlackLivesMatter. A recent BPS Statement on Diversifying Psychology Curriculum published in July 2020 (see Appendix B) seems to demonstrate a welcomed institutional response, demonstrating a belated awareness of the Whiteness of UK psychology. The statement is significant in its acceptance of what many psychologists (not least psychologists of colour) have long seen and struggled with. It belatedly offers a recognition "that psychology has its own challenging past which it must confront". In this admission, the statement goes on to say:

It is important that we do not shy away from teaching the next generation of psychology students and trainees about the discipline's history ... ensuring that the information is presented through a critical lens which underpins why some research and theories are outdated in the current context.

While this is undoubtedly the case, insofar as this statement appears to show an emergent awareness or perhaps a grudging admission of the Whiteness of educational psychology, what is also needed is the creative, yet rigorous exploration of what educational psychology could be. Here we are encouraged into this conversation by our final paper in this volume from the University of East London's position.

### Concluding Thoughts

Educational psychology does not, and cannot, stand outside of society and social processes, and, although this is contentious to some, it is common sense to others. This truth claim is the starting point for considering the theme of Whiteness in educational psychology interrogated within this volume. In attempting to learn from the past and considering previous attempts to address race inequality both within and beyond the profession, this special edition, in effect, calls for change. It is clear, for such change to take place, the work of decolonising that is needed must be not only recognised but also valued and prioritised.

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## Appendix A: Open Letter to the BPS/DECP

### EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS' "RACE" AND CULTURE FORUM (EPRCF)

#### Open Letter To:

Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP)  
 British Psychological Society/ Division of Educational and Child Psychology (BPS/DECP)  
 Educational Psychology Training Courses — Professional doctoral training  
 National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP)

October 2020

#### Open Letter from the EPRCF to the BPS/DECP, all National EP Organisations and Training Courses

As conveners of the Educational Psychology "Race" and Culture Forum (EPRCF), we write on behalf of our supporters and followers to urge you, as the leading institutions for our profession, to join us in the battle against racism within psychology, and take all necessary steps to address and eradicate institutional racism and all forms of systemic inequalities from our profession.

Since the murder of George Floyd on May 25 (2020), adding to the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Black and other Minority Ethnic communities, we have seen an expansion of the Black Lives Matter movement and a global outcry for racial equality, equal justice and other fundamental changes in our society. Mass protests in the United States of America have been followed by further demonstrations not just in Britain but world-wide. Accordingly, there has been growing debate and responsive action across various sectors, notably business and the arts, to begin to address these fundamental issues in British society. Yet in that time, and in spite of an outpouring of personal experiences on EPNET, the voice of psychology, our profession, has been conspicuous by its absence!

With a sense of alarm, and to some extent to begin the process of helping to fill the void, the EPRCF organised a series of webinars over the summer (July 16, 23 and 30) to share concerns and take pointers as to the best way forward. There were over three hundred and fifty (350) EP representatives during the course of those webinars, from different ethnic groups, at different stages of their careers and with a wide range of experience (Please see note 1 below). When asked for their level of confidence regarding "cultural competence" most could only answer "a bit". Even more alarmingly, respondents shared the following revelations:

- 45% experienced Racism growing up

- 58% witnessed Racism against a colleague
- 25% had themselves been the target of Racism

Analysis of respondents' online Chat identified the following key themes (presented in order of appearance and for brevity only one or two illustrations are given):

#### Cultural Competence–Diversity (CC–D)

- It's bigger than Cultural Competence, has to be Cultural Comp and Diversity
- Need for Cultural Responsiveness, especially in Supervision

#### Intersectionality (INT)

- Intersectionality is an important focus
- Systemic racist barriers are about maintaining power

#### Ignorant for So Long (IFSL)

- Sense of Shame that I've been ignorant for so long
- Feel uncomfortable that things (racism) happening and I wasn't aware

#### Whiteness and White Fragility (W–WF)

- Need to consider White Fragility\*
- Is it about "Whiteness" per se or British colonial concept of "Whiteness" globally?

#### Implicit Racism/Microaggression (IR/MA)

- Now realise how much I normalised my experience- or allowed others to!
- Shocked by number of workplace experience of racism

#### De-Colonisation (DeC)

- How to decolonize the curriculum — (and) not just a tick-box exercise

#### Racism in Academia (RIA)

- Under-representation of BAME in Higher Education
- High exclusion of BAME students

#### Data Collection (DC)

- Data Collection an essential factor\*

**Discomfort (DisCo)**

For a long time, I felt the problem lay with me!

Dilemma faced by BAME when considering push for promotion (SMT) — impact on Mental Health

**Unfair Burden (UFB)**

- Unfair burden placed on BAME to spearhead change — exhausted!\*

**Call for Action (CFA)**

Need a survey of EP's who have experienced microaggressions

Inspired for change now — can't wait for another George Floyd! (See note 2 below)

What this kind of feedback speaks to is the need for meaningful change and a demand for that to start right now. Throughout our webinars there were frequent references to a DECP Working Party Report on Anti-Racism (April 2006) *Promoting Racial Equality within Educational Psychology Services*, which said this:

An important aspect of the role of educational psychologists is to promote racial equality in the schools and communities in which they work, in pursuit of fairness and social justice. The goal of inclusion permeates much recent educational legislation, laying responsibilities on schools and the professionals working within them to value diversity and actively promote racial equality and harmony. (DECP, 2006)

To the vast majority, this particular DECP Report has not seen the light of day and the recommendations were never implemented. As so often the case, working parties are designed to divert attention and slow down the march towards meaningful change: the quantum shift has to be focussed on the implementation of structural changes and measurable steps towards racial equality.

What do we expect of you and how can we work together?

Our call for action comes from a position of knowing, based on experience. People of colour, and others who are growing in awareness, can point you to the persistent injustices and numerous barriers to racial equality within our profession. However, the full weight of responsibility for redressing these imbalances rest with those of you who control the institutions, based on the authority vested in you by your constituents.

The process of transformation has to start with honest conversations and re-examination of our attitudes and convictions on “race”, racial equality and diversity. If you are able to acknowledge and discuss the dynamics of racism, and see

yourselves within them, then we can talk. Without that you cannot begin to disengage from participating in racism in its many forms. Simply put, it's no longer “okay” to say I'm not a racist — neutrality is out! We have to demonstrate (actively) being anti-racist, each of us as enlightened individuals and collectively as dedicated and committed psychologists.

Please consider this letter as a call for action, with a commitment to work with you in honest endeavour to address systemic racism, the necessary changes in our profession, and how to remove the barriers to a fairer and more just society. Once you are able to reflect on your respective positions and responsibilities, we look forward to your reply with proposals as to the best, most co-constructive way forward.

Yours faithfully,

Denny Grant PhD, AFBPsS Co-Convenor, EPRCF  
Dilanthe Weerasinghe Co-Convenor, EPRCF

Key contributors:

Dr Sarif Alrai, EPRCF  
Dr Gurdip Theara, EPRCF  
Dr Tony Williams, EPRCF

Notes:

1. A list of participants is available and will be published in due course.
2. Data compiled will also be published in more detail.
3. We also have a list of essential recommendations to share.

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\*These are recurring themes.

## Appendix B: BPS Statement on Diversifying Psychology Curriculum

We have all been hugely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Our day-to-day lives, our society, our work, our communities and our families have all felt the impact.

As highlighted in a recent piece by our 2019/2020 Society President, David Murphy, this pandemic has not been the great leveller that some thought it would be. People from black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to be in precarious employment with the greatest exposure to risk of infection, more likely to be in poorer health and to have suffered more serious consequences of the virus, including death.

The pandemic arrived at a time when systemic racism, inequity and oppression of minority and marginalised groups was already found across all aspects of health, housing, education, justice and beyond. The virus has further exposed these inequalities.

More recently, and following the abhorrent murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, people have taken to the streets to unite and rally against the systemic, underlying factors of racism, inequality and forms of oppression, both overt and subtle.

As part of this, many students and programmes have contacted the BPS to enquire what our response will be to support this movement and address inequality, particularly in relation to psychology curricula. Late last year, our Partnership and Accreditation Committee held discussions regarding a root and branch review of its standards and, as part of this, a working group was established to specifically look at the curricula and provide guidance on how programmes can offer more culturally and socially diverse perspectives in their teaching and learning.

We recognise that psychology has its own challenging past which it must confront, and it is important that we do not shy away from teaching the next generation of psychology students and trainees about the discipline's history. It is important that programmes consider carefully how they will do this with integrity, sensitivity and respect, ensuring that the information is presented through a critical lens which underpins why some research and theories are outdated in the current context. Going forward, the society will proactively explore this aspect of programme design as part of accreditation activity, using the process as a way to challenge poor practice and to support, capture and share best practice.

To return to David Murphy's statement:

We are striving, through the work of the diversity and inclusion taskforce and other initiatives to build the BPS into an anti-racist and "inclusionist" organisation at every level. We are not there yet and we gratefully accept all the support that those in marginalised and oppressed groups are able to provide, whilst recognising that these problems are not of their making nor their responsibility to solve.

The BPS stands in solidarity with all those who are feeling pain and expressing righteous anger about racial injustice and recommit to valuing diversity and fighting inequity.

Echoing these words, we will support our accredited programmes and their teams in meeting these challenges. Students must be involved, their feedback and, particularly, that of marginalised groups, is incredibly important. We are all listening and learning.

Staff, students and trainees should feel safe to voice their upset, outrage and disbelief at some of the research that may be presented. Programmes need to be proactive in creating safe spaces for discussion and reflection.

We accept that we do not have all of the answers at this point, but our commitment towards equality for all will sit at the heart of everything we do. We have a remarkable opportunity to engage with students and trainees to show how psychology can help to offer evidence-based approaches and solutions to some of society's biggest problems, including racism.

We would welcome any feedback that you have, which will feed into the working group currently revising the accreditation standards. To suggest feedback, please email Claire Tilley, Head of Workforce Education, Training and Standards [claire.tilley@bps.org.uk](mailto:claire.tilley@bps.org.uk)

Thank you.

Incorporated by Royal Charter — Registered Charity No 229642

St Andrews House

48 Princess Road East Leicester LE1 7DR