Race and Racisms in Early Childhood

Tapestry Education Conference (TEC): Reflecting on Anti-racism in the Early Years

Shaddai Tembo
Thursday 25th March 2021

Welcome

What does it mean to address race and racism in the early years?

In light of the recent Black Lives Matter movement, this session will address the contemporary climate surrounding race and racisms before examining how these forms of discrimination and prejudice are experienced in practice within early childhood spaces.

I will outline ways to understand some of the tensions in interpreting racism and work through the current policy context before sharing case studies intended to continue the discussion beyond this session.

Admin

- Not a 'how-to' guide.
- Images (Yes and cite)
- Additional links.
- Questions and comments

Who am I?

Shaddai (pronounced Shad-eye) (He/him/they).

- **Lecturer** at Perth College UHI

- 3rd year **PhD student** at the University of the West of Scotland.

- Former **Early Years Practitioner** and **Family Support Worker**.

- Part of **GenderEYE.org project**, and **MITEYUK.org**.

- **Trustee** for Early Education.

- **Co-convener** for SERA EY network.

- (occasional) **Writer** at CriticalEarlyYears.org.

Contents

Contextualising race

What is the current broader political climate?

- **Suggestions in recent years that** in light of Barack Obama's presidency, and Meghan Markle's engagement to Prince Harry, **we may be post-race.**

- The problematic of the 'postrace' argument is clear when one considers **the large discrepancies between racial rhetoric and racial experience**, where for many racialised minorities ongoing racial stratification and inequality mean that **conditions have largely remained unaltered or have worsened under present systems**.

(Kapoor, N., Kalra, V. S. and Rhodes, J. (2013) The State of Race.Palgrave Politics of Identity and Citizenship Series. Palgrave Macmillan UK: Basingstoke, Hampshire.)

Contextualising race

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(https://blacklivesmatter.com/)

What is race and what is racism?

So, how do we understand race?

- Race is **unreal** as a scientific category.

- The seeming importance of skin pigmentation is rooted in racist discourses that arose during the Enlightenment period.

- **European pseudo-scientific racism** was mapped onto African people where degrees of lighter and darker phenotypes became the marker of ones hierarchical position in the pecking order of humanity.

> " In the hot countries the human being matures in all aspects earlier, but does not, however, reach the perfection of those in the temperate zones. Humanity is at its greatest perfection in the races of the whites. The yellow Indians do have a meagre talent. The Negroes are far below them. "

(Immanuel Kant *in* Eze 1997, p.63).

What is race and what is racism?

So, how do we understand race?

- However, **we live *as if* race has meaning**, we live race in practice experiencing the world in ways that are mediated by racialized social categories and relationships. **We all have a racial identity*.**

- So, although the concept of race is a construction (no basis in biology), its offspring, **racism** is a very real and tangible phenomenon affecting the life of millions of people globally.

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What is race and what is racism?

So, how do we understand race?

- A **racial ambivalence standpoint** complicates race as both **real** as a social tool and **unreal** as a scientific category.

- The consequences associated with race are understood according to '**racialisation**', a term used to highlight the processual construction of racial categories, while rejecting the notion of race as fixed, natural, and real.

Follow up activity

- As mentioned in the previous slide, **we all have a racial identity**. However, for many white people this is often unnoticed or imperceptible. Search google for '**peggy mcintosh white privilege**' and download the first pdf link. Work through her list and see if you have certain privileges you rarely notice in daily life.

Tembo, S. (2020) Black educators in (white) settings: Making racial identity visible in Early Childhood Education and Care in England, UK. Journal of Early Childhood Research

Racism in education

Racism in educational spaces is prevalent in the UK...

As examples...

- A recent BBC report found that **exclusions for racism in primary schools in England had risen more than 40% in the past decade** (McCamley, 2020).

- Statistics show that **Black children are both at significantly greater risk of, and over-represented within, school exclusions** (Timpson, 2019).

- As Bhopal (2018) points out, **schools are not bound to record how well they are addressing their equality duties**, nor are they required to record incidents of racial bullying, however a FOI request by the NSPCC (2019) that **racial abuse and bullying against children has risen by a fifth over the past 5 years.**

- This confirms an earlier report by Ofsted (2012) which revealed that **racially prejudiced language and bullying is commonplace among pupils in schools.**

(Bhopal_, K. (2018) White privilege: The myth of a Post-Racial Society. Bristol: Policy Press.)

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Racism in the early years

...and racism exists in the early years, too. However:

- ▣ In the EY policy context, **talk of equalities is dominated by calls to address the gender imbalance and tackle harmful gender stereotypes**.

- ▣ The Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017: 25) makes explicit reference to the 'Gender diversity of the workforce'. However, there is **no reference to the fact that the most recent statistics reveal Black educators make up just a fraction of the profession** (DfE, 2014).

Table 1: Statistics on ECEC practitioners in England, UK.

	Full day care (FDC)	FDC in children's centres	Sessional	Before school	After school	Holiday	Childminders
White	88%	80%	89%	88%	87%	87%	87%
Black or Black British	3%	7%	3%	2%	3%	4%	4%

Racism in the early years

Early years foundation stage profile results in England, 2019.

Table 1: Achievement in early years foundation stage profile (EYFSP) teacher assessments by pupil characteristics

| Ethnicity | Number of eligible pupils | Percentage achieving | | Average point score | Good level of development attainment gap |
		At least the expected standard in all ELGs	A good level of development		
White	459,403	72%	73%	34.9	0.9
Black	31,136	68%	69%	33.4	-2.5
All pupils	638,946	71%	72%	34.6	

Two conclusions are possible

- Either we believe in **genetic determinism**, that intelligence has a biological basis for racial difference in educational achievement
- Or we accept that, even with children in the early years, **there is already a level of racial bias at play.**

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Hold on, we're alright here (because we're *all white* here)

This is a form of **narrow nationalism**. If you hear it, challenge it.

- ☑ To only recognise racism (or the perceived lack thereof) within the confines of one's own town, village, or city impedes the broader **global struggle** to end inequality worldwide.

- ☑ The experiences of Black and minoritised people within predominantly white places are no less important than the experiences of those in more visibly diverse communities.

- ☑ Racism is not just an elsewhere-problem for Black and minoritised people to solve.

we're all white,
THANKS
the persisting myth about 'white' schools
Chris Gaine

Gaine, C. (2005) We're all White, Thanks: the persisting myth about 'white' schools. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books Limited.

Discrimination in practice Example

Joe, a four-year-old Black boy of African-Caribbean heritage, joins a local nursery. He doesn't know any of the other children. He feels a bit shy and so plays alone on a bicycle for a few minutes. He gets braver and starts going quite fast, riding all over the place. One practitioner, **Jessica, has a responsibility for Joe** and is pleased to see him occupying himself. Although she would not actually say it, or perhaps does not even know she thinks it, **she has an idea that black boys have difficulty in concentrating and that they like physical activity**.

Several days later, Joe is still occupied mainly with the wheeled toys. Despite the requirements of the curriculum, **no one really ensures that he plays elsewhere**, with jigsaws or painting, working with a group or looking at books. **No other child is unsupervised in this way**. Because of Jessica's assumption, based on a stereotype is that Joe is doing what he is best at doing and what he likes doing, she is happy for him and happy that he appears to be content. But **Joe has had no opportunity to develop a range of learning skills** or to cooperate with other children,

Jessica's discrimination is unintentional, but it is based on stereotypes, attitudes, and assumptions that can remain hidden and may have **serious and long-term implications** for Joe.

Discrimination in practice **Example**

Speedy Joe Discussion points: 📄

This is a particularly good case study to work through in groups.

- ▣ What are the long-term implications for Joe if this practice continues?

- ▣ What should Jessica be considering and doing?

- ▣ Who has overall responsibility for this situation, and what actions should they be taking?

My research **Example**

Two quotes from my research interviewing Black practitioners on their experience working in predominantly white settings:

Suddenly I pop up

> I think with the parents I've met at the moment that are Black, they seem happy to see me! It's like they were hiding everybody away and *suddenly I pop up*, so they're asking what have you been doing and where have you come from? So yeah, I delight in the fact that it looks like there's a relief on their face, I can say oh we're not the only ones here or thank god there is someone I could talk to that looks like me.

Discussion point: What could you do to ensure that your spaces are as inclusive to your communities as they can be?

Creating space for conversations

> I think I just hope it doesn't come up to something I have to deal with, you know I'm not like fighting a cause or anything that's not my life and when these things crop up tis more of like oh f-sake it's just something I'm going to have to – can't let it go and guess I'm going to have to deal with it, but you can never find the right words, so thankfully I've never had to deal with it … People are just silly, and I can't be dealing with them to be honest with you!

Discussion point: Ask yourself, have you and your setting ever broached this topic with each other? Would it make you unconfortable do so? Why?

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Recap

- The current broader political climate, even before the Black Lives Matter protests, suggests that **racism remains a salient issue** in the UK.

- It's useful to take a **racial ambivalence standpoint** to complicate race as both **real** as a social tool and **unreal** as a scientific category.

- The early years is not in a bubble, immune to racism. The EYFSP assessments point toward this.

- My examples draw attention to how racial discrimination operates in early childhood spaces. **Not discussing race may perpetuate such issues**.

Very final note

Talk to the children!
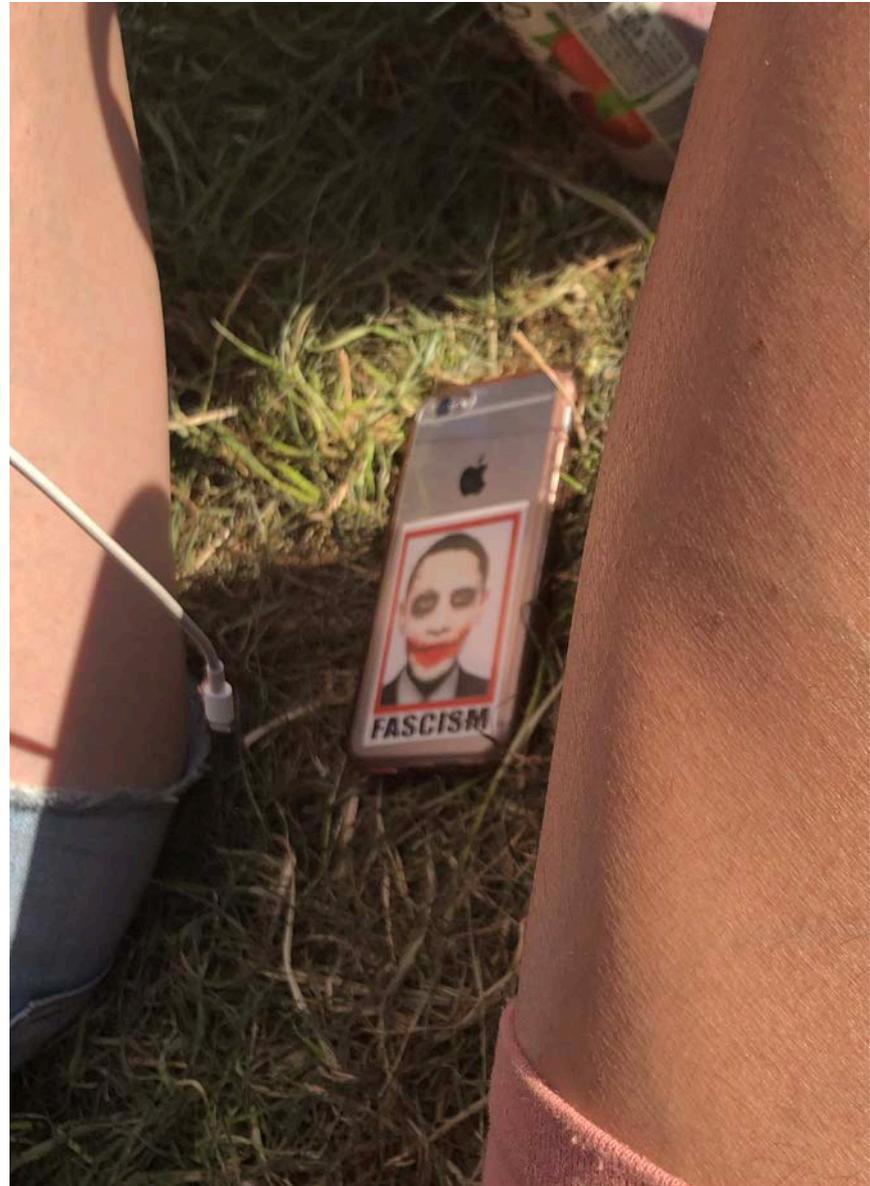
Thanks for listening!

(I'm on Twitter @CriticalEYears)

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