RESEARCHING MARGINALISED GROUPS

WHY RESEARCH GYPSIES?

RESEARCHING RACE AND RACISM IN EDUCATION DURING A ‘WHITELASH’

FEATURING

CARL PARSONS
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NEWS FROM THE BRITISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
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BERA begins 2017 in very good shape. We have once again increased our membership. This is very welcome news and stands as testimony to the vibrancy of the education research community both here in the UK and abroad.

There certainly is a lot to discuss. In a post-truth, post Trump, post Brexit environment, the need for clear-headed thinking based on a careful consideration of the evidence remains as vital as ever. We expect as researchers to argue the case for the views that we hold, and root them in rigorous enquiry. We settle differences through interrogating the strengths as well as the weaknesses of the research traditions we operate within. Recognising the gaps in the evidence base that critical scrutiny reveals has a crucial role to play in opening up new avenues of enquiry. Purposeful and vigorous exchange across different research traditions keeps the field alive to current and pressing concerns. It also deepens the contribution research can make to the public good. In this context it is worth quoting from the Special Message on Overcoming Hate and Hostility that the President and Executive Director of AERA sent to their members in the aftermath of the American election: “We urge the education research community to keep heart, to take on the challenges ahead, and to be mindful of our larger purpose as scholars — and in so doing to demonstrate our commitment to intellectual engagement, to civic responsibility, to democratic principles, and ultimately to social justice.” This issue of RI, with its theme of Researching Marginalised Groups, illustrates some of the ways in which the education research community are indeed exercising their responsibilities to speak out on injustice and support those at the margins of our society.

BERA Council members play an important part in determining how we can best deliver on our strategic priorities over the planning cycle.

Building the BERA Community
BERA values the diversity of our research community. In setting out our Strategic Plan for 2016–21 we have clarified how we intend to pursue our key strategic objectives: to advance educational research quality; build educational research capacity; and foster research engagement in the education field. You can find the document at https://www.bera.ac.uk/about/strategic-plan. BERA Council members play an important part in determining how we can best deliver on our strategic priorities over the planning cycle, taking into account the capacity we can muster within the office, via the membership of our committees and in our SIGs. We are now looking to refresh our Council through election as some members come to the end of their terms of office and step down. Council members act as a board of charity trustees, so this is a position of responsibility. We welcome applicants who may bring a wide range of skills, expertise and different experiences to that role, enriching the capacity of Council to deliberate on how best to fulfil our charitable purposes. Owing to the balance of skills amongst continuing members, we are particularly looking for candidates with experience of journal editorship who might be able to contribute to our Publications committee; candidates from the different regions of the UK; and those who might be able to speak to the interests of ECRs.

The Year in Review
This past year has been a busy one for BERA. The AcSS publication, Making the Case for the Social Sciences: Education, had a successful launch at the Houses of Parliament, with MP Mike Kane (Shadow Schools Minister) outlining the case for the importance of research-informed policy-making. BERA was well represented at the launch, and particular thanks go to Professor David James for the role he played in compiling the case studies. In November, BERA decided to join the More than a Score campaign. This follows on from the submission we made to the Education Select Committee of Inquiry on Primary Assessment where we concluded: “Any system of
assessment needs to win consent from teachers, parents and pupils. There is mounting evidence that current assessment arrangements do not do this. The confusion between assessment data that can justifiably be used for accountability purposes and assessment data that can usefully inform teaching and learning is a serious issue that has not attracted the attention it deserves.” We called for an urgent review of the current test architecture, to be guided by systematic scrutiny of the relevant research evidence. BERA members including our past President, Mary James, are amongst those called to give evidence.

It is hard to keep up with the pace of legislation and the speed of consultation that the Government insists on. On our radar are Justine Greening’s review of baseline assessment and the Higher Education and Research bill, where the House of Lords is taking a lead role in defending the public service responsibilities of the university sector. In pursuit of our own priorities, we are putting out to tender a small-scale piece of research looking at Close to Practice research, and how the value of such work can be enhanced. We have under way a review of BERA’s ethical guidelines, and wish to involve the wider BERA community in identifying areas that may have been hitherto neglected or require clearer guidance. We are consulting with members in Wales about a Welsh Forum for BERA members. We will round off the Presidential Methodological roundtables with a selection of papers on methodological challenges that face the field, to be published in the next issue of RI.

Look out for the launch of the Masters and Doctoral Award Competition 2017. This is an important means of recognising the best in scholarship from emerging researchers, and we welcome your nominations.

Professor Gemma Moss
University of Bristol
The booklet outlines 12 recent key research projects that demonstrate the value of educational research to helping children understand what they read, improving struggling schools, widening participation in higher education, closing the attainment gap, understanding the challenges faced at school by children born in August, educating about diversity, identity and Britishness, supporting children’s learning in a digital world, improving young children’s attitudes towards cultural diversity, enhancing primary education, competing in the global knowledge economy, improving learning by identifying threshold concepts, and enhancing school science.

The booklet was launched on 7 December 2016 at the House of Commons. At the launch, which was chaired by Professor Roger Goodman, Chair of the AcSS, Professor Paul Connolly of Queen’s University Belfast and Professor Lorraine Dearden of the UCL Institute of Education introduced their projects, which were included in the booklet. Mike Kane, the Shadow Minister for Schools, responded with a number of pertinent questions about how research can inform education policy and practice in a ‘post-truth era’.

Following a lively debate with participants at the launch, David James observed that the booklet contained only a small cross-section of the high quality educational research conducted across the UK in recent years. He also stressed the importance of PhD training in providing new researchers with the skills to engage with policy and practice, and also the continued need for independent and critical research in a democratic society.

The booklet can be downloaded from the BERA website at https://www.bera.ac.uk/bera-in-the-news/making-the-case-for-the-social-sciences-education and copies can be ordered from the AcSS office at 33 Finsbury Square, London, EC2A 1AG or downloaded from the Academy and Campaign websites.

A short video about the publication and launch event can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9ENtH9o6zs&feature=youtu.be.
Taggart Oak Academy, a member of a highly successful chain, makes extensive use of data on student attainment from daily testing. A teacher at the Academy, undertaking an MA dissertation, intends to make use of test data from her own school, and from another school in the chain as a control group, to understand the impact of a pedagogical intervention. The school's Principal and the chain's Data Management Officer insist that the data is the property of the school, and are happy to share it. Not only that, they are insistent that the teacher not pester parents with a consent form for the release of the data.

Jessie, a final year Honours student interested in bullying and sexuality in schools, is advised to undertake a desk-based study because of the sensitivity of the subject matter. She downloads a social network app for LGBT people and joins all the groups she can find with 'bully' in the title, and uses the 'public' information users have posted openly for all users of the app as data for her dissertation. All from the comfort of her iPhone, without ever leaving her desk!

Following the closure of the local authority funded youth centre in Edgeton, the Herbert Marcuse Centre for Youth Work Studies at St Thomas More University is invited to run a new participatory youth settlement. Operating out of a local church hall, the settlement engages young people in the creation of participatory research projects, with impromptu street performance, in-depth interviews and letter-writing campaigns all designed by the service users in their weekly evening review meetings. The Principal Investigator on the project is asked by his institutional ethics committee, chaired by a bioscientist, to provide a clear outline of the research question, methodology, and all research instruments at least two weeks ahead of each bi-monthly committee meeting.

These and other contemporary dilemmas in research ethics were still on the distant horizon when the last revision of BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research was undertaken in 2011. With a view to these challenges, BERA’s Academic Publications Committee (APC) convened a sub-committee to review the Guidelines and consider some of the challenges posed by technological development, action research and other contemporary challenges. From the advent of researching schools to innovations in participatory action research methodology, the blurring of the line between researcher and participant is in many places a welcome development in educational research, and one the sub-committee was keen not to discourage, even as they grappled with the ethical dilemmas it poses.

Beginning with a recognition that some of these challenges require us as a research community to return to philosophical first principles, the sub-committee’s recommendations to BERA draw on the experiences of researchers and supervisors in navigating and interpreting the Guidelines over the past five years. Taking care to avoid attempts to redefine key ideas, the review recognised that the existing Guidelines work well on the whole and intersect with the disciplinary communities of our members – for example, sociologists, psychologists, economists, historians and those Julian Stern terms ‘action philosophers’ (Stern, 2015) – in ways that require a complex balance. With regard to digital ethical research, in particular, we are mindful of Easterbrook’s warning of ‘the cross-sterilization of ideas. Put together two fields about which you know little and get the worst of both worlds’ (Easterbrook, 1996). Just as we do not need a separate ‘law of the horse’ to understand whether to apply animal welfare, transport or property laws to a case, Easterbrook argues, so we do not need a distinctive ‘law [or in our case, ethics] of cyberspace’. Rather than delve shallowly into the digital, the revised Guidelines should encourage researchers to consider their real-world equivalents: do you need a gatekeeper to gain access to a digital space? If so, treat it as you would a real-world gatekeeper; do your participants know they (or their online posts) are being watched? If not, treat it as you would covert research in the real world. Only in a few rare circumstances does digital research offer ethical
challenges with no suitable moral precedents in the everyday world.

A greater challenge presented itself around the question of participatory research. The sub-committee recommended that BERA encourage democratic approaches to research design, but also recognised the challenges of fitting these into the traditional and sometimes risk-averse structures of the university. The assumption that educational research always involves the university was also problematized. In an increasingly complex educational world, where Multi-Academy Trusts employ their own researchers, independent consultants undertake evaluation work for schools, and participatory and democratic interventions that began as research continue with a life of their own beyond the timescale of the project, a set of Guidelines which assumes that the ‘researcher’ is either a student or academic, easily disentangled from his or her ‘participants’, may have outlived its usefulness.

**REFERENCES**


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**INVITATION TO MEMBERS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE ETHICAL GUIDELINES REVIEW**

The recommendations of the sub-committee were reported to APC and BERA Council, leading to the establishment of an Ethical Guidelines Working Group led by APC’s vice-chair Sara Hennessy (sch30@cam.ac.uk). This group has been charged with seeing through the review of the Guidelines using processes of consultation with BERA members (especially those for whom research ethics is a field of study), exploring issues of research ethics with groups from outside academia, such as within schools, policy circles and funders, and deliberation within the group. The ethics Working Group is made up of Council members and others approached on the basis of their expertise and experience in research ethics. We have also appointed a research assistant, Jodie Pennacchia, who will assist us.

Revision of the Guidelines has started by drawing upon the recommendations of the sub-committee and other views, policies (such as the AOIR with respect to digital research and the SRA guidelines for research outside academia) and ethics literature collated by the Working Group to date. We are also very interested in drawing upon the knowledge and experiences of the wider BERA membership to help identify further gaps or ambiguities in the existing Guidelines. We invite you to contribute to this work, reflecting upon the following questions to support revision of the Guidelines.

- Besides the three key issues highlighted above: digital research, action research and practitioner research outside academia; are there any other important contemporary issues for ethical practice in educational research that are missing from or underdeveloped in the 2011 BERA Ethical Guidelines that are not yet being considered by the Working Group?
- If you have identified any gaps or ambiguities, can you direct us to resources or sources that will help us to understand the issue better and what guidance we should offer?

The Working Group’s focus is on revision of the Guidelines, with a view to presenting revised Ethical Guidelines to BERA Council in 2017, but we are also recommending that as we get closer to finalising the document BERA could engage the membership and wider public on putting the new Guidelines to work. Ideas include developing scenario-based briefings and finding other ways to promote the use of the Guidelines within communities where there are emergent interests in educational research. If you can offer advice on either the revision or utilisation of the Guidelines please get in touch with David Lundie dlundie@marjon.ac.uk and Ruth Boyask ruth.boyask@plymouth.ac.uk. There will also be a members’ consultation process during the course of the early spring.
This partnership between education and countering extremism is not unique to the case of Malala Yousafzai. Education systems in countries where incidents of extremism are most prevalent have received ever-increasing levels of intervention from the international development community (Novelli, 2010). It is argued that supporting education reduces the threat of extremism, and thus benefits the security interests of donor countries. As such, education development has become securitised. This is particularly the case in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the region of Pakistan in which Yousafzai grew up. Yet, concurrently, Pakistan’s schools are attacked by militants more often than in any other country globally, targeted for their perceived political or ‘Western’ status (GCPEA, 2014). Examining this duality of security and insecurity, my research examined how the securitisation of education engenders insecurity, particularly for school students. The research itself comprised a critical discourse analysis of the ‘education development discourse in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’. The analysis began from a theoretical perspective that language and discourse play a crucial role in the construction of the social world. The analysis sought to examine the metaphors, arguments and subject positioning written into the discourse on education and security. In particular, it examined how the subjects of ‘school student’ and ‘extremist’ were discursively produced, and especially whether subjects were drawn into positions of insecurity. A corpus of documents drew together the discourse from international development agencies, political actors, journalists and commentators, and Tehrik-i-Taliban. It is noted that the research was restricted to resources written in English. Although there is not the space here to do so, the question of translation in the context of discourse analysis is a fascinating one to examine, particularly how (and if) discourses alter or permeate between different languages.

Three key findings emerged from the research that shed light on the discursive implications of linking education to security through counter-extremism. First, the discourse presented the role of education in countering extremism as a battle between ‘mindsets’ – an educated versus an extremist mindset. Education thus became a process of ‘mindset transformation’. Such a notion is not only unhelpful, as the discourse ignores the absence of a correlation between a lack of education and participation in extremism (Winthrop & Graff, 2010), but also should be troublesome for education scholars more generally: an education that focuses on transforming mindsets...
is one that appears to impose a homogeneous way of thinking onto the global subject.

Second, in a securitised education discourse, students are presented as ‘soldiers’ and education becomes ‘weaponised’. The fight against extremism becomes devolved to students who must, in Yousafzai’s own words: “wage a global struggle against illiteracy, poverty and terrorism and let us pick up our books and pens. They are our most powerful weapons” (Yousafzai, 2013). This metaphorical weaponisation, as the Tehrik-i-Taliban themselves alluded to, places not only the duty of learning on students, but also the duty of sacrifice, as students become seen as legitimate and politicised targets for attack (Dawar, Jul. 17, 2013).

The third finding uncovered a disturbing blurring between two distinct subjects, the uneducated and the extremist, merging into what I termed, ‘the threatening, uneducated Other’. Through linguistic markers, such as the linkage between education and citizenship stripping the uneducated of citizenship, and the problematic depiction of the region as the ‘borderlands’ between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the uneducated became universally threatening. After all, if education leads to security, then a lack of education must infer insecurity and threat. The research argued that not only was the securitised education discourse putting those inside the schooling system, the students, in positions of insecurity, it was also placing those excluded in such a position too, in danger of being assumed to be extremists. The discourse focused education on the ‘next generation’. It appeared that the ‘current generation’ had been abandoned.

Overall, in examining the mechanisms and implications of a securitised education discourse, the research presented a profound challenge to academic and development communities alike. The research argued that the discursive linkage between education and global security engenders an environment of local insecurity. As such, the thesis calls for a de-securitisation of education and development. Yet this process is by no means a simple one, particularly if one seeks a solution that takes on board the interests of those who, like Malala Yousafzai, conceive of their future as intimately tied to their education. Thus, as well as providing methodological challenges in terms of access to resources, and language limitations, this research project also offered deeper ethical questions regarding how the research responds to the interests of school students. The research left a troubling question: how can the Global North reconcile a foundational belief in the universal value of education with a critical awareness that the antagonisms of the presence of actors from the Global North can bring in endangering that very same value?

REFERENCES
Research evidence suggests that students with lower prior attainment (often students from disadvantaged backgrounds) may do better if taught in mixed-attainment settings (Ireson et al, 2002). However, we know less about why this is, or what characterises successful practice in mixed-attainment classes. We were awarded the BERA BCF Routledge Curriculum Journal Prize in 2016 for work carried out in developing our intervention ‘Best Practice in Mixed Attainment’, which aims to ensure good practice in mixed-attainment teaching contexts.

The Education Endowment Foundation hosts the Teaching and Learning Toolkit (Higgins et al, 2015) to provide teachers and school leaders with summaries of the research evidence in relation to a broad range of possible school practices. One such practice is ‘Setting and streaming’, where there is ‘moderate’ evidence to support a claim of ‘-1 month progress’ – in other words, on average, ‘ability’ grouping has a small, negative impact on student outcomes. Research also suggests that where ability grouping is used, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately concentrated in lower sets and streams, and that students in lower sets make less progress (Francis et al, 2016). Despite this inauspicious evidence, setting by ‘ability’ remains a very common practice in English secondary schools and schools are reluctant to take up mixed-attainment teaching (Kutnick et al, 2005; Taylor et al, 2016).

The Best Practice in Grouping Students project is funded by the Education Endowment Foundation and based at UCL Institute of Education. Our project aims to improve the educational attainment of all students, by ensuring that low attainers’ progress is not detrimentally affected by poor practice, and to assess the relative effectiveness of different methods of grouping students. The project includes two interventions that ensure all students are equally able to access high quality teaching and a rich curriculum. One intervention is Best Practice in Mixed Attainment, currently in its second year and due to report in January 2018.

Prior to the start of the intervention, we spent a year working with three schools (Plashet School, Hinchley Wood School and Kings Norton Girls’ School) exploring Best Practice in Mixed Attainment. Our aim was to work collaboratively with teachers to develop curriculum materials that would then be used to support schools participating in the intervention. We drew on published research evidence and on pilot teachers’ prior practice and experience, working in genuine partnership together.

The schools were selected on the basis that they used mixed-attainment grouping in Maths and English in Year 7, and that they were judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. Two maths teachers and two English teachers participated from each school (with the exception of one school, which only participated for maths). These teachers participated in a series of six workshops hosted at King’s College London (where the project was initially based), and also facilitated research visits to their schools.

Together with the teachers, we established Best Practice Principles for mixed-attainment. Students should be grouped into classes so that there is a broad range of prior attainment in each class. Teachers should have high expectations of all students, regardless of prior attainment. ‘Ability’ is regarded to be flexible rather than fixed. Differentiation should be achieved principally by outcome and by questioning and feedback, rather than through the provision of different tasks. Where teachers choose to group students within the class, groups should be flexible and not by ‘ability’. Teachers provided curriculum exemplars to illustrate these principles in action.
Involvement in the pilot phase of the project made a positive contribution to teaching and learning in the participating schools. This can be illustrated by the results of an evaluation conducted by Margaret Anthony, maths Lead Practitioner at Plashet School. She found that following the introduction of mixed-attainment grouping, student attainment improved and feedback was positive. Furthermore:

“Since embarking on the mixed-attainment project, specific pedagogy meetings have become the norm. The aims of these meetings are to ensure the mathematics department keep abreast of best practice and the development of new pedagogies in mathematics. (...) an effective mechanism of co-planning encourages teachers to work together, to talk and to share experiences.”

At the final pilot workshop, we asked teachers for their feedback:

“Since embarking on the mixed-attainment project, specific pedagogy meetings have become the norm. The aims of these meetings are to ensure the mathematics department keep abreast of best practice and the development of new pedagogies in mathematics. (...) an effective mechanism of co-planning encourages teachers to work together, to talk and to share experiences.”

“I became an even better teacher: my resources are interesting, my students are developing skills that they will have for life rather than learning for an exam. And of course it is a system of greater equality.”

The materials and intervention strategies developed with teacher colleagues during the pilot are now being used in the intervention study with six further secondary schools. At the end of the two-year trial these materials will be made freely available to all schools. We are optimistic that our model of Best Practice in Mixed Attainment, developed collaboratively with teachers, indicates the feasibility of raising attainment through the teaching of mixed groups.

REFERENCES
BERA is pleased to announce the dates for the 2017 competition.

The competition for both of these prestigious and competitive awards will open on 1st February 2017.

The deadline for receipt of applications is 7th March 2017.

Winners will be announced at the end of April 2017.

The prizes for 2017 include:

- £500.00
- Featured article (double page) in BERA’s membership magazine: Research Intelligence

A further announcement with full details of how to submit and criteria will be published in the New Year.

2016 WINNER of the Masters Dissertation Prize, Aileen Ireland reaffirmed the importance of the prize: “I truly appreciate the magnitude of this honour and I am thrilled that the Panel have deemed my work to be worthy of this prize.”
Welcome to the first 2017 edition of Research Intelligence. I don’t think I can be alone in wondering firstly, where did 2016 go; and secondly, what on earth happened? 2016 has seen the most significant changes in politics; certainly in my lifetime. It was the year the British public voted to leave the European Union and the American public voted Donald J Trump the 45th president of the United States of America. Such significant political changes have led to insecurities in the global financial market, a rise in racist and fascist movements and for academics a need to understand this discourse of difference, insecurity and fragility.

In such a fragile climate in which ‘others’ continue to be marginalised and blamed for society’s ills, now is a time when we must as educators continue to put such groups at the forefront of our educational and political agenda. For this reason, this edition of Research Intelligence focuses on the importance of researching groups which remain at the margins. It explores the different complexities and dilemmas that researchers have to address when they focus on ‘hard to reach’ groups. All of the pieces in this edition outline why it’s crucial to continue to explore how marginalised groups are positioned as outsiders and the need to include them in discourses of educational achievement and attainment.

Martin Myers highlights the need to question what we mean by ‘marginalised’ and emphasises that we need to develop strategies in our research that do not simply reproduce a homogenous model of educational success. Rather, we must continue to disrupt this process, to change the ground rules for who conducts research and how we understand that research.

Gavin Bailey suggests that it is important for us, as researchers, to ensure that we consider the wider responsibilities we have as social scientists. Instead of seeing one group of individuals as the problems and all others as bystanders, we have to ensure that we focus on a much more nuanced and holistic account that takes into consideration all aspects of the issues we are addressing.

In emphasising how a post Brexit and post Trump society has resulted in a ‘whitelash’—a taking back of control in a perceived loss of power and privilege in an increasingly diverse society, Claire Crawford suggests that critical education research on race and racism cannot ignore the role of whiteness and white researchers must recognise their own position in this, and question the very structures of white supremacy and how this impacts on the research process. Karl Kitching and Olaniyi Kolawole suggest that in a ‘post-truth’ society it is imperative that we think about our role as researchers, but also what this particular moment in history means to us as educational researchers. Kitching and Kolawole suggest that this moment calls for an urgent need for our research to be engaged as a form of political praxis.

In conducting research with gangs, Ross Deuchar explores how he tackled the delicate trust building needed to work with gang members, through a process of impression management with participants. Sarah Lewthwaite explores how research must be accessible in order to be inclusive. Accessibility must include a process of reflexivity and this must take place through the research design, which may involve competing structures, interests and goals.

Veena Meetoo in her piece questions how when researching race, we must think about how our own racial self-identity and self-positioning affects how we position ourselves as researches, how we deal with ‘race’ in our research relationships and how ‘race’ is tied to our positions of power as knowledge producers. Carl Parsons suggests that we must continue to challenge the discourses of educational success and failure, particularly in its relationship to poverty. As researchers, we must explore the limits we put on the questions we ask and how we disseminate our research to make a difference to those we research.

All of these articles remind us of the need to continue to fight for a society that values equity, social justice and inclusion. As educators we must continue to strive to fight in our classrooms and our lecture theatres, in academic boardrooms and always in our research for those principles which we value the most. The challenge for 2017 is not to become lost amidst political chaos but to find a clear path forward.
Why Research Gypsies?

By Martin Myers, University of Portsmouth

Attending academic conferences and listening to researchers describing their work, I have often been entranced by a seemingly obvious insight into somebody else's world. I have also noted the prevalence for much work to be conducted by those closely affected. The black, single-parent researcher investigating experiences of black, single-parent families or the middle-class home educator presenting work on home educating families. We are all marginalised differently and the exploration of our marginalisation is invariably interesting and hopefully often valuable. When we talk about ‘researching marginalised groups’ however, we usually mean something more specific. We mean certain sorts of people; certain types of marginalisation.

I am also entranced by obscurity. Obscure books, obscure poets, obscure music: obscure culture generally. Sometimes the two collide: obscurity and marginalisation. Worlds that are not understood and worlds we don’t want to understand. Walter Benjamin described the Angel of History transfixed by a past that resembles a single continuous train crash, simultaneously being blown remorselessly into the future. This could be a Gypsy angel surveying the catastrophes of slavery, holocausts and pogroms whilst being endlessly propelled into a storm of the future. It’s a history that seems obscured somehow; the slavery, the holocausts, the pogroms are documented but they drop out of view. Wearing academic hats we contextualise the obscurity as marginalisation; we talk about researching a marginalised group.

Tomorrow I will be interviewing some Gypsy mothers. Hopefully we will largely be talking about their children’s experiences of transitioning from primary to secondary school. I’m easily distracted though, so we will probably end up talking about Strictly Come Dancing or about how poor the bus service around bits of Hampshire has become. I don’t think the reason I’m easily distracted is because Gypsy families’ experiences of the transition from primary to secondary school is an unimportant subject. Lots of young Gypsies don’t do as well at secondary school as they want to or their families hope for. They drop out of school. They do other things. Quite a lot of them drop out of view. Too few go to university. Almost none become academics.

I’m not sure though that the research is so very important. I have that sneaking suspicion that actually a lot of the findings could be quietly anticipated. That somewhere in an academic journal I could easily locate a number of accounts of why Gypsy families often struggle with secondary school, (bullying, racism, cultural appropriation) (Levinson, 2013; Myers et al, 2010). This leaves me wondering why if I know the answer I’m still doing the interviews; and why, if the answers are out in plain sight, the education system has not changed.

It’s an obvious thing to say, but Gypsies are not obscure. Gypsy families live in the same neighbourhoods, parishes, communities and streets as the home-educating, the middle class, the working class, the single parent, and the Black and Asian families. They have lived in those places in the UK
for around 600 years, which is long enough in terms of education policy. When I carry out my interviews tomorrow it will be equally obvious that Gypsy families do not lead obscure lives. They watch the same television programmes and have contracts with the same mobile phone networks as everyone else. They do not inhabit alternative worlds that occasionally intersect; Gypsies and non-Gypsies are not like wizards and muggles (Rowling, 1997). They shop in Tesco or Sainsburys or Waitrose. They share the same needs in life: warmth, comfort, food, human contact. I don't need to do any research into the obscure nature of education provision for Gypsy families. Different maybe but not obscure (just like the requirements of home educators or single parents or Catholics or the ‘gifted and talented’).

I would however prefer to be entranced by other insights. Insights from within Gypsy communities, from Gypsy academics. In part the homogeneity of success stories is part of a process that fails to deliver Gypsy academics. The single continuous line of catastrophe that Benjamin’s Angel of History is transfixed by is also the continuous history of success stories of those at the centre. The terrible homogeneity of so much academic work is part of the process that excludes many people from the margins and selects and promotes the same elites. Researching marginalised groups is not just about the impact of improving subjects’ lives; it is about changing the ground rules for who conducts and understands research.

Educational researchers are right to want to look at marginalised groups. They are right when they try to uncover how education fails some people a lot of the time. I’m a lot less convinced by the emphasis placed on understanding successful strategies – how to make all families just like successful, middle-class professionals. It’s another obvious thing to say, but strategies that reproduce a homogenous model of what success looks like tend not to connect with marginal lives. That’s one reason to keep doing the research: to try and disrupt the flow. The first Professor of Romany Studies in the UK, Thomas Acton, flagged up the need to keep on stating the obvious, to not reinvent the wheel. There’s plenty of evidence in plain sight, so make sure it stays in plain sight.

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Doing Digital Disability Research: Developing accessible technical methods for qualitative research

By Sarah Lewthwaite, University of Southampton

With the advent of social media and mobile, networked devices, services and systems mediate our social world as never before. A technological tipping-point (the ‘computational turn’) is now behind us. This year, we begin to look forward to affective – emotional - computing, augmented and virtual reality and robotics complicating our formal and informal learning spaces (Johnson et al, 2016). As technologies are not value free (Selwyn & Facer, 2013) educational researchers, technologists and teachers have hard questions to ask about the politics of these media, moving beyond functional accounts of ‘what works’ to engage fundamental critical issues about participation and autonomy. This is about establishing the ‘state of the actual’ (Selwyn & Facer, 2013). Importantly, in our dynamic field, ‘digital divides’ represent a moving target. These divides, which identify how particular groups are marginalised, silenced, or missing, are increasingly familiar – but their full extent remains largely unknown, requiring a departure from the hype and inflated expectations that surround new technologies, to deal with a messier reality.

So how should qualitative researchers broach this frame? At present, many social science researchers undertake research that is achieved through an ‘unsystematic mix’ of existing, and often familiar, technologies (Halfpenny & Proctor, 2015: p7). As a result, social media and immersive (virtual or gaming) environments may be used to recruit, convey or stimulate interviews and focus groups, and constitute part of data collection, for example for content and visual analyses or digital ethnography. In addition, screen-capture and the web-based remote screen viewers associated with IT support and user experience research can be used together to record participants’ onscreen activity (see Lewthwaite, 2011). Whilst complicated, this kind of bricolage can produce rich and contextually sensitive qualitative data.

Reflecting on the technologies used in research can usefully move discussion beyond ‘mode effects’ to observe how creative approaches to technology – hacks and workarounds - align with particular research philosophies: notably, those of bricolage and feminist theories of knowledge-making. However, the technologies that are used to articulate research (Skype, Twitter, Facebook and others) are often under-theorised within methods talk. This matters, particularly for education, because technical issues – specifically surrounding the accessibility or inaccessibility of technologies (for example, for disabled users and others who use assistive technologies, such as screen-readers, magnifiers or other adaptations) can represent a partial or complete barrier to research participation. Educators know that tools and materials deployed in the classroom must be accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. Methods must be scrutinised in the same way. If used uncritically, the risks are twofold: first, that we perpetuate the exclusions that are embedded in the technologies we are researching (caught in an uncritical cycle of hype and expectation). Second, that unsafe methods result in research narratives that systematically exclude certain groups, and they are rendered invisible by the research process. Taken together, these issues identify disabled people as being at particular risk of marginalisation in digital research.

In digital spaces, disability is can be recognised in three key aspects (Lewthwaite, 2011). Socially, through discrimination, dis/ablism and in acts and sites of resistance. Secondly, socio-technically, in terms of normalcy and biopolitics. These refer to the ways in which a tool or interface induct norms that constitute disability as a visible, deviant or deficit identity. Key issues here might be the highly normative conditions of a social network, where every action is open to scrutiny and impairments can be subjected to an unequal gaze that produces
disabled subjectivities. The third way in which disability is enacted is technical. This is dependent on the accessibility of a given service or resource, specifically the extent to which it can be accessed, by all users with or without assistive technologies in a given time or place.

Before we can engage critically with social and socio-technical spaces, accessibility must be ensured at a fundamental level, alongside the principles of inclusive research that govern ethical research with disabled people. To do this requires informed planning at the design stage, early evaluation against accessibility guidance, careful piloting and ongoing review in the field.

**PLANNING**

When selecting research tools or investigating a digital environment, seek information about the accessibility. Many providers have accessibility statements about the extent to which they meet standards such as Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0, the de facto international standard that is the template for many national guidelines). Automated accessibility checking tools can also check web-based media against these standards. Together these give a broad sense of the accessibility of tools and services, but they cannot substitute for real people. For this reason, consulting stakeholders and experts on the accessibility and efficacy of methods at the design stage is essential.

**PILOTING**

Individual adjustment is a core constituent of universal design. As there are no complete universally accessible digital methods that will work for all people in all situations, thought needs to be given to the precise context and activities that participants will engage in during research. Piloting is an important phase of research and an opportunity to develop the methods to be used and gauge potential and alternative modes of participation.

**FIELDWORK**

Constant evaluation of methods throughout data collection allows methods to be tailored to the requirements of participants. When working between and across multiple technologies, vigilance is needed for alternative techniques, modes and, where necessary, alternative methods. This can be structured through participant involvement at the recruitment stage, and in checking through debriefs. Without this scope for reworking, approaches that could be deemed ‘universal’ can result in new forms of exclusion.

If research is to be inclusive, it must be accessible. Accessibility issues cannot necessarily be eradicated, but when reflexively engaged they can be more creatively contested. Research design is frequently mediated and remediated within a nexus of (sometimes) competing structures, interests and tools. There are clear moral, ethical and legal imperatives to conduct accessible research. By placing those who are at the edge of these interests at the centre, I believe we can effect much more robust claims to knowledge.

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Conducting Research with Gang Members: Insights from a decade of ethnographic research

By Ross Deuchar, University of the West of Scotland

Over the past decade, my research has been focused on exploring the nature and impact of gang culture and gang violence among disadvantaged young people. Most of my work has been ethnographic in nature, involving the use of participant observation and in-depth semi-structured and life history interviews conducted in a variety of settings including youth clubs, care homes, secure accommodation and prisons. Since gang membership and gang violence is most often a predominantly male pursuit, the focus of my research has often been centred on young men’s experiences. Many of those I have worked with could be described as ‘cop fearing’ in nature: they are distrustful of the police, and are suspicious of any strangers for fear they might be undercover officers. They have also been let down by many adults in their lives, so are naturally wary. Engaging in informal conversation with the youngsters on the streets, in youth clubs or even in prisons is therefore vital in order to put them at ease.

I have often grappled with the tensions associated with being reflexive and responsive to empirical context on the one hand and meeting the often stringent requirements of university ethics committees on the other. For instance, I have found that regulatory ethical bodies’ expectations for gaining informed consent are often guided by a focus on explicit cover (Fine, 1993). There is an expectation that I should make as complete an announcement about the goals and fine details of the research as possible to participants at a very early stage in a project. This is in contrast to the ethnographer's preferred focus on shallow cover, where he/she explains the research intentions to participants but is intentionally somewhat vague about the fine details in the beginning (Fine, 1993). The focus on explicit cover often involves the need to design a participant information sheet that provides full relevant details of the nature, object and duration of each study. For studies like my own, it also involves making
participants fully aware that they should avoid disclosing any details about criminal activity they know about or anything that might be planned, since such information would need to be passed on.

As a result of this, I have sometimes found that the participant information sheets I have used have very much resembled a police caution to the young men I work with. The mention of ‘criminal activities’ is also contentious, since many of the young men involved in gangs regularly drink in public places and use recreational drugs like cannabis. I have, at times, struggled to put ethical expectations and priorities across to them in a way that also recognises and respects their routine (and often fairly innocuous) youth pastimes.

Conscious of the way in which the ethical procedures can potentially undermine the delicate trust-building phase that is essential when working with hard to reach groups like young gang members, I have frequently taken careful steps to maintain their trust through impression management (Goffman, 1959). The most common means of impression management I have adopted is to foster and encourage humour and ensure that I engage in friendly ‘banter’ with the young participants. Since the vast majority of my participants have been young males, I have been able to use gender to my advantage and engage in informal discussions with them that reflect the ‘hegemonic’ forms of masculine identity so commonly found among working class, disadvantaged young males (Deuchar, 2013). For example, in Glasgow’s deprived housing schemes simply being aware of the weekend’s football scores and the names of the top premier division players has often been an important means of earning the respect and trust of the young men.

Through becoming a ‘marginal native’, I have fitted in within the young men’s social landscapes while also firmly positioning myself as an academic researcher, complete with sufficient levels of emotional distance (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). At times, this emotional distance has been challenging for me when some of the young men have shared their harrowing stories of disadvantage that have compelled them to view their gang as a surrogate family and violence as a compensatory means of gaining status, recognition and respect.

The work I have been engaged with has constantly involved me grappling with risks, challenges and ethical dilemmas. Often, I have been unable to predict what I might encounter out in the field and have had to make personal, reflexive, context-specific decisions. This stands in stark contrast to the anticipatory, disembodied decision-making process that is often demanded of us by prescriptive ethical guidelines (Bosk & de Vries, 2004; Deuchar, 2016).

Over the past ten years, I have gained wide-ranging new insights into, and empathy for, the challenges faced by marginalised young men in gangs. But, beyond this I have also learned that ‘perfection is professionally unobtainable’ (Fine, 1993: 290). The requirements of ethics committees are important and useful, but compromises with idealised standards will often have to be made. In making those compromises over the past decade, I realise now that I have become more ethical and moral in every research decision that I have to make, while also ensuring that the most disadvantaged have been given a voice through my research.

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If ethical research practice requires us to do good and avoid harm, does this also include avoiding harm to these activists? Is the research for the good of the state, society, or particular parts of society, thus needing us to consider 'the wider ethical responsibilities of social sciences'? (Downes, Kelly & Westmarland, 2014). While responses may come easier if we see one set of people as the problem, and everyone else as an innocent bystander, a more nuanced and holistic approach is, I believe, necessary.

Indeed, 2016, with the white terrorist killing of Jo Cox, Brexit, and the election of Donald Trump, has seen a great deal written about the populist right, alt-right and far right, alongside the conceptualisation of a segment of society described as ‘the left behind’ or ‘the white working classes’. This is nothing new, however, with the same form of analysis in use when the BNP had some success in the European Elections of 2009. When taken as easily definable problems, the far right and a particular demographic can then be the scapegoat for what is a bigger and more diffuse issue.

First, the far-right groups I have researched are not a coherent movement, nor are particular groups necessarily internally coherent. At a leadership level, groups disagree on what they are for, what they are against, and how to campaign. For example, the EDL had a pro-Israel stance as their enemy’s enemy is a friend, whereas other groups are antisemitic. Within a group’s participants there is a range of thought and engagement, with some being long-term true believers but many more being short-term and relatively ignorant of what they had signed up to. It is no surprise that when membership was at a peak, most of the BNP members only ever joined for one year. Second, the focus on the poorer segments of white populations is an extremely partial telling of the story of the far right, populist right, Brexit or Trump. While there is a skew, such that those in the particular white and working class demographic are more likely to have supported or voted in this way, there are still significant numbers of those in the white and middle class demographic that did too. As Danny Dorling points out, as a total number more middle-class people voted leave in the recent referendum, than working-class people (Dorling, 2016).

Ethical research working towards equality and tolerance is not best served by a focus on the usual bogeyman groups and ‘dangerous classes’. Stereotyping a population or a set of voters and activists, especially if using emotive language like ‘extremist’, can mean alienating them further, and offers no way back for them. More importantly, it...
ignores the role of the dominant sections of society, and the institutional biases of all nation states. As Henry Louis Gates Jr put it back in 1996, 'The real power commanded by the racist is likely to vary inversely with the vulgarity with which it is expressed.' The powerful can wash their hands and point to academic research that shows that it is the poor people that did it, whether we are talking about hate crime, Brexit or Trump. The state can present itself as officially anti-racist. I suspect there are many barriers to rethinking how we research politics and racism. There is a path dependency that sees people like me doing research on far-right politics, because others have made it a topic of interest. Similarly, once we accept demographic segmentation as a starting point for research, it is tempting to take the short cut of only focusing on the place where we know we will find the easiest results. As a journalist pointed out to me, there is a reason why particular estates are repeatedly featured: they are near to the office and you know you'll only have to approach three people and not six to get the juicy quote. Without funding, we end up with research that takes election results as a ‘proxy for poor race relations’ (Easton, 2008), despite the inherent problems with this approach.

Finally, though, there remains a highly mechanistic view of society, with coherent groups and individuals following particular paths with simple causal mechanisms. In this view, isolated communities, parallel lives, economic hardship and far right propaganda are straightforwardly causal for racism, far right support, hate crime and Brexit. This view is undermined by the subcultural nature of social movements, the strength of working class antifascism, the nature of communication across boundaries and, most importantly, holistic psychosocial complexities. The story of Thomas Mair, Jo Cox’s killer, begins with a rejection by his mother as she made a new family with a Caribbean immigrant, and continued with a mix of decades of neo-Nazi propaganda and obsession, mental health issues and bereavement, and a fear of losing his home. Similar stories are found in the backgrounds of other extremists, radical Islamist and far right. While it is right to condemn, it is only by understanding such complexity that the caring professions, especially teachers and social workers, can give the support that might make such paths less likely. Exoticising individuals and groups as ‘not us’ gets us nowhere.

Stereotyping a population or a set of voters and activists, especially if using emotive language like ‘extremist’, can mean alienating them further, and offers no way back for them.

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Conducting research with minority ethnic students involves reflections and responsibilities that go beyond the standard ethical procedures researchers conventionally adhere to.

My experiences as a ‘South Asian’ woman researching South Asian and Muslim female students have raised a number of challenges: as a racialised subject, I had to navigate, firstly, school staff’s expectations to perform multiple roles that moved beyond solely being a researcher, and secondly, my relationship as a researcher/role model with the students. In addition, researching South Asian and Muslim girls raised issues of power that we, as researchers, bring with us to the settings in which we conduct our research.

I wish to highlight what can be seen as the contradictions, or the ‘double-edged sword’ of doing ‘race’ research in schools: by studying processes of racialisation, ‘race’ research may reinforce categories of difference, but may also provide critical spaces for discussion, building alliances, and creating solidarities through shared experiences, thus enhancing understandings of marginalisation.

My recently completed doctoral study was conducted in one secondary school (Meetoo, 2016). Whilst my experiences may be specific to this study, a number of similar experiences have been documented by other scholars doing ‘race’ research (Bhopal, 1997; Egharevba, 2001). Conducting research in schools is a complex process, from gaining and sustaining access, to building relationships with students and staff. Bound by these complexities, there were moments where lines were crossed from being a researcher, to other roles specific to being racialised as a South Asian woman.

1. REIFYING ‘RACE’ THROUGH RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

It is long established in the social sciences that ‘race’ is a fiction and given substance through performance, action and utterance, where repetition makes it seem real. ‘Race’, then, is an absent presence that haunts our social constructionist interpretation (Nayak, 2006). This signals one ethical dilemma: doing research which recognises that categories of ‘race’ are not essentialist is problematic as we often reify categories that we are seeking to abolish through the research we do.

For my doctoral study, access to the school was granted because I was seen by the gatekeeper as a South Asian woman who could act as a role model for the South Asian and Muslim girls. I was seen as someone the girls would be better able to relate to, as opposed to the school’s majority white, middle class teachers. I ran Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) lessons with another South Asian teacher, where we talked about multicultural identity, and issues at home and school. With the other South Asian teacher, I performed ‘South Asianess’ and (re) created ‘race’ through my encounters with the girls.

There were indeed similarities between the teacher, the girls and myself: we could be physically interpreted as South Asian, and we shared some familial expectations of how we, as women and girls, should behave. These perceived commonalities enabled me to present myself as an ‘insider’. However,
we did not all share similar socioeconomic backgrounds, migration routes, nor the same levels of gendered surveillance and generation. These significant differences were at risk of being silenced, overlooked, downplayed or simply forgotten in the moments of doing research and enacting being same ‘race’ role models. Indeed, same race role models have been criticised for being based on perceived biological similarities (that is, skin colour) rather than social relations, and perpetuating reductionist constructions of ‘race’ (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012).

2. EMPOWERMENT AND ANTI-RACISM THROUGH SAME ‘RACE’ RESEARCHERS AND ROLE MODELS?

A number of benefits of same ‘race’ role models have been evidenced in educational contexts, including a better understanding that minority ethnic teachers potentially have of local communities and students with similar socio-cultural backgrounds, the educative role they play for white pupils to help counteract negative racial stereotypes, and the increased likelihood that minority ethnic parents will be more willing to communicate with the school through ethnic minority teachers (Sewell, 1997; Bush et al, 2006). My own focus groups with the girls appeared to have positive effects: they explicitly welcomed my presence, telling me how much they liked the sessions because they had the space to talk about issues that affected them without feeling embarrassed, with someone ‘like them’.

The same ‘race’ identification also led the South Asian teacher to open up about her own experiences of exclusion, which offered further insights into race relations in the school. She explained the burden of being the ‘Asian’ teacher: she was assumed to ‘know everything’ about forced marriage and honour killing, was pigeon holed as a having expertise on ‘race’ issues, and seen to hold the solutions to problems of South Asian and Muslim girls. She also spoke extensively about being treated unfairly (for example, being given more work in comparison to other ‘white’ colleagues), reflecting other findings that suggest BME teachers experience marginalisation (Powney et al, 2003).

Therefore, same ‘race’ identification can facilitate dialogue and open up other non-threatening spaces where experiences can be shared. Powerful anti-racist spaces may be produced, especially when such spaces deal with ‘race’ in our encounters with participants, and how ‘race’ is intrinsically tied to our positions of power as knowledge producers (Nayak, 2006). There is a continued need to be reflexive of the tensions and contradictions in doing ‘race’ research: the double-edged sword of engaging with ‘race’ as a category of difference brings with it the reproduction of ‘race’, but also moments of opportunity with participants for critical dialogue.

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‘Race’ research may reinforce categories of difference, but may also provide critical spaces for discussion, building alliances, and creating solidarities through shared experiences.
In our experience, many educational researchers and community workers who engage with policy-makers and the media on the experiences of marginalised communities feel relative frustration about how their work is taken up in public and political rhetoric. Some are justifiably frustrated that their work is not listened to at all. The frustrations of tenured academics with privileged social status(es) stem from, but of course pale in comparison to, the everyday online and offline racist, misogynist and classed threats faced by marginalised social groups. This is particularly true given the rise of openly far-right, political movements across Europe and the United States, whose existence, as yet, does not threaten the majority of (white, male, middle class) academics.

The term ‘post-truth’ was named as the Oxford English Dictionary ‘word of 2016’, in tacit reference to some of the rhetoric and claims associated with far-right movements. Certainly, this term must cause further frustration for many. But the term calls for a pause to think about our role as ‘researchers’, a term that is all too easily deployed to suggest we unproblematically and benignly ‘report’ on objective conditions of marginalisation. The issue of research with marginalised groups raises multiple, hugely significant ethical questions, including insider/outside status, gaining academic status while these groups are further minoritised, and so on. But we wish to focus on the wider question of what the ‘post-truth’ moment calls on us as education researchers to do. We believe there is an urgent need for research with marginalised groups to be engaged as political praxis, in two specific ways.

The first engagement is with the politics of knowledge production itself. Foucauldian thought has long emphasised that the question of whether knowledge has a universal truth is less politically relevant than the ways that knowledge is mobilised and normalised (Foucault, 1980). As such, researchers carry an admittedly intense, unforgiving responsibility to ‘be political’ about their work with marginalised groups; to not only portray it to various publics (communities, media, schools, policy-makers, fellow researchers) but to respond to, reflexively learn from, and, where necessary, disagree with how it is portrayed amongst these publics. One useful recent example is where colleagues ‘spoke back’ to the media, NGO and Governmental constructions of the LGBT lives we researched as being inherently ‘at risk’ (Bryan & Mayock, 2013). In the context of Governments co-opting migration scholarship and community supports, Karl has also argued we must move beyond the question ‘how does the state govern citizens and noncitizens?’, and interrogate how the very normality of such categories is caught up in the complex ordering of unjust education societies (Kitching, 2014).

ETHICS OF SURVIVAL
The second, more fundamental engagement is with the debt we as researchers owe to generations of social movements for both their intellectual legacy and their ongoing work in making racism, sexism, class stratification, ableism and homophobia, amongst other issues, worthy of political and educational research relevance. Institutional racism, for example, while precariously positioned within...
media and policy discourse (and more palatable than whiteness studies scholarship), would not be a viable option for research were it not for the social movements protesting it (Richardson, 2005).

We are indebted to women of colour and critical race theorists in particular for cultivating what Garcia-Rojas (2016) describes as ‘ethics of survival’ for marginalised groups: for epistemologically and practically “founding worldviews... that ignite and cultivate individual passions and social erotics” (2016: 2). Finding creative ways to think about marginalisation, and how it distorts and individualises collective educational desire is key to research as praxis (Mirza, 2009). Olaniyi’s current research with Nigerian higher and further education students offers counter-stories, in the Critical Race tradition, that refuse their prevailing framings as disinterested in education in Ireland and, in some cases, not having the intellectual ability to excel. Olaniyi’s research is a side-project to his own doctoral research, that he nevertheless felt the urgency to conduct. Many participants in Olaniyi’s study had to formulate diverse kinds of coping strategies to deal with the racialised, gendered and classed forms of exclusion they suffered. A few, for instance, mentioned working alone, and becoming a ‘one-person soldier’ to deal with being excluded from study groups. A few participants related they were on one form of anti-depressant or another to be able to cope with their daily realities within education. But many took solace in networking with each other and helping one another, forming cohorts of Nigerian students in their institutions. Many also related that they studied very hard just to prove they can do it. Thus these students, while forced to individualise and fix ‘their problems’, also find ways of thriving in environments that do not recognise their capacity to intellectually organise.

Recent political upheavals remind us not simply of the dangers of far-right extremism, but also of the limits of a liberal consensualism and meritocratic individualism that fails to challenge the normalisation of white national(ist) educational superiority. The urgency for researchers to collectively mobilise counter-narratives and to argue for complexity over anti-intellectualism has never been greater.

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Despite determined claims to the contrary, both Brexit and the election of Donald Trump are about race. Whilst each respective campaign was couched in a superficially palatable and colourblind (but deeply racially coded) commitment to ‘taking back’ control for their respective citizens, both claimed the mantle of patriotism and promised a political hardline on restrictive immigration.

Today, on both sides of the Atlantic, political histories are being written, not despite racism, but because of it – a so-called ‘Whitelash’ (Ryan, 2016) against a perceived loss of power and privilege in an increasingly diverse society. As suggested by Toni Morrison: “So scary are the consequences of a collapse of white privilege that many... have flocked to a political platform that supports and translates violence against the defenseless as strength” (Morrison, 2016). Notions of Brexit and Trump’s vision of America are both (fundamentally if not explicitly) about protecting a racial order in which Whiteness reigns supreme. If we are truly serious about ‘taking control’ or making a nation ‘great again’, we must ensure that every child can go to school free from fear, and that opportunities are equally available to all.

The marked increase in racist and xenophobic attacks following both votes drives home the desperate need for continued research in our education systems. However, until the rhetoric of shock and outrage to the recent events move us to action, there is a danger that even well meaning ‘liberal’ critics will become complicit in the processes that they outwardly deplore. Outrage without action could merely absolve us from responsibility and worsen the situation. The need for action is especially urgent for those White people who do not consider themselves racist; Whiteness may simply become recast as witness to racism, but without any action to dismantle the enduring system of White supremacy. Merely being reflexive about the way in which one is complicit in the oppression of others does not make this oppression excusable or acceptable (Ahmed, 2004). In times of extremes, there is a responsibility to go further. If the scholar-activist Derrick Bell taught the academy anything, it is that one person’s actions can and do make a difference. It may not be enough to notice or write about race and racism in education; sometimes we are called to ‘confront authority’ (Bell, 1994).

As scholars in an academy dominated by White persons (87%), there is an urgent need to critically consider how White academics, researchers and educators, specifically, can contribute to the disruption of White supremacy. White scholars are all too often driven to inaction for fear of: ‘overstepping’ boundaries; ‘offending’ or patronising colleagues or participants of colour (Bergerson, 2003); or are themselves unwilling to acknowledge the existence of Whiteness as a political project to defend and enforce the racialised social order.

Critical race theory (CRT) is a radical perspective that seeks to expose the racialised character of society and, in particular, to document and interrupt the taken-for-granted assumptions that reinforce the racist status quo. Such a perspective requires constant critical reflection and poses particular challenges for White researchers. As a White, female, critical race theorist, I urge all scholars to tirelessly question the dominant-culture process of conducting research with minoritised people, keeping a firm view on their own potential to reinforce injustice, further marginalise minority communities, and perpetuate White hegemony.

1 “Vote Leave, Take Control” (Vote Leave campaign slogan) and “Make America Great Again” (Trump campaign slogan). 2 ‘Race and religious hate crimes rose 41% after EU vote’ suggest recent Home Office figures, see http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-37649982 and ‘The Southern Poverty Law Center counted 867 cases of hateful harassment or intimidation in the United States in the 10 days after the November 8 election,’ see http://edition.cnn.com/2016/11/10/us/post-election-hate-crimes-and-fears-trnd.
Whilst several scholars have explored the effects of White researchers (as ‘cultural outsiders’) researching minority ethnic persons’ experiences and narratives (as ‘cultural insiders’) (Laimputtong, 2010), ultimately, although it may seem a ‘safe’, ‘familiar’ and/or ‘culturally centred’ approach for participants, the notion of restricting research in race and racism in education to ‘cultural insiders’ is not only practically irrational but also politically and ontologically unreasonable. For example, in the UK there are only 57 Black male professors and 17 Black female professors (Bhopal, 2016) (out of a total 14,315 professors; around 0.5% of all professors), and yet, 5.5% of students in UK state-funded primary and secondary schools are classified as ‘Black’, or 11% if you include those of White-Black African/Caribbean backgrounds.

Whilst acknowledging the criticisms of not being ‘matched’ to many of the participants in my own research (race/nationality/gender) (Mizock et al, 2012), it would be misconceived to conclude that differences of skin alone impacted upon the ‘truthfulness’ of the participants’ responses (Phoenix, 1994). In my own experiences, although the participants – both Black and White - never mistook me for ‘one of their own,’ the participants did create a space for me. With time spent together, experiencing lived realities alongside them as a living and reacting human being, the participants permitted me their truths, as they perceived them to be – each unique.

I thus challenge any simplistic assumption that a single dimension of identity (even one as pivotal as race) is a barrier to ‘cross-cultural’ research in education, on the grounds that ‘matching’ researcher and participant: 1) ignores the dynamic interaction of social difference, 2) proposes mono-culturality, in which members are homogenised along racial and ethnic lines, and 3) treats racial identity as separate to other identities, to include gender, age, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and individual norms, mores, values and beliefs.

What is most vital to critical education research on race and racism is that White researchers do not ignore the presence of difference between interviewer and participant; doing so is a privileged viewpoint that has great potential to perpetuate White hegemony and further marginalise minority ethnic groups (Bergerson, 2003). Additionally, by not acknowledging one’s own racial positioning, a White researcher can fail to recognise the ways in which structures of White supremacy impact on the whole research process, and therefore contribute to reinforcing the racial order.

Critical Race Theory offers an opportunity to expose Whiteness as an unspoken yet pervasive ideology, and acknowledge how Whiteness and White privilege are institutionalised in the process of schooling. For a critical race theorist, central-guiding questions may include: Whose interests are being served through this research? How and when are racialised dynamics produced and negotiated within the interview process? How are participants’ narratives given meaning in the analysis? How am I centreing the voices of my participants in the presentation of the data (and not re-centring my own voice: a White voice) (Chadderton, 2012)?

Collectively, the academy has a powerful capacity to challenge the ‘White gaze’ of traditional ethnographic research, and in the spirit of Derrick Bell, confront the ‘Whitelash’ we are witnessing in political arenas, and in society more broadly, on both sides of the Atlantic.

REFERENCES

Howard Becker’s *Outsiders*, first published in 1963, dealt with a wider phenomenon than inequalities in education. Becker writes of the *rule creators* and *rule enforcers* and these maintain a stratified society, conformers and deviants, insiders and outsiders which adds up to winners and losers. Becker was amongst the first to write of *labelling theory* (Becker, 1963: 178), although he was critical of it as theory. What it suggests to us is that individuals and groups are labelled by particular quarters in society, which often extends through the media to be a broad cultural condemnation. The labels are also constructs designed by the *rule creators*.

I was drawn (back) to this book for two reasons: firstly, because we have, in Britain, groups and communities which are not benefiting from educational provision and are disadvantaged in multiple, mutually reinforcing ways; secondly, this situation is not just long well-known, and not explicitly countered, but is created and sustained by national policies coupled with a subtle blaming culture.

The *Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission* (now just *The Social Mobility Commission*) in its 2013 report states its role as one which ‘holds the Government’s feet to the fire’ (p. 1) and goes on to acknowledge, as so many reports do, the enduring social class attainment gap. It refers to this gap as ‘stubborn’ and uses the term seven times placing responsibility on the victims; it is not exactly that they are stubborn but the problem situated within them. The report implies too that Government is intervening sufficiently to expect levels of educational inequality to diminish.

However, it is neither intervening sufficiently, nor is it targeting the sources and burdens that diminish the chances for impoverished children (Parsons, 2016).

In a quite credible class contest explanation, the *rule creators* ensure a particular class/status group benefits from the content of English state education and the way it is assessed. In the past ten years we have seen an intensifying of assessment practices, a narrowing of the curriculum and a great reduction in the proportions of GCSE courses that can be teacher-assessed. The character of the curriculum and accompanying assessments have increasingly put less educationally astute families and learners at a disadvantage. This trend was evident under Labour but speeded up by the later Coalition and Conservative administrations. I give the example of one school, the *Marlowe Academy* in Ramsgate, Kent, designated a ‘School in Extremely Challenging Circumstances’, which had twice been in the press as ‘the worst school in the country’ before it became a sponsored academy in 2005. The academy’s curriculum was designed, from the outset, to give progression routes from 14-19 attuned to the benchmark attainment measure at that time heavily based on vocational courses, where as many as four GCSE equivalents could be achieved via BTEC courses and when maths and English were not a necessary part of the 5A*-C criterion. Year after year results improved, until in 2009, the Academy at 68% was within 4% of the national average (Parsons, 2012: 100) and was a *DCSF Case Study school* in 2010. Then the Labour Government’s Secretary of State
for Education, Ed Balls, announced that from June 2010, the new GCSE floor target for schools would be 30% of pupils gaining 5A*-C grades including mathematics and English. Achieving GCSE equivalents from BTEC courses was also restricted. This plunged the school to near the bottom of the league tables. The Academy struggled to get above 20%. These targets removed from young people the sense of achievement and the entry qualification for college and purposeful further vocational training. The hitherto successful head teacher ‘left’ after the reduced results in 2011. The changes represented a status protection move reinforcing class-related differentiation.

The Marlowe Academy was an innovative 8am – 5pm school, where homework sessions were built into the day, there was real motivation at Key Stage 4, attendance and behaviour were good and it seemed to be a model of practice for disadvantaged communities. The policy changes so damaging to the academy were felt by many to be a conspiracy and betrayal designed to prevent a working class school from doing well.

Stacking of the odds against the poor by narrowed curricula and formal examination processes is complemented by pressure from the rule enforcers for school improvement; the focus is limited to schools solving the problem of family income inequality in educational attainment. The exhortation to ‘narrow the gap’ is loud but the gap between the 14% of free school meals pupils and the average attainment at 5A*-C GCSEs from 2011 to 2015 remains unchanged at a little over 20% (DfE, 2015).

The rule creators and rule enforcers create an educational environment where this inequality exists; they label the ‘failures’ and attach blame to poor parenting and a lack of resilience and aspiration. There is a denial of the link with poverty, sometimes covert, sometimes acknowledged with politicians saying, ‘it does not vote in my constituency’, or explicit and forceful such as when a Director of Education says to a gathering of head teachers, ‘This professor says that low attainment is related to low income. Well, let me tell you that in this authority, poverty is not an excuse for low attainment’ (paraphrased from verbal report).

Becker’s studies of Outsiders and the social mechanisms he identifies which create them should alert researchers to press harder for an ecological understanding of educational experience and performance. The stubborn link between deprivation and attainment endures because of the way we have constructed our education system and, from a broader sociological perspective, the numbers of pupils we allow to grow up poor. Researchers have to examine the limits they put on the questions they ask and the vigour and targeting of dissemination and advocacy conclusions.

REFERENCES

BERA COUNCIL VACANCIES

2017

We run an annual election every year to elect members to our Board of Trustees (BERA Council). Council is the strategy setting body for the Association and meets three times a year (one of which is a two night residential meeting).

HOW MANY VACANCIES?
There are up to four vacant general positions on BERA Council in 2017.

HOW LONG IS THE TERM OF OFFICE?
Council members are elected for 3 years and are eligible to re-stand for election at the end of their first term.

WHAT’S INVOLVED?
As a BERA Council member, you are expected to attend meetings to offer your expertise on areas of critical importance to the Association and field of educational research. You are also expected to join one of the four main standing committees for the duration of your term.

WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR:
Engaged, committed and well placed members of the educational research community to help shape and deliver the strategic decisions made by Council.

COUNCIL GENERAL POSITIONS
Specifically, we are looking for well placed, collegiate members of BERA who have a strong background in academic publications, strong connections to policy and practice stakeholder communities and can help to shape the strategic direction and implementation of BERA’s work in the next four years.

ELIGIBILITY: ✔️
To be eligible to stand, candidates must be fully paid up members of BERA at the time of the nominations process opening.

Their proposers must also be fully paid up members of BERA at the time of the nominations process opening.

Candidates must not be ineligible to stand according to the rules set out by the Charity Commission or Companies House.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:

Candidates & Proposers:
Nominations open 1st Feb 2017
Nominations close 22nd Feb 2017

Candidates & Eligible Voters:
Formal election opens 1st March 2017
Election closes 22nd March 2017

Results:
31st March 2017

Further information will be released via the BERA Members Newsletter and the BERA website in the New Year.
**CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO FUTURE ISSUES OF RESEARCH INTELLIGENCE**

The next issue of *RI* (RI 133, Summer 2017) will focus on Methodological Challenges.

*RI (Research Intelligence)* is BERA’s primary record of members’ contributions to the field. Each issue is dedicated to a holistic investigation of a topical theme of interest to the field of educational researchers, and those with an interest in the impact of educational research on policy and practice. We regularly invite contributions from researchers at different stages in their career to demonstrate the Association’s commitment to engagement, capacity and dissemination.

If you have recently completed research that you feel demonstrates a strong link to upcoming themes as outlined above, then please summarise in 900-1000 words and send to the Editor c/o beraresearchintelligence@gmail.com with the subject line “RI 133”. The deadline for *RI* 133 papers will be 5th May, 2017.

**OPINION AND GENERAL CONTRIBUTIONS – THE BERA BLOG**

Members are invited to contribute to the BERA Blog, with brief opinion pieces discussing other current critical issues affecting education research and its stakeholders. We also encourage members to submit contributions discussing initiatives of strategic importance to education research from any sector of activity. Members wishing to respond to a published *RI* article should contact beraresearchintelligence@gmail.com. We would like to receive brief pieces relevant to agencies or individuals who use educational research. We would particularly welcome contributions sharing news in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

SIG convenors can use the medium of the BERA Blog to update all BERA members of their activities or open up a particular issue for debate. Accounts of events supported by BERA are also very welcome. Contributions should be 500-750 words and be sent to Farzana.Rahman@bera.ac.uk making clear they are containing a potential blog post. In all types of submissions please avoid the use of footnotes and keep the number of references to a minimum. Please see https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog for examples of acceptable formats and additional details.

**NOTES FOR RESEARCH INTELLIGENCE CONTRIBUTORS**

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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

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UCL, Institute of Education

PROFESSOR GERT BIESTA
Brunel University London

DR NICOLA ROLLOCK
University of Birmingham

PROFESSOR GERRY CZERNIAWSKI
University of East London

KEY DEADLINES

13 March 2017
Authors notified of outcome of submission

01 May 2017
Early bird registration deadline
All presenting authors to be registered

23 May 2017
Authors notified of date and time of presentation

UPCOMING EVENTS

WHAT CAN NEUROSCIENCE OFFER ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION RESEARCH?
10 March 2017
Newman University

CRITICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO EDTECH RESEARCH
7 April 2017
The Open University, Milton Keynes

PRACTICAL THEORY: THE UTILITY OF SOCIAL THEORY AS TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
20 April 2017
Sheffield Hallam University

FAITH, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND RACE
18 May 2017
Nottingham Conference Centre

PRISON TEACHERS MATTER
23 May 2017
House of Lords

PRACTITIONER RESEARCH IN MATHEMATICS EDUCATION (PRIME)
17 June 2017
London Mathematical Society, London

BERA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2017
4 September 2017
Jurys Inn, Brighton Waterfront

For more information or to register for these events and more, visit: events@bera.ac.uk