This paper considers the implications of the Troops to Teaching (TtT) programme, introduced in England in autumn 2013, for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and race equality. Supported by both the previous Labour government (1997-2010) and the present Coalition government, TtT will fast-track ex-armed service members to teach in schools, without necessarily the requirement of a university degree.

This paper reports on an analysis of policy and media discourse around the controversial programme, spanning the last five years. It also considers similar initiatives internationally.

Research questions included:

Which social groups is the programme aimed at?

What are the implications of the programme for ITE?

How does the programme relate to the wider educational and political context and what is the state hoping to achieve?

Employing theories of white supremacy, the notion of tacit intentionality (Gillborn, 2005) and Althusser’s (1971) concept of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatus, I argue that this initiative both stems from, and contributes to, a system of social privilege and oppression in education. Despite appearing to be aimed at all young people, the planned TtT initiative is actually aimed at poor and racially subordinated youth. This is likely to further entrench polarisation in a system which already provides two tier educational provision: TtT will be a programme for the inner-city disadvantaged, whilst wealthier, whiter schools will mostly continue to get highly qualified teachers. Moreover, TtT contributes to a wider devaluing of current ITE; ITE itself is rendered virtually irrelevant, as it seems TtT teachers will not be subject specialists, rather will be expected to provide military-style discipline, the skills for which they will be expected to bring with them. More sinister, I argue that TtT is part of the wider militarisation of education. This military-industrial-education complex seeks to contain and police young people who are marginalised along lines of race and class, and contributes to a wider move to increase ideological support for foreign wars - both aims ultimately in the service of neoliberal objectives which will feed social inequalities.
