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A BLACK CURRICULUM OR AN ACCURATE CURRICULUM?

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Dr Sheine Peart

Dr Sheine Peart

Associate Professor in Access, Equality and Inclusion, Bishop Grosseteste University

Co-author: Professor Jonathan Glazzard, IEUC Fellow, and Professor of Education for Social Justice, University of Hull



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Education has the power to transform attitudes, values and beliefs. Education can advance equity through fostering awareness of social injustice, discrimination and prejudice and it provides us with hope that the future will be better for minoritised individuals and groups.

Given the prevalence of hate crime in the UK and globally, it is becoming increasingly important that the school curriculum addresses matters related to race and racism. In England and Wales specifically, [statistics](#) show that there were 98,799 reported crimes related to race in 2023/24. The same data set also suggests that reported hate crimes overall have more than trebled since 2012, which is extremely concerning. Education serves several important purposes, but despite the fact that one of the aims of the [National Curriculum](#) in England is to provide 'pupils with an introduction to the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens', the focus on developing citizenship is often lost at the expense of developing subject knowledge.

Nelson Mandela's reminder that 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world' is just as important now as it was when he expressed this in 1994. Education has the power to transform attitudes, values and beliefs. Education can advance equity through fostering awareness of social injustice, discrimination and prejudice and it provides us with hope that the future will be better for minoritised individuals and groups. [Connell](#), back in 1993, argued that social justice should not be seen as an 'add-on' but, crucially, is fundamental to a good education. However, [Wrigley](#) argues that neo-conservative policies in countries in the Global North have resulted in the introduction of curricula which is systematically divorced from young people's life experience and concerns. The current National Curriculum in England does not address race, yet [evidence](#) suggests that racism is alive and kicking and prevalent within the communities in which students live.

Racism and racist attitudes have developed over hundreds of years and overt, state-endorsed documented racist attitudes can be traced back to 1596 when Elizabeth I issued a proclamation to the Mayor of London requiring 'Negars and Blackamores' ([Too Many Blackamoors: Deportation, Discrimination, and Elizabeth I](#)) to be 'sent out of the lande' (ibid), adding for clarification 'of which kinde of people there are already here too manie' (ibid). Historians differ on whether or not this proclamation was enacted, however, the significant issue is the Head of State made it clear she wanted to reduce the number of people of colour in London; a point which was echoed by Margaret Thatcher in a television [interview](#) when she referred to the UK being 'swamped by people with a different culture' (1978, Granada TV). The trend here is clear, Heads of Government have made openly racist statements which in turn has implicitly set the tone to express (and possibly carry out) racist actions through state bodies and personal actions.

While leading UK state figures have normalised such behaviour, Black communities have not accepted this oppression and have organised to fight against injustice and to reject their allocated 'second-class status' (Bourne, 2013) with actions such as the formation of [The Black Supplementary School Movement](#), an example of grassroots activism resisting racism in the British school system'. This resistance has evolved over time and continues to this day with new initiatives such as [The Black Curriculum](#), 'a social enterprise founded by 22 year old Lavinya Stennett in 2019 shortly after her studies at SOAS to address the Eurocentricity and the lack of Black British history in the national Curriculum' which works

to empower educators and students to engage with Black history and to ensure that when students are studying topics such as human blood groups they are aware of the pioneering work of Charles Richard Drew, in computing and mathematics the work of Katherine Johnson in the space race, in physics Lewis Latimer's development of light bulbs and Garrett Morgan's life-saving work on traffic lights. We argue these kinds of initiatives are laudable and it is essential to include Black and global majority populations' contributions to human society in the school curriculum as it ensures a full and accurate curriculum is taught to all students and enables them to counter entrenched racist attitudes. Such work is too important to relegate to a peripheral (possibly optional) curriculum enrichment.

The UK government's [Curriculum and Assessment Review](#) is currently exploring the content of the future curriculum and rightly identifies that 'Rapid social, environmental and technological change necessitates that the curriculum keep pace' (p.26). The interim report mentions important content which is not currently addressed in the National Curriculum, but which needs to be more prominent in the revised curriculum. Areas that are mentioned include financial education, education for employment, digital skills and the use of artificial intelligence. These elements will ensure that the future curriculum in schools and colleges is contemporary and responsive to the rapid pace of change within society. However, it is concerning that there is no mention of race and other aspects of social justice, including increasing awareness about disability, sexuality and gender. Without adequate coverage of these themes, there is little hope that education will advance social justice and little hope that

the increased prevalence of hate crime will be reversed.

So that current and future educators are in the best position to service the needs of all students and to enable individual and communities to effectively challenge racism whenever and wherever it occurs, we assert that all educators

- Need to have the professional integrity to recognise the faulty, inaccurate curriculum currently taught in schools today which, through omission and misrepresentation, continues to propagate embedded racist attitudes;
- Have the professional courage to recognise that good education demands accuracy and that for students to have the opportunity to develop positive pro-social attitudes they need to understand how global majority communities have in the past and continue today to contribute to local and community well-being and prosperity;
- Take personal and professional responsibility to address their own educational shortcomings and by accessing material and resources from organisations like the Black curriculum, re-educate themselves so that they can ensure the students they teach fully understand the ways we are connected and how People of Colour have enriched the lives of all populations.

References

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