

Educational Leadership in Non-white Majority Schools: a Post-colonial Perspective on Global Multicultural Capital.

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Background

This is a study of two secondary schools and one sixth-form college in Leicester. It looks at how both staff and student leaders understand, recognize, and embed diverse embodied cultural capital within the institutional environment/ ethos/ cultural pedagogy of these schools and colleges.

This project looks for evidence of a global multicultural capital embedded within each institution's ethos/ environment/ open spaces.

Are the embodied narratives, histories, and experiences of non-white students recognised by leaders as a way to contest unequal power/ cultural relations reproduced by the formal colonial curriculum and wider racialised society?

Conceptual Framework

This research project is founded on a postcolonial perspective. It is founded on the theory that European colonialism has had a lasting impact on non-white people who became settled in the UK. It is a theory which asserts that the UK has not effectively 'decolonised' its attitudes, beliefs, and institutions.

This has the effect of devaluing non-white cultural capital (linguistic, artistic, religious, and historic heritage) and knowledge through a colonial metanarrative that reproduces cultural inequalities.

Methodology

This study of two secondary schools and one college incorporated a critical ethnographic approach. Methods employed to collect the data were as follows: non-participant observations; documents; semi-structured interviews; and impromptu conversations. This data was then thematically coded and analysed for emerging themes.

Key Findings

INSTITUTIONAL ETHOS/ PEDAGOGY

- There was little to be found in the way of institutionally recognised symbolic and objectified non-white cultural capital in these majority non-white schools. Spatial codes reinforced cultural inequalities.
- Where it was symbolically recognised, it was promoted at a semi-official level through certain members of staff acting within a semi-autonomous role, or through students themselves.
- *Centrally-driven colonial values were found to be increasingly occupying the physical and metaphysical open spaces of these institutions.*

STUDENT LEADERS

Evidence suggests that for students their multicultural identities operate at two levels within these secondary schools:

1. **At the official level.** This is for the most part a culturally, historically, and politically decontextualized level based on a neutral-universal egalitarianism that masks 'racial' and cultural inequalities.
2. **At an unofficial, student level.** This is a more global – but unreflective and undervalued – student-led discourse that is much more focused on cultural interaction and learning. It is often a more critical voice. However, it is also patchy and uneven and this global multicultural capital finds little expression in the official knowledge, heritage, and spaces of the schools and college. Conceptual foundations to express this learning are limited.

STAFF LEADERS

- There was very little non-white representation in senior and middle leader roles within these institutions.
- There was much greater non-white representation within the pastoral roles – the roles associated with promoting/ enforcing institutional values and discipline on students at 'ground-level'.
- Senior and middle leaders on the whole did not articulate any real personal engagement with the cultural diversity at their institutions either at a subjective or objective level: there was little in the way of cultural learning or dialogue to inform their practice.
- Professionally and personally, they tended towards relying on centrally-driven structures to frame this cultural diversity. These structures included the official curriculum, statutory requirements, and increasingly, British Values.

Summary:

'There' but not *there*.

Staff Leaders at the middle to senior levels are increasingly relying on external and centrally-driven structures or individualised neutral universal values such as 'respect' when it comes to addressing cultural diversity. But these restrictive and often colonial external structures do not allow non-white cultural capital official institutional space.

Instead, leaders normalise and externalise cultural difference to skin colour or visible symbols on the person. They do not seem to have internalised this cultural diversity or formed a meaningful dialogue with it. Non-white cultural capital is thus positioned outside of their understandings/ habitus of leadership and therefore outside of the official ethos and cultural pedagogy of these institutions. Consequently, non-white cultural capital remains to a large extent 'masked'.

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