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Opening the “Can of Worms”: Preparing Teachers to Address Issues Relating to “Race”

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This paper reports the findings of a study which involved a critical examination of “race”-related provision on initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in England. It draws upon data collected as part of a national survey of ITE provision which included interviews with providers and students, and case studies of ITE providing institutions. The study utilized aspects of Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies as a theoretical framework with which to analyse the data. The paper explores the nature of provision relating to “race,” suggesting that teacher educators and student teachers are often ill-equipped to address the complexities relating to this area and, as a result, they can fail to recognize the importance and potential impact of their professional practice, and their pedagogical decisions. It suggests that ITE practices are often underpinned by dysconscious racisms and manifestations of Whiteness, leading to a marginalization of “race” input, with opportunities for deeper interrogation missed, or actively avoided. The paper explores some of the constraints impacting on ITE namely a lack of time; a lack of confidence on the part of a predominantly White teacher educator workforce; a lack of recognition of the importance and significance of “race” on the part of White student teachers, and an emphasis of superficial measures of student satisfaction at the expense of deeper interrogation and deconstruction of hegemonic norms. It makes recommendations relating to how practice can be improved within the current challenging global contexts in relation to “race” equality. It calls for teacher education to aspire to produce novice teachers willing and prepared to embrace “race”-related challenges in their teaching careers, and to contribute to curricula which acknowledge and address inequality.

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This paper will outline and discuss the findings of a study which examined provision relating to “race” on initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in England. The reference to the “can of worms” in the title alludes to the fact that previous research (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1999; Aveling, 2002, 2006; McIntyre, 2002; Solomon et al., 2005; Picower, 2009; Lander, 2011, 2014) has concluded that preparing teachers to work in contemporary, globalized, and ethnically diverse societies can be difficult terrain to navigate. The term “opening a can of worms” has been defined as “planning to do or talk about something is much more complicated, unpleasant or difficult than is realized and

which might be better left alone” (Collins Dictionary, 2019). The paper presents and discusses data collected from ITE providers in which provision related to “race” is constructed as difficult to address with student teachers, is rarely given priority, and is often reduced to a tokenistic “one-off” session or left to an “expert.” The paper therefore concludes that provision related to “race” can be defined as a “can of worms” as it is an area of complexity, and one which is either deliberately, or unwittingly avoided, thus undermining its potential impact on future teachers.

In the interim period since the research was completed, it could be argued that work of this nature is all the more important given recent political developments in the UK and globally, with a reported rise in racism, right-wing political discourses, an increase in migrant and displaced populations (Clark, 2018) and the persistence of racialised educational inequalities (Alexander et al., 2015; Gillborn et al., 2017). The summer of 2020 has also seen the re-emergence of the Black Lives Matters movement following US-based events which have over spilled on a global level. The area of “race” is once again on educational agendas and the time is ripe for meaningful discussion and action in order to disrupt the persistence of racism in schools and wider society, and to prevent the inaction and tokenistic practices of the past which have had little impact (Mirza, 2005). Many commentators have challenged the notion that we live in a post-racial society, and in her recent consideration of White privilege, Bhopal (2018, p. 163) argues that more recent policy, within a neoliberal context, has failed to “*acknowledge the role that race and inequality play in perpetuating advantage over disadvantage.*” She concludes, from her consideration of the UK and US contexts that “*race acts as a marker of difference in a society poisoned by fear, insecurity and instability*” (Bhopal, 2018, p. 164). Furthermore, Alexander et al. (2015, p. 4) suggested that:

Education remains a primary area for both the maintenance of entrenched racial stereotyping and discrimination on the one hand, and anti-racist activism on the other. Concerns over structural racism, low educational attainment, poor teacher expectations and stereotyping, ethnocentric curricula and high levels of school exclusions for some groups remain entrenched features of our school system.

The training of teachers who will educate future generations, equipping them with the skills to thrive in a diverse society and an increasingly globalized world is therefore of paramount importance. Within the context of the UK, Ball (2008) has expressed concern about the deleterious effect of neoliberal reforms of education and, specifically in relation to ITE, the concomitant erosion of critical spaces within teacher training programmes. Hill (2001) suggested that this has affected student teachers’ ability to address, or even acknowledge the significance of issues relating to social justice and I would argue that this applies particularly to those relating to “race” (Smith and Lander, 2012; Lander, 2014). In my study, “race”-related provision was interpreted as fostering in future teachers an understanding of the nature of racism (Garner, 2010) including structural factors which disadvantage particular Black and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, exploring possible reasons for differences in

patterns of attainment amongst particular groups, and feeling prepared to teach in a diverse, multi-cultural society. This latter interpretation was of particular interest as previous research in the UK (e.g., Gaine, 2005; Lander, 2014) highlighted a tendency for those teachers working in predominantly “White” areas to regard “race” related issues as less relevant, as opposed to an integral part of their practice, thus undermining the potentially transformative nature of education in this area.

TEACHER EDUCATION, “RACE,” AND WHITENESS

Significantly, within the UK, the past decade has seen a gradual erosion or dilution of practices aimed to promote race equality in education, and a marginalization of race equality more generally, fuelled by the promotion of post-racial discourses (Bhopal, 2018). As part of the latest incarnation of the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014a) and the Teachers’ Standards (Department for Education, 2011), there has been a greater demand on schools to address issues related to religious fundamentalism and extremism. Schools are no longer legally required to report and monitor racist incidents as they were following the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000), but instead, have a duty to promote “fundamental British values” (Department for Education, 2014b) and, under the Prevent duty (Department for Education, 2015), to monitor and report any pupils deemed to be at risk of radicalization. Dunne et al. (2018) argue that this shift contributes to a silencing of more critical discussion relating to race equality, fuelled by a misplaced notion that “*race has been ‘dealt with’ in a post-racial era*” (p. 163). Other critiques of the focus on fundamental British values (e.g., Farrell, 2016; Smith, 2016) have concluded that this not only serves to silence or marginalize racism as a concern, but could be interpreted as a more dangerous apparatus through which inequality and injustice remain beyond scrutiny, and the concept of a nationalistic cultural homogeneity is promoted. Elton-Chalcraft et al. (2017) criticized the introduction of fundamental British values, calling for deeper interrogation of its meaning and for further opportunities within teacher education programmes for the term to be explored critically. They challenge the implicit assumption that teachers “*know how to promote such values and indeed be able to articulate them clearly to children and young people without seeming to indoctrinate or promoting jingoism in schools and classrooms*” (p. 30). It should be pointed out that the duty to promote fundamental British values was not statutory at the time when the data upon which this paper draws was collected. It is however, important to acknowledge such change as it serves as evidence that the political context within which ITE is delivered has become more complex, and the critical spaces within educational discourse and policy have subsequently become even more eroded (Dunne et al., 2018; Warmington et al., 2018).

Until relatively recently, work in this area conducted in the UK was quite limited. However, building on work conducted in the US (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2001, 2005; McIntyre, 2002;

Marx and Pennington, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Marx, 2004, 2006; Sleeter, 2008; Gorski, 2009), with some other significant international perspectives (e.g., Finney and Orr, 1995; Aveling, 2002, 2006; Santoro and Allard, 2005; Solomon et al., 2005) research conducted in the UK has echoed some persistent themes. Wilkins (2014) suggested that consideration of “race” equality within ITE curricula in the UK has become increasingly marginalized and cites Gillborn (2005, p. 499) claim that such marginalization “retains race injustice at the center.” It is important to acknowledge the differences in the political and racialised histories of particular contexts where such work has been conducted, although despite such differences, there are similarities in relation to “race,” and in particular, to issues impacting on ITE. Key emerging themes from this body of literature include the notion of resistance on the part of White trainee teachers to being asked to consider and interrogate the notion of White privilege (Picower, 2009); the narrow interpretation of “race” to mean the racialised “other,” often underpinned by deficit or exoticised perceptions (Lander, 2014); a lack of focus on “race” within UK-based education policies and practices, some of which apply to ITE, which serve to insulate, or render invisible discriminatory practices (Gillborn, 2008); and an appropriation of the nebulous term “diversity” to make “race”-related provision palatable to a predominantly White audience (Ahmed, 2007). More recently, research has also considered the impact of student teachers’ identities and the impact of this on their conceptualization of “race” (Bhopal and Rhamie, 2014). Bhopal and Rhamie (2014) concluded that there was a need for issues of identity to be embedded across ITE and for the explicit teaching of how to manage racism in schools. This paper therefore aims to analyse how likely this is to be realized, considering the constraints affecting ITE providers, and how more recent UK-based policy has further exacerbated what was already a challenging undertaking.

For those who are unfamiliar with ITE in the UK, it is worth pointing out that there exists a range of available routes into teaching, some of which are three-year undergraduate programmes leading to a qualified teacher status (QTS) recommendation, and a degree-level qualification. Another option is a post-graduate certificate or diploma consisting of 1 year’s study with the majority of the time spent in a school-based context. Some post-graduate school-led options (e.g., School Direct, Teach First) have also gained in popularity. It is beyond the remit of this paper to discuss in more depth the complexities of ITE in the UK and the related government policy. For an overview of UK-based routes into teaching, see: <https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk> and for the most recent summary of current policy direction relating to ITE, see Foster (2019).

The analysis draws on two broad, and inter-connected theoretical sources: Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS). The application of CRT to the context of education has, to date, been dominated by US academics (e.g., Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Delgado and Stefancic, 2000) although more recently, it has been applied to the UK context (e.g., Gillborn, 2008; Bhopal, 2018) and more specifically, to ITE (Lander, 2011). CRT is premised

on the notion that racism is a permanent feature of society and education (DeCuir and Dixson, 2004), and that its manifestations can be subtle, both individual and systemic, and relentless (Gillborn, 2018). It is therefore the aim of CRT to uncover, and expose racism at its many different levels (Ortiz and Jani, 2010). Furthermore, it aims to deconstruct and challenge liberal discourses surrounding “race” — “the seemingly ‘colorblind’ [sic] or ‘race neutral’ policies and practices which entrench the disparate treatment of non-White persons” (Stovall, 2006, p. 244). Although not applicable to this particular study, CRT also foregrounds the minoritised voice, “shifting the frame and beginning to value the knowledge of people of color (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 8).”

It is important to note that Sleeter (1994) and later, Ladson-Billings (1998) expressed concern about the *mainstreaming* of CRT by the (predominantly White) educational establishment, or the tendency of Whites to “take over, to set directions and agendas” (Sleeter, 1994, p. 5) This dilemma is discussed by Bergerson (2003, p. 52) who, as a White academic, struggled with the notion that for White people to move into the area of CRT would be a form of colonization in which “we would take over CRT to promote our own interests or recenter our positions while attempting to ‘represent’ people of color.” She concluded however, that CRT can indeed be used by White people, and, perhaps more significantly to this paper, can help those committed to fighting individual and structural racism in three ways. Firstly, it reinforces the importance of centring race in our personal lives and work which in turn means acknowledging the privileges that come with our “race” and challenging “manifestations of racism that are observed” (Delgado, 1997, p. 615); it makes us understand that CRT is a framework developed by minority ethnic groups to understand and explain their experiences and to move toward social change and racial equality; and thirdly, it necessitates White academics joining the fight to legitimize and publicize research that utilizes alternative methods such as CRT.

Unlike CRT, the study of Whiteness, and particularly its relevance to ITE has a longer, and richer history, particularly in American, Canadian, and Australian studies (e.g., McIntyre, 1997; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Aveling, 2002, 2006; Marx and Pennington, 2003; Solomon et al., 2005; Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Work relating to Whiteness within the UK-context is more limited although some notable exceptions (e.g., Bonnett, 2000; Garner, 2007, 2010) have applied aspects of CWS to the UK context. In relation to education however, and to ITE in particular, there has been much less attention to the impact and potential significance of Whiteness.

Frankenberg (1993) suggested that Whiteness has three dimensions. Firstly, it is a standpoint, a place from which to view the world. Important to this dimension is the notion that Whiteness is something that defines the “other” but is not itself subject to others’ definitions (Bonnett, 2000). Whiteness is therefore relational—the “norm” against which the racial “other” is judged. Frankenberg (1993, p. 30) added that “Whiteness makes itself invisible precisely by asserting its normalcy.” Frankenberg’s second dimension is that Whiteness is a position of structural advantage or “race” privilege. Dyer (1997) noted that many successful White people refuse to believe that their ethnicity has any part to play in their achievements,

preferring instead to hold on to meritocratic, colourblind, or in Frankenberg’s (1993) terms “color [sic] and power-evasive” explanations. Pearce (2014, p. 390) explains Frankenberg’s preference for the term “color and power evasive,”

“..because it encapsulates the strategy of appearing to recognize and value cultural differences, while refusing to acknowledge the role of race in structuring social inequalities.”

Finally, Frankenberg’s third dimension is that Whiteness is a set of unmarked cultural practices. It is an inability to recognize and name one’s own culture, leaving intact therefore the notion that Whiteness is a neutral place from which to look at others. Those engaged in critical analyses of Whiteness and color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva and Forman, 2000; Bonilla-Silva, 2006) have highlighted this third dimension as perhaps the most dangerous in terms of sustaining White power and privilege, and of perpetuating racisms.

“White people’s lack of consciousness about their racial identities has grave consequences in that it not only denies White people the experiences of seeing themselves as benefitting from racism, but in doing so, frees them from taking responsibility for eradicating it (McIntyre, 1997, p. 16).”

McIntyre (1997) adds that being unable to, or indeed never having to conceptualize Whiteness, means that White people are unable to see the advantages afforded to the White population. Furthermore, they fail to see how these advantages come at the expense of the disadvantaged. Critical scholarship on Whiteness is therefore not an assault on white people *per se*. (Gillborn, 2005), nor is it an attempt to essentialise or homogenize all White people. Rather it is an assault on the socially-constructed, and constantly reinforced power of White identifications and interests.

The combination of CRT and CWS provided a critical lens through which to examine the data arising from the original research (Davies and Crozier, 2006), providing an opportunity to examine and disrupt ITE practices, to analyse the constraints which can impact on this, and to consider how this can be challenged and addressed in the future.

METHODS

The study drew upon data initially collected for a Government-commissioned survey of ITE practice relating to “diversity” which was conducted by the author (Davies and Crozier, 2006). The survey adopted a mixed methods approach consisting of a combination of questionnaires, telephone interviews and four focussed case studies.

The questionnaire was designed to elicit basic information relating to the nature of the provision available at the particular institution, and to identify any particular pedagogical practices being adopted. It asked respondents to rate their institutional provision in terms of quantity and quality of and also to identify any constraints impacting on this area of their practice. Opportunities were also provided for respondents to respond

to more open-ended questions and to make further comments in relation to their practice. The questionnaire was distributed to 205 ITE providers, with a response rate of 40% from a range of different training routes, and geographical areas across England. The arising data was analyzed through quantifying initial descriptive statistics, and some initial thematic analysis of the more open-ended responses. The data was then used to inform and plan subsequent stages of the research. Clough and Nutbrown (2007, p. 143) suggest that “it is unlikely that a questionnaire will reveal the depth of those views and experiences in any of their rich detail.” However, a questionnaire can play a useful role in qualitative research in setting the scene, mapping out a social world (Denscombe, 2014), or in establishing a broad picture, in this case, of provision within a range of ITE settings. This broad picture was then used as the basis for the selection of a sub-sample of respondents to be followed up through a telephone interview.

An overview of the sample is provided in **Appendix 1**. For full details of the descriptive statistics arising from the initial survey, please see Davies and Crozier (2006).

A total of 7 males and 23 females were interviewed across the 28 chosen institutions. 30 telephone interviews were conducted with all but one respondent identifying as “White British” which is indicative of the ethnic make-up of the teacher workforce (86.2% of teachers identified as White British in the latest Government statistics (www.gov.uk, 2018). Written, informed consent was obtained from participants, all of whom were over the age of eighteen. All participating institutions and respondents were allocated a pseudonym in order to protect their identities.

The main aim of telephone interviews was to give the respondent an opportunity to expand on their questionnaire responses, to probe responses further, and to begin to unravel complexities. The telephone interviews were used to elicit the kinds of richer qualitative data which a questionnaire could not, and to provide an opportunity for expansion and explanation. The questionnaire survey, despite its well-documented shortfalls (see for example, Cohen et al., 2011) was a useful starting point from which to structure and guide the interview.

The final stage of the research was the collection of further data from four ITE providers chosen as case studies. The aim of the case study work was to illuminate the general by looking at the particular (Denscombe, 2014). It was not the intention to present the case studies in full in a more conventional interpretation (Walters, 2007), or to form generalisable conclusions to be applied across ITE providers. Rather, they informed some of the arising themes and issues following the analysis of the telephone interview data. In this way, the insights afforded through face-to-face dialogue and observation of practice, coupled with notes and analytical memos taken in the field, strengthened the analysis and the conclusions drawn. The case study data differed from the telephone interviews in that they enabled firstly, the establishment of a “rapport” between the researcher and the respondents and secondly, access to visual and non-verbal cues which were “*thought to aid communication and convey more subtle layers of meaning* (Irvine, 2010, p. 1).”

Arising interview data was analyzed within an interpretivist paradigm (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013), drawing on element

of a grounded theory approach involving initial open and axial coding (Cohen et al., 2007), an on-going comparison of emerging themes in order to identify, develop and relate concepts (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This was used as a means of bridging more traditional positivist methods with those more associated with a critical, interpretative approach (Charmaz, 1995).

ITE providers’ responses were analyzed and on the basis of coding, they were categorized into ideal types (Miller and Brewer, 2003). The complexity and multifaceted nature of the data made it difficult to establish definitive categories as there was often overlap and contradiction. This was exacerbated by the complexity of routes which providers offered so for example, on one programme within the same institution, provision might have differed according to a particular route or age or subject specialism. The ideal types presented are therefore “representations constructed on the basis of what the researcher considers their character in some pure essential form (Miller and Brewer, 2003, p. 147).”

KEY FINDINGS

Provision Relating to “Race”

Provision relating to “race” was often very limited, consisting of a one-off lecture given in isolation or, in some more extreme cases, as an optional, additional session. For many trainees, or newly qualified teachers therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that they were likely to begin their teaching careers with little, or very limited preparation in relation to “race.”

Providers were categorized into two broad ideal types (Miller and Brewer, 2003) and named “race conscious” and “race dysconscious.” Those in the former category were characterized by an awareness of the importance of work in this area for student teachers, and a commitment to the potentially transformative nature of teacher education. While it was not the intention of the research to quantify ideal types, it was significant that very few providers met the criteria to be considered as “race-conscious.” Those that did included reference to the need for student teachers to consider their own identities and backgrounds and to be mindful of preconceptions and stereotyping and how these might impact on teachers’ expectations and pupil outcomes.

In the following example, the provider describes a session she delivered with the intention of disrupting the stereotypical perceptions of trainees.

Respondent: What they have is a session on recognizing diversity, barriers to learning where they’re actually encouraged to challenge their own stereotypical views across the board.

Interviewer: Right, I mean how do you actually encourage trainees to recognize their own stereotypical views?

Respondent: Well they do like a workshop, we have all sorts of different types of people up on boards and they go round and they actually write down, stereotypical views that they think are associated with those, you know for example football fans, men and women.”

Eve: Subject Leader, Professional Studies, Primary Undergraduate route

The notion of the need for teacher education to involve the unpacking of trainees’ preconceptions and stereotypical views, though prominent in the literature relating to this area (e.g., Gaine, 2001; Aveling, 2002, 2006; McIntyre, 2002; Ullucci, 2010) was not found to be a common element of provision being mentioned as a feature of provision in only two providers. In the example above, I argue that the provider was attempting to do this, although she avoided making reference to racialised stereotyping in the examples that she offered. In a very small number of providers however, a focus on trainees’ own identities and the ways in which this impacted upon their views and subsequent professional practice was explored, albeit to a limited extent. This approach is exemplified below:

“We ask them to consider professional values and practice and that’s a strand that runs all the way through. So it’s, you know erm, it’s looking at... I think first of all, particularly on the undergraduate programme, it’s actually helping them to tease out where they are in terms of their own perceptions and then building it from that.”

Rebecca: Programme Leader, Primary undergraduate route

Another provider, Tina, explained her institution’s starting point:

“What we do is we try and understand what we mean by difference, what we mean by culture and we get trainees perhaps more to the view that, well culture has probably evolved and we can’t, you know, have stereotypical understanding and simply group children into those groups, what we have to understand is that culture evolves, and that people place their allegiances to different cultures, as and when they want to or need to, so we look at what we understand by culture, by looking at trainees’ own cultural groups, their own group affiliations, their own sort of, how they would perhaps group and classify themselves, we then look at why we need to classify and we need to, and then we look at what, what can go wrong if these classifications are made on people without really understanding that these are not fixed boundaries.”

Tina: Diversity Support Tutor, Primary and Secondary post-graduate routes

In Tina’s response, the focus on identity appeared to be very much on the identity or culture of the “other,” thus contradicting Levine-Rasky’s (2000, p. 271) assertion that dialogues need to shift away from the racial “other” to a “critical problematisation of whiteness itself.” However, in Tina’s explanation, although she does demonstrate a more critical understanding of the nature of culture than most respondents, in her explanation of group affiliation, she does not name Whiteness. This was however, the closest example which could resonate with Marx’s (2004, p. 32) recommendation that “White teachers and teacher education students must be guided in an exploration of their own Whiteness.” What was not as clear however, was the extent to which this was played out in practice. Indeed, in a later interview, Tina expressed frustration at the lack of institutional commitment, suggesting that she felt her role as “diversity support tutor” absolved other colleagues from the responsibility of having to address potentially uncomfortable, or difficult issues with students. The creation of the role of “diversity support tutor” could, on one level be seen as a positive step and an institutional commitment

to tackling diversity-related issues proactively. However, from another perspective, it could be seen as, in CRT terms, a “*contradiction closing case*,” (Gillborn, 2018) an action which creates a veneer of anti-racism commitment, but actually masks the perpetuation of mainstreamed discriminatory practices, and has little impact on day to day activity.

A further characteristic attributed to the “race-conscious” type was an awareness of the need for “race”-related provision to agitate and disrupt (Aveling, 2006). The following respondent articulates her approach:

“After my session, it’s difficult really, I kind of think, if they’re all smiling and happy, then I haven’t really done my job properly- I have become used to getting a bit of flak now! I don’t mind putting people’s backs up if I can then still work with them, but when they just walk out of the lecture thinking, ‘well she’s got a bit of a bee in her bonnet hasn’t she?’, it’s really frustrating – this kind of thing needs to be followed up properly.”

Rebecca: Programme Leader, Primary undergraduate route

The frustration at the lack of opportunity to “follow-up” lead lecture input is linked to the perception of a lack of time on ITE programmes which will be addressed subsequently. Her frustration is, however, also linked to her later comments relating to colleagues who do not necessarily continue and develop discussion in smaller group contexts.

“You need experienced staff. Staff who are confident and committed to this and although we have fantastic staff, I’m not sure, hand on heart, that I could say that they would all fit into that category.”

Rebecca: Programme Leader, Primary undergraduate route

The issue of levels of staff confidence to deliver sessions, and lead discussions relating to “race” will be explored later in the paper but this adds to the complexity of analyzing provision in that, having one committed member of staff, who, in the case of this research, was often the gatekeeper for the institution, did not necessarily mean that this was echoed by other colleagues.

In summary, therefore, for those providers described as “race-conscious,” an expression of commitment to anti-racism was made and an understanding of the importance of, and need to engage student teachers with work in this area was articulated. Most respondents in this group viewed themselves as key drivers of work in this area and this was evident in the impact that they had on session content or course design. However, there was a significant lack of reference to the concept of Whiteness and related hegemonic norms which can permeate wider society and educational institutions (McIntyre, 2002) and it was not clear whether the commitment expressed by one member of the staff team was a true reflection of wider institutional practice. Therefore, in terms of implications for future practice, I argue that, although providers in this first category demonstrated some elements of effective provision, its impact was often compromised due to other, more systemic factors.

In contrast, there existed a larger “type” defined as “race-dysconscious.” These providers were those who embedded “race” provision within the broader concept of “equality,” claiming that trainees’ understanding of “race” was developed through

curriculum subjects, or through a *permeation* throughout their programme. The term “dysconscious” therefore is not intended to signify that “race” received no attention at all, but rather it was done in a more acritical, and perhaps piecemeal way. In defining this type, I draw on the work of King (1991) who developed the term “dysconscious racism” to describe,

“... an uncritical habit of mind that lacks any ethical judgment regarding or critique of systemic racial inequity. By unquestioningly accepting the status quo, this mind-set, which is identified as an outcome of miseducation, prevents teachers, for example, from questioning the existing racial order and leaves no room for them to imagine practical possibilities for social change or their role as change agents (King and Akua, 2012 in Banks, 2012).”

Provision was predominantly characterized by the claim that “race” was *embedded* or *permeated* the curriculum. This is explained by one provider below:

“On the, on some of the academic modules there’s one on cognitive development and one on learning in the early years [Right] Both those modules will touch on these issues [issues relating to ‘race’]. I guess you could say that it permeates everything they do.”

David: Programme Leader, Primary undergraduate route

It was interesting to note that David was unable to provide any specific examples of what this “permeation” would involve and later in the interview, he conceded that the effectiveness of such an approach relied heavily on who was actually doing the delivery. This supports the assertion that input can become so *permeated* that it disappears altogether (Jones, 1999; Gaine, 2001). Other research (e.g., LeRoux and Moller, 2002, p. 184) has suggested that in reality, a permeation approach does little to disrupt or explore areas which are often “*ethnocentric in orientation and content*,” thus reflecting King and Akua’s (2012) assertion that such an approach is unlikely to create opportunities for novice teachers to “*imagine possibilities for social change*.” However, the approach still appeared to remain a popular one amongst ITE providers, with the majority of the sample indicating that this was their approach of choice. Alongside this strategy, some providers utilized one-off, “*flash and dash*” (Sleeter, 2005, p. 1950) sessions with little or no opportunity for discussion. These were sometimes delivered by external speakers who, in some cases were from a BAME background, which was considered to be significant by respondents. When probed, respondents found it difficult to explain or articulate the nature of this input, as exemplified in the quotation below:

“Respondent: We have the local education authority in. They come and do a half day conference session with all our students.

Interviewer: And what would that involve?

Respondent: Well [laughs] I thought you might ask that – I didn’t actually go to the last one so I can’t really tell you but other colleagues went, so they would be better placed. I have been to previous ones where you know they come in and do a bit of this, and bit of that relating to EAL, or diversity, or something along those lines [pause].”

David, Programme Leader, Primary undergraduate

In the case of “race”-dysconscious’ provision, input therefore appeared to be implicit within a broader “diversity” agenda, with this umbrella term, perhaps unwittingly, reducing the more explicit focus on “race,” and often leading to it being interpreted in simplistic ways. Most notable in terms of the distinction from “race”-conscious provision was the tendency to present information to trainees with limited opportunities for discussion or deeper analysis of the implications for practice.

Constraints Affecting Provision

The coding process identified some key constraints impacting on provision which were mentioned by respondents. These were: a lack of time available on Programmes; a lack of confidence on the part of providers, fuelled by, for some, a lack of experience with “race;” a lack of priority or importance attached to “race” on the part of trainees, and an emphasis on superficial measures of trainee satisfaction at the expense of more transformative and innovative practices. These will be addressed in turn below.

The most frequently-mentioned constraint was that of a lack of time available on ITE programmes, particularly on shorter post-graduate routes, echoing Hill’s (2001) concerns about a lack of the erosion of critical spaces and the “*ideological straight-jacketing*” (Hill, 2009, p. 305) caused by centralized policy. However, on deeper analysis, this also appeared to be linked in some cases to what was interpreted as a lack of priority being attached to “race” on the part of providers. As one respondent remarked:

“The modules are always rather like empty suitcases and it’s very much a question of what you choose to put in them, and what people choose to put in them is what they believe to be important.”

Paul, Senior Lecturer, Education Studies, Primary and Secondary

While time is undeniably a factor with so much to cover on already over-crowded ITE curricula, my analysis suggested that this was sometimes used as an excuse not to address issues relating to “race” which often stemmed from a lack of confidence on the part of providers. This was manifested in simplistic interpretations of “race” and related issues, often resulting in provision becoming one session considering those pupils for whom English was an additional language, with little or no reference made to more socio-political issues. Some respondents were open about their own lack of confidence which they attributed to their lack of experience of working in more culturally or racially diverse contexts. In the quotation below, a respondent explains her reluctance to discuss issues relating to racism:

“I do think that the students don’t grasp the difference between multiculturalism and anti-racism but anti-racism is something that I don’t feel confident about approaching myself as a White person.. I don’t want to do a session on racism myself so that is provided by [name] [Local Council representative] who’s done a lot in promoting anti-racism – she’s from a BME background herself and so is in a much better position than I am to handle it.”

Amy: Course tutor, SCITT (School-centered route)

The respondent’s reference to, and awareness of her own Whiteness as a barrier to feeling confident to tackling the area of “race” highlights the way in which Whiteness is seen as a neutral viewpoint, and how a person from a Black background is somehow “in a better position” to address this issue. The tutor’s comment relating to “*not wanting to do a session on racism*” indicates that she is choosing to actively avoid it, using her Whiteness to justify this. As Hayes and Juárez (2012, p. 10) point out, “*Whites do not talk about race and racism because Whites don’t have to: Whites use their racial power to ensure that they don’t have to talk about race and racism.*”

It is also important to consider the model that this action gives to trainees and how it might impact on their perceptions of their role in talking about “race.” Although the use of a local authority “expert” was justified in terms of her being able to make more of a positive impact, the unintended consequence of fostering a belief that racism is about the “racial other” and not anything from which White people may benefit seems likely, particularly, in this case, given the predominantly White cohort in the particular institution.

In another interview, a respondent recounted a student making a racist joke as part of a presentation to the rest of this group.

“I thought, ‘Oh, please don’t go there’ you know, ‘don’t do it’. I didn’t challenge it and you know it just happened, and it did make me feel very concerned that to be honest -that happened and I didn’t do anything, so it’s easy to say, ‘Well I would challenge this, I would be ready and I would be...’ but I didn’t, so there you have it – things like that do happen. It’s easy to say that you would challenge it, but in reality... I don’t know how many other – I think there were 10 other presentations where I was just really impressed with the level of, at which they tackled these issues in what I thought was a very good way – and that particular group, that was the only thing that made me feel sort of very concerned, and the rest of what they said wasn’t the slightest bit racist really but then I thought, well how much must they have really thought about these issues and you think afterwards, like you say, should I have said something and perhaps, you know we should, but I also find it very interesting that these people are, you know they are adults obviously so how far do you – where is the line, when would you step in, when would you, you know... Please tell me that I shouldn’t be worrying about this! I’ve got ideas theoretically where I would step in but ..., I find it quite interesting working with adults now, you know – would I do that at the same point at which I would have done with children – you know for me there are interesting issues with children – you’ve got the – you are more of an educator aren’t you? And with working with adults there is a thing that, well you know, free speech or you know... if you jump on everything, the danger is that the students just stop saying anything at all.”

Elizabeth, Course Tutor, Primary PGCE

The incident, and the way it is recounted is revealing on many levels. Firstly, it is an example of a tutor’s lack of confidence in her own ability to challenge overt examples of racist behavior, but also her minimization of the significance of the incident—the fact that the rest of the presentation was “*not in the slightest bit racist*” being given as part of a justification for her not challenging it. This represents an example of the aforementioned definition

of “race” dysconsciousness in that the provider demonstrates an *“uncritical habit of mind that lacks any ethical judgment regarding or critique of systemic racial inequity”* (King and Akua, 2012 in Banks, 2012). Furthermore, the way in which she seeks approval from a fellow White teacher educator: *“please tell me that I shouldn’t be worrying about this”* reveals the levels of insecurity which can underpin this area and illuminates why previous research suggests that ITE providers’ lack of confidence in dealing with “race” can lead to them avoiding the subject altogether (Hick et al., 2011). Finally, the distinction the respondent makes between children and adults and her reluctance to “police” trainees’ language and actions reveals her construction of her role as a teacher educator in the promotion of social justice and indeed begs the question of where, if not in a teacher education context, would such behavior be challenged and problematised? This particular example is in stark contrast to Gonsalves’ (2008, p. 16) assertion that the teacher educators’ role is to *“help prospective teachers re-evaluate their assumptions in order to recognize beliefs that are grounded in racist ideologies.”* In the example above, there is very little evidence that trainees were encouraged to analyze the approach that they took to their presentation which ultimately serves to reproduce and reinforce racist ideologies rather than deconstruct and disrupt them (Sleeter, 1994).

A further constraint identified by respondents was a lack of importance or priority attached to “race” both on the part of trainees and in some cases, in the schools in which they spend time as part of their training.

“It isn’t their [trainees’] prime concern, or the one after that, or the one after that, really!”

Carl: PGCE (Secondary Science) Course Tutor

Another respondent explained:

“It’s so hard trying to cram everything in and people will come to what is most urgent or pressing in their particular context. It can be really difficult to make someone interested in this area when it’s just not an issue for them in their particular school.”

Alice, SCITT (School-Centered route) Manager

A third respondent suggested systemic issues which made it *too easy for people to think of other issues as more important* (Rob, Tutor, PGCE Secondary Science). This lack of prioritizing could therefore be seen as a product of the standardized ITE curriculum, or, seen through a different lens, as a form of White resistance to the interrogation of understandings of “race” which ultimately preserve the status quo and allow trainees to adopt *“unreflective standpoints”* (Pearce, 2003, p. 465) which are underpinned by Whiteness.

Linked to the theme of the priority attached to “race” was the concept of student satisfaction. In a context where institutions compete for students, and when student satisfaction surveys are in the public domain [e.g., National Student Survey for undergraduate routes www.thestudentsurvey.com; Newly Qualified Teacher survey (Department for Education, 2018)], it could be argued the kinds of transformative practices which previous research has suggested can irritate or foster resistance

on the part of some students, may well be avoided, or at least, rendered palatable for a predominantly White audience. The quotation below is an example of how “race”-related input can reportedly be received by trainees.

“I have never had active resistance as such – they would all recognize its importance, I’m sure, but for them, there are just more important things – more immediate priorities I suppose. There are also a small number of people who... I wouldn’t call it resistance but they clearly get irritated by input relating to ‘race’.”

Midtown University: Course tutor, Secondary PGCE

The palpable discomfort evident in the interview could suggest two things. Firstly that the “effective” practice described during the telephone interviews, is, in fact, not necessarily a shared commitment across the institution and perhaps more significantly, that many teacher educators do not feel equipped themselves to challenge and expose more subtle forms of systemic racism (Bhopal et al., 2009; Hicks et al., 2010), but tend to “play safe” or to deny that any problem exists.

Some interviewees expressed concern that they might make a comment that could “cause offense,” while others adopted a more “color-blind” approach, effectively failing to consider that the experiences of Black students could be different in any way to their White peers. There were also instances of practices rooted in stereotypical constructions of the “other.” For example, one provider expressed concern about the recruitment of “young Asian females” as they *“tend to be more passive, as that’s their cultural background”* (Sam, SCITT course tutor). In the following example, a provider illustrates her frustration and lack of confidence in effective practice:

“Again you know I’ve thought of maybe having a day, a diversity day at the University where we could celebrate different cultures but [interviewee reports attending a national conference where she had suggested this] and again the Black teacher trainers are saying that, you know, ‘That’s horrible, that’s like saying, right you’re different, let’s get you in at the university and let’s, you know, have a look at your culture.’ So, I just don’t know any more! I mean I thought that was an effective move but apparently not, and I really worry about offending people – I mean some of the Black teacher trainers at the conference were getting really cross about it, you know, and I thought, oh gosh, I’d better keep quiet, they know more than I do, you know what I mean?” [Laughs]

Alison, PGCE Course Leader, Secondary

It is clear from the example above that there needs to be on-going dialogue and debate in order for providers to feel more confident, and to develop a clearer vision of what effective practice might involve.

One respondent reported that his sessions on “race” consistently received the lowest ratings in student evaluations in comparison to his teaching in other areas. Another respondent suggested that if input was negatively received, it would not be repeated the following year. Her justification is explained below:

And you’ve also got to be careful with the speaker that you get talking to your audience is not going to turn them away from the

positive work that you’ve already done, because you do occasionally get speakers with their own chip on their shoulder about ethnicity, and there are problems then.

Jill: Course tutor, School-based route

One has to question what ‘*a chip on their shoulder about ethnicity*’ might mean in reality, and whether the strategy of prioritizing student satisfaction over more challenging input which might *agitate*, could be interpreted as an act of White resistance to input which seeks to disrupt White hegemonic norms. The respondent’s comment is also reminiscent of Hooks (1989, p. 113) assertion that White-dominated institutions “*want very much to have a Black person in ‘their’ department as long as that person thinks and acts like them, shares their values and beliefs, is in no way different.*” It is suggested therefore that decisions relating to how *diversity* will be interpreted, and “*how much ‘diversity’ will be tolerated*” (Hayes and Juárez, 2012, p. 8) is decided by the White majority, thus maintaining its power and dominance.

DISCUSSION

It is clear that provision relating to “race” is complex and, although two distinct “ideal types” were identified, these were difficult to define categorically. What was clear however was that any explicit attempts to address or disrupt White trainees’ hegemonic understandings, or their “*tools of Whiteness*” (Picower, 2009, p. 205) was absent. Rather, the majority of providers tended to “play safe” or to avoid either irritating or upsetting White trainees, or causing offense to Black trainees. Using the critical lens afforded by Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), I argue that “race-conscious” providers do, at least, acknowledge and recognize the complex, and entrenched nature of racisms. However, the available time and resources on ITE programmes render any opportunity for meaningful discussion and activity which could, potentially, lead to transformative practice, less likely. On the other hand, “race dysconscious” practice does little to even acknowledge the significance of racisms and therefore any potential to disrupt the racial power of Whiteness is compromised, or indeed, missed altogether. However, I argue that this enactment of White privilege is not necessarily one that is totally passive (Hayes and Juárez, 2012) but one which stems from a lack of critical awareness on the part of White people of their own privilege, and how this can be enacted. While this “lack of awareness” could imply an unwitting innocence, or in Milner’s (2008, p. 343) terms, a “false racist innocence,” the data analysis suggests that the choices that are made by some of the ITE providers actively divert attention away from Whiteness, thus preserving its power. While this is not necessarily a new perspective (see for example, Ladson-Billings, 2001), particularly within the context of the US, there has been very little work within a UK context to explore this which, I argue, could be a contributing factor to the stubborn persistence of racisms within education (Mirza, 2005).

The additional theme of the need to manage student satisfaction, and the active avoidance on the part of some providers, of more critical, introspective analysis could be indicative of the increasingly marketised higher education system

in the UK which has resulted in a reduction of more critical spaces in favor of pedagogical approaches which are less likely to cause students to be critical in their evaluations of teaching (Haggis, 2006). These spaces are vital if we are to impact on the thinking, self-awareness and future practice of teachers.

In conclusion therefore, analysis of ITE practice exposed manifestations of Whiteness on the part of providers. Examples included an inability or reluctance to disrupt “normalized” viewpoints; a lack of confidence to do so, and the presence of deficit view of the “other.” Even in cases where providers had a strong understanding of the kinds of activities which might help students to develop critical race consciousness, this was often thwarted by more systemic factors such as a lack of time, a lack of broader institution-wide shared commitment and understanding, and an over-reliance on the “expert.” As a result, in the main, Whiteness and its processes which can serve to perpetuate inequality and institutional racisms appeared to be allowed to continue, largely unaddressed.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The research concluded that although some practices existed within ITE which aimed to disrupt trainee teachers’ thinking in more transformative ways, in the main, this was limited. It was more common for provision relating to “race” to be more piecemeal, enough to be seen to be compliant with national requirements, but limited in its potential impact on trainees’ thinking. For many trainee teachers, and indeed, ITE providers therefore, the “*can of worms*” remained firmly closed, the difficult and often problematic questions, left unaddressed, and the complexities relating to “race” and Whiteness remain unexplored. I conclude that this can serve as a form of preserving the multi-faceted complexities of racism and is a missed opportunity to disrupt White hegemonic norms which can pervade education and wider society. As part of a core, and compulsory ITE curriculum, there needs to be time dedicated to this, regardless of the nature of the training route or the location of the provider.

The implications of the research suggest that there is a need for a (re-)centralization of race and racisms within ITE and that this should be done in a meaningful way which moves beyond political rhetoric and superficial models of compliance. This would necessitate core and compulsory teaching sessions as part of ITE curricula which consider how “race” intersects with other aspects of social justice or in Gillborn’s (2008) words, other “axes of oppression” such as class, gender, disability, and sexuality. It would also require a commitment to on-going professional development for teachers and teacher educators in order for this to be seen as a shared undertaking, and not the responsibility of an “expert” or the “other.” The use of more critical theoretical lenses such as those offered by Critical Race Theory and Critical Whiteness Studies could play a role in this, offering new perspectives on stubbornly persistent issues, providing a voice for sometimes previously marginalized groups, and disrupting student teachers’ and indeed ITE providers’ world views and understandings of the manifestations of contemporary racisms.

Critical Race Theory directly challenges post-racial stances, thereby centralizing “race” as an integral part of provision and requiring a critical examination of “race,” its manifestations, both individual and structural, to be explored and disrupted.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge this is a highly complex area, and not one which can be “addressed” within what, for some, is a short and intensive period of training or preparation. There is a need for on-going professional development for teachers post-qualification, particularly in light of changing political landscapes both nationally within the UK, and more globally with a rise in far-right thinking and legitimized discourses fuelled by racist and nationalistic ideologies. Teachers need to be equipped to support all of their children to thrive and to work positively and constructively within the communities they serve. There is also a need to equip future citizens with the insights necessary to make society more understanding and inclusive of all of its members. The research suggests that there is a need for teachers at varying stages in their professional development to have opportunities to engage in honest dialogue about their own understandings

which shifts the gaze away from the “racial other,” and to continue to explore why, for many, addressing “race” remains a “can of worms.”

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets generated for this study are available on request to the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Sunderland University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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Conflict of Interest: The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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APPENDIX 1

The following table represents an overview of the sample selected for telephone interview.

TABLE 1 | Overview of sample.

Region of England	Participating Institutions HEI: Higher Education Institution SCITT: School-led route DRB: Designated recognized body (School-led) GTP: Graduate Training Programme (school led, no longer available as a route)
East Midlands	3: 2 HEIs and 1 SCITT (Primary and Secondary)
London (including greater London)	4: 3 HEIs and 1 DRB
North West	4: 3 HEIs and 1 GTP Consortium (Secondary)
North East, Yorkshire, and Humberside	5: 4 HEIs and 1 SCITT (Primary)
South East	4: 3 HEIs and 1 GTP Consortium (Primary)
South West	4: 2 HEIs and 2 SCITTs (1 Primary and 1 Secondary)
West Midlands	4: 3 HEIs and 1 SCITT (Secondary)