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This article highlights antiblackness pervading English higher education. This antiblackness is attributed to a majoritarian view, which not only upholds the view that education is value-neutral, meritocratic, colour-blind, but also has a cultural disregard for those racialized as Black Minority Ethnic (BME). There has been considerable attention drawn to the achievement gap issue in English higher education in which those racialized as BME are less likely to obtain a 'good honours' degree than those identified as white upon graduation. However, there is no critical work, as of yet, which examines university responses to addressing it. This paper sets out to investigate this, as well as the extent of institutions embracing a majoritarian view of race inequalities in education. This is done through reframing the issue by examining race equality action plans of six English universities. These six universities all received positive national recognition for their race equality work. A reframed reading of these institutional policy documents concludes that colour-blind interpretations of inclusion reproduce not only a misrecognition of differences of students of colour but also a rejection of their humanity.

Inequality in higher education has to do with one's deficits?

Warikoo (2016) observed that Oxford University students of colour[1] did not recognise

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[1] I use the phrase 'students of colour' interchangeable with the British category 'Black and Minority Ethnic'. The phrase emphasises students being racialised in juxtaposition to a white norm (e.g. white supremacy) (see Bhopal 2018). The phrase 'students of colour' is also employed in line with many critical race theorists in the field of education to describe the

structural racism. The students Warikoo interviewed invested in a notion of meritocracy, justifying their status as Oxford students to their own merit – work ethic and intelligence. They did not see the significance of 'race'[2] and racism that has structured their lives. Evidence from her work suggests that they were not as racially literate (Blaisdell 2015), or having an awareness of structural racism, as their peers in the USA 'elite' universities of Brown and Harvard.

I begin with Warikoo's (2016) observations of Oxford students as it offers a snapshot of the extent of the lack of awareness of 'race' and racism pervading English higher education. Students lacking awareness of structural racism which exists around them is indicative of the pervasiveness of white supremacy to the extent that it is invisible, unmarked, or even ignored (Bain 2018). This is attributed to a majoritarian narrative (Solórzano and Yosso 2002), which upholds the view that education is value-neutral, meritocratic and colour-blind. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002, 28), the majoritarian narrative is generated 'from a legacy of racial privilege… in which racial privilege seems "natural".' It is 'natural' for the Oxford students in Warikoo's (2016) study to believe they are students in Oxford due to their own merit. This majoritarian narrative is context-specific and ahistorical leaving the legacy of

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experience of racialised students and staff (e.g. Blaisdell 2016; Gillborn 2015b; Ladson-Billings 2006).

[2] Inverted commas are used for 'race', as it is a social category always in the making. The process of social categorisation takes into account power and hierarchy in ethnic relationships where social categories are identified, defined, and delineated by others. This process is in contrast, but implicated, to the process of group identification where social groups define themselves, their name(s), their nature(s), and their boundar(ies) (Jenkins 1997:75).

colonialism, eugenics (scientific racism) and slavery unchecked and unaccounted for on 'race' matters in England (Bain 2018; Chitty 2009).

With this dominant narrative, 'race' inequalities, such as academic achievement, within the English higher education sector are explained away to one's deficits (see e.g. interview material from higher education staff cited in Stevenson 2012) , to one's culture (e.g. Cotton, George and Joyner 2013), or one's social class (Russell Group 2015). This leaves 'race', specifically whiteness, unmarked, invisible and taken-for-granted, which simultaneously misrecognises the differences and life experiences of students who are racialized as 'Black minority ethnic' (BME). The diversity existing within this BME category is exhaustive. The socially constructed category discounts and misrecognises the variety of differences of people groups within it. Misrecognition, as understood here, is pejorative, oppressive, mirroring Fraser's (2000, 113-4) thinking:

> To be misrecognized, accordingly, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down
> upon or devalued in others' attitudes, beliefs or representations. It is rather to be
> denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of
> institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively
> unworthy of }respect or esteem.

The above statement is tied to the call of Charles Taylor (1992) and Iris Marion Young (1990) who challenged the liberal ethic that 'everybody is the same' to recognise and value group differences. With the majoritarian narrative, whiteness pervades, and taken-for-granted as normal in the everyday. Whiteness, as a concept, offers a broad scope to reflect and examine institutional racism throughout English higher education, within and outside the lecture halls, impacting both staff and students. It is a social construct, in particular a social process (Frankenberg, 1993; Ware and Back 2001; Wellman 1977), that excludes to include, dividing 'us' from 'them' (Barth 1969; Jenkins 1997). Whiteness is a marker of ethnic differentiation based on white

supremacy, derived from a specific historical circumstance – colonialism (Allen 1994; Ignatiev 1998). To this day, this process impacts on everyday lives particularly in English education (Bain 2018; Chitty 2009; Gillborn 2008, 2015a), whiteness is reproduced and maintained to not serve the needs of this English racialized category of BME (Madriaga 2017).

The reproduction of whiteness in English education is intertwined to the nation's ignorance of its role in the slave trade in the Americas, colonialism and imperialism (Bain 2018). Whiteness is invisible, taken-for-granted in notions of British and/or English identity (Gilroy 2003; Neal 2002). Misrecognising pervasiveness of whiteness in national belonging is ignorance (Bain 2018). Bain (2018, 6) has argued that this 'white ignorance' is a 'systemic, structural epistemological phenomenon within the racialized political system of white supremacy whose primary function is the production of ignorance, falsehoods, and distorted framings of facts in service of the production and reproduction of white supremacy.'

The dominant discourse on the the achievement gap in degree outcomes based on race in English higher education is disentangled with the historical legacy of white supremacy. The issue is explained away with the notion that BME students have cultural deficits (e.g. Cotton, George and Joyner 2013; see interview material from higher education staff cited in Stevenson 2012). The constant reification of this majoritarian narrative has writers, such as Dumas (2016) and Stein (2016), argue that education policy and practice (as played out in the USA), reflects antiblackness. In explaining his position, Dumas (2016) elaborated that Black people in the USA were never meant to participate in education given the nation's origins and heritage of slavery, Jim Crow and apartheid. The legacy of slavery, of people being considered

propertied and nonhuman, is reflected in perceptions of Black people today particularly in the context of the West (Dumas 2016; Stein 2016). As Stein (2016, 172) has argued:

> Categorization of Black people as non-human and evolutionarily inferior justified their relegation… In the era of chattel slavery, this translated into a logic according to which Black flesh was inscribed and treated as fungible—that is, interchangeable, accumulable, and objectified as property.

Dumas (2016, 16) reflected upon antiblackness in education policy in antebellum USA with state-sanctioned slavery, segregated schools during Jim Crow, and the fight to integrate schools during the Civil Rights Era in declaring that Black people have been categorised as, 'nonhuman; inherently uneducable, or at the very least, unworthy of education; and, even in a multiracial society.' This contention highlights an issue of *recognising difference* of nonhumans in the classroom in the liberal ethic sense, which challenges Fraser's (2000) notion of misrecognition. Dumas (2016, 18) argued that 'the Black is not only *misrecognized*, *but unrecognizable as human*, and therefore there is no social or political relationship to be fostered or restored' [*emphasis added*].

This understanding of antiblackness is applicable to England given its role in the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism and imperialism, which 'relied on the construction of a non-white Other whose humanity was sufficiently undermined to be eradicated, subjugated, and exploited for white profit' (Bain 2018, 4). The dichotomy of the colonised and the colonizer informs contemporary notions of what constitutes Englishness (Gilroy 2003; Neal 2002). As Ringer (1983, 13) concluded in his assessment of the impact of England's colonisation of the Americas on contemporary notions of USA national identity, 'it was on the back of the enslaved black that the white settler constructed his first comprehensive model of a plural society.' This aspect

of English history is ignored (Bain 2018), and absent from the English school curriculum (Doharty 2018). Ignorance of this colonial history and its legacy in recent discussions of race inequality in English education requires attention. This ignorance manifests itself in educational settings and teaching practiced in which the overwhelming majority of teachers, at both primary and secondary levels of education, self-identify as white (Doharty 2018, 3). As Doharty explained in her work (2018, 3), this lack of awareness of structural racism and legacy of colonialism contributes to racial achievement gaps in English education as it positions 'black and minority ethnic and religious communities at the margins of the nation rather than as an integral part of "our island story.' The Othering and marginalisation of students of colour are exemplified in the current discourse of unequal degree outcomes in English higher education.

Across the English higher education sector, there is a 15% gap between 'home'[3] graduates of colour and white graduates, which favours the latter, in obtaining a 'good honours' degree (1st or 2.1 classification) (Equality Challenge Unit 2017, 116). This statistic is significant because it challenges dominant perceptions of what constitutes equity. The achievement gap statistic is an embarrassing key performance indicator for the sector, as well as for individual institutions. As a result, universities, with encouragement and support from national organisations such as the Office for Students (formerly HEFCE) and AdvanceHE (merger between the former Equality Challenge Unit and the Higher Education Academy) , have been attempting to improve this specific key performance indicator at a national level.

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[3] This statistic does not include international students, only UK-domiciled students (Equality Challenge Unit 2016).

Inclusive education as a solution?

Inclusive teaching and learning in English higher education has been pushed as a way forward in ensuring equal access and opportunity of a diverse student body (Thomas and May 2010). The terms 'inclusive' and 'inclusion' were introduced in English education in the 1970s in integrating and supporting disabled children into school classrooms with non-disabled children (Hockings 2004, 1). With the passing of progressive disability discrimination legislation in early 2000s, supporting disabled students in higher education and inclusive education became intertwined and synonymous (Madriaga *et al.* 2010). Evidence emerged that disabled students in higher education were able to achieve similar academic outcomes as their non-disabled peers with inclusive, academic support in place (Madriaga *et al.* 2010). Such evidence gave way to consider inclusive teaching and learning in addressing the achievement gap of degree outcomes between those racialized as BME and those identified as white (see Singh 2011).

While much has been written about the reasons for the achievement gap in English universities that foregrounds race and racism (Broecke and Nicholls 2007; Singh 2011; Stevenson 2012), there is no critical work, as of yet, which examines university responses on the issue. In addressing this *gap* in knowledge, this paper sets out to investigate the extent of institutions embracing a majoritarian view of race inequalities in education, in which solutions to address race inequities are 'value neutral' and 'colour-blind'. This is important as 'value neutral' and 'colour-blind' solutions may not only misrecognise cultural differences of students of colour (Fraser 2000), but leaves the legacy of white supremacy in English education policy and practice unmarked, invisible, and intact (Bain 2018; Dumas 2016).

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The 'colour-blindness' of solutions stem from a dominant view of inclusive education, or inclusive practice, which is grasped by the English higher education sector. For instance, the Department for Education is a ministerial department in England responsible for children's services and education, including higher education policy. They published a document, guided by a Disabled Students Sector Leadership Group, on inclusive teaching and learning practice in higher education that not only reproduces a 'colour-blind' notion of inclusion, but also may be meaningless for disabled students (Department for Education 2017). The Department for Education (2017, 32) citing the work of Hockings (2010) recognises inclusive practice as:

Teaching which engages students in learning that is meaningful, relevant and accessible to all, embracing a view of the individual and of individual difference as a source of diversity that can enrich the lives and the learning of others.

Inclusive learning therefore invests in the following principles:

- Learning is enriched by the varied experiences of students;
- Accessible learning is relevant and approachable by all students;
- The curriculum and the means of delivery are both part of this accessibility;
- Students with full access to learning and teaching are more likely to engage with learning, and to reach their full potential.

The 'colour-blindness' of inclusive practice, as represented above, employs statements such as '*relevant and accessible to all*' and 'accessible learning is relevant and approachable by *all students*' [*emphasis* added]. Although it attempts to account for individual differences of students, it repeats the phrase '*all students*'. As touched on earlier, this phrase reflects the liberal ethic that 'everybody is the same' and

simultaneously misrecognising and ignoring the racialized experiences of students of colour.

Not only does this concept of inclusion fail to mention anything about 'race', as well as gender and social class, it also fails to recognise how disability structures lives. This is the result of adopting an 'all embracing notion of inclusion' that does not 'focus on particular groups identified by a single characteristic, such as gender, ethnicity or disability' in relation to 'individual learning' (Hockings 2010, 2). This all-embracing notion of inclusion discounts the social, the collective ties, and emphasises the individual learner. Unfortunately, the national awarding body for professional recognition, the Higher Education Academy (now AccessHE) has adopted this view (Thomas and May 2010). It indicated an inclusive approach as necessitating 'a shift away from supporting specific student groups through a discrete set of policies or time-bound interventions, towards equity considerations being embedded within all functions of the institution and treated as an ongoing quality enhancement' (May and Bridger 2010, 6). This is an instance, taking the words of Slee and Allan (2001, 181), of 'missing the point' of inclusion, as it is 'both there and not there… citing inclusion as our goal; still waiting to include, yet speaking as if we are already inclusive.'

This all-embracing notion of inclusion is a departure from Ainscow *et al.* (2006). I hark back to Ainscow *et al.* (2006) in response to the misrecognition that perpetuates an all-encompassing notion of inclusion that emphasises the individual, simultaneously discounting the value and subjectivities of social, collective identities (Jenkins 1996). Ainscow *et al.* (2006, 2), like Slee and Allan (2001), argue that inclusion in education is a move against exclusion:

> [Inclusive education] asserts that the aim of inclusion is to reduce exclusion and
> discriminatory attitudes, including those in relation to age, social class, ethnicity,

religion, gender and attainment. It does not focus only on a response to individuals but on how settings, policies, cultures and structures can recognise and value diversity.

Two things to point out from this understanding of inclusion. First, inclusive education does not *only* equate inclusion with disability, or a special needs education. In fact, there is no mention of disability above. Of course, it is a shortcoming, but a significant departure from a majoritarian view within the English higher education sector which equates inclusion with disability (i.e. Department for Education 2017). Second, unlike Hockings (2010), May and Bridger (2010) and the Department for Education (2017), this understanding of inclusive practice places less emphasis on *individuals* but 'on how settings, policies, cultures and structures can *recognise and value diversity'* [*emphasis* added] (Ainscow et al. 2006, 2). This leads me to the question of how the collective experiences and the lives of those racialized as BME are accounted for in drawing solutions to narrowing an achievement gap.

Reframing race equality plans and the 'achievement gap issue'

In comprehending the extent of meaningfulness of inclusion in English higher education policymaking, I drew inspiration from methods employed by both Smith (2012), and Slee and Allan (2001). Smith (2012, 154) discussed reframing as a decolonising method, in regards to how a problem or issue is defined, which then determines how best to solve the problem. For her, social problems that impact Indigenous communities in settler colonial states, such as New Zealand, are never solved due to the ways they have been framed with history ignored:

'[governments and social agencies] have framed indigenous issues in the 'indigenous problem' basket, to be handled in the usual cynical and paternalistic manner... Many indigenous activists have argued that such things as mental illness, alcoholism and suicide, for example, are not about psychological and

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individualized failure but about colonization or lack of collective self-determination (Smith 2012, 154).

Reflecting on the process of colonisation, not *metaphorically* (Tuck and Yang 2012), I see the dominant discourse of the achievement gap issue in England is attributed to one's cultural deficits, which in turn determines that the solution has to be related to 'them' overcoming their deficits. Thus, there is a need to *reframe* the achievement gap issue that accounts for the legacy of white supremacy and destructive processes of colonisation. This reframing complements a deconstructed reading method employed by Slee and Allan (2001) in their work of progressing inclusive education.

Slee and Allan (2001, 177) employed deconstruction in reading the UK Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Code of Practice in Disability in Higher Education (1999) as they were suspicious of descriptions of inclusive education in such policy statements as posturing. They were dubious that these texts, in declarations of progress towards inclusion in educational settings, amounted to a little more than the assimilation of the marginalised, specifically those categorised and identified as disabled. In pushing forth the notion that inclusive education is a 'social movement against educational exclusion', they have argued that the possibilities offered by deconstruction positions the researcher as a cultural vigilante (Slee and Allan 2001, 180-181):

> …seeking to expose exclusion in all its forms, the language we use, the teaching methods we adopt, the curriculum we transmit and the relations we establish within our schools, further education colleges and universities… deconstruction is one kind of research which might induce some radical thinking about alternative practices. So in posing as a vigilante, the violence we intend to inflict is merely textual…

The work presented here reframes the issue of racial achievement gap in English higher education by taking on a deconstructive approach on reading university race

equality action plans. There are three reasons for taking this approach. First, this approach allows for matters of 'race' to be foregrounded (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008), which is consistent with the tenets of critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Solórzano and Yosso 2001; 2002). This offers a counternarrative to the majoritarian story of race and English higher education in which proposed solutions to the 'BME gap achievement' issue are value-neutral and colour-blind. Moreover, in staying true with CRT, experiential knowledge of people of colour, such as myself, is pivotal in analysing education and society. Second, in being a counternarrative, it is aligned with 'refusal' work (Grande 2018; Patel 2015; Tuck and Yang 2014). This entails not reproducing the colonial practice of researching 'down' – the marginalised, the racialized, the disabled, the classed and the gendered. As Tuck and Yang (2014, 817) argued, 'Refusal makes space for recognition, and for reciprocity. Refusal turns the gaze back upon power…' Thus, this examination of texts below is an instance of researching 'up'. Finally, the work conducted here exposes exclusion as it is inscribed within inclusive education policies (Slee and Allan 2001), with a goal of addressing and eliminating racial oppression (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). In framing the issue of race inequality in higher education, there is a question as to the extent of exclusionary language used in inclusive policy institutional documents. There is a question as to what is culturally recognised and valued.

Race equality plans from six different English universities (see Table 1) have been scrutinised here. These universities were chosen as their work on race equality has been positively recognised throughout the sector by a leading national higher education organisation. I am keeping the name of this organisation anonymous as the six universities will be identifiable. This was stipulated in my ethics approval for this research endeavour from my own university's ethic committee. The six institutional

race equality actions plans have been made publicly available by the national

organisation. Availability of plans was important for access as original intention was to

review eight plans, but two plans were not publicly made available or accessible. For

the purposes of confidentiality, the names of these six institutions will not be disclosed.

Looking at action plans is important because it is the institution's accountability

processes on addressing its race equality initiatives to itself and to the public.

Employing CRT as a framework of analysis (Solórzano and Yosso 2001; 2002), I read

these texts as a scholar of colour employed in an English university, born from

immigrant parents, and raised and racialized in the USA. In analysing these texts, I was

specifically looking for patterns and commonalities in which the issue of 'race' was

misrecognised or ignored in addressing the achievement gap issue. I was deliberately

seeking to mark whiteness in these texts. For instance, I examined the texts to see how

institutions interpreted and attached meaning to the notion of inclusion, with questions

such as: Were racial differences and racism considered and recognised in inclusive

policy and practice in these texts? If so, what was the extent of universities pushing for

race-specific initiatives? How much of an attempt, if any, were universities attempting

to reach out to students of colour and their communities?

(Insert Table 1 here)

Meanings attached to inclusion in English higher education
In having a race equality plan, these six institutions have documented how they will

address the key performance indicator of narrowing the degree attainment gap between

those racialized as BME and non-BME (white) graduates. The six race equality plans

that were scrutinised here encompassed a spectrum ranging from institutions that

misrecognises racial difference with an all-embracing notion of inclusion to one institution that recognises the historical legacy of racism and its impact on their curricula.

The extent of whiteness being left unmarked in these action plans is reflected in how an institution interprets inclusion in their setting. There were four institutions out of the six explicitly indicating that they were taken an inclusive approach to addressing race inequalities in academic achievement. One of them highlighted their university's own curriculum design toolkit which had an inclusive practice strand (University C) that:

- Ensures the understanding of individual learning needs
- Takes a coherent approach which is anticipatory and proactive
- Provides environments for effective learning for all
- Ensures materials are accessible and representative
- Uses assessment which enables all students to demonstrate their learning
- Makes of use of feedback and performance data
- Is informed by professional development.

As evidenced in this list, whiteness is left unmarked by not recognising racial difference in addressing race inequality in curriculum delivery. Moreover, the language employed above, with words such as 'anticipatory' and 'accessible' mimicking disability discrimination legislative wording, reflects a dominant perception of inclusive practice as axiomatic of supporting the needs of disabled students. This is reflected in the action plans of two other institutions. These two universities described how they were appropriating existing institutional inclusive policy and practice, which was initially written-up for disabled students, and incorporating as part of their action plan for addressing the achievement gap issue:

The university has developed an inclusive teaching and learning materials policy that has a focus on disabled students… To augment the university inclusive teaching and learning materials policy to consider all aspects of diversity (University B).

As an institution we have focused on inclusive curriculum for some time, initially with disabled students in mind. Developing inclusivity of curriculum and pedagogy with regard to supporting disabled students has been a very successful journey, which can be evidenced by attainment figures and qualitative data. This approach puts the University in a good starting position which enables us to address other diversity areas, including race (University D).

Recognizing the disabled student experience and the discrimination faced by disabled people in English higher education (Madriaga *et al.* 2011), I contend that building upon such 'inclusive' policy perpetuates misrecognition of ethnic differences and ignores the pervasiveness of whiteness on the everyday lives of students of colour. What is good for disabled students is not necessarily good for *all* students. The disabled student journey in higher education is multifaceted and diverse. However, there is a shared experience that disabled students may or may not recognise with each other. It is the experience of having to disclose their impairments to their respective universities in order to have disabled student support in place. This is to ensure that one has access and an equal experience in comparison to their non-disabled student peers, which is consistent with national equality legislation. In having to disclose medical evidence to the university to achieve some sense of equity, disabled students are forced to lay bare that they are not a 'typical', normal student (Madriaga *et al.* 2011). Due to this, it should not be surprising that University D stated above 'that this [inclusive approach] is a good starting position' to address other diversity areas, including 'race'. In its attempt to be all-embracing, it demarcates the normal from the deviant, whether disabled or racialized. Building upon such 'inclusive' policy to address race inequalities will

require a rethink.

Actioning for curriculum change?

Inclusion can be interpreted in various ways. The dominant interpretation is that inclusion equates to disability and special needs education. In addressing the gap achievement issue, institutions have considered their learning, teaching and assessment strategies in their respective action plans. Out of the six, three universities have indicated explicitly of accounting for 'race' in curriculum changes. One of them recognised structural racism existing in curriculum delivery, which is congruent with Blaisdell's (2015) notion of racial literacy in teaching delivery.

University E explicitly stated in its action plan a structural, historical understanding of racial oppression. It declared: 'We recognise that to liberate is to go beyond merely recognising 'diversity', by acknowledging the present legacies of historical oppression, and by acting now to address them.' It then elaborates that the curriculum encompasses not only pedagogy, but also other elements comprising: (1) syllabus – the choice of topics, resources, examples or case studies; (2) process – the teaching methods and learning activities; (3) participants – the students and tutors on the programme; and (4) environment – the rooms and buildings, the signs and statutes, and the local area, taking into consideration the accessibility of these spaces both physically and socially. This university's action plan was the only institution to recognise the legacy of historical racial oppression. It did this with limited mention of inclusion or inclusive practice with heavy emphasis on challenging traditional notions of pedagogy and curriculum.

University A, like the previous university, did not mention any adaption of existing inclusive policy or make explicit mention of inclusive practice in its action

plan. However, it has set out to embed equality in its curriculum in the form of staff development workshops. It seeks to build upon the work of its English subject area in which curriculum texts were updated to be 'more diverse and inclusive'. This was the only recognition of 'race' and cultural differences being considered in altering curriculum in its action plan to address its achievement gap.

University C, unlike the previous two universities, highlighted inclusive practice in addressing gap achievement issue via the curriculum. It had adapted its inclusive approach from its support of disabled students. However, it has made an effort to recognise issues of racism in its action plan by explicitly marking and celebrating Black History Month in university calendar. It also stipulated that:

> Issues must be addressed through the review of resources, materials, teaching methods, and assessment to ensure these are inclusive of *all students* [emphasis added]… Recent examples of changes to sources used and cited in programmes in response to our work on inclusive practice include:
>
> • Introduction of a module in African American Literature
> • Diversification of the journal subscription lists by information managers
> • Introduction of video clips, guest lecturers and TED talks from prominent academics of a BME background in disciplines where the majority of the staff team were of a White British background

While this university has attempted to recognise and celebrate 'race' in its action plan, it listed examples which raises questions about its intent in addressing the gap achievement issue, particularly in comparison to University E's stated efforts in attempting to decolonise its curricula. The latter written in its action plan that it is rethinking syllabus, teaching methods, teachers and students as participants in learning, and university spaces due to historical legacy of racial oppression. The stated scale of change is vast for University E in comparison to piecemeal examples cited by

University C entailing an inclusion of one module of African-American literature (ignoring the British Black experience), video clips of BME academics giving TED talks and request of local librarians to subscribe to a diverse range of journal titles. Given this, there is difficulty in not being sceptical of notions of inclusion and/or inclusive practice with the emphasis of *all students*. These piecemeal examples of University C not only restricts recognition of cultural differences, but ignores the pervasiveness of whiteness and anti-black racism negatively affecting the lives of students of colour in English universities.

With the exception of the three universities mentioned above, curriculum change initiatives as indicated in the other action plans of the other universities did not account for 'race', legacy of racism or one's cultural differences. For instance, in addressing the gap issue, these universities (B, D, and F) indicated that they will move or sustain the roll out of anonymous marking. In addition, as a quality check and accountability to an inclusive agenda, University F indicated in its action plan that external examiners will be offered the opportunity to comment on the extent of inclusivity of curriculum and pedagogical practice. In addition, University F disclosed that within the area of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) changes may not be relevant to 'inclusion' issues as it would be for the areas of humanities and social work. This point is without any evidence or compelling rationale, especially considering the work of Emdin *et al.* (2016) in which they successfully employed a culturally relevant approach to teaching and learning in STEM. This kind of university response is indicative of resistance to innovate teaching and learning, hinging on a colour-blind ethic in education that continues to misrecognise cultural differences and ignore racialized experiences of students of colour. This is how whiteness in education works. It perpetuates the dominant narrative that it is not the curriculum, the pedagogy, the

teaching, learning and assessment methods employed which reproduces racial

inequalities in education. It frames students of colour as having cultural deficits to best

explain the gap achievement issue. Since this is the problem, proposed solutions

become interventions to remedy these 'deficient' students, attempting to make them

normal.

Outside the curriculum – 'race'-specific initiatives

This dominant narrative is reflected in initiatives which reside outside of curriculum

changes. One initiative that two universities (B and C) were planning to implement is

running a mentoring scheme. University B stipulated that 'BME students are

encouraged to act as peer mentors, with the aim of increasing BME participation in

these schemes and that the impact of this is monitored and evaluated.' There was no

rationale for running this peer mentoring other than addressing the gap achievement

issue. It is assumed that the peer mentoring scheme will follow suit with other schemes

in the English higher education sector which seeks to support first-year students in their

transitions into university life and academic study (Thomas 2011). This is in contrast to

University C's mentoring scheme which is integrated with recruitment and outreach

activities. At the time of the write-up of their action plan, University C was piloting a

mentoring programme with a local school designed for eleven fifteen-year olds who

happen to be male pupils of Black African and Caribbean backgrounds. According to

University C's action plan, the 'scheme is designed to ensure that Black boys reach their

full potential.' The commonality between these two mentoring schemes is the notion

that BME students are not as prepared for university study in comparison to those

students racialized as white. This is consistent with the majoritarian narrative that

students of colour have deficiencies prior to entering higher education. It conveys the

thinking that if only they were more prepared for higher education study, they will succeed like those students racialized as white.

Similar to the mentoring schemes, at least two universities (C and D) have indicated in their action plans that they will employ BME student ambassadors to better reflect student profile. For University C, the students ambassadors, like student mentors, are to be 'role models in local schools to raise motivation, aspiration, and attainment.' Student ambassadors, unlike mentors, are explicitly working in the recruitment and marketing of their respective universities. To acknowledge a need to employ more BME student ambassadors, these two universities have implicitly indicated that there are areas in their student recruitment which requires improvement. Also, this acknowledgement suggests that prospective BME students may be more interested in committing to a university if there are current students who look like themselves. This was a definite sentiment expressed by young people of colour in previous research in choosing universities to study for racial reasons (Reay *et al.* 2001).

Openings for dialogue
The paper concludes that race neutral, colour blind initiatives to tackle the English higher education sector 'BME achievement gap' issue reproduces misrecognition of cultural differences and ignoring the racialized experiences of students of colour. This is exemplified in the symbolic appropriation of notions of inclusion and inclusive practice within institutional policy statements. Meanings attached to inclusion and inclusive practice, for the most part, did not account for racialized experiences. This misrepresents the thinking of inclusive education advocates such as Ainscow *et al.* (2006, 2) in which 'settings, policies, cultures and structures can recognise and value

diversity.' This is not to say that recognising and valuing diversity in the classroom will tackle race disparity in academic achievement in English higher education.

Recognising cultural differences in the classroom is important. Recognising cultural differences in conjunction with an awareness of how whiteness, white supremacy, structures lives, is perhaps more significant. To counter the majoritarian view of a value neutral, colour-blind inclusion, I reiterate the challenge of Dumas (2016, 16) in marking the everyday ill effects of whiteness in education that reproduces an antiblackness that casts Black children and young people as 'uneducable', 'unworthy of education', 'nonhuman.' Classrooms have to allow space for honest dialogues on matters of 'race' particularly the notion of antiblackness that is not only meshed in the fibres of USA education, but in English education:

> …antiblackness infects educators' work in schools, and serves as a form of (everyday) violence against Black children and their families. This acknowledgement is different from a broad stance against intolerance or racism, or an admission of the existence of white privilege. Teachers, administrators… should create opportunities to engage in honest and very specific conversations about Black bodies, blackness and Black historical memories in and of the school and local community (Dumas 2016, 17).

For teachers and practitioners in the university classroom, this will mean not only recognising and valuing students, their culture and heritage, but also marking whiteness in everyday lives that castigates Black students as nonhumans. To do this will require reflecting upon transformative pedagogies in which matters of race are foregrounded, such as Ladson-Billing's (2013) culturally relevant pedagogy and Emdin's (2016) reality pedagogy. It will also require a reinterpretation of 'inclusion' in which university teachers and administrators question their practice. So, instead of having answers to conclude this article, I depart with questions for myself as a university

teacher and course leader, which may be applicable to others:

- Are we recognising the culture and differences that students bring to our classrooms?

- Are we recognising the pain and frustration of racism and discrimination that our students of colour face on an everyday basis?

- <mark>Does our teaching of the curriculum and assessment practices connect with our students of colour?</mark>

- Are we racially literate teachers?

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Table 1: Brief contextual UK domicile data from six universities

	Number of 'home' students in total (rounded off to nearest 1000)	% of 'home' BME undergraduate students
University A	15000	50%
University B	21000	23%
University C	19000	41%
University D	20000	17%
University E	10000	39%
University F	2000	20%