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[1]Race, 'Warehousing' and Vocational Education and Training: a European Issue? {Presentation Notes}

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[1]Race, 'Warehousing' and Vocational Education and Training: a European Issue?[1]

In this paper we examine the relationship between race and Vocational Education and Training (VET), setting the discussion within the broader socio-economic and historical context.

For the European Union and many other societies the route to economic competitiveness is thought to arise from the development of a knowledge economy.

Similar claims have been made by the OECD (2014) with such notions becoming hegemonic and a feature of international policy debates.

It is in this context that VET has an important role to play. To that end a significant body of work has addressed the manner in which European VET systems develop in young people the competences, skills and dispositions required in work (Mulder and Winterton, 2016).

A theme that is rather less emphasised in European research is an examination of the relationship between VET, social justice and inequality.

In this latter instance the focus is on issues concerned with what could be described as the reproduction of classed and gendered relations, with some small recognition of ethnicity (see Beck et al, 2006; Hughes, et al, 2006).

This recognition of ethnicity has often been couched, somewhat gesturally, in terms of intersectionality and the articulation between race, class and gender.

It is however important not to ignore that these processes are mediated by the specific social formation in which they are located. Virolainen (2015) and Jørgensen (2014) have highlighted the different VET strategies present in Nordic countries as well as the relationship of these to class and gendered processes.

In Germany a number of writers have considered, or at least noted, the relationship of VET to class (Deissinger, 2015; Müller, 2014; Schmidt, 2010; Schneider and Tieben, 2011; Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011, chapter 7).

Interest has frequently been directed towards marginalised and disadvantaged youth and in instances where race/ethnicity is addressed this has often been in terms of migration (see, Taylor, Foster and Cambre, 2012 for a Canadian example) and/or current concerns surrounding refugees and asylum seekers who are fleeing from conflicts in the Middle East (Chadderton and Edmonds, 2015).

Comparing the situation of young people from ethnic minorities on vocational courses between European nations is complicated by the differing status of vocational provision which is relatively high somewhere like Finland and relatively low somewhere like Italy.

Moreover, data on ethnicity and other biographical details is not gathered in a similar or systematic way even by EU countries (Cedefop 2014) and in England/uk a plethora of slightly different terms.

Nevertheless, in a broad overview of educational policy across the EU a report for the project Ethnic Differences in Education and Diverging Prospects for Urban Youth in an Enlarged Europe (EDUMIDROM), Szalai et al (2014, 23) argued that

> **[2]**Vocational training is often not only the dead-end of schooling but it is saturated by discriminatory practices that minority ethnic students have to face, [adding that] in vocational training minority ethnic youths are often subject to mechanisms that not only multiply their disadvantages but make them feel redundant early in their career.

Mannitz, found that students from minority groups were less likely than ethnic Germans to be "within the fully qualifying system of dual vocational training or vocational schooling"; 40 per cent versus 60 per cent, with the dual system maintains high status in Germany and she concludes (p4):

> **[3]**Germany has the most pronounced correlation between a student's social background and migration history and their educational achievement – even despite the fact that the correlation has slightly diminished since 2000. (Mannitz, 2011, 4)

To reiterate the particular circumstances of a country shape the place of vocational education in the structure of educational hierarchy and general inequality.

Three issues

[4]1. The first concerns the way in which we are mobilising the notion of race. We draw on Leonardo's (2005: 409) concept of *race ambivalence*[(1)] which suggests that whilst race is an arbitrary social construction, it nevertheless has 'real' material consequences.

That is to say, we experience social relations through the prism of race as if it were 'real' and has meaning despite these being arbitrary and more often than not divisive. As Apple (2001: 204) suggests "race is a construction, a set of fully social relationships".

[5]Secondly, we acknowledge the political economy of race and education, which in the UK and elsewhere has been marked by a complex settlement that reflects the uneven and sometimes antagonistic relations between education, the state and black and minority ethnic (BME) communities.

[6]Finally, the concept of 'warehousing' points towards a relational analysis of race and VET, insofar as it is not limited to quantification of students' progress and attainment, nor to

identifying 'barriers' to access but rather aims to explore VET as a site in which race as a social relationship is (re)produced. Echoes Szalai et al comment and to reiterate

> **[7]** Vocational training is often not only the dead-end of schooling but it is saturated by discriminatory practices that minority ethnic students have to face… [adding that] in vocational training minority ethnic youths are often subject to mechanisms that not only multiply their disadvantages but make them feel redundant early in their career. (Szalai et al, 2014, 23)

We initially hoped to compare and contrast the situation in the UK/England with that of continental Europe.

Very quickly it became apparent that this was over ambitious not least because of the paucity of data as well as its conceptual confusion.

Hence in this discussion focus on the UK and more specifically England

'Black youth', education and training

English research from the 1980s that addressed race/ethnicity and VET is salutary and poses a number of important questions that have been submerged in current debates. A reconsideration of this work raises a number of significant questions for VET researchers.

More than thirty years ago a body of research examined the manner in which black youth were marginalised in the English VET system.

Much of this work addressed the youth training schemes that had been developed during the 1980's a period much like the present in which there were concerns about the consequences of youth unemployment for social stability as well as the need to develop in young people the skills and dispositions required for employment.

Verma and Darby (1987: 27) noted the disproportionate impact of unemployment upon young people who had new commonwealth backgrounds, whose families had originated in the Caribbean or the Indian subcontinent.

These young people were consequently disproportionately represented on youth training schemes and in colleges of further education. This was a finding echoed in the work of Eggleston et al (1986, see chapter 11) who suggested that African-Caribbean youth were likely to remain in education longer than their white counterparts and who were over represented in colleges of further education (FE) (see Avis, 1988; 1991a, b).

This pattern of educational engagement limited entry to age specific apprenticeships, a process compounded by the informal networks that were frequently mobilised to secure apprenticeships, whereby those employed in skilled labour drew on their contacts to secure places for their children (Lee and Wrench, 1983).

Importantly, the youth training schemes that developed in the 1980's were not all of piece. Some schemes offered greater employment opportunities than others.

A number of writers argued that black youth were more likely to be found in community based provision or in colleges of Further Education, much of this provision emphasised the development of social and life skills at the expense of offering work-based training. Solomos (1983: 53), referring to the work of Bedeman and Harvey (1981) stated,

> [8]A number of research reports from the MSC [Manpower Services Commission] have pointed out that the actual participation of black youth on particular schemes within YOP [Youth Opportunities Programme] is quite uneven and that there is an overrepresentation of ethnic minority youth in those schemes which emphasise social and life skills as opposed to actual training. (Solomos, 1983: 53, citing Bedeman and Harvey, 1981)

In addition Solomos (1988:172-6,189) suggested that given the propensity to pathologise black youth there was a tendency to place them in programmes that were ameliorative and concerned with social and life skills.

Such findings were a consistent feature of research concerned with Youth Training Schemes (YTS) whereby black youth was deemed to be problematic and in need of containment. This led to the emphasis on social and life skills and the ghettoization of these young people in college, community, and training agency provision that was at one stage removed from the workplace (Newnham, 1986; Troyna and Smith, 1983; West Midlands Youth Training Scheme Research Project, 1985; Hollands, 1990; Cohen and Bains, 1998; Racial Equality in Training Schemes, 1985).

Black and anti-racist thinkers were highly critical of the ways in which those in charge of planning 'youth policy' offered models of education and training that pathologised black youth by focusing on supposed cultural deficits in social and life skills (Carby, 1982).

This work implied that black youth had been removed from the labour market and were in effect being 'warehoused', encountering low level VET that had very limited purchase in the labour market.

[9]The Eclipse of Race in VET Research

focus on school and Access to HE

By the late 1980s the grassroots access movement, which had in part grown out of the aspirations of black adult learners (Heron, 1986), was being increasingly subsumed into government directed widening participation policies, embedded in neo-liberal discourses of meritocracy and social mobility.

For those with historical understanding of the centrality of educational opportunity to the political struggles of black British communities, the resonance of the widening participation discourse was very apparent.

In terms of sheer numbers black and minority ethnic communities have been beneficiaries of widening participation drives (Alexander and Arday, 2015).

However, increased diversity in the student population has not necessarily meant greater equity in terms of race, class and gender; recent research has identified racialised gaps in degree attainment, access to elite HE institutions, entry to the graduate labour market and the profile of academic staff (Equality Challenge Unit, 2008; Stevenson, 2012). Access to HE does not equate with SM.

Consequently research that has addressed race and education, whilst clearly present in work on higher education and schools, has been far less visible in relation to VET and Further Education (but see for example, Chadderton and Wischmann, 2014; Chadderton and Edmonds, 2015).

At times it is almost as if FE and VET have been erased from research that addresses race and education.

It is possible that this reflects the low status attributed to VET and FE, with researchers wishing to distance themselves from the problematic aspects of youth training that stressed a notion of deficit by focusing on social and life skills that pathologises black youth.

If this conjecture is sustainable it is deeply concerning as Black Youth remain a significant constituency in VET and FE (Youth Cohort Study and Longitudinal Study of Young People in England, 2009, 2010).

In respect of the provision of VET, the Wolf Report (2011) has pointed towards the limited value of low level vocational qualifications. Whilst such processes have been examined in terms of disability and class, as well as their articulation with gender, there has been limited engagement with race and ethnicity.

Blacker (2013:1), commenting on the current stage of neo-liberal capitalism writes,

> [10]The current neoliberal mutation of capitalism has evolved beyond the days when the wholesale exploitation of labor under-wrote the world system's expansion. While "normal" business profits plummet and theft-by-finance-rises, capitalism now shifts into a mode of elimination that targets most of us – along with our environment – as waste products awaiting managed disposal. (Blacker, 2013, p1)

Blacker suggests that "The current neoliberal mutation of capitalism" has shifted towards "a mode of elimination that targets most of us" (P.1), with Marsh (2011) adopting a not dissimilar argument.

The work of these authors work articulates with descriptions of the labour market in the US as well as Western Europe, in which precariousness, under- and unemployment are key features of work. If these ideas are accepted they raise important questions about the role of education in general and VET in particular, as well as the manner in which we examine the relationship between race/ethnicity and VET.

The English context

[11]Turning specifically to VET in England, provisional analysis of existing literature and patterns of BME participation and outcomes, suggests a need to reinvigorate research on race and VET. There are a number of overarching reasons why race/ VET remains a necessary site of study:

- Despite the strong focus in research on race and education on schools and HE, only 47% of young people in England follow a purely academic route through education after the age of 16.

- The majority of English VET is provided in FE colleges; historically post-16 BME students have tended towards FE colleges but this pattern is changing, not least because most major BME groups now have increased rates of entry to HE.

- There is evidence that certain BME groups (e.g. black Caribbean; white/ black Caribbean) have relatively poor outcomes on FE-based VET programmes.

- [12]There is also compelling evidence that BME youth are disadvantaged in relation to work-based routes and apprenticeships (see Crook, 2014; Chadderton and Wischmann, 2014).

- Since VET programmes are diverse in the kinds of knowledge and skills they develop, and in the ways they are positioned in relation to employment and continuing education, it is necessary to examine not only rates of participation and achievement but to develop an understanding of the *types* of VET programmes in which BME students are concentrated.
  (source Avis et al, 2016)

The overarching message from our provisional analysis is that 'participation' in post compulsory education and training in itself does not equate to social mobility.

This may be particularly true of fractions of working-class BME students on VET programmes, who may still be channelled towards particular types of 'non-advanced' VET programmes and who may struggle to access apprenticeships and employment with structured training.

These racialised dynamics may have been obscured by recent emphasis on growth in BME entry to HE (Alexander and Arday, 2015) and partial gains in, for instance, GCSE attainment (DfE, 2014). The following sections of this paper reflect on current patterns of participation and outcomes among BME students in FE in England.

The finding that ethnic minority students in England are less likely to take vocational courses is mirrored in Denmark where "children of immigrants are significantly less likely to choose the vocational branch" (Colding 2006, 351). There too, their achievement rate is less: "the dropout rate for those who do start a vocational education is significantly higher than for

their Danish peers" (Colding 2006, 351).

Conclusion

There is historical data to support the contention that Black youth have been warehoused in VET on low level courses.

However, the current evidence is more complicated and in recent years (2015) there is data to suggest there has been a shift in patterns of participation.

Black youth are less likely to attend vocational further education and more likely to attend academic sixth forms and Higher education than their white counterparts. Whilst Black youth are more likely to attend university than their white counterparts, in the case of elite universities the pattern is reversed.

However, when black youth attend FE they do worse than their white counterparts and as HE and FE graduates are more likely to be unemployed.

There are two questions that follow from this. Firstly, is this the result of statistical anomalies or does it represent a new development?

Secondly, and in relation to the latter how can we explain this possible trend?

Notes

1. A fuller and somewhat different version of this paper is currently under review. Avis, J., Orr, K., Warmington, P. Race, 'Warehousing' and Vocational Education and Training.

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