Seeking equality of educational outcomes for Black students: A personal account

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*I keep saying there's no such thing as being "not racist." We are either
being racist or antiracist. And in order to be antiracist, we must, first and
foremost, be willing to admit the times we are being racist.*
<div align="right">Ibram X Kendhi (2020)</div>

Introduction

It makes me feel uncomfortable to admit that I used to subscribe to the notion that fairness means treating everybody equally, and that skin colour does not matter. I have learnt relatively recently, however, that attempting to treat people fairly by being 'colour-blind' fails to take into account historic, socio-political, and institutional racism, which serve to hinder the progression of some groups of people on the basis of their skin colour or ethnicity (Cabinet Office, 2017). Ignoring skin colour delegitimises the daily experiences of those who face the 'baggage' of racial difference, and creates a powerful sense of alienation (Hirsch, 2018, p. 124). The global pandemic caused by coronavirus has highlighted the systemic nature of inequalities caused by racism in Britain: people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic[1] (BAME) groups were more likely to be in jobs that had a high risk of exposure to infection, were more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19, and were more likely to die from the virus (Public Health England, 2020). These systemic problems are not of the making of these groups of people, nor are they their responsibility to solve (Winters, 2020). Equal treatment of people is likely to preserve disparities between groups under the well-intended, but misguided umbrella of fairness.

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[1] I will discuss issues with this terminology later on.

A number of factors are likely to be responsible for my former beliefs about fairness. I grew up in a white[2] family, in a safe home, which was in a sheltered neighbourhood in a small town in Surrey, UK. I attended primary school in which there was only one Black[3] child, with whom I was not friends, and I do not recall being taught about racial differences. During childhood, I learnt that equal treatment was fair treatment: I was one of three siblings, and cries of "That's not fair!" tended to be responded to with a blanket rule, and not given individual consideration. I realise that I came to apply this type of thinking as an adult, believing that treating people equally was fair. So, growing up, I was not particularly exposed to, or had cause to consider the unfairness that exists between people on the basis of skin colour or ethnicity.

What is equality?

A more inclusive understanding of fairness can be seen in the illustration provided in Figure 1. On the left-hand side all three spectators have been treated equally, but the outcomes are far from fair – they do not all attain the same benefit from the support available. In the middle image, the spectators have been given differential support, and this provides them with equal access to the game. On the right-hand side, the systemic barrier causing the inequalities has been removed, which enables all spectators to access the game without requiring special provision. I found this visualisation of equality very instructive and it enabled me to think differently about how I understood fairness, particularly in my role as an educator.

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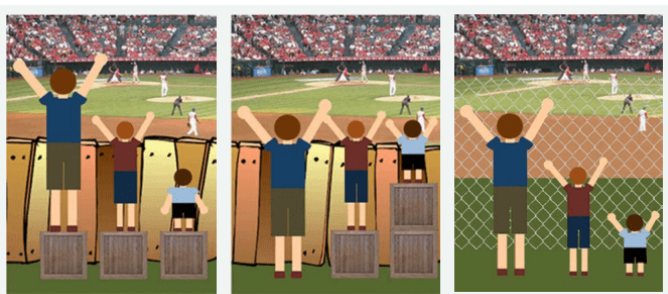
[2] I use lowercase 'white' and capitalise 'Black' as an 'act in recognition of racial respect for those who have been generations in the 'lower case'' (Brookings, cited in Winters, 2020, p. v.).
[3] I use the term 'Black' throughout this essay in a broad and inclusive way to refer to people who experience racism on the basis of their skin colour (i.e. anti-Black racism). I am attempting to overcome issues with value-laden terms such as 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' (BAME), which I will discuss later.

Figure 1: Equal provision of support (far left), equal outcomes (middle), removal of the barrier to equality reducing the need for intervention (far right). (Image source: City for All Women Initiative, 2015).

I first experienced professional tensions between the notions of equality as fair treatment (Fig. 1, left) versus equality as fair outcomes (Fig. 1, middle and right) when discussing with my academic colleagues how much support we should be giving to individual students. Some colleagues held the view that, because we were allocated a certain number of (insufficient) workload hours to provide one-to-one support for students, we should not give any individual student a disproportionate or 'unfair' allocation of our time. However, I started to recognise that some students needed more support than others, for a whole variety of reasons. I began to realise that to ensure equal opportunity for all students to achieve their full potential, we should not be counting the minutes (or hours) spent with any one individual, but provide the amount of support that an individual needs.

In this edition of open dialogue, I will share how I began to learn about the issues that contributed to unfair academic outcomes for Black students. I will talk about the findings form a significant research project that I led with colleagues and students in order to explore students' lived experiences of anti-Black racism in higher education. Embarking on this project saw the beginning of a challenging journey in which I learnt more about unconscious biases and the cultural stereotypes that are responsible for embedding this form of racism in our higher education institutions and wider society. By sharing my learning and the mistakes and successes I made along the way (hopefully fewer of the former and more of the latter), my hope is that this article both informs and inspires educational change that promotes racial equality of outcomes both within and beyond our classrooms.

Inequalities in educational outcomes

A few years ago, I took what had been my nominal and haphazard reflections on equality one step further and agreed to lead a research project in our faculty to investigate the 'BME attainment gap[4]'. I knew that BME stood for 'Black and Minority Ethnic' but I hadn't

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[4] I will discuss issues with both the terms 'BME' and 'attainment gap' later on.

previously heard about the 'attainment gap'. I will fully define this shortly, but essentially it refers to the fact that students from BME backgrounds are less likely to graduate with a First or 2;1 than white students, even when prior attainment is taken into account. Part of the reason why this funding call attracted my attention was because I had just taken on a new role that involved teaching psychology to social work students. The majority of students I had previously taught in psychology were white, whereas I couldn't help observe that approximately one third of my social work students were Black. This represents social work programs generally (Skills for Care, 2019) and is a greater proportion than the number of 'BAME' students in the student population (just under one quarter, UUK, 2019). I felt an acute sense of responsibility to my new students, and the focus of this research project provided me with the impetus to learn about their experiences (both educational and more broadly) so that I could more effectively work towards fairness of educational outcomes.

Before I discuss some of the findings from our research project, I will present some of the inequalities in outcomes for Black students in the British education system. A recent report argued that racism still 'plagues' our education system (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020, p.4). For example, most recent figures for 2018/19 show that Black Caribbean pupils had a lower pass rate for maths and English at GCSE level than white students (48% versus 64%) (Roberts & Bolton, 2020). These types of differences have implications for further and higher education experiences: Black[5] pupils are less likely to attend 'prestigious' universities, less likely to obtain high grades, and less likely to engage in further study (Roberts & Bolton, 2020). In terms of degree grades, the latest figures from Advance HE (2020) for the year 2018-19 show that 58.8% of Black[6] students were awarded a First/2:1 degree compared with 81.4% of white students, a gap of 22.6 percentage points. When considering First class outcomes only, white students were twice as likely to be awarded a First (29.8%) compared to Black students (14.9%). Unfortunately, the size of the gap has been fairly consistent since the first Advance HE statistical report was published in 2003/04, and if the current rate of progress continues, it will not close until the academic year 2085-86 (Loke, 2020).

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[5] In this report, 'Black' here refers to 'Black African', 'Black Caribbean', and 'any other black background'
[6] Black here refers to 'Black or Black British – Caribbean', 'Black or Black British – African', 'Other Black background'

Degree awarding gaps

Some authors in the sector have recently realised that, despite good intentions to address these unfair degree gaps, calling them 'attainment' gaps inherently assumes that responsibility for the gap rests with the student. This plays into cultural stereotypes that depict Black people as less intelligent (Taylor et al., 2019). For example, Barack Obama (2020) writes about his presidential campaign volunteers fielding obtuse remarks about him along the lines of "I don't think of him as being Black, really . . . . I mean, he's so intelligent" (p. 115). The negative impact of these types of beliefs are further compounded by teachers having lower expectations of the abilities of these students (Woolf et al. 2008). A more recent term for the degree attainment gap is the 'degree awarding gap' (Loke, 2020). This term places more responsibility for attainment on institutions, their policies, and their structures, as well as those more directly responsible for students' education. Small, seemingly insignificant changes in language used to describe differences can have a powerful impact on our attention and response to them. When I learnt of the term 'awarding gap', the problems inherent in the term 'attainment gap' immediately became apparent; I felt relieved that I would not have to explain that the degree gap was a result of institutional failings, not due to an 'intellectual inferiority' model. Calling it an awarding gap makes it inherently clear that its root cause is external to the student, which reduces the need to qualify it. Using this revised term when talking about these educational disparities could go some way towards nudging educators to take greater responsibility for addressing the awarding gaps.

Understanding students' experiences of anti-Black racism

Turning now to the research project, we (Bunce et al., 2021; Bunce & King, 2019) wanted to begin to understand some of the barriers faced by students affected by the awarding gap (at the time we referred to it as the attainment gap). To this end, we conducted three focus groups with 'BME'[7] students studying health and social care related subjects. They described themselves as Black African (n = 12), Asian (n = 3), or White and Black Caribbean (n = 2), and they were all female with a mean age of 32 years. English was an additional language for 11 of the students. I realise now that it would also have been important to

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[7] I use this term here because, at the time, it was the term we used in the research, but I will discuss issues with this term shortly.

establish whether they had spent most of their lives living in Britain or whether they had recently moved to the UK to study, because this would further help to disentangle the issues that pertain to these two groups of students. We grounded the research in a robust and universal theory of achievement and wellbeing, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT proposes that optimal forms of achievement motivation and wellbeing are attained when we experience fulfilment (not frustration) of three basic psychological needs. These three needs are the needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy, and have recently been explained by Vansteenkiste et al., (2020, p. 3) as follows:

> *"Relatedness denotes the experience of warmth, bonding, and care, and is satisfied by connecting to and feeling significant to others. Relatedness frustration comes with a sense of social alienation, exclusion, and loneliness."*
> *"Competence concerns the experience of effectiveness and mastery. It becomes satisfied as one capably engages in activities and experiences opportunities for using and extending skills and expertise. When frustrated, one experiences a sense of ineffectiveness or even failure and helplessness."*
> *"Autonomy refers to the experience of volition and willingness. When satisfied, one experiences a sense of integrity as when one's actions, thoughts, and feelings are self-endorsed and authentic. When frustrated, one experiences a sense of pressure and often conflict, such as feeling pushed in an unwanted direction."*

In our research, the focus groups questions were developed around the themes of relatedness, competence, and autonomy, for example, 'How well do you feel that you fit in with other students on the course?' (relatedness); 'Do you feel that there are any barriers for you to achieve your full potential on the course?' (competence); and 'Do you think that you can be yourself on the course and talk about your own ideas and opinions?' (autonomy). The examples of racism and discrimination that the students discussed, and the frequency with which they endured them was upsetting to hear. I was not prepared for the extent to which their experiences could be so negative. In the remainder of this article, I will briefly present some of their experiences from the research, and contextualise these with current developments and my reflections. But, before going any further, I will discuss issues with acronyms such as 'BME'.

Black and Minority Ethnic or People of the Global Majority?

I cringe at our uncritical use of this acronym, which, like its relation 'BAME' has been heavily criticised for homogenising, dehumanising, and ignoring the wide spectrum of cultural identities and ethnicities (Ali, 2020; Bunglawala, 2019). In the West, these terms situate people's ethnic identities in relation to the majority white group, implying that whiteness is the default and, therefore, all else is 'other'. Unfortunately, it did not occur to me to ask students who participated in our research how they would describe their ethnicity. However, one student explained:

> I don't like the term black and minority, I think I prefer people of colour, because I don't like the word minority, I don't like thinking that we're anything less than anyone else, and I think it highlights the difference between… that is the large group, and this is the small group, … we're not as important because we're only smaller. And I disagree with that. So, I like people of colour, because we're all people first, and we just happen to be in a country where… we're of a different colour to most people.

For this student, the concept of minority was diminutive, and had the connotation 'less than'. She further explained: "we're not less than anyone, we're equal".

Campaigns such as #BAMEisLAME (D'Clark, 2018) and #BAMEOver (Mahmood, 2020) have raised awareness of these problems. Some prefer the description 'People of the Global Majority', which seems to be gaining traction (Lim, 2020; Comic Relief, 2020). Advocates for this term view it as empowering, highlighting the fact that these people comprise the majority of the world's population. Others, including David Lammy, have argued for a system similar to the one in America that draws on people's heritage, e.g. Jewish American or African American (Sandhu, 2018). Current advice from the UK government (Gov.UK, n.d.) is not to use BME, BAME, or even People of Colour (which is more common in the USA, but the use of which is criticised, Pérez, 2020). Instead, they recommend the use of 'ethnic minorities' to refer to ethnic groups other than White British, however, as my student pointed out, this may feel diminutive. Another alternative description developed by the #BAMEOver campaign (2020) is 'people who experience racism'. They argue that this term acknowledges harm caused, but should be used in conjunction with a qualifier to articulate

who is being referred to, e.g., people of South Asian heritage, or Jewish people. Similarly, the charity Comic Relief (2020) have adopted the phrase 'communities who experience racial inequalities', which removes the need to refer to specific ethnicity altogether. I think that these broad terms are helpful, but they do not differentiate between racism on the basis of skin colour and racism on the basis of ethnicity (someone might be an ethnic minority and white, for example white-Irish, or white-Gypsy). This distinction is arguably important for understanding how to address racism. If you do not know how to refer to a group of people or a specific individual, BAMEOver (2020) urges you to ask them: 'How do you describe your ethnicity?' Resist the temptation to ask 'where are you from?' because this implies a lack of belonging, particularly when the person is British (Hirsch, 2018).

I've learnt that language used to talk about ethnicity is problematic, that personal preference is important, and also that language to describe differences by ethnicity is continually evolving. We need to be mindful of these issues when describing students on the basis of ethnicity, and acknowledge that some terms may cause discomfort to the people that they represent. I can see how the term 'People of the Global Majority' is empowering and could serve to promote change, but it may irritate some in the West given that the majority of people in the West are white. The phrase 'BME' is still used in the education sector and accepted by some people who have different ethnicities (e.g. by Prof. Bhopal, see Bhopal & Pitkin, 2020; and Dr Singh, see Singh, 2020). Thus, I doubt that we have seen the end of this term, and its relation 'BAME', which are still used by many in this field with good intentions to address unjust disparities in education.

Experiences of need fulfilment among Black ('BME') students in higher education
I will now briefly present some findings from our research, focusing on the students' voices and largely previously unpublished data[8]. Not unsurprisingly, students' needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy were largely not met in the teaching and learning environment. After presenting these data, I will provide some personal reflections and ideas about what educators can do to improve students' need fulfilment in the classroom.

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[8] Quotations without page numbers were not published in the original research by Bunce et al., (2021).

Relatedness: Many students discussed their frustration and distress that resulting from feeling isolated and or excluded from their peer group because of their skin colour:

> I was isolated [Crying] [Pause] Okay, I wasn't the only black person in the class, but I was the only, mm like, […] I have an African accent [Teary laughter] [Pause] I didn't have anyone to turn to [Pause] um… this is too painful [Teary laughter] I don't want to go back there.

> We hang around each other, they hang around each other, it's not for lack of trying. […] Without the support of these ladies, I would have been by myself. I know that for an absolute fact.

> In the whole [accommodation] block, I'm the only black person. […] There's no-one, like, I can like talk to, and have those type of conversations […] [about] the culture that I've been brought up in (p. 5).

Some discussed a student-led class WhatsApp group, in which 'pretty much the whole cohort' were included, except for 'people of colour' who had 'never actually been invited' to join:

> How can you form a class group, a so-called class group and only the black, the so-called black people are not there?

One student noted that this was an example of 'the divide'. They explained:

> Now we go in, and we smile at everyone, we…you know, we're fine, we're cool to you all, but there is that divide there. And you wouldn't want to say that's because they're white and we're people of colour, because you don't want to articulate those things, you don't want to perpetuate that kind of thing all the time, you know what I mean? We'll never go to the leader of that [WhatsApp] group, and say why haven't you invited me? Is it because I'm black? I will never say that! But in the back of my mind, I'm like hmm it looks like that! But I carry on anyway.

I could see this divide in the classroom for myself: Black students usually sat together, albeit not in one big group, but in twos or threes. This was seen as problematic by many of the students who discussed their willingness and desire to bridge the gap between them and to have open conversations about diversity:

> I would love to talk to the students. I would rather hear their point of view, because there was one time, in my second year, after talking about diversity here and there, there was one student who was like "I actually feel a bit scared to talk about it, in

case I offend you", I was like "but no… if you want to know about it, you have to come on to our side to learn about it, how else are you going to know about it? […] I would rather talk to them and […] for them to know… you know, what it's like to be a person of colour.

Competence: Students discussed that they often experienced a sense of failure and helplessness. They were left feeling unable to reach their potential, despite possessing a strong work ethic and confidence in their innate ability to succeed:

If I think back to my undergrad […] I just felt like, you know, this is too much, I haven't reached my potential, I don't even know how I'm supposed to do that.

Students also explained the 'twice as good rule':

The twice as good (rule) is, if you are of a minority, in order for you to achieve something that a white person achieves, you have to be twice as good, yeah, you can't just be on the same level as a white person.

This is the same 'age-old maxim' in the black community that former First Lady Michelle Obama (2018) describes: "you've got to be twice as good to get half as far" (p. 295). It gets passed down from parents to children, as one student explained:

I have been told by my parents, you know that in life you'll need to work a lot harder to get to where you want to be.

Subsequently, this seemed to place extra pressure on students to perform well:

Even though I passed, I felt I still didn't pass because it was a C. […] I don't even think I told my parents, until now, I just told them, "oh yeah, I passed". […] a C may be good for someone who's classed as white, but for me, I know that we need, like, to succeed and be successful, is to get like an A.

They also recognised negative cultural stereotypes relating to their academic abilities. For some, this motivated them to want to excel, but for others it was demoralising:

Deep down people think that you're not capable of doing things […] or you're not able to do well in life. And it actually makes you want to work harder, to prove that you can do it

[Now] I just want to pass, I just want to get it scraped through and go, but, sitting here and reflecting, the truth about it is, if we were given the opportunity to be at our best, most of us would have excelled (p. 7).

Autonomy: Students felt unable to be authentic by expressing and sharing their true thoughts and feelings. They felt that they had to comply with non-BME norms for how to behave.

> [I can't talk about] how I like, like my braids or like my mum who's nagging on me to find a Husband.

> We have to put on the acceptable front, you know, the package … to prove yourself to fit into white society. […] You can't be yourself (p. 8).

Another student explained feeling like an imposter and tried to hide her accent, but this felt 'fake' and undermined her experience of autonomy:

> I feel like an imposter. […] [With lecturers] I put on an act … my accent changes, my voice changes, and I'll pretend that I am a clever person. […] If I, you know, put on my real accent and if I talked like where I come from, I probably wouldn't be that well liked there. […] I feel a bit fake (p. 8).

Some students felt cautious about expressing themselves owing to a fear of how they will be perceived. Two students discussed:

> It's hard to go to your White British lecturer to talk about something like that [racist comment from another student], they won't understand.

> That's part of the thing that knocked my confidence, because I could see it, that I wasn't being received.

Relatedly, some students also referred to concerns about being labelled as the stereotypical "angry black women", as applied recently to Serena Williams and Michelle Obama (Prasad, 2018; M. Obama, 2018, p. 265), which was another reason not to express themselves. One student shared that she no longer had the energy to challenge discrimination, suggesting that it was easier to try and fit in than challenge the status quo:

> I've gone through life, and I have had to shout and fight and challenge and raise and re-raise and re-challenge […] It's just not ever gonna stop. And that is bloody tiring. I'm knackered, I am tired, I am fed up (p. 8).

The concept of 'Black fatigue' was evident here, which is the physical and psychological toll of systemic racism on generations of Black people (Winters, 2020). Part of the problem was the lack of diversity on campus and in the curriculum (I will discuss decolonising the curriculum later on), which led to fear that their contributions would not be understood.

When you look at our lecturers, um, they don't reflect us, say we are writing essays that relate to our cultural backgrounds, or, err, our identity, err, they may not necessarily understand, um, err, and have a bias about it (p. 7).

Personal Reflections and Educational Change

Hearing the accounts of these students was shocking and deeply saddening. It inspired me to learn how to change educational processes and advocate for students who experience anti-Black racism. One author (I can't remember who) recommended starting by diversifying your bookshelf, which I realised I sorely needed to do. I bought novels written by authors from a different cultural perspective to the West, e.g. Ngozi Adichie (Nigerian), Khaled Hosseini (Afghan-American), and Maya Angelou (African American). I also read autobiographical accounts of people with different life experiences to my own, e.g., Malala Yousafzai (a Pakistani girl, shot by the Taliban, who fights for girls' education), Hibo Wardere (a Somalian who was subjected to female genital mutilation), and Frederick Douglas (former slave and abolitionist). More recently, I have also read somewhat less harrowing but informative books about racism by Eddo-Lodge (2017), Hirsch (2018), DiAngelo (2018), and Kendi (2017). I have been fortunate to be able to do a lot of travelling, visiting South America, Southern India, and countries in North and East Africa, which has further developed my interest in and knowledge of other cultures.

Although I didn't immediately make any big changes to my teaching practice, I started to notice small but significant changes in my language and behaviour that helped me to interact more freely with my Black students. I was more confident from my increased knowledge of different cultural backgrounds, and I felt more comfortable talking about anti-Black racism. My Black students subsequently contributed more to class discussions and seemed to find me approachable. By developing a genuine rapport, I felt I was supporting their need for *competence* because they were not afraid of asking for help and I was able to guide them appropriately in return. One student admitted to me that she would have left the course because she was finding it difficult, if it wasn't for my encouragement. Developing truly inclusive and anti-racist practice is not, however, a one off event; I am conscious that it is an ongoing process and one in which I continually need to challenge myself.

I shared the findings of our research widely and spoke passionately about my experiences, but I was met with some resistance. This resistance could be considered a demonstration of white fragility, a term coined by DiAngelo (2018) to describe the defensiveness and dismissal that white people exhibit when their ideas about race and racism are challenged. For example, some colleagues could not see a problem, arguing instead that we should be focusing on supporting men, who are a minority in some health and social care courses, or arguing that we do not have degree awarding gaps. However, I began to see a change in my colleagues who realised that we needed to address the awarding gap and explicitly make our teaching anti-racist. We began (and continue) to discuss and implement changes in our educational practices, from our admissions policy, to how we deal with suspected plagiarism cases (which are more common among Black students).

We also began to decolonise the curriculum, coinciding with student-led social media campaigns such as #WhyIsMyCurriculumWhite and #RhodesMustFall, which sought to raise awareness of the lack of diversity in education and racist institutional structures. Decolonising the curriculum involves critically interrogating assumptions about how the world works and how these assumptions affect Black people. It requires questioning the location and identity of authors, interrogating what they write about, how they write, and what influence this has on our understanding (Sabaratnam, 2017). Decolonising enables views of marginalised voices to be acknowledged and appreciated, reflecting the experiences of all learners in the curriculum, helping them to understand who they are (Moncrieffe et al., 2020). This can contribute towards fulfilling students' needs for *autonomy* because they may be able to express themselves more authentically if they see themselves reflected in the curriculum.

I also considered evidence-based ways to address the 'divide' in the classroom and improve *relatedness*. The contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) promotes the idea that contact between members of different groups reduces prejudice and promotes positive attitudes toward each other. Contact is particularly effective if it involves cooperation, allows for the development of close relationships, and is done with institutional support (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). One exercise that I adapted involves students standing in a big circle. I call out

a number of different characteristics, one at a time, of varying degrees of seriousness, e.g., you have a pet, you went on a gap year, you hate marmite. If a characteristic applies to the student, and if they want to share that information, they walk into the centre of the circle and form a mini group. They can briefly share something of themselves with others in the group, e.g. what type of pet they have, before returning to the wider circle. (I learnt to be cautious about including characteristics that produced groups that are divided by ethnicity, e.g. you have lived in a country other than the UK, or you speak English as an additional language). After a few rounds of this game, I facilitate students forming groups of about four based on one of the characteristics that they shared (e.g. one group might comprise dog owners). Although this exercise might be difficult in some teaching spaces with larger class sizes, it could be adapted by randomising students to small groups and providing them with a written list of characteristics that they discuss to find commonalities. In their small groups, over the course of the week they complete an exercise in which they have to choose a protected characteristic from the Equality Act, 2010, and find a notable person who has experienced discrimination on the basis of that characteristic (e.g. Nelson Mandela or Mala Yousafzai). They briefly present that person's challenges and achievements to the class the following week (this is the cooperation element). To further improve the success of 'contact' by supporting the development of close relationships, I request that students return to their small groups regularly during the term when conducting discussions or activities. I see these students forming new friendships that are not based on ethnicity, and it seems to be one way to help to reduce the 'divide'. Further instructions for this activity and others can be found on my website at www.brookes.ac.uk/SIIP and I would encourage you to try it.

Finally, a legacy from the research project is that we continued to run regular discussion groups for Black students. This was because several of our participants appreciated the cathartic nature of being able to talk openly about their experiences of discrimination with each other, and the group provided a safe space for them to achieve this. The focus groups were led by a recent graduate of the program, and have now become student led. We debated what to call the group, and they have recently elected to define it as the 'Global Majority Collective'. A spokesperson from the group feeds back any issues or concerns from students anonymously to staff so that we can address them on the course. If you want to run this type of discussion group, some suggestions for conversation starters based on the

research are available at www.brookes.ac.uk/SIIP. While large-scale institutional changes are obviously required to address the awarding gap (see e.g., those in the UUK/NUS 2019 report[9]), small changes that individual educators can make today have the potential to make a significant impact.

Final reflections

The level of change necessary to eliminate educational (and numerous other) inequalities for Black people in Britain and other Western countries should not be underestimated. Becoming a mum two years ago caused me to consider the importance of starting to make this change in early childhood, given that children as young as 3 and 4 years are aware of skin colour. Shukla (2021), for example, describes his young daughter complaining that she 'doesn't want to be brown' (p. 15) and doesn't want to play with her brown doll because 'brown is dirty' (p. 16). In research, preschoolers (regardless of their own skin colour) show pro-white bias by associating more positive traits with white people and more negative traits with Black people (Doyle & Aboud, 1995). Worryingly, by the age of 10 years, children (White Americans, at least) are already concerned to appear racially colour-blind (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). This colour-blindness may stem from the fact that adults tend to avoid talking to children about ethnicity (Pahlke et al., 2012), which may be because they underestimate children's ability to understand it (Sullivan et al., 2020). Whatever the reason, the result is that children learn to avoid talking about skin colour themselves, which may help to perpetuate the notion that everyone is equal. It is vital that we discuss differences in skin colour and ethnicity with children; as a new mum, this feels like a challenging but important responsibility that I am prepared to embrace. Discussing skin colour is important because it provides opportunities for children to develop empathy for others, learn new perspectives, understand their own identity, and ultimately learn to be anti-racist (Hughes et al., 2007). It is also important to help children understand that fairness does not mean treating everybody equally, but making sure that everyone has the

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[9] In brief, their five recommendations are: 1) provide strong leadership; 2) have conversations about race and changing the culture; 3) develop racially diverse and inclusive environments; 4) get evidence and analyse data; and 5) understand what works through case studies.

same opportunity to achieve their full potential. By working together as educators and psychologists, we are well placed to rise to this challenge.

> *In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.*
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> Martin Luther King Jr. (1968)

Acknowledgements

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