

# Thinking beyond the box

developing critical curriculum  
perspectives and culturally  
responsive pedagogy

A collection of recommendations  
for change by Black researchers  
and practitioners.

# Foreword

The independent review of the national curriculum in England launched by the government is an important opportunity.

The Curriculum and Assessment Review, chaired by Professor Becky Francis, has sought submissions of evidence “to help them improve the curriculum and assessment system”. The current national curriculum needs to become more relevant and representative for all our children and young people. Currently, our students experience an offer which is too narrow, both in terms of the subjects they’re able to access and the topics; and a narrow range of assessment methods which generate ‘exam factory’ cultures and distort teaching styles and choices.

We require a teaching philosophy that taps into the diverse range of knowledge and experiences of pupils as a means of making classrooms and curricula inclusive, and which draw on home and school cultures in a culturally responsive pedagogy (further explored in this publication).

We acknowledge that shifting towards a critical, diverse and inclusive national curriculum that recognises the current and historical multicultural landscape of Britain is decades overdue. The report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson (1999) recommended “that consideration be given to amendment of the national curriculum aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism, in order better to reflect the needs of a diverse society” (p 382).

Since then, numerous, Black-led coalitions and grassroots organisations have campaigned for an anti-racist, decolonised national curriculum. Many academics and teaching practitioners, school leaders, publishers and community organisations have created innovative, anti-racist teaching materials, some of which are detailed in this publication. Many more, including young people themselves, have begun to transform their own curriculum and pedagogy.

In the union’s evidence to the review, we have detailed exemplars of the many successful initiatives and pilots which exist across the nation. We’ve drawn on the highly relevant steps by the Scottish and Welsh governments

in collaboration with practitioners and experts to mandate diverse, anti-racist curricula and teacher training nationwide.

Given the rising global threat of intolerance and racism, and the prevalence of misinformation and lack of criticality, there is no more urgent a time than now to better educate our nation on our shared island story of colonialism and migration. This has resulted in the richly diverse tapestry of Britons and Britishness that built our thriving nation. But how do we disrupt decades of a narrow, Eurocentric perspective?

This publication features a collection of leading Black practitioners, researchers and grassroots organisations posing a range of perspectives. It offers a theoretical grounding in decoloniality, critical and culturally responsive pedagogy, and anti-racist practice.

**Now is the time to empower leaders and teachers to fully respond to the needs and rights of our increasingly diverse student population.**

**Now is the time to equip our young people with critical thinking skills and a more accurate, honest understanding of Britain’s story to help them thrive and feel a real sense of belonging.**

**Now is the time to reform the national curriculum to ensure all learners are included, engaged and given a deep love of learning, pride and possibility.**



*Daniel Kebede*

**Daniel Kebede**  
General secretary,  
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*Note: The NEU uses Black in a political context to encompass all members who self-identify as Black, Asian and any other minority ethnic groups who do not identify themselves as white.*



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## 'The big ask': can teachers decolonise the curriculum?

Heidi Safia Mirza, Emeritus Professor of Equalities Studies in Education, Institute of Education, UCL University of London.



Since the watershed moment of the death of George Floyd and the eruption of Black Lives Matter, teachers and lecturers are being urged to decolonise the curriculum. But what does that mean for those of us on the chalk face of our busy and demanding profession? How do we go about dismantling 400 years of colonial knowledge production that informs the 'hidden curriculum' behind the very curriculum we are employed to teach? It is indeed a 'big ask' of teachers to lead the charge to decolonise their classrooms.

Black activists and scholars describe decolonising as a 'thought revolution' that decentres the taken-for-granted canon of Eurocentric knowledge that underpins modernity and shapes the western world as we know it. That is an ambitious world-changing project if there ever was one. However, decolonizing movements are not new. They are rooted in the long arc of history for the struggle for racial justice. They reach back to the early 20th century when Black and Asian anti-colonial and liberation scholars in India, Africa and the Caribbean began their intellectual struggle for freedom and independence from British imperial rule. Scholars who spanned this era, such as W E B Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, John La Rose, Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah, Edward Said, Angela Davis, Malcolm X, Steve Biko, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Sylvia Wynter among many others, championed Marcus Garvey's decolonising call to "free the mind from mental slavery", as immortalised in the well-beloved lyrics of the late great Bob Marley.

In the 21st century, it is now argued the exclusion of 'other ways of thinking and being' in the world constitutes a major crisis in western education. In modern, multi-racial, diverse, transnational learning environments an inward-looking curriculum is no longer fit for purpose. The call to decolonise the curriculum highlights the erasure of whole swathes of Black, African, Asian, Hispanic, Middle Eastern and indigenous epistemologies of knowledge from the curriculum. Sticking plasters like Black History Month, the fairy dust of posters of Black and brown icons and guest speakers can no longer cut it in a changing global world order. Power has shifted away from the stark brutality of Black and white racialised systems of enslavement, apartheid and *Jim Crow laws* that sustained white western dominance for centuries. Populations are changing – becoming more mixed and diverse as we move towards complex multi-racial, multi-religious international labour markets shaped by mass global migration. In this new climate of change, inclusive praxis and pedagogy is foundational to decolonising the curriculum.

In the wake of huge unstoppable social, economic and technological changes the question has to be: how do we deliver decolonising on the chalk face of the classroom? While we can inspire our students, decolonisation is a world-changing project which we cannot do alone in the isolated silos of our classrooms. Faced with the compelling matter of 'decolonise or decline' we need to mobilise strategies and resources.

- First we need the government to acknowledge and embrace the depth and breadth of this world-changing project. There is no better time than now for the review to take on board the urgency of a new geopolitics of knowledge fit for 21st century. The stakes are too high and the battle too big for individual and committed Black, indigenous and global majority teachers of colour to be left to be the change makers from the bottom up.
- Secondly, we need joined up thinking between the secondary and tertiary education sectors. At the very time we need Black and Muslim and Asian academics to provide the academic content for this curriculum, British universities are closing their world class Black studies, Black history and Black literature courses. We need joined up thinking if we are to build the intellectual capacity and resources to have honest, open, informed decolonising dialogues for the future. To do this we need brave visionary leadership from the top down. We need real solidarity between universities, politicians and policy makers to make this happen. We know it can happen as it has with Holocaust education. In the same way decolonial education should also be championed as an integral part of the British curriculum.

The Curriculum and Assessment Review offers us a timely opportunity to truly decolonise the curriculum. My message to Professor Becky Francis who is leading the review is that we need a 360-degree holistic decolonial vision delivered through 'doable' tangible actions that flow through the holy grail of our education system – from teacher education to curriculum content and finally classroom delivery. To achieve this, we need to:

- First set the scene and move beyond outdated imperial notions of 'British

values' and institutional racialised discriminatory practices such as Prevent and exclusions that set the tone of containment, surveillance and mistrust which has no place in an inclusive education system. This goes hand in glove with instituting a national statutory anti-racist framework to build a teacher workforce competent and comfortable with cultural diversity and difference.

- Second, to complement this, we need to develop excellent anti-racist decolonial curriculum content and resources that speak to a new age of technological modernity. However, teachers on the front line need everyday support to deliver such an exciting new curriculum. A recent parliamentary report found 90 per cent of teachers said they needed more direction and support in designing and delivering decolonial curriculum content, especially in less prescribed subjects such as history, arts and humanities. This should not be hard to achieve given the wealth of our global majority world class scholars who could easily replace the 'imperial innocence' of Britain's 'small island story' with a more progressive global identity grounded in an ethos of decolonial reparatory racial justice.

In conclusion, it is indeed a big ask to decolonise our classrooms and curriculum. As such it must be a call to service of the whole teaching profession and its leaders, not just left to the small minority of impassioned Black and brown global majority teachers chipping away at the chalk face. Decolonising is an exciting, forward looking world-changing project that requires more than lip service if it is to be a serious anti-racist educational movement that truly serves our young people to go well into the world knowing who they are and what they are worth... and they are worth the earth.

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# Anti-racist practice: a lens, not an activity

Professor Vini Lander and Dr Penny Rabiger, the Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality at Leeds Beckett University.



When considering the curriculum, educators must acknowledge that racism is a real and persistent feature of society, manifesting differently across cultures and histories. Despite progress in civil rights and diversity initiatives, racism remains embedded in social structures, systems and norms, influencing curriculum choices and pedagogy. Racism is more than isolated incidents; it is a lived reality with psychological, material and generational consequences. Addressing it requires recognising not just overt acts, but also the subtleties and omissions that reinforce it alongside other forms of oppression.

At the Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality (CRED), our mission starts with educating on the permanence of racism. This may seem counterintuitive if the end goal is to alleviate the harms of racism in our schools and society. However, until we grasp that racism is a real and prevalent feature of our society, anything we do under the name of anti-racism will be purely cosmetic.

## Racial literacy is essential

Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) stated “race is the child of racism, not the father”<sup>1</sup>, highlighting that racism is about power and oppression. Race was created to delineate racial categories which essentially sort us all into human, less human and non-human.

Race, while socially constructed, has tangible effects, perpetuating hierarchies that disadvantage racially marginalised communities in education, employment, healthcare and more. Racism operates systematically through institutions, leaving psychological marks such as isolation, diminished self-worth, and trauma.

However, this basic racial literacy is largely absent in education – not only for students but also in teacher education and professional development. To address this, racial literacy should be a compulsory aspect of teacher professionalism, treated with the same priority as safeguarding. Implementing CRED’s anti-racist framework for initial teacher education would be a solid foundational step.

## Racism is a technology, anti-racism is resistance

Being anti-racist goes beyond being non-racist; it requires vigilant action and embedded practices. Racism is not monolithic; it takes many forms and adapts to social, political and economic contexts. It can be overt, like racial slurs or explicit exclusion, or covert, like microaggressions or coded language. It evolves through ignorance, stereotyping, discriminatory policies or policy enactment. Evolving with society’s shifting norms and beliefs makes racism adaptable and persistent. The myth of a post-racial

society is debunked by these evolving manifestations of racism that slip into new rhetoric, technologies and institutions.

Racism is reinforced by what is left out – through omissions, obfuscations and silences. For example, school curricula may omit the perspectives of racially marginalised groups or ignore racial inequities in policies. These silences perpetuate stereotypes and erase the contributions and struggles of our communities. Furthermore, racism intersects with other forms of oppression, such as sexism and classism. Anti-racist curricula must therefore account for these interlocking systems of inequity, ensuring that responses are inclusive of multiple identities and experiences.

## Learning to see through the lens of anti-racism

Designing and delivering an anti-racist curriculum begins with educators gaining racial literacy and consciously unlearning racism. This allows them to understand, challenge and dismantle racism wherever it exists. Schools play a critical role in shaping ideas about race and equity, making educators key to anti-racist work. It is their responsibility to create inclusive learning spaces where all students feel valued.

This requires taking a stand in personal and professional contexts, confronting learned racist biases and advocating for structural changes that promote equity and justice. Educators working with all age groups and in all places are crucial to anti-racism work.

For example, in early years and key stage 1 (KS1), this might involve having dolls, household artefacts and stories reflecting various heritages, and acknowledging contributions such as the Indian origins of our number system. Staff should also be trained to recognise and address racism, instead of dismissing it as too complex for young children to understand. In KS2, educators can use stories and historical activities to help children explore and develop an understanding of racism, while also setting class values on addressing it. This builds children’s awareness of racism and enables them to recognise it.

By KS3 and KS4, students can engage critically with curriculum topics and relate them to contemporary issues, such as the Benin Kingdom and debates around returning the Benin Bronzes from the British Museum to Nigeria. Understanding historical contexts like global capitalism can help students grapple with discussions around reparations and sustainability, which are connected to racial and economic injustices.

<sup>1</sup> Coates T-N (2015). *Between The World And Me*. New York: Random House.

Anti-racist education involves more than celebrating diversity or including diverse books in the curriculum. It demands critical engagement with issues of power, privilege and historical injustice, enabling students to think deeply about the world and their place within it. For this reason, students' personal experiences should be incorporated into critical pedagogy approaches which develop their critical understanding of the operations of power in society, eg colonialism, imperialism, slavery and subjugation.

Educators must not shy away from powerful conversations about race and racism. Instead, they should foster dialogue, encourage reflection and challenge students to question the dominant narratives they encounter. This requires an ongoing commitment to self-education, listening to marginalised voices and actively advocating for change within educational settings. Talking about race and racism is never enough.

Our work at CRED involves supporting teachers to not only unlearn racism, but to learn to consistently and confidently see through the lens of anti-racism. The question then becomes not: "Will I find racism in my school?" but rather: "In what ways has racism been designed into the policies, practices, processes and procedures, and how might I design it out?"

For example, a school might recognise that the education system requires us to promote a curriculum and pedagogy which centres whiteness as the norm. By diversifying the curriculum, we may be engaged in 'sprinkling colour' as a concessionary measure, while our pedagogy and critical understanding of power remain untouched. Applying an anti-racist lens helps teachers understand how even our diversifying efforts may reproduce tropes and deficit ideologies, and how what we are calling decolonising the curriculum might culminate in an 'oh, and people of colour' approach. On closer inspection, teachers may find that the Black and global majority protagonists chosen are depicted as engaged in struggle,

refugees, deviants and outsiders – or perhaps as geniuses and superhuman athletes. Rather than seek a desired quantity to rebalance the absence of people of colour, we should endeavour to find the quality of presence and balance of representation.

### A call to action

Developing the curriculum through an anti-racist lens means to move beyond passive rejection of racism and take deliberate actions to see, name, challenge and change it. This involves listening, learning, reflecting and advocating, both individually and collectively. It is a commitment to vigilance and continuous effort, recognising that the work of dismantling racism is ongoing and multifaceted.

Anti-racism is not an activity or checklist; it is a lens through which educators must view all aspects of their work. Through consistent effort and engagement, educators can help dismantle the deeply rooted structures of racism that persist in education and society at large. By embedding anti-racism into the curriculum and daily practice, we can create a society that values equity, racial justice and the humanity of all people.

### Useful resource

CRED's Anti-racism Framework for Initial Teacher Education/Training. [leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/centre-for-race-education-and-decoloniality/anti-racism-framework/](https://leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/centre-for-race-education-and-decoloniality/anti-racism-framework/)

## Cultural diversity in the national curriculum to prevent racism

Dr Marlon Lee Moncrieffe, president of the British Educational Research Association.



The national curriculum for schools and pupils in England must include statutory teaching and learning in the value of cultural diversity for preventing racism.

### Issues and diversities of society

One of the aims of the Curriculum and Assessment Review is to generate recommendations for future national curriculum policy that can address the "issues and diversities of society, ensuring all children and young people are represented" (Department for Education (DfE), 2024a, b). In the backdrop to this announcement, waves of ugly nativist 'racist' rioting and hate towards non-white minority ethnic people spread wildly across the UK.

I see familiarity in the statement "issues and diversities of society, ensuring all children and young people are represented" with what Macpherson (1999) wrote as a key recommendation for educational policymakers in the aftermath of the racially motivated white British gang attack and murder of London-born Black British teenager Stephen Lawrence in 1993, over 30 years ago:

*"That consideration be given to amendment of the national curriculum aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism, in order better to reflect the needs of a diverse society."*

(Macpherson report 1999, 382)

However, this recommendation from Macpherson failed to germinate in a social and political climate as a national curriculum policy where contemporary multiculturalism and cultural diversity was being accused of preventing social cohesion (Race 2015).

Further, decolonising the national curriculum was a key objective of the Black Lives Matter anti-racism UK public protests in 2020. Public petitions were written and delivered to the UK Parliament demanding government debate and seek transformative action, with curriculum review and change as a key outcome (Moncrieffe 2023; Moncrieffe et al 2024). One petition – titled Teach Britain's colonial past as part of the UK's compulsory curriculum – was supported by 268,722 signatories (UK Government and Parliament Petitions 2020a, p4). Further similar themed petitions were signed by members of the public in their tens of thousands, including: Add education on diversity and racism to all school curriculums, and Making the UK education curriculum more inclusive of BAME history (UK Government and Parliament Petitions, 2020b, c).

### Privileged national curriculum narratives

The national curriculum in England (DfE 2013) contains aims and contents which privilege focus on the lives and experiences of white Britons only (Moncrieffe 2020). The statutory aims and contents of the national curriculum for teaching and learning about the history of 'nation building' and 'national identity' speak



only about white people arriving and settling on the British Isles. All other non-white people of ethnic groups in their histories of mass migration and contribution to nation building and the making of national identity are absent from the curriculum.

My research (Moncrieffe 2020) also exposed the general pattern of the uncritical complicit cultural reproduction of this Eurocentric national curriculum narrative by teachers, teacher educators and trainee teachers from majority backgrounds. Therefore, in advocating for an anti-racist curriculum, I am also calling for the decolonising of teacher education (Moncrieffe 2020a, b, c, 2022, 2023; Moncrieffe et al 2024).

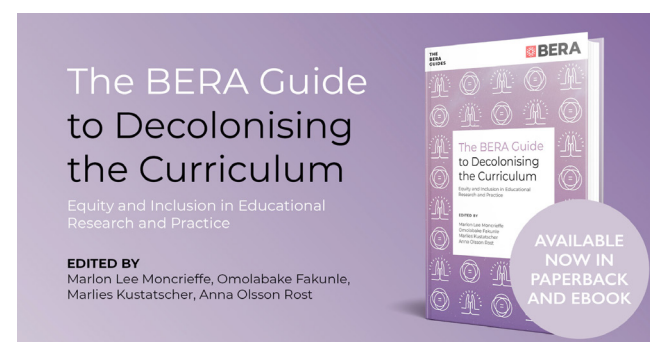
Evidence gathered by the House of Commons Petitions Committee and the Women and Equalities Committee from leading educationalists, academics and educational researchers, and the views and experiences of school staff and home educators via the theme Black history and cultural diversity in the curriculum, pointed much criticism at the curriculum (UK Parliament Committees 2020). One response suggested: "Giving teachers the 'flexibility' to teach about Black history is not sufficient – a statutory requirement is needed." Ninety per cent of respondents felt there should be a statutory requirement for all children to be taught explicitly about the history of Britain's ethnic and cultural minorities. Another response was: "The curriculum as a whole does not reflect the diversity of modern Britain." Seventy-four per cent of primary school respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement: "The content, set texts, resources and guidance associated with the national curriculum fully reflect the diversity of modern Britain." (UK Parliament Committees 2020, 1-7). The issues about the lack of teaching and learning about the value in cultural diversity for preventing racism in the national curriculum were made very clearly.

## Recommendations

In our witnessing of nativist 'racist' rioting and hate towards non-white minority ethnic people spreading wildly across the UK in the summer of 2024, and in considering the national curriculum review aim – "the issues and diversities of society, ensuring all children and young people are represented" (DfE 2024 a, b):

- The national curriculum in England should be strengthened through statutory teaching and learning the value of cultural diversity for preventing racism.
- The multiple amounts of rich evidence-led research by educational researchers and practitioners should be used as frameworks and guidelines in this purpose.

For example, at the British Educational Research Association we have recently published *The BERA Guide to Decolonising the Curriculum* (Moncrieffe et al 2024). This presents evidence-led educational research findings and impact through curriculum teaching and learning in value of cultural diversity for preventing racism in early childhood and primary education settings, secondary and tertiary education settings,



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# Developing a culturally responsive pedagogy: making the national curriculum more inclusive and relevant to pupils' lives and identities



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## Introduction

The recent announcement by the Labour government for the independent Curriculum and Assessment Review – led by Professor Becky Francis – is both overdue, necessary and vital. There are many inherent complexities with the existing national curriculum introduced in 2014 – centralised control, the vagueness, the rigid division of subjects, the neglect of cross-curricular themes, age-appropriate teaching and assessments, the immense target-driven pressures on schools and pupils, too many exams and so on. Furthermore, one other key area that needs reviewing is the clear Eurocentrism of the national curriculum in many subjects such as history, art and English (refer to the review by The Black Curriculum 2021). While there is a whole page devoted to the centrality of 'inclusion' in the national curriculum (DfE 2013:8; DfE 2014:8) for both primary and secondary education which states that teachers should take account of the diverse backgrounds of pupils, much of the UK-based and global empirical research, below, suggests that the idea of inclusion, diversity and equality of pupils, especially those who are of Black and global majority background, appears to operate as rhetorical, nominal and symbolic as opposed to genuine and actual.

So, how can we make inclusivity a more central and tangible part of how we teach and learn? One way is to develop a more culturally

responsive pedagogy in our approach to dialogically working with our pupils and interpreting the curriculum to make it more relevant to their lives.

## Culturally responsive pedagogy

Developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995: 467), the term 'culturally responsive pedagogy' is a teaching philosophy that taps into various kinds of knowledge and lived experiences of pupils as a means of making classrooms and curricula more inclusive and refers to a "dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture". It is premised on the idea that valuing culture is central to learning. Educators should take time to understand the lived experiences of their pupils and their sociocultural worlds, and listen to them, as well as valuing and recognising their cultural identities, histories and heritage within pedagogical practices inside the school. This is especially the case for many Black and global majority pupils who come from disadvantaged, low socioeconomic backgrounds and whose identities and voices are often silenced, misrepresented or ignored, with many feeling 'invisible' within schooling spaces (Hoque 2015, 2018). Some complex questions underpin a culturally responsive pedagogy:

- Do teachers really know who their pupils are?
- Should they care? Does this matter?

- Are teachers aware of the wider social, community and cultural realities through which many of their pupils are living?
- How do we blur the line between the school and the local community?
- Why is it important that the curriculum is relevant to the lives of our pupils, reflecting their social worlds?
- How do we get to know our students?
- What practical and realistic strategies can teachers adopt to ensure that pupil identity, lived experience and culture is embedded within the curriculum?

## Funds of knowledge and identity

There are some important studies that enhance our understanding of the educative and ethical value of a culturally responsive pedagogy:

In their in-depth ethnography of working class Mexican communities from Tucson, Arizona, Moll et al (1992) developed the idea of 'funds of knowledge' for teachers as a way of connecting the homes and cultures of their pupils with the classrooms. They argued that the barrier between the school and the community needed to become more blurred, informed, dialogical and flexible, as opposed to rigid and binary.

It is not always possible for educators to gain insight into the funds of knowledge of their pupils. Therefore, educators should also draw upon the multiple funds of culture and identity that are meaningful to their pupils, such as family, community, language, faith structures, etc (Volman and Gilde 2020).

The importance of religion and faith for many young people attending schools in the UK is an important part of a culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy. My own study (Hoque 2018) of the educational experiences of a group of young Bangladeshi Muslim pupils aged 15 to 19 from east London, illustrates further why a culturally responsive pedagogy is necessary, particularly when they feel a sense of tension and conflict between their faith, language, cultural identities and schooling experiences.

## Strategies to include faith, culture and identity in the curriculum:

The following three approaches will empower teachers and senior leadership to develop a culturally responsive model of education:

1. **Adopt an additive and positive view of your pupils.** Don't focus on what they lack. Instead, focus on the lived experiences and skills that they bring to classroom learning.
2. As a concept, decolonising refers to a process of foregrounding students'

social and cultural backgrounds within the curriculum (Hickey-Moody and Horn 2022). **Put simply, pupils need to see themselves and their cultural worlds reflected, valued and represented in the books that they read and the history that they are taught.**

3. **Educators should develop a critical, non-judgemental and reflexive approach to teaching.** Teachers should teach with a sociopolitical consciousness, where self-teaching and understanding of the larger 'school-community-nation-world' (Ladson-Billings 2001: 120–121) is important. Teachers can be agents for change.

### Practical suggestions for teachers

Below, I outline some practical approaches for teachers to consider in developing a culturally responsive pedagogy that is relevant and inclusive.

- Celebrate the cultural worlds of your pupils, such as researching and drawing a family tree, growing vegetables from around the world, playing traditional non-European sports, etc.
- Ask pupils to become heritage researchers and learn more about their family history. This will help children to become more connected to their own cultures and ancestry.
- Enhance your knowledge about the community that your school serves. Meet local people, read local newspapers, go for a walk in the local area and work in close partnership with parents and community leaders. Try to view the world from the perspective of your pupils – take a walk in their shoes.
- Build relationships with your pupils. Share your own migration story with your pupils, memories of childhood and who you are. Choose your own favourite book/movie

that represents your own culture and share it with pupils. Let them know that you are human and approachable.

- In light of the global #BlackLivesMatter movement, encourage pupils to research and write about a local (unknown) person from the local Black and minority ethnic community.
- Can your pupils see themselves in the books that they read? Ask pupils to find a book from their country of origin and share traditional folk tales with other members of their class.
- If you don't understand something about the cultural world of your pupils, ask them to tell you about it.

### Conclusion

This article concludes with the assertion that teachers should become genuine researchers in trying to understand the life-worlds of their pupils, and a review of the national curriculum should give teachers the flexibility and autonomy to do so. We know that pupils perform better academically if value and importance are attributed to issues that matter in their lives.

A culturally responsive pedagogy helps establish a dialogical relationship with the cultural worlds of pupils based upon reciprocity and respect. This then has the potential to blur the rigid distinction between the school and the community, and to make the experience of education more equitable and inclusive.

### Useful resources

- Adichie C N (2009). The danger of a single story. TED. Available at [youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg)
- The Black Curriculum (2022). Available at [theblackcurriculum.com](https://theblackcurriculum.com)

- The Education Hub (2022). The principles of culturally responsive teaching. Available at [theeducationhub.org.nz/what-is-culturally-responsive-teaching](https://theeducationhub.org.nz/what-is-culturally-responsive-teaching)

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Volman M & Gilde J (2020). The effects of using students' funds of knowledge on educational outcomes in the social and personal domain. *Learning, Culture and Social Interactions* 28(100472): 1–14. doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2020.100472



# Practitioner examples

## Creating a global citizenship curriculum

Frances Akinde, local authority special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) inspector, education consultant and anti-racist schools coach.



### Introduction

In September 2020, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced statutory guidance for relationships education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education. However, the statutory mandate for this was established three years prior to this under the Children and Social Work Act 2017. In the years leading up to the statutory mandate, the PSHE Association played a pivotal role in campaigning to improve personal, social, health and economics (PSHE) education in schools. Their efforts, including the Disrespect No Body campaign targeting 12 to 18-year-olds in collaboration with the Home Office, were instrumental in challenging attitudes and behaviours among young people.

In the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd in 2020, the PSHE Association saw an opportunity to emphasise the critical importance of educating children and young people about social justice, equality and anti-racism. However, when the statutory requirement was introduced by the DfE just four months later, these elements were dropped.

At the time, the DfE emphasised that:

*All elements of PSHE are important, and the government continues to recommend PSHE be taught in schools [however] the new requirements are about a 'levelling up' of PSHE standards across all schools.*

(PSHE Association 2019)

The DfE guidance states:

*In teaching relationships education and RSE, schools should ensure that the needs of all pupils are appropriately met and that all pupils understand the importance of equality and respect.*

(DfE 2021:15)

The transition to statutory status brought both opportunities and challenges. While it was a significant step forward, ensuring that the curriculum effectively addressed issues of prejudice and discrimination required ongoing effort and vigilance.

### Critique of the current national curriculum

Since the murder of George Floyd, there has been growing recognition of the importance of these issues, even more so since the summer race riots of 2024. The recent unrest has highlighted, once again, the deep-seated issues of racism and division within our society, making it even more crucial for our schools to take a proactive stance.

The national curriculum, while comprehensive in many respects, has faced criticism for its narrow focus and lack of diverse voices. Critics argue that even after reforms, it will still reinforce a Eurocentric perspective, marginalising contributions from non-western cultures and histories. Without diverse voices, how can we move beyond tokenistic inclusion and ensure anti-racism is genuinely integrated into the learning experience?

Each UK country's government, notably apart from England, has developed resources to support schools in developing an anti-racist curriculum, including frameworks to promote inclusivity and combat racism in education. Therefore, there is an even more pressing need for the English government to do the same. Why would not the DfE ensure that every school in England has support, training and funding from the top to address racism and promote inclusivity effectively?

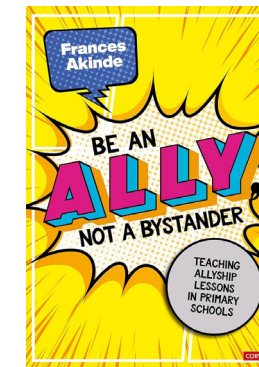
In terms of guidance, the National Education Union's anti-racism charter, produced in response to the Barriers report of 2018, is a good place to start.

The framework states that: "Racism is a structural barrier perpetuated by individuals that leads to discrimination against a person because of their race." (NEU 2024)

Advocates like myself who work within anti-racism, understand how urgent it is to address these issues now and push for systemic change. To drive meaningful change, we must all recognise and address these structural barriers head-on, ensuring that our educational institutions are places where every child can thrive without the looming fear of discrimination.

### Introducing global citizenship in the curriculum

One significant limitation of the national curriculum is its inadequate emphasis on global issues and multicultural education. For instance, topics such as climate change, global inequality and human rights are



often treated as peripheral subjects rather than integral curriculum components. This marginalisation deprives students of a well-rounded education and fails to prepare them for the challenges and opportunities of a globalised world. In my book *Be an Ally, Not a Bystander*, I emphasise that global citizenship is more than just a fashionable buzzword; it is a crucial framework for education in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world.

Global citizenship education can address the current shortcomings within our curriculum by fostering an understanding of global interconnectedness and promoting values of empathy, justice and co-operation. As I state, global citizenship is about more than just acquiring knowledge – it is about cultivating a mindset that values diversity and is committed to social justice.

*Global citizenship refers to the rights and responsibilities that individuals have beyond their national borders. It teaches us that we are all part of a global community.*

(Akinde 2024: 13)

### Recommendations for the curriculum review:

A national curriculum encompassing global citizenship must be rooted in key principles that reflect the interconnected nature of our world and the diverse voices within it.

- **Interconnectedness:** Helping our students see the bigger picture,

understanding their role and connections between local and global issues, and recognising the impact of global events on local communities.

- **Cultural competency:** Developing a deep appreciation and respect for cultural diversity and learning to communicate with respect across cultures. This goes beyond tolerance; it's about genuinely being willing to understand the value of diversity.
- **Critical thinking:** Encouraging students to engage with global issues through a critical lens, question assumptions and consider multiple perspectives, not just the western narrative. This helps to develop informed citizens who think deeply and are not easily swayed by misinformation.
- **Active participation:** Empowering students to be allies by taking meaningful action on global issues. Whether through advocacy, community service or other forms of civic engagement, this principle is about translating awareness into real-world impact.
- **Fostering a true sense of belonging:** Creating a curriculum that ensures every student feels seen, heard and valued. This is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment that goes beyond welcoming diverse perspectives; it celebrates every child's contribution and enables them to thrive.

## Conclusion

Education should be inclusive, relevant and empowering.

Educators have a responsibility to demonstrate empathy, respect and open-mindedness. Yet our children and young people are telling us that they continue to experience bullying, discrimination and racism within our schools. These issues hinder their

academic progress and affect their mental and emotional wellbeing, which has long-lasting impacts. What better argument do we need to ensure that championing diversity and inclusion and ensuring every child feels like they belong within school communities is embedded into every aspect of school teaching and culture?

By integrating global citizenship into the core curriculum, specifically including principles around anti-discrimination, we can equip students with the knowledge, skills and values necessary to navigate and contribute positively to our diverse local, national and global landscapes, which are rapidly becoming increasingly more diverse. However, this shift requires critically evaluating a national curriculum that fails to promote inclusivity and diverse perspectives.

By doing this and incorporating diverse perspectives, we can prepare students to thrive in a globalised world. To discover more about how to create a whole school culture around global citizenship, consider reading *Be An Ally, Not a Bystander* which covers this in more detail.

## Useful links

NEU Anti-racism Charter (2024): Anti-racism charter | National Education Union <https://neu.org.uk/latest/library/anti-racism-charter>

NEU Barriers report (2018): Barriers | National Education Union <https://neu.org.uk/latest/library/barriers>

PSHE Association Campaigning: [pshe-association.org.uk/our-vision/campaigning?form=MG0AV3](https://pshe-association.org.uk/our-vision/campaigning?form=MG0AV3)

PSHE Association (2020). Challenging racism through PSHE education [pshe-association.org.uk/news/news-and-blog/blog-entry/challenging-racism-through-pshe-education](https://pshe-association.org.uk/news/news-and-blog/blog-entry/challenging-racism-through-pshe-education)

# Our migration story: re-making British histories

Professor Claire Alexander, head of the School of Social Sciences at the University of Manchester; Dr Sundeep Lidher, lecturer in Black and Asian British history (post-1800) at King's College London.

## Introduction: history matters

History matters. It tells us not just about what happened in the past, but about who we are now, how we got here and, perhaps most importantly, who we might become. It is a form of time travel, which connects past, present and future. Rather than a collection of dry, dusty facts – dates of battles, a roll call of kings and queens, of great (and terrible) deeds – history is a magical mystery tour, with new stories to tell, secrets to reveal, truths to revisit and unravel. History is what places us, as individuals, families, communities and nations, within the larger stories of war and invasion, religious transformation, migration and settlement, invention and exploitation, climate change. It connects us to local familiar spaces and to faraway places, which have shaped who we are and which we, in turn, have shaped. It is the story of us.

Of course, that is not how history is taught in schools. Indeed, since the launch of the new national curriculum in England in September 2014, the focus has been on 'facts, facts, facts' (Alexander, Chatterji & Weekes-Bernard 2012). For the past decade, in particular, the history national curriculum has been dominated by a reductive, narrowly nationalistic and uncritically patriotic view of British (or, rather, English) history. This was branded by prime minister David Cameron as 'our island story' – referencing a children's book written at the height, and in celebration, of Britain's imperial power.



History, and history teaching, changes – over time, by place and too often at the whims of whatever government is in charge. Since its inception under Margaret Thatcher, the history national curriculum has been a site of contestation – a shifting framework for collective remembering or forgetting (Lidher, McIntosh & Alexander 2021). It reflects, and shapes, a sense of national identity that can be open and tolerant of diversity, or closed and exclusionary.

If British history tells us who 'we' are, the question arises, who or what is included in this national story? And who or what is excluded? Who are 'we'?

## Our Migration Story: an alternative history

Our Migration Story ([ourmigrationstory.org.uk](https://ourmigrationstory.org.uk)) was a deliberate attempt to offer an alternative vision of British history to the more insular 'island story' narrative that dominates the revised curriculum. A partnership between academics and the Runnymede Trust, this work began with a project tracing Muslim migration in and from the Indian state of Bengal in the period after the Partition of India in 1947, including to Britain. The project placed the little histories of individuals and families within the big histories of empire and decolonisation, war, mass migration and climate change, to explore how history shapes, and is shaped by, stories 'from below'.



As part of this project, we developed the Banglasteries website and teaching resource aimed at young people aged 11-14 in British schools (banglasteries.org). The website launched in 2010, and was followed by two projects exploring how inclusive histories could be taught in British classrooms. The first (2011-12), Bangla Stories: telling community histories, used family and community oral history methods to engage young people in Sheffield, Leicester and Cardiff as history researchers. The second project (2013-14), History Lessons, examined place and heritage, and worked in east and south London and Manchester (makinghistories.org.uk). The latter project focused on teachers, and the challenges they faced in teaching an inclusive curriculum in increasingly diverse classrooms (Alexander & Weekes-Bernard 2017).

Two key lessons emerged from these projects. First, that there was a strong desire among all young people for history teaching that reflected a broader range of voices and experiences. Second, that while there was a willingness to teach more representative histories, teachers felt ill-prepared and uncomfortable engaging with 'difficult' topics in diverse classrooms. Moreover, they felt constrained by their own lack of subject knowledge, and increasing demands on their time and energies in a fast-changing teaching climate (Alexander & Weekes-Bernard 2017). During a final roundtable event for the History Lessons project, one teacher challenged the project team to create a resource that would make it easy for them to access material they needed to teach British histories of migration.

Our Migration Story (OMS) was our response to that challenge. In 2016, we worked with more than 80 academics, museums, archivists and local historians to compile an independent, free-to-access site that would enable teachers easily to access the materials they needed to teach a broader curriculum (Lidher, McIntosh & Alexander 2021). The website tells an alternative story of Britain through 2,000 years of migration, divided into

different historical periods and with access to scholarship and resources, and downloadable lesson plans. Since its launch in 2016, the website has had more than 1.3 million users and over 2.2 million views from across the globe.

Such statistics suggest that there is real appetite, especially among young people, for a fuller, richer, evidence-based account of Britain's past. This has undoubtedly grown in recent years through the demands to decolonise the curriculum, particularly in the wake of Black Lives Matter. Of course, OMS is just one small part of a much longer and wider movement to develop a more inclusive curriculum, from the supplementary school movements of the 1960s and 1970s, through the Black Curriculum to the more recent Teach Race Empire Migration campaigns led by the Runnymede Trust.

OMS has four main arguments. First, that 'our island story' is inescapably a story of migration to and from its shores. Second, that British history is not simply national but global, entangled with complex, and uncomfortable, histories of empire and colonialism. Third, that the histories of Black and brown people are part of our national story within Britain itself, and for over 2,000 years – that Black histories are British histories. Fourth, that in placing very different histories of migration alongside each other, and in dialogue, we can begin to talk about both what divides us, and what we share, as equals, in a modern, multicultural Britain.

### **Conclusion: re-making British histories**

The current curriculum and assessment review presents an opportunity for the government to reconsider the 'our island story' narrative, to embrace a more inclusive story of Britain that reflects our diverse past and present, and offers a vision of an equal, shared future. In the wake of the racist riots over the summer of 2024, a more open, honest conversation has never been more urgent.

Such a conversation places teachers as crucial interlocutors. Our recent research, Making History Teachers (Lidher, Bibi & Alexander 2023), shows that, especially in the wake of Black Lives Matter, teachers and teacher educators are committed to making change in their classrooms and curricula. However, the move away from subject-specific training, the fragmenting of the education sector and the ongoing pressures on teachers mean that enacting these changes is often impossible to achieve.

Accordingly, we suggest two main changes. First, that histories of migration, empire and colonialism are placed at the centre of narratives of British national identity. Second, that we equip teachers to address these often-difficult topics through subject-specific training, and through opening up the time and resource for continual professional development. History matters.

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- Lidher S, McIntosh M & Alexander C (2021). Our Migration Story: history, the national curriculum and re-narrating the British nation. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1812279
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- Lidher S, Bibi R & Alexander C (2023). Making History Teachers: The Role of Teacher Training and Teacher Education. London: Runnymede Trust. [pure.manchester.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/261547564/Runnymede\\_CoDE\\_Briefing\\_Teacher\\_Training\\_FINAL.pdf](http://pure.manchester.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/261547564/Runnymede_CoDE_Briefing_Teacher_Training_FINAL.pdf)

# Lit in Colour: a perspective

Dr Zaahida Nabagereka, senior social impact manager, Lit in Colour, Penguin Books.

Penguin Books collaborated with race equality thinktank the Runnymede Trust to publish research (Elliott et al 2021) which found that fewer than one per cent of English literature GCSE students read a book by a writer of colour, despite 34.4 per cent of students identifying as Black, Asian or minority ethnic. This research also found that primary and secondary teachers received little to no training on how to talk about race and representation in the classroom. The Lit in Colour report established that the four main barriers which prevent primary and secondary schools from teaching books by writers of colour are time, money, lack of teacher confidence and subject knowledge.

## The barriers

**Time:** Schools and teachers are time poor – the effect of the pandemic has exacerbated this massively. This means they do not have time to research appropriate texts by writers of colour or create resources to use in the classroom that are necessary for teaching a new text. New texts generally do not have resources, whereas texts that have been on the curriculum for decades have thousands of tried and tested resources that teachers rely on to get their students through the assessment and to maintain certain levels of attainment.

**Money:** School budgets have been consistently cut in recent years, so buying new books is not a feasible reality for a lot of schools when they must make other decisions about where to spend available budget. If a school has 250 copies of *An Inspector Calls* for example, they are likely to continue to use this rather than invest in new books that have

Lit in Colour 



little to no resources to support teaching the new text.

**Teacher confidence:** Our research showed there is a serious lack of teacher confidence in knowing how to talk about race and representation in the classroom, with just 12 per cent of secondary and 13 per cent of primary teachers receiving initial teacher training on this subject. Teachers are not confident in talking about race in texts written by writers of colour in addition to heritage texts by white writers that do engage with the concepts of race in addition to topics related to empire and migration. There is a strong fear of ‘getting it wrong’, losing control of classroom discussion and causing harm to students who have experienced racism and discrimination.

**Subject knowledge:** There is a lack of teacher subject knowledge about books by writers of colour. Our research showed that many teachers were not familiar with texts by writers of colour as they had not been taught them at school or degree level. This further compounds all the other barriers resulting in a **systemic under-representation of Black, Asian and minority ethnic writers in the curriculum relative to both their place in contemporary British literary excellence but also compared to the demographics of the school population.**

The most positive aspect that the 2021 research highlighted was that there is an appetite for change among both teachers and students. Our research found that 70 per cent of young people agree that diversity is part of British society and should be represented in the school curriculum.

Since 2021, the Lit in Colour campaign has been working with multiple education and publishing partners and stakeholders to clearly demonstrate that it is possible to find solutions to these barriers within the current education system. Through convening and collaborating with our partners (Runnymede Trust, Pearson, National Literacy Trust, OCR, TES, Twinkl, National Association of Head Teachers, Peters Corr books, Black Writers’ Guild, School Library Association, Oxford University Press, Nick Hern Books, Concord Theatricals, Hachette, HarperCollins, Bloomsbury, National Association for the Teaching of English), Lit in Colour has been giving immediate support to schools which have been ready to make changes. This is exemplified in the latest research published with partner exam board Pearson Edexcel.

Through working with Pearson Edexcel since 2021, we have enabled more than 250 secondary schools and 29,000 students to study a writer of colour at GCSE or A-level. Our new research (Elliott et al 2024) shows that studying a book by a writer of colour creates significant positive outcomes for all students – not just students of colour. These include greater engagement in class, increased empathy, students feeling books are more relevant to them, and that students are able to achieve across the full range of marks answering on a new Lit in Colour Pioneers text, including at the highest levels. The finding of increased levels of empathy is important, as building this within young people is critical to develop them into compassionate, empathetic citizens, and to support social cohesion. We also received anecdotal feedback from teachers that it helped improve attendance in class. The government has identified improving school attendance as an educational priority due to the current attendance crisis, so supporting teachers to teach a more diverse range of texts could be one mechanism to support this goal. Our research also shows that diversifying the subject at key stage 4 (KS4) has the potential to reverse the declining numbers of students studying English A-level

and degree level English which is a threat to the UK’s wider creative ecosystem.

We therefore urge the curriculum and assessment review panel to recommend interventions that will remove the barriers which are currently preventing primary and secondary schools and teachers from teaching diverse texts. This is vital for creating a truly inclusive and representative curriculum, and will unlock important benefits for young people.

Calls for the national curriculum to be widened are not new (for example, Dabydeen & Tagoe-Wilson 1987). The English curriculum does not exist in a vacuum; literary canons are the result of social reproduction (Guillory 1993). The Macpherson report (1999) highlighted this in its finding that the national curriculum has failed to reflect the needs of a diverse multicultural society, in addition to highlighting that the number of exclusions from school are disproportionate to the ethnic mix of pupils. Connected to this, research from Dr Remi Joseph-Salisbury and the Runnymede Trust (2020) found that the teaching workforce is still overwhelmingly white; this is even more pronounced in the English literature teaching workforce, of which 85.7 per cent are white British (Elliott et al 2021). There is an urgent need to increase the racial literacy of all teachers and to diversify the pipeline of people entering the profession, as a more diverse range of teachers who teach a more diverse range of texts will help ensure learners from all backgrounds are able to fully participate, achieve and succeed in English, and in school generally.

**We strongly encourage the curriculum review panel to recommend that the Department for Education take the following action:**

- Establishes formal structures, training and accreditation for initial teacher education. For example, the Teachers Standards (DfE 2011a) should be updated to require

training in, and demonstrate commitment to, anti-racism, inclusion and diversity.

- Make funding available and require mandatory ongoing subject knowledge development and training on anti-racism, inclusion and diversity in pedagogy and curriculum development for all qualified teachers.
- Enable all students to access a broad and inclusive range of writers who promote a deeper understanding of and engagement with race, empire and migration in English literature teaching, as this positively impacts students' engagement, empathy and understanding of others.
- Collect and publish data on the ethnicity of teachers training by subject and ensure a robust pipeline of outreach is implemented to recruit people of various ethnic backgrounds to join the profession and teach all subjects, with a particular focus on English as a core subject.
- Require awarding bodies to ensure a minimum of 25 per cent of all texts offered across English literature, language and literature A-level texts are written by writers of colour; and strengthen English literature at KS3 to ensure it is a gateway to a range of themes, identities, concepts and perspectives.

### Lit in Colour research

Elliott V, Nelson-Addy L, Chantiluke R & Courtney M (2021). *Lit in Colour: Diversity in Literature in English Schools*. Penguin Books & Runnymede Trust.

Elliott V, Watkiss D, Hart B & Davison K (2024). *The effect of studying a text by an author of colour: The Lit in Colour Pioneers Pilot*. Pearson, Penguin Books, Oxford University & Runnymede Trust.

### Research case study videos links

1. Boys Don't Cry at UTC Derby



2. The Empress at Blue Coat School



3. Boys Don't Cry at Heathlands School for Deaf Children



### Relevant references

Macpherson W (1999). *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny, CM4262-1*. London. HMSO.

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# Anti-racism education PSHE/RSHE: lesson sequence for key stages 1-4

Katie Bayley, anti-racism education,  
Hallam Teaching School Alliance.



### Who we are

Anti-racism Education was launched in 2022 to provide primary and secondary educators across the UK with a sequence of anti-racism lessons that could be delivered as part of the relationships, sex and health education/ personal, social, health and economics (RSHE/ PSHE) curriculum for key stages (KS) 1-4.

The lesson sequence and accompanying resources (eg glossaries, teacher notes and racial literacy explainers) have been developed by a collaboration of schools based in London and Sheffield and led by Katie Bayley at the Hallam Teaching School Alliance.

### Our aims

Our aim is to educate students on race and racism, while at the same time developing the racial literacy of teachers, introducing them to the core principles of anti-racist pedagogy. Participants explore the historical roots of racism and how this has shaped the world we live in. This awareness is crucial for recognising the ongoing racist biases and inequalities that exist in society today.

This programme is built on the belief that education is a powerful instrument for social change and aims to equip learners with the tools they need to critically examine and challenge systemic racism.

### Broadening our understanding of racism

A key part of this work is working with teachers and students to broaden their definition of racism. Moving beyond seeing racism as something that is intentional and that 'bad people' do, we begin to explore the ways in which we have all been shaped by racism through the process of racial socialisation.

Socialisation is the process through which we internalise the beliefs, messages and values of a society in a myriad of ways, such as through literature, news media, TV, film and education. Racial socialisation refers to the subtle and explicit messages we receive from society about what it means to be white, 'not white' and from particular racialised groups. Consciously or not, we are all shaped by these dominant discourses from a very young age and, because of this, it can be difficult for us to get a sense of the extent to which racist biases might show up in our thinking.

In the anti-racism education lesson scheme and introductory racial literacy for teachers' continuing professional development (CPD), we critically reflect on racial socialisation, focusing for example, on the role of Britain's colonial history in shaping the education system and the dominant narratives we find ourselves reinforcing in our subject curricula. We address issues such as the Eurocentric



nature of the national curriculum, the omission of non-white histories and the perpetuation of racial myths and stereotypes.

### What exactly do we mean by anti-racism education?

Anti-racism education differs from multicultural education, where the emphasis has been on celebrating cultural differences. While celebrating difference is important, it can feel superficial if there is an absence of education on the ongoing systemic issues that cause harm to communities of colour. Focusing on 'saris, steel pans and samosas' alone can feel tokenistic if racism is not addressed in the classroom and training room.

- Anti-racism education equips teachers and students with the tools they need to challenge racism. It is best understood as a critical perspective, a lens through which to examine subject curricula, data, and the practices and policies within a school. Irrespective of how well-intentioned they may be, it asks the following question of our systems and initiatives: is this practice/policy leading to equitable outcomes for all?
- It moves beyond celebrating 'other cultures' by addressing racism directly. For example, concepts such as systemic racism and racial socialisation are explored in the training room and classroom (appropriate to key stage). And rather than lighting on a few particular moments in history when educating on racism, anti-racism requires us as educators to take a more joined up view of history, tracing past racism through to the present, for example, looking at how the legacy of colonialism is showing up in the realities faced by communities of colour today.
- It explores some of the cognitive aspects of racism such as unconscious/implicit bias.
- It equips students (and teachers) with the skills they need to be critical thinkers,

encouraging questions such as: Who is the writer of this source? Who benefits from this source? Whose perspective is missing from this source?

- It ensures a **diversity of voices and perspectives** within and across subject areas.

### We aim to develop the following key skills:

- **Critical thinking:** The lessons promote critical thinking by enabling students to ask questions of sources, identifying biases and seeking out different perspectives. This skill is vital for challenging systemic issues.
- **Communication:** The lessons aim to foster effective and respectful communication skills, enabling students to articulate their thoughts clearly and sensitively.
- **Empathy:** By exploring personal stories, examples and scenarios through interactive activities such as role-playing and group discussion, the lessons aim to develop students' empathy and understanding.

It is important for educators to note that, engaging in lessons such as anti-racism education by no means 'does the job' of interrupting systemic racism, nor will it make a school anti-racist. Educators must be supported by the government to commit to ongoing racial literacy work over time. With greater support, training and funding, we believe that educators can create a more equitable and inclusive learning environment, empowering students with the language, skills and knowledge needed to challenge racism and advocate for social justice.

Website: [antiracism.education](http://antiracism.education)

### Recommendations for the curriculum review

We believe the national curriculum should:

**Educate for social justice:** Teachers should be facilitated to provide students with a language for addressing issues of equity and social justice. The curriculum should encourage teachers to take an active role in educating for social justice, inspiring students to become advocates for change in their communities.

**Think critically:** In a broad, diverse, inclusive and creative curriculum, students should be encouraged to critically analyse sources and media texts around them. In turn, students should be supported to question the dominant narratives they are exposed to in society and develop their own informed viewpoints.

**Offer diverse perspectives:** Curriculum content and resources should offer diverse voices and experiences. This enables students to understand events from multiple viewpoints, developing a more comprehensive and critical understanding of national and global issues.

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Anti-Racism Education website. It includes the logo on the left, a menu with links for 'About', 'Primary', 'Secondary', 'Training', and 'Contact', and a 'Get Started' button on the right. Below the navigation is a large yellow banner with the text 'Education is a tool for social justice.' and a sub-headline: 'Our aim is to empower students and teachers to explore the ways in which learning about 'race' and racism can help us to challenge the unequal systems that surround us in society.' A 'Get Started' button is located at the bottom of the banner.

# Global Black narratives for the classroom

Bettina Ogbomoide, project co-ordinator for BLAM UK.

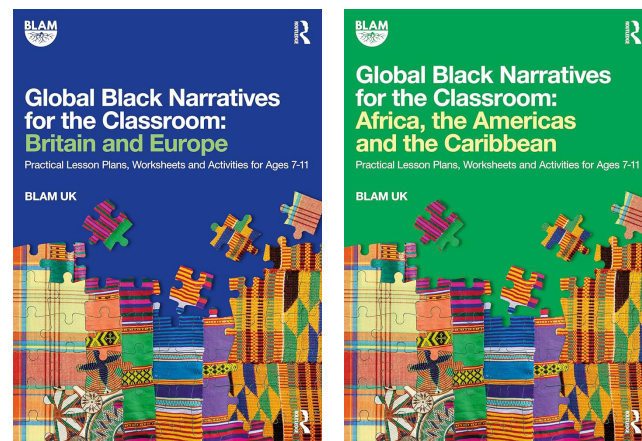


BLAM UK (Black Learning Achievement and Mental Health) is a not-for-profit charity dedicated to creating an anti-racist educational environment that centres Black British cultural capital, creativity and heritage. Our work supports social inclusion for Black British communities, addressing the systemic inequalities embedded within the national curriculum and providing targeted support for Black pupils and teachers. Through our educational projects, BLAM UK collaborates with schools to transform learning experiences, making sure they reflect African, Black American, Black British and Caribbean histories, experiences and contributions that are all too often overlooked.

In order to address the systemic racial bias witnessed in schools, BLAM UK promotes an anti-racist curriculum designed to create a deeper understanding of Black narratives and experiences among educators and all students. Racial bias and anti-Black racism is still an ingrained issue in British schools, as highlighted in a Runnymede Trust report on race and racism in English secondary schools (Joseph-Salisbury 2020), which found that Black students are about three times more likely to face school exclusions and experience higher levels of teacher bias. Black Caribbean students are almost twice as likely to be excluded compared to their white counterparts. Through our teacher training programmes, we empower educators to confront these biases and develop anti-racist practices for an inclusive and affirming classroom environment. Our training equips teachers with the resources and skills needed

to challenge stereotypes, celebrate Black identities and support the wellbeing of all students, especially those that are racially minoritised.

Our teacher handbook series – Global Black Narratives for the Classroom: Vol 1 & 2 (2023, 2024) published by Routledge – are an important resource that enables teachers to confidently teach Black histories and experiences that extend beyond the limited representations often seen in the current curriculum. The books offer educators lesson plans aimed at key stage 2 (KS2) that can be used throughout the year, which align with the national curriculum and offer a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of global Black narratives. For teachers without knowledge of these histories, Global Black Narratives is a comprehensive resource with reliable, creative materials to diversify the curriculum, support student engagement and teacher confidence, and build a more inclusive, representative educational experience.



BLAM UK's initiatives are rooted in our commitment to bridge educational inequalities and social injustice. Data on pupil outcomes from the Department for Education shows a concerning correlation between socioeconomic disadvantage, racial bias and academic performance. Black students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to experience barriers that impact their educational outcomes and wellbeing. By addressing these issues through a decolonial curriculum, mental health support and advocacy against inequitable disciplinary practices, we aim to dismantle structural obstacles that hinder Black and minoritised students' wellbeing and success.

## Recommendation for the curriculum review

BLAM UK is driven by the belief that an inclusive, anti-racist curriculum and culture of education is essential for an equitable society. The government should set out a national curriculum that provides teachers and students with the tools to recognise and counter racial injustice, while also strengthening community resilience and mental wellbeing and, in turn, creating a better future for racially and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in this country.

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## Confronting the crisis of racism in UK schools: a call for comprehensive reform



Aisha Sanusi, director of the African Caribbean Education Network (ACEN)

*"Give me some sweets, or I'll whip you slaves. You should be out picking cotton and call me master."*

Weeks later, a teacher responds to a student's forgotten textbook by suggesting they would "end up in the gutter doing crack-cocaine". The latter is an incident you might attribute to a student's behavioural profile perhaps. However, in context, this is a highly academic school where socioeconomic challenges that are typically responsible for proximity to drug dealing, or drug dealers do not exist.

Some may find it shocking, but just how isolated are these incidents? Over the last three years, I've trained thousands of students and teachers on various aspects of racial inclusion, and I can tell you that these incidents reflect a broader pattern of racial discrimination and prejudice that still permeates educational institutions across the UK, one of which is growing.

### Student experience

An investigation by The Guardian uncovered that 226 multi-academy trusts reported 36,064 racist incidents, with 28,524 cases going unreported to local governments (Batty and Parveen 2021). Experts suggest these numbers represent merely the tip of the iceberg, as the vast majority of instances, both overt and covert, go unreported. Research from the Equality and Human Rights Commission also reveals that many students, particularly those from racial minority

backgrounds, feel that incidents of racism are often ignored or mishandled by schools. In a survey of more than 10,000 students, nearly 50 per cent said that when they did report racism, it either wasn't taken seriously or no action was taken at all. Many students expressed that they were either dismissed by staff or encouraged to "move on" from the incident, leading to a culture where incidents of racism go unreported or unresolved.

Recent statistics support this troubling picture. In a study of more than 500 young Black people, commissioned by the Black Youth Alliance and YMCA, 95 per cent of Black students reported hearing racist language at school, nearly half (49 per cent) of young Black people identified racism as their primary barrier to academic success and 50 per cent cited teacher perceptions as their biggest obstacle to achievement (YMCA, 2020).

In addition, bias, although hard to identify on a case-by-case basis, can and has been evidenced time and again to show the breadth and depth of this issue, confirming that it extends beyond individual incidents. Research from the University of Bristol reveals that teachers often hold lower expectations for Black students, which directly impacts their academic outcomes (Strand, 2011). This bias manifests in grade predictions, with Black students frequently receiving lower predicted grades than their actual performance warrants, thereby limiting their higher education and employment opportunities (Department for Business, Innovation & Skills,

2011). This further highlights the crucial need for racial literacy in teacher training and continued professional development, which is also advanced by Dr Remi Joseph-Salisbury and the Runnymede Trust in their report on race and racism in English secondary schools (2020)

*"By their own admission, many teachers are ill-prepared to teach in ways that promote anti-racism, and this can include BME teachers. Racial literacy therefore needs to be placed at the centre of teachers' role and teacher training. It is important that all teachers take responsibility for teaching in ways that promote anti-racism."*

(Joseph-Salisbury 2020)

### Beyond education

We're not treating the experiences of Black students in education as the race-based crisis that it is. Vitally, there is not enough focus on the interconnectedness between the first institutional engagement Black people have and the structural outcomes this creates in households thereafter. Alarming, young Black men face significantly higher unemployment rates in the UK compared to other groups, with rates reaching approximately 35 per cent – substantially above the national youth average of around 12 per cent (TUC 2023). With nearly half (47 per cent) of all Black children living in poverty,

almost double that of white children (26 per cent) (Child Poverty Action Group 2021), how racially minoritised students engage with educational institutions also needs greater thought.

### Equipping, not burdening teachers

Research indicates that a significant number of UK teachers feel unprepared to handle issues of racism and would greatly benefit from racial literacy and anti-racism training. A survey by the Centre for Mental Health found that over 90 per cent of teachers believe anti-racism training should be mandatory, with only a third having previously received any form of training on racism or microaggressions (Treloar et al 2023). This lack of training leaves the majority of educators ill-equipped to address racial incidents, impacting both students and teachers who face such discrimination in schools. Additionally, many educators are calling for the Department for Education to embed anti-racism training in teacher preparation and continuing professional development programmes, to ensure all school staff are well-equipped to manage and reduce racial bias effectively.

The 2024 far-right riots underscored deepening racial and religious tensions across the country. These riots were driven by growing Islamophobic sentiments and a broader climate of racial hostility, which also targeted Black individuals, migrants and ethnic minorities. Without addressing

the systemic issues of racial injustice and discrimination, these divisive ideologies will continue to fuel tension and violence.

As it stands, racial inclusion more broadly is not being recognised as the safeguarding issue that it is and, by failing to do so, we're not equipping teachers with the tools to adhere to their legal duties. Further, yes, we need to empower teachers with greater racial literacy and the ability to deal with issues of racism as they are asking for, but surely part of that solution must be tackling the root causes of these issues and decreasing their prevalence, the curriculum being the starting place.

### The underappreciated benefits of a diverse curriculum

A diverse and inclusive curriculum helps to foster critical thinking by exposing students to a variety of perspectives and histories, helping them challenge stereotypes and biases before they form. Research shows that when students engage with a broad range of viewpoints, it disrupts homogenous thinking, promotes empathy and encourages the questioning of societal assumptions, which are key to reducing prejudice and fostering more inclusive attitudes (Morrell 2017; Lamberts 2019).

Instead of thinking that curriculum diversity benefits a few and is an issue of equity for minoritised groups alone, we need to understand that greater curriculum diversity has societal benefits for all, and data supports that it also leads to higher academic outcomes, for all.

At Lilian Baylis Technology College in London, the introduction of a diverse English curriculum, incorporating literature from various cultural backgrounds, significantly boosted student engagement, particularly among ethnic minority students. This mirrors efforts in schools across Birmingham and Manchester, where revising the curriculum to reflect the UK's racial and cultural diversity has shown that students perform better

when they see their identities and histories represented. In its first year, the Reflecting Britain initiative, adopted by several schools in London, resulted in a 30 per cent increase in student engagement, with ethnic minority students reporting higher academic confidence, and a 15 per cent improvement in GCSE results (Mayor of London 2024). Similarly, at St Martin's School in Birmingham, revisions to the curriculum led to a 40 per cent increase in student participation in lessons on cultural diversity, a 20 per cent increase in GCSE pass rates for ethnic minority students and a reduction in racial incidents (Ohene-Darko 2021). Westminster Academy and the East London Cultural Roots project also saw similar benefits, including improved exam scores and a shift in students' views on racial equality and inclusion (Manchester University 2024).

### A call to action: seizing the opportunity for transformative change in education and society

The evidence is clear: racism in schools remains a significant challenge that requires immediate and sustained attention.

- Government ministers must prioritise a diverse curriculum as a cornerstone of education reform, using the blueprint of successful initiatives such as Reflecting Britain and curriculum updates in schools across London, Birmingham and Manchester that illustrate inclusive education benefits all students.
- We strongly encourage government ministers to collaborate with educators, communities and lived experience experts to make curriculum diversity a national focus.
- To support these changes, the government should mandate racial inclusion training for teachers as part of both initial teacher training and ongoing professional development, again, valuing and engaging with the vital lens of experts with lived experience in the process.

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