

# Learning cycles & current issues

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Some say trends are cyclical <sup>1</sup> and I would say that the change cycle in education is one of about 20 years. In my third cycle of learning, I ask - **What do I observe in this current cycle relating to racism & education?**

## The only Black teacher ...

When I started teaching in the late 1970s I was the only Black <sup>2</sup> teacher in that secondary school. At times it felt like I had given birth to every Black child in the school. Teachers, who had little idea of their pupils' cultural lives, would ask me (because I was not white) questions around culture and identity. Wishing to assist children, I would do my research and hopefully respond accordingly. Tide~, an invigorating organisation, supported me at that time (as it has done throughout my career) and nurtured within me the skills and dispositions I wanted to promote and ultimately nurture in my pupils and fellow educationalists.

We teachers are a product of the culture of omission and so need educating ourselves, perhaps even more so within the current political and social environment.

We, and our students, need to develop skills and dispositions, for example to enable us to question what we experience, and engage with the need for change.

## Questions on 'race'

Race and racism are often misunderstood – 'race' is a social construct, but is mistakenly and widely used to denote difference. This construct is a challenge to educators; for example, in how we relate to all pupils in our teaching. Currently there are debates (in this cycle) about decolonising history as a response to the Black lives matter cause.

Bob Marley summed it up powerfully:

Understanding the context of today's immigration debates is impossible without understanding that large numbers of people who came to the UK didn't come as migrants; they came as citizens from colonies and former colonies. A representative, relevant education system should reflect all children's histories, achievements, culture and politics. **All children deserve to see themselves reflected in books, resources, schools and communities, and to achieve this we must re-think the curriculum.**

Educators have an obligation to confront the pernicious nature of racism. That is why we must commit to becoming anti-racist and also prepare our students to be anti-racist. As Angela Davis stated, **"in a racist society it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist"**.

The current growth in intolerance and racism must be challenged. A safe and supportive environment is needed in which to do so. Training can only be effective in a culture conducive to open discussions about race and racism. Only in such settings can we develop the concept of global citizenship, and explore issues of equality and justice locally, nationally and internationally.

## Making choices - what can we do?

The UK has seen many campaigns to challenge systemic racism. As educators we have an obligation to confront the poison of racism.

**We forget there is only one 'race' – the human race. We need to remember there is so much more that connects us as human beings than divides us.**

As a Prevent Education Officer I see the construct of race being exploited by extreme groups and the ripples from this within institutions, including schools. Unchecked, this will lead to increasing racism. Self-reflection by practitioners, not just Black colleagues, can allow us to enhance our ability to mitigate racism. We need to work on a personal level and be vocal about 'race', diversity and inclusion.

If you know your history

Then you would know where you coming from

Then you wouldn't have to ask me

Who the heck do I think I am

1. The Strauss–Howe generational theory, also known as the Fourth Turning theory.

2. Black within a political sense, Black is used to indicate people with a shared history. Black with a capital 'B' is used in its broad political and inclusive sense.

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Balbir reflects on the need to renew commitment to anti-racism.

