Challenges in Promoting an Inclusive Educational Environment for British Children: Issues of Race, Ethnicity and Social Class

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Abstract

This paper reviews different factors affecting an inclusive educational environment for British children, including race, ethnicity, and social class. Research has shown that different ethnicities and races affect children's national identification – to be British is perceived as less relevant than being English, Scottish, Welsh, or Northern Irish. In addition, children's association of positive attributes, such as food, school clothes, or extra classes, with people from high-ranking social class also divides classroom environments in the UK. In this context, children coming from lower ranking social status can be vulnerable. This reality requires educational solutions to promote intercultural competence that would foster respect, embrace differences and cultural diversity, and create an inclusive educational environment for British school children.

Keywords: *ethnicity; race; social class; British children; multicultural education; intercultural clashes.*

1. Introduction

The United Kingdom is a multicultural society made up by a diversity of nations, languages and cultures. This multicultural diversity is initially reflected in the four countries that form the kingdom— England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, each of them with their own dialects, music and traditions. Historically, the Roman, Vikings and Norman that inhabited the British Isles left their

mark as well, in the language and culture. Moreover, due to the proximity to continental Europe, the UK has a long and well-established tradition of commerce, war and family ties with many European nations. The Royal Family, for instance, has long been a reflection of multicultural family relationships.

Another issue that explains multiculturalism in Britain today has to do with the nation's colonial past. In post-colonial periods, the UK received numerous immigrants from former colonies of the British Empire around the globe. Nowadays, mass immigration still continues to be high in the UK. While the many ethnic groups enrich big cities in a multicultural atmosphere, there are challenges associated with the economy, work opportunities, health protection, housing and education for all.

In this paper, we aim to critically analyse how British children perceive their national and ethnic identities, as well as their social class, in order to understand the challenges of promoting an inclusive educational environment for British children. Kids can actively build their stereotypes and prejudices, but they can also challenge existing opinions, regarding race, ethnicity and social class (Kustatscher 2017).

With this aim, the research questions are the following:

Research question 1: How do British children perceive their national and ethnic identities?
Research question 2: What are British children's views of social class in the context of primary school?

In order to answer the two questions above, the following concepts are reviewed: children's awareness and understanding of race, ethnicity and social class; and children's playmate preferences based on race, ethnicity and social class.

2. Children's awareness and understanding of race, ethnicity and social class

2.1 Children's awareness and understanding of social class

According to Kustatscher (2017), research on the relationship between social class and children's everyday lives has mainly been theoretically framed by social reproduction or Bourdieusian approaches, focusing on the role of parents and schooling in the process of shaping children's lives.

Kustatscher (2017) also reviewed that the earliest effort to study children's perspectives of social class can be traced back to the 1950s, aiming to investigate if children could identify their own and others' social class correctly through questionnaires or structured interviews. The concept of social class was formed through the notion of occupation and income of parents. Kustatscher (2017) also argues that while these studies attempted to discover children's perception of social class, they actually assumed children's insight not to be equal as adults'. Therefore, if their answers to the questionnaire and the interview did not match grown-up researchers' perspectives and evaluation, regarding social class categorization and identification, they were assessed as incorrect. In the 21st century, children's perception of social class has been studied through more child-centred approaches, such as exploring children's views of living in poverty carried out by Ridge (2002); contrasting the perspectives of children from disadvantaged and wealthy backgrounds conducted by Johnson and Hagerman (2006) (Kustatscher 2017). Kustatscher (2017) also summarised that research has mostly paid attention to middle childhood and youth (starting from 8 years) while the views of younger children have not been concerned, which can be the result of the thinking that children are innocent or incompetent in order to understand social class (Kustatscher, 2015).

The common view of children in all studies reviewed by Kustatscher (2017) put themselves on a middle ground in terms of social class although the children come from different backgrounds. The author contends that this corresponds to the findings of Savage et al. (2001) that adults positioned themselves as 'ordinary', 'just themselves',

'normal', which already implied 'other' in their views. She also reviewed that in children's understanding of social class, economic status was emphasised strongly, however, there are other aspects that children also focused on regarding social class. They are: relationships with family and peers, emotional well-being and problems around participation. In addition, in recent research, school also became a factor to evaluate social class as it is related to clothing and sweets or taking part in school trips and projects (Kustatscher 2017).

2.2 Children's development of awareness and understanding of race and ethnicity

Ethnicity can be defined as 'a human unit of individuals who see themselves as being alike, and tend to be so regarded by others, by virtue of one or more of the following attributes: common ancestry, national origin, race, religion, language, cultural background, and social customs, among others' (Lam 2013: 3). Lam (2013) argues that ethnic identity not only involves in cognitive components but also a considerable affective or evaluative element which consists of the inclination to perceive or feel about one's own and other ethnic groups in approving or disapproving ways, and a sense of preference for group members or vice versa.

According to Nesdale (2004), children's development of awareness and understanding ethnicity and race can be explained by three theories: (i) Social identity theory - SIT (Tajfel & Turner 1979); (ii) Self-categorisation theory - SCT (Turner et al. 1987) and (iii) Social identity development theory (Nesdale 2004). SIT and its elaboration SCT propose that prejudice and discrimination against members of other ethnic groups are the outcome of individuals' inclination to identify with social groups that are considered to be distinguishable or superior in comparison with other groups, so as to enhance their self-esteem (Nesdale 2004). The author also argues that SIT 'is virtually mute on the issue of the development of prejudice in children' (Nesdale 2004: 225) and proposes SIDT to explain the formation of children's ethnic prejudice, which is related to children's awareness of ethnicity.

Social identity development theory (SIDT – Nesdale, 2004) puts forward the notion that children who show ethnic prejudice experience four sequential development phases: undifferentiated, ethnic awareness, ethnic preference, ethnic prejudice, each with different features of behaviours.

According to Nesdale (2004), in the first phase – Undifferentiated, before two to three years, racial cues are not significant to young children, their response to objects and people initially depends on what attracts their attention. In the second phase – Ethnic awareness, it starts to appear at around the age of three, especially in children inhabiting multiracial societies and they tend to facilitate social grouping based on the colour of skin. Their ethnic awareness begins after adults' action of identifying or labelling an out-group member. From an early age, children live in an environment with concepts and social categories that are already established. A notable achievement of this phase is children's ethnic self-identification – the recognition of being a member of a specific group. By reviewing different studies, Nesdale (2004) summarised that self-identification has been reported in three-year-old children of dominant groups and in virtually all dominant groups of children in multiracial communities by six to seven years old. The author also notes that it is not clear if children's awareness of their own ethnic identity appears before or after their awareness of other people's ethnicity. In addition, this phase also pushes the beginning of the next phase which overlaps children's continuous growth of ethnic awareness.

Coming to the third phase – Ethnic preference, it is noteworthy that after the second phase (Self-identification), the child learns that he/she belongs to a particular ethnic group and focuses more on their own group rather than other groups, on similarities rather than differences, on positively distinctive features instead of negative attributes of their own category.

For the last phase – Ethnic prejudice, it is noteworthy that Nesdale's notion (2004) is opposite to Aboud's (1988). While Aboud (1988) contends that ethnic prejudice reduces in children from seven years

onwards as they develop their cognitive acquisition with the ability of understanding that different contrary dimensions can exist in one object or person; SIDT proposes that 'it is precisely in this period that prejudice actually crystallises and emerges *in those children who come to hold such attitudes*' (Nesdale 2004: 229), meaning that prejudice does not emerge in all children. SIDT also argues that prejudice requires at least an equal focus on both children's own groups and other groups. Moreover, SIDT puts forward that 'instead of engaging in interethnic play and friendship, prejudice means derogating and discriminating against minority group members whenever occasion arises' (Nesdale 2004: 230).

3. Children's playmate preferences based on race, ethnicity and social class

3.1 Children's playmate preferences based on social class

Up to now, there has been a lack of research on children's playmate preferences based on social class. According to Mandalaywala et al. (2020), in cultures where there is a relationship between race and socioeconomic status, children often use race to predict social status. For instance, research pointed out that in the United States and South Africa, pre-schoolers expected White people to be wealthier than Black people by matching the former with possessions and houses having better appearance than the latter. In addition, in the United States, six-year-old children expected Black people to have lower status than the White. Furthermore, children's views on social status were not influenced by their own race, either Black or White (see Mandalaywala et al. 2020). Moreover, this group of researchers also reviewed how children's views of social status impact their social preferences and behaviours. They summarised that pre-schooler preferred people connected with high-wealth items, in comparison to people with low-wealth items, and children showing their preferences for pro-wealth also demonstrated an implicit pro-White preference.

In addition, Mandalaywala and colleagues (2020) also note that researchers often apply matching tasks to investigate children's use of different cues (wealth, social power) or different social domains

(gender, race) to predict social status. For example, in the wealth-matching task, children are asked to match a specific person with the items he/she can possess.

3.2 Children's playmate preferences based on race and ethnicity

There are tests and measures to research children's playmate preferences based on ethnicity and race rather than apply observation in daily life activities. First, the visual preference task shows infants with examples of faces from two different racial groups and simultaneously measures the time children spend looking at each example. The time, therefore, is applied to identify children's preferences of race (see Kelly et al. 2007).

Second, explicit racial bias was measured by the "Doll test" designed by Clark and Clark, 1947). The study was carried out in the Southern part of the United States when racial separation was very high and race was an organising factor in both children's home life and their school life, and it also defined the hierarchy in the society. The test asked children to choose either a Black or a White doll for each adjective describing each doll, such as 'good', 'bad', 'ugly', 'pretty', which showed their attitudes towards race. The results of the test shows that over 95% of the European-American children preferred the lighter doll, whereas only approximately two-thirds of the African-American children preferred the darker doll. Killen and Rutland (2011) pointed out a problem related to the "Doll test" which is that the test only provides two options and forces children to choose one. This forced choice could create ambiguity if the test is to measure children's prejudice or children's preference of playmates coming from their own group to other groups.

Third, racial attitude in children is measured by the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure – PRAM (Williams et al. 1975) as well. The measure includes six positive and six negative evaluation items related to pro-White/anti-Black bias, as well as four gender-stereotype filler items. The original pictures of Black and White persons (both women and men) were redrawn to vary hair texture and skin colour. For each

adjective evaluating a person, the child was shown two corresponding pictures of a White person and a Black person and required to match the adjective with either the picture of a Black person or the picture of a White person. To code the test, one point was given if the child selected a White person to a positive assessment as well as a Black figure to a negative assessment.

Fourth, racial attitude was measured by the 'Multi-response Racial Attitude measure' - MRA created by Doyle and Aboud (1995). The MRA was used to measure the bias towards Whites, Blacks, and Native Indians. The tool includes twenty adjectives used to evaluate people (ten positive and ten negative) which were withdrawn from the PRAM, along with four neutral filler items. Each of them was shown along with a concrete behavioural instance depicted exactly in the same way on three cards with the same size. The cards were categorised into three boxes, labelled as belonging to a White child, a Black child, and a Native Indian child. The pictures in the three boxes share similar drawings of heads and gender, and the only different features are the colour of skin and hair texture. For each adjective, the child was asked to place them in the box or boxes that fit with the adjective.

Similar to the "Doll test", PRAM and MRA also limit children's choices and force them to choose among restricted options that are given based on researchers' thoughts and intention instead of offering children opportunities to give their own opinions and be listened to. This kind of tests can elicit some children's attitudes towards race and contribute to transferring the message of pre-existent racial stereotypes that adults (researchers) have already had.

Fifth, there are recent tests created by Kinzler and colleagues (2007), Kinzler and Spelke (2011) to evaluate infants' social preferences based on language and their preferences for social interactions based on race. The tests provided videos of two individuals from different races: White and Black. The two persons offered exactly the same toys to a 10-month-old infant and spoke with their native language. An illusion was created to make the effect that the toys emerging from the screen fell and landed on the table in front of the infant. Infants' manual selections of toys were

measured. The research carried out in 2007 showed that infants' choices were strongly affected by the language of the persons offering toys. They tended to prefer toys from persons speaking the language that they had been exposed to and familiar with. Therefore, in order to measure infants' preference for social interaction based on race and restrict the effect of language, for the research in 2011 half of the infants were tested with silent videos, however, the persons appearing in the videos still showed their friendliness. In contrast, the rest were tested with the persons speaking their native language when offering children toys.

Then the tests for the babies were applied to children aged five to collect their prediction. They were presented a movie of the White and Black persons smiling and offering toys for the babies. Then they were asked to predict who the babies would take the toys from. In addition, they were also asked to choose a person to be friends with between the White and Black ones.

4. In the context of the British cultural environment

4.1 National and ethnic identification in the British environment

According to Lam and Corson (2013), being 'British' is not quite important for many British children aged six to twelve years; its importance is ranked after their age, gender, city and being 'English'. The authors also explain the reason for this phenomenon, which is that White British are likely to identify more with 'English', 'Scottish' or 'Welsh', which are also considered as the ethnic identity for some individuals rather than 'British'. In addition, the power of ethnic identification (being either English, Scottish or Welsh) even accelerates through age as a result of the representation of the aforementioned nations in many realms of everyday life, especially in some specific national sports, such as football where English, Scottish or Welsh teams are considered as rivals (see Lam & Corson 2013). Furthermore, the strength of national identity is different among different groups of gender, social class and ethnicity; for instance, children whose

grandparents/ parents are originally Bangladesh feel less English than White children (see Lam & Corson 2013).

National and ethnic identification in British children (including White children – children having European origin, Black children – children having African or Carribean origin, Asian if their origin is from Asia continent, and mixed race) was measured by Lam and Corson (2013) by applying the Strength of Identification Scale (Barrett 2007) with five items below:

1. Degree of identification, 'how British– or relevant ethnicity, (such as Indian) – do you feel?';
2. Pride, 'how proud are you of being British/Indian?';
3. Importance, 'how important is it to you that you are British (Indian)?'
4. Feeling, 'how do you feel about being British/Indian?'; and
5. Internalisation, 'How would you feel if someone said something bad about British/Indian people?'.

For items 1, 2, 3 the responses are scored from 1 to 4, which correspond with not at all, a little bit, quite or very British/Indian, proud or important. For items 4 and 5, the responses are scored from 1 to 5, which match with very sad, quite sad, neither sad nor happy, quite happy, or very happy. It is notable that the scores are reversed for item 5.

Their study found that for British children, their national identification peaked at the age of nine and then decreased while the strength of ethnic identification still remained with age.

4.2 Social class in the British environment

Regarding social class, Kustatscher (2017) argues, in her study on young Scottish children's social class identities in everyday life at primary school, that in the school being studied, practices to celebrate diversity often focused on celebrating diverse ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, languages and cultural customs but ignored factors of race, gender and social class. By applying ethnographic approach, Kustatscher pointed out that social class differences in everyday life are

noted at school through a number of everyday activities and familiar things, such as clothes, lunch boxes and school trips which could become pressure for low-income families. According to the author, in a specific circumstance where social class differences were marked in the class, the teacher solved the situation through a 'smoothing out' strategy without mentioning clearly either 'social class' or 'poverty'. Kustatscher concludes: 'this silencing may ultimately contribute to the creation of stigma around social class differences and work to oppress, rather than address, social class inequalities' (2017: 389).

Furthermore, the Kustatscher (2017) also pointed out that through peers' interaction, play and games in the class, children showed their perception and affection towards specific social classes and even the hierarchy in their relationship in which the one who assumed a superior position, based on the social class often took the dominant role in a peer relationship. The author gave an example of the conversation between two girls about a yogurt which was recognised by both the researcher and the dominant child (in that peer relationship) to have bad quality. By stating the bad attribute of the yogurt and distancing herself from the representation of the yogurt ('good' children are made of 'good' yogurt), the girl in the example not only marked the social class difference in the school context but also brought negative feelings to the other child in that conversation.

In addition, Kustatscher (2017) also observed children's perception of social classes in role-play. The example that Kustatscher described was a play where girls played as a queen, princesses and maids or servants. The roles of maids were seen as disgusting and humiliating and two girls even wanted to cry when being assigned those roles, which illustrated children's emotions towards social classes in the society. The study of Kustatscher (2017) showed that children are not passive in perceiving social class identities but actually 'use their agency to reproduce or challenge existing structures' (392).

5. Recommendations

In the 20th century, methods to measure children's racial attitudes, such as the "Doll test", PRAM and MRA often restrict children's choices and force them to pick an option that reflects researchers' thoughts instead of offering children the opportunities to express their own opinions and attitudes towards race. Therefore, the tests already assumed that children had those racial stereotypes and did not let them to show their own thoughts. Research in the 21st century should let children free of stereotypes and offer a natural environmentwhere children can display their own opinions about race and ethnicity as well as their playmate preferences based on race and ethnicity, instead of imposing researchers' thoughts on children. The ethnographic approach which observes children in their cultural context can be a solution for the methods of the 20th century so as to investigate children's perspectives of race, ethnicity and social class.

In addition, in the context of the UK, there are not many studies on promoting an inclusive educational environment for children as well as children's viewpoints of race, ethnicity and social class and their affection towards these issues. However, some studies on these topics already pointed out the vulnerability as well as negative feelings of children from lower social class in their interaction with peers in British educational environments, how they reproduce or challenge the already established opinions of the society (Kustatscher 2017), and how British children define themselves by their ethnicity, such as English, Scottish, Welsh rather than their national identity - British (see Lam & Corson 2013). These issues require more educational interventions, the promotion of intercultural competence, and teacher training to solve the problems of race, ethnicity and social class division in British school context so as to create more inclusive learning environments for children. According to Kustatscher (2017):

> For practitioners, engaging critically with social class differences in primary school means negotiating a balance of both challenging and addressing class-based inequalities (e.g.,

> children's lack of food) while making sure that normative positions of teachers and children do not marginalize children who do not fit into dominant identities. (Kutstatscher 2017: 393)

Conclusions

The paper reviewed the following concepts: children's awareness and understanding of race, ethnicity and social class; children's playmate preferences based on race, ethnicity and social class; as well as studies on British children's perception of national and ethnic identities and their perspectives of social class to find out challenges of promoting an inclusive educational environment for British children. Although there are not many academic studies on the aforementioned topics, existing studies already illustrate that children's perception of social class affected their peer interaction, which actually divided classroom environments in the UK in which children from lower ranking social status could be vulnerable. In addition, the fact that British children tend to identify themselves with ethnic identity rather than national identity can propose a risk of social cohesion in the UK's context. This requires educational solutions to promote intercultural competence for children to help them respect differences and cultural diversity in order to create an inclusive educational environment for British children.

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