

First Letter to White Educational Psychologists. We Can't Breathe. Black Lives Matter

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Abstract

Many psychological professional groups have professed their commitment to diversity, and the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) a professional union, has posted a message: Racism has no place in our society. What about in our profession? Reading this thread, I can't help thinking, here we go again. Anti-racism statements are like equal opportunities policies which languish in filing cabinets. People say all the right things but rarely is this matched by actions and very little changes. Sadly, commitments to diversity and position statements are not enough as nothing seems to change.

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Introduction

Many psychological professional groups have professed their commitment to diversity, and the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) a professional union, has posted a message: *Racism has no place in our society.*

What about in our profession?

Reading this thread, I can't help thinking, here we go again. Anti-racism statements are like equal opportunities policies which languish in filing cabinets. People say all the right things but rarely is this matched by actions and very little changes.

Sadly, commitments to diversity and position statements are not enough as nothing seems to change.

What we need are real tangible and practical actions which challenge the fabrics of institutional and organisational racism within the psychology profession and more specifically within the educational psychology profession. A focus is needed not only on the efficacy and applications of psychology in reducing disadvantage and removing barriers but also on the recruitment and selection processes and stereotypes/behaviours which impede the recruitment and progression of Black and Asia Minority Ethnic (BAME) psychologists within the profession.

It's over 20 years ago that Simon Gibbs and I edited the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Division of Education and Child Psychology (DECP) journal on Challenging racism within education and educational psychology. A few years ago another special edition on racism commented how little had changed since that first publication.

Currently there are only a handful of BAME Principal Educational Psychologists nationwide. What does the data look like for senior managers in the Psychology profession as a whole? I suspect much the same. Why is this?

A reason for the lack of interest and lack change is the lack of understanding of the lived-in experiences of black psychologists. Training courses and

employers are slow to address the selection processes which perpetuate the discrimination against BAME applicants and professionals. For those of us who make it into the profession over 60% (a guesstimate) are forced out.

Only yesterday I was on an induction for agency/locum educational psychologists held by one LA. The group was made up of 3/4 ex Principal Educational Psychologists (all black) who had all faced racism and had been pushed out of the profession.

Last year, I wrote to the Association of Educational Psychologists raising my concerns about the racism and discrimination faced by black senior managers (and the differential treatment) within the union and in the work place and asking what the union could do to support black workers and more importantly (as evidence based practitioners) what data the union had on complaints/disciplinary action towards black psychologists and black senior managers. The response and action from the AEP were and continues to be disappointing.

Unfortunately, my experience which is shared by other BAME senior managers is when you raise questions or are seen to challenge the psychology profession the system pushes you out and HR processes can make it difficult if not impossible to get a job at the same position, if at all.

Unfortunately, this is how the system works and my experience has been that organisations like the BPS and the AEP Union turn a blind eye. Individual psychologists are portrayed as the *angry black/ Asian/man/ stereotype*. Or organisations justify their actions and lack of inclusivity by saying, she or he is difficult to work with or if only he/she had phrased things differently than we would have listened.

It's easier to label the individual professional than look at our actions as a profession. What is it we say to teachers, the problem is not within the child but it's important to look at the environment and the context?

When BAME professionals disappear from the profession, forced out for whatever reason, how many ask questions or speak out. And when this pattern of exclusion is repeated time and time again why do psychologists remain silent? Why do the unions fail to investigate or to collect data on what is happening within the profession? Why does the profession continue to allow BAME professionals to fall out of the system?

Commitment to diversity is not enough- an understanding of the lived-in experiences of black professionals and black senior managers along with an interrogation of data is urgently needed. As a profession we either seize the opportunities offered by the tragic murder of George Floyd or we continue to lounge in our ivory towers and say to ourselves racism exists everywhere else but it does not exist within the psychology profession.

We continue to turn a blind eye to the selection and recruitment processes which discriminate against the appointments of BAME groups. We turn a blind eye to the outcomes and continued exclusion of our BAME colleagues.

We remain silent and as such when the time comes, we will not be part of the solution. Some may say the time is now.

How can we as psychologists support others to look at barriers to learning, exclusions and disadvantage when we are not able to look at our own profession?

Perhaps this really is the beginning and the current global momentum will also propel our profession into action with tangible results and this time things will be different. (?)

Maybe soon we will all be able to breathe and more importantly BAME educational psychologists joining the profession will not suffer the experiences many of us have.

Rest in peace George Floyd.

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