

Power Analysis of the UK Education System as it relates to Black Education

The reform of our education system is critically important in the pursuit of social mobility and reducing economic inequality. When examining history and the current outcomes of education for Black children in Britain, it becomes clear that our education system requires reimagining. Central to this reimagining must be an understanding of power and how it functions in schools, communities, and families.

Power is often thought of as something that is purely hierarchical with elites or certain individuals holding more power than others. While this traditional idea of power helps to understand issues such as representation (or a lack thereof), it does not fully provide us with the depth of understanding on how power functions. With our research on **Black Education and Power** we take a different view, understanding power not as a fixed thing that only some people have. Rather we see power as something that is everywhere. We believe that there is power found in Black communities.

This is why we are conducting research that seeks to conduct a power analysis of Black Education. We want to understand the areas in which parents feel they lack power but also where they feel empowered. We believe that across the country, Black parents, teachers, communities, young people and others exercise power in productive ways. They empower their communities, their schools, and their children. Power can limit us but can also build us up. Our primary concern is how.

Power Analysis

Identifying the Sources of Power

- **Decision-Making in Education Policy and Practice:** the Department for Education (DfE), led by the Secretary of State for Education, primarily holds the power to make decisions about education policy. Local education authorities and school governing bodies also play significant roles in decision-making at a more localised level.
- **Allocation of Resources to Schools:** The central government, through the DfE, is responsible for allocating resources to schools in England. This allocation is often done based on funding formulas that consider various factors like pupil numbers, needs, and socio-economic status, in conjunction with the local authority and education board. Academies receive funding directly from the government and are run by an academy trust. They have more control over how they do things than community schools who adhere to local authority regulations
- **Investment in Extra Tutoring:** Parents or guardians with sufficient financial resources have the power to invest in extra tutoring for their children, creating disparities based on socio-economic status. There are a number of well-established tutoring schools in the UK, some, for example Symphony Schools, focuses on education black boys.
- **Shaping the Curriculum:** The national curriculum in England is set by the DfE. However, academies and private schools have more freedom in shaping their curricula. Teachers and educational professionals also contribute through advisory roles. Curricula for years 7-9 (Key Stage 3) are more fluid, GCSE and A Level (Key Stages 4 and 5) curriculums are more fixed as they are based on DfE approves exam board
- **Hiring and Firing Headteachers and Teachers:** This power typically lies with school governing bodies and local education authorities, with some influence from the DfE and Ofsted inspection outcomes.
- **Supporting Pay and Progression of Black Teachers and Staff:** School governing bodies, local education authorities, and the DfE play a significant role in setting salaries and teacher pay scales. There is no race-specific pay scale. There is also an involvement of broader issues of diversity, inclusion, and anti-discrimination policies at the national and school levels.
- **Recruitment of Governors:** School governing bodies are generally responsible for recruiting governors. This process is guided by regulations set by the DfE in conjunction with the local authority, applications and appointments are open to parents, as well as those with an interest in education.
- **Exclusion of Children:** Headteachers, backed by governing bodies, have the power to exclude children, following guidelines set by the DfE. Appeals can be made to independent review panels.

- **Needs Assessment for Differently Abled Children:** Local education authorities are primarily responsible for assessing and meeting the needs of differently-abled children, as per the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) framework.
- **Homeschooling:** Parents or guardians have the legal right to homeschool their children, provided they offer a suitable education.
- **Power to Protest:** This is a democratic right and can be exercised by parents, teachers, students, and community members to influence education policies and practices.

Understand the Dynamics of Power

- How is power being used by groups to maintain racism in education? **Maintaining Racism in Education:** Institutional and structural biases in the education system can perpetuate racism. This involves complex dynamics among policymakers, school authorities, and societal attitudes.
- How is power being used by groups to resist/redress racism in education? **Resisting/Redressing Racism:** Efforts to resist and redress racism often come from grassroots movements, educational activists, community groups, and some progressive policymakers.

Understanding the dynamics of power in the UK education system, especially in the context of maintaining or redressing racism, involves examining how different sources of power contribute to or combat systemic racism.

How Power Maintains Racism in Education

1. Government Policies and Department for Education (DfE):

- **Curriculum Design:** The national curriculum, set by the DfE, can inadvertently maintain racism by excluding diverse perspectives, especially those of Black and minority ethnic groups, in historical and cultural education.
- **Resource Allocation:** Funding formulas and resource allocations that do not adequately address the specific needs of racially diverse or disadvantaged communities can perpetuate educational inequalities, it has been documented that funding is lower in poorer socio-economic communities.

2. Local Education Authorities and School Governing Bodies:

- **Staff Hiring and Training:** A lack of diversity in hiring practices and insufficient training in cultural competency lead to a predominantly homogenous teaching staff, which does not fully represent or understand the needs of a diverse student body. Statistics and research show that a lack of Black teachers contributes to the lower attainment levels of Black pupils and the prevalence of racism in schools
- **Disciplinary Policies:** Disproportionate disciplinary actions against black pupils, such as higher rates of exclusions for Black Caribbean students, reinforce negative stereotypes and educational disparities.

3. Parents or Guardians with Financial Resources:

- **Access to Additional Resources:** The ability of wealthier families to provide extra tutoring or educational resources can create a gap in educational attainment that disproportionately affects racial minorities, who are often statistically more likely to be economically disadvantaged.

4. Schools and Educators:

- **Curriculum and Classroom Dynamics:** The lack of inclusion of Black history, culture, and perspectives in the curriculum and teaching materials can lead to a narrow educational experience that fails to challenge existing racial biases.

- **Teacher Expectations:** Low expectations or unconscious biases from teachers towards students of certain racial backgrounds can hinder their academic performance and growth.

How Power is Being Used to Resist/Redress Racism in Education

1. Government and Policy Level:

- **Inclusive Policies:** Introduction of policies that promote diversity and inclusion, such as anti-discrimination laws and guidelines for inclusive curriculum development (e.g., Implementing Inclusive Education, 2018)

- **Funding for Diversity Initiatives:** Allocating resources for programs that support minority students, such as scholarships, mentoring programs, and diversity training for teachers (e.g., The Race Disparity Unit, The Model History Curriculum).

2. Local Authorities and School Governing Bodies:

- **Diverse Hiring Practices:** Implementing strategies to recruit and retain more diverse teaching and administrative staff. Positive discrimination, BAME teacher incentives, specified marketing.

- **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:** Encouraging and training educators to adopt teaching methods that are inclusive and responsive to the cultural backgrounds of all students.

3. Community and Grassroots Movements:

- **Advocacy and Activism:** Community groups and activists working to bring attention to racial disparities in education and lobbying for change.

- **Supplementary Education:** Community-run programs that provide additional educational support and culturally relevant teaching to minority students. There are a number of well-established Black teacher networks.

4. Educators and Schools:

- **Curriculum Reform:** Efforts to include more diverse and comprehensive content in the curriculum that reflects a range of cultural and historical perspectives have already begun.

- **Inclusive Classroom Practices:** Teachers actively working to create an inclusive classroom environment that values and respects diversity.

5. Parents and Guardians:

- **Advocacy and Engagement:** Parents from minority communities getting involved in school governance, PTAs, and other forums to advocate for their children's educational needs and to challenge discriminatory practices.

6. Students and Alumni:

- **Student Activism:** Students raising awareness and campaigning for changes in school policies, curriculum content, and the school culture to be more inclusive and anti-racist.

While there are systemic issues in the UK education system that maintain racism, there are also concerted efforts across various levels to resist and redress these challenges. The key lies in continuous advocacy, policy reform, community engagement, and a commitment to inclusive education at all levels.

Black Education and Power

Rather than purely focusing on school deficiencies, we've taken a systemic approach to education and race with an explicit focus on power.

Summary of the key gaps

An approach to power the moves beyond the hierarchical

A simplistic lens is too often used in the analysis of power which views this as purely hierarchical. While this is useful for mapping issues such as representation, it does not provide us with the nuance of the function and experience of power.

An asset-based approach to research with a focus on power

The deficits of power are much discussed, particularly in a hierarchical sense. However, how Black individuals and communities utilise power in ways that create opportunities and success requires analysis.

An intersectional approach to research

Too often research identifies Black communities as a monolith and does not adequately take account of ethnic, gender, place and class differences. It is critically important that the nuance of the Black communities is centered in research, as their experiences differ across the country.

Connections between the historical and generational policies and movements on today

There are a range of historical policy and interventions that undoubtedly have longer term impacts on Black communities, most notably the Educationally Subnormal issue (ESN). There are also historical movements and activism that occurred in the 60s, 70s and beyond where we can learn from how power was exercised and navigated. There is a key gap in the literature here.

The Operationalisation of Power

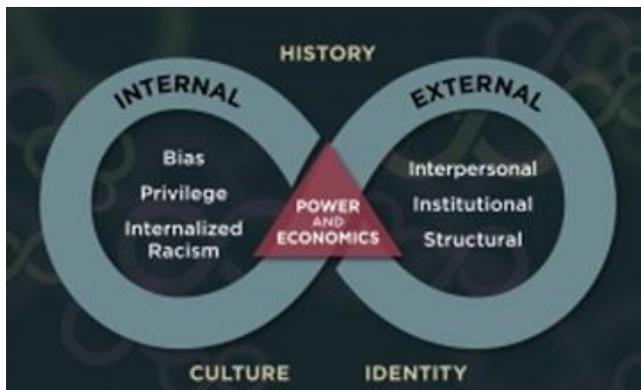
The application of the above concepts to this research forms our approach to power analysis. We do not simply want to only do a numerical exercise that highlights how many Black individuals are in certain positions, as this is research that has been done, and continues to be assessed. Our primary concern is on the 'hidden forms of power' and how power is experienced. This approach to power which provides an opportunity to understand the nuance of experiences of Black communities, is under-researched. This analysis therefore aims to consider three areas as follows namely:

- A. **Parental power:** This analysis seeks to understand how Black parents exercise power and where they feel there is a deficit. The aim will also be to map out support structures for Black communities, that help to scale-up their perceived assets.
- B. **Community power:** We want to understand how power functions in communities again seeking to understand assets, areas of perceived deficits, while mapping areas and opportunities to scale-up what is working well.
- C. **School power:** Finally, we seek to understand how power functions in schools by particularly looking at the experience of Black teachers from newly qualified to senior leadership levels. Considering the discussion on norms, classifications and exclusions above we seek to understand the how black teachers operate in this overarching discourse of British education. We also want to understand the assets that Black pupils perceive that they have in schools, as well as their perceptions of power deficits.

While there are a range of institutions which the focus of our analysis can center on (such as OFSTED, DfE, examination bodies and others), focusing on the nuance of Black experience in direct relation to power structures allows us to understand whether these instruments of government are functioning effectively for Black communities.

Finally, when engaging with the above three areas we understand that structural and systemic issues, do have individual and internal effects. Thus, by focusing our analysis on the smaller subsections of the Black experience, the research will signal institutional failures and opportunities for readdress.

Figure 1: The inter-connection of internal and external factors



Summary of potential exploratory questions

Parental power

1. How do you as a Black parent (or non-Black parent with a Black child/children) feel that you can exercise power in matters relating to your children's educational needs?
2. How can this be scaled up and supported?
3. As a Black parent (or a non-Black parent with a Black child/children), what resources do you have to support your child/children? (For example, in your local community, home, school, church, family members etc).
4. How can these resources be improved?
5. What are the main barriers that you face supporting your child in school?
6. Do you feel you have power (to whichever degree) in your child's education and outcomes?

Community power

7. Are there any resources found in your local community that improve the educational success of Black children and young people? If so, please describe these. (For example Youth workers, charities, places of worship etc).
8. Are the resources easily accessible? Have you accessed these resources?
9. How can these resources in your community be improved?
10. Are there any difficulties that you perceive to be in your community that hinder the potential of Black children excelling academically? If so, please describe these.

Teacher and school power (for teachers only)

11. How do Black teachers exercise power within schools?
12. What are the assets Black teachers perceive they have within the school environment and how can this be scaled up?
13. What are the perceived deficits of power found with Black teachers?
14. What are the assets that Black pupils perceive they have within schools?
15. What are the deficits that black pupils perceive exist within schools?
16. As a teacher, what resources do you have to support Black children in your school? (For example, your personal experience, black-focused materials, a supportive work-environment).
17. As a teacher, do you feel empowered to teach black pupils and challenge bias?
18. Are there any constraints found in your school that hinder you supporting Black children? If so, please describe these.
19. What are the key things that should be changed in your school to assist you supporting Black children better?

Pupil power (for pupils only)

20. What are the positives that you as a Black pupil perceive you have within school?

21. What are the negatives that you as a black pupil perceive exist within school?
22. What resources have you seen in school to help you succeed or support you, if any?
23. As a Black pupil, do you feel empowered as a student?
24. How can you be better supported to in your school?

Union power (Only answer if you are a part of union)

25. How effective have you found unions in supporting you to exercise your resources/assets as a Black teacher?
26. How can unions better support you with your work in schools?

The power of history

27. What can we learn from historical education movements birthed in the 60s and 70s for Black Education today?

Open question

28. Finally, is there anything else that you would like to share?

Our proposed approach

There are three primary forms of data collection tools that we plan to use which are listed below:

- A. **Call for evidence/Co-Commission:** This is a national call to be showcased on the Black Equity Organisation and Mission44 website and shared by Advisory group members. Our aim is to invite evidence and wider engagement with the above questions through allowing Black communities to provide evidence in ways they which to choose to.
- B. **Surveying/Quantitative research:** We aim to conduct surveys of parents, teachers and pupils.
- C. **Qualitative research:** To further support the above data collection we plan to engage deliver semi-structured interviews with parents, community groups and young people.