

RESEARCH INTELLIGENCE

ISSUE 162
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NEWS FROM THE BRITISH EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

SPECIAL SECTION

International comparative education

ALSO FEATURING

**Winner of the BERA
Educational Research
Book of the Year award**

**BERA's AGM & awards
ceremony: Highlights
& photographs**

**Teacher Network
inaugural feature**

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About Research Intelligence

Research Intelligence (RI) is the quarterly magazine produced for and on behalf of BERA members, produced by the BERA Secretariat with academic oversight provided by BERA's Publications Committee. For more details about *RI* – including periodic open calls for themed special section proposals – see bera.ac.uk/research-intelligence or contact publications@bera.ac.uk.

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Hitting the ground running



MARLON LEE MONCRIEFFE
BERA PRESIDENT

I hit the ground running in an extremely busy start to my presidency. With support from our amazing professional office staff, I have led and been involved in multiple public representation and engagement activities.

In October 2024, I attended the first of the Department for Education's public meetings on its commissioned curriculum and assessment review for schools in England, held at Exeter College. Representing BERA at the first of these meetings was important to demonstrate our interest in the process.

On 1 November, I led the BERA Presidential Seminar on Anti-racism in Education¹ at Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh. It was wonderful to witness this event so very well attended; a review is provided on pages 10–11. (Follow the link below² for information on future events in the series.)

On 16 November, I delivered a keynote address for the Chartered College of Teaching during their AGM. I was asked to speak about the importance of building a culturally diverse community that includes teachers and leaders with Black and Global Majority (BGM) representation. I obliged, adding further thoughts to what I see as the equal if not greater importance of schools, educational organisations and institutions becoming critically reflexive sites in demonstrating cultural humility (Farrelly et al., 2022; Magill, 2021) – that is, in transforming their ways of being and doing in realisation of the tremendous asset of BGM teachers as their colleagues and leaders. To some extent, in their articles in this issue of *RI* Eleanor St Hilaire (pages 26–27) and Anita Volkert and Donia Keith (pages 30–31) provide related discussion, when sharing on professional relationships between tutors and students being guided by ethical, personal and institutional values aimed at the holistic development for all.

The BERA AGM and Awards Ceremony in London on 26 November was a particularly special occasion, marking our 50th anniversary. I had the honour of

leading the celebration in recognition of our member colleagues' marvellous contributions to the field of study. I was extremely pleased to share a panel with a selection of former BERA presidents and leaders, discussing our past, present and future as a learned society.

Also in November, the Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) invited me to attend their 2024 annual conference at the University of Dundee. In attending, I learned much about many progressive forms of methodological approaches to educational research being applied by colleagues. I participated in the conference plenary panel discussion, reinforcing BERA's commitment to work with SERA in our shared aspirations as learned societies to champion the value and power of educational research for the public benefit.

I continue on into 2025 with positive momentum developed from my public representation and engagement in multiple activities, in full service and commitment to the BERA membership.

¹ www.bera.ac.uk/event/presidential-seminar-series-anti-racism-in-education-2025

² www.bera.ac.uk/event-series/presidential-seminar-series-2024-2026

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BERA NEWS

Presidential Seminar Series 2024–26

The BERA Presidential Seminar Series ‘Advancing equity and inclusion in educational research, policy and practice 2024–2026’ is well underway. The first seminar, ‘Anti-racism in education’ took place at Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh, on 1 November 2024, and was supported by the university’s Race and Inclusivity in Global Education Network. (See pages 10–11 for a summary of the event.)

Each seminar involves a range of speakers and contributors with knowledge about the topic in focus. Contributors also bring pressing questions for consideration, from policy, practice and research perspectives. Emphasis is given to recurrent concerns in education that are directly relevant to policymakers, practitioners and research communities.

For information about the series and to register for future events, visit www.bera.ac.uk/event-series/presidential-seminar-series-2024-2026

New BERA podcast series on the UN Sustainable Development Goals & educational research

This new BERA podcast series explores the intersection of higher education (HE) and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Curated by Richard Hall and Kate Mawson, the series emerged from a collaborative initiative co-facilitated by the BERA Higher Education and Social Theory Special Interest Groups (SIGs).

Seven podcasts consider how HE can respond to the urgent call for action set out in the *UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Adopted by UN Member States in 2015, the agenda envisions global peace and prosperity for people and the planet, centred on 17 transformative goals.

At its core, the project aims to explore how HE policy and practice can engage with and impact the SDGs. It invites academics, practitioners and policymakers to examine the intersections of HE with personal, social, ecological and resource needs, including poverty eradication, sustainable cities, clean energy and justice.

The podcasts and further information are available at www.bera.ac.uk/media-series/the-sdgs-and-higher-education-impacts-on-policy-and-practice

BERA Blog turns 10!

Join lead editor Gerry Czerniawski and the blog team in celebrating the BERA Blog’s 10th anniversary throughout 2025.

The BERA Blog was established in 2015 to provide research-informed content on key educational issues in an accessible manner. The aim is to produce and promote articles that attract academics, policymakers, teachers, educational leaders, parents, members of school communities, politicians and anyone who is interested in education.

The blog has so far published over 1,650 posts, 30 special issues, eight blog series (with a ninth in the pipeline) and 11 BERA Bites, and has reached 210 countries.

We will be marking this milestone in several ways; central to the celebrations will be 10 special blog posts written by esteemed authors, commissioned to reflect on key themes in education. The anniversary posts will be published between February and November, with a final post from the editors commenting on the collection of articles in December.

For more information see www.bera.ac.uk/blog

Mark Priestley awarded BERA Academic Citizen of the Year 2024

We are proud to announce that Professor Mark Priestley has been named the BERA Academic Citizen of the Year for 2024. This award recognises his dedication to academic citizenship and his significant contributions to the educational community, both in the UK and internationally.



Mark's leadership in the academic community is exemplified by his roles at the University of Stirling as director of research in the education division, and director of the Stirling Centre for Research into Curriculum Making (SCRCM). He has played a pivotal role in enhancing the profile of *The Curriculum Journal* during his six-year tenure as lead editor, including introducing the Curriculum in Professional Practice forum. This initiative fosters meaningful dialogue among educators, policymakers and professionals, helping to connect academic research with practical applications in curriculum design and implementation.

His commitment to academic service extends to several key professional organisations. Mark has served as

co-convenor of the European Educational Research Association's Network 3 (Curriculum Innovation) for a decade, and as a member of the General Assembly of the International Assembly for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies. He is also actively involved in the Scottish Education Council and serves on the Advisory Board for the UCL Centre for Teaching and Research.

Mark is not only a leader in formal academic settings but also a strong advocate for community engagement. Through the SCRCM, he has facilitated numerous seminars and webinars, reaching over 600 participants from schools, colleges, universities, policy and third sector organisations. His efforts ensure that the benefits of academic work are shared broadly and contribute to ongoing professional development across the educational landscape. He has completed 12 doctoral students and continues to support seven others.

Congratulations to Mark on receiving this award – we look forward to witnessing his continued contributions to the field of education.

BERA 2024 EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH BOOK OF THE YEAR

This award celebrates the publication of educational research and is awarded to a scholarly book on education that is deemed to be high quality, engaging and innovative.

After reviewing both books on the 'outstanding' shortlist, the judging panel decided that the winner of the 2024 BERA Educational Research Book of the Year Award is

Bhopal, K., & Myers, M. (2023). *Elite Universities and the Making of Privilege: Exploring Race and Class in Global Educational Economies*. Routledge.

The judges said: 'This book is empirically rich, theoretically challenging and inspiring for current and future educational researchers'.

Congratulations to the authors; their publication is the focus of the *RI* book feature on page 14.

The shortlist is available at www.bera.ac.uk/educational-research-book-of-the-year-shortlist

BERA ANNOUNCES THE 2025 BJET FELLOWSHIP AWARD WINNER



The *British Journal of Educational Technology* (BJET) and BERA are delighted to announce that the 2025 BJET Fellowship, valued at up to £5,000, has been awarded to Peter Bannister (Universidad Internacional de La Rioja, Spain).



Peter's research proposal, 'A Critical Demystification of the Personalisation of Learning and Other ChatGPT-Spun Fairytales in Cross-Cultural Higher Education', stood out

for its innovative and critical approach to exploring the role of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in HE.

Congratulations to Peter on the fellowship and we eagerly anticipate the impact of his research in fostering innovative, equitable and critical practices in educational technology.

The judges also wanted to highlight two highly commended submissions from:

- Xin Zhao (University of Manchester)
- Wicaksono Febriantoro (University College London).

BERA Public Engagement & Impact Award 2024 winner announced



We are delighted to announce that the winner of the 2024 BERA Public Engagement and Impact Award is the initiative, #BeeWell: Making Young People's Wellbeing Everybody's Business, led by the University of Manchester. This exceptional project exemplifies

the transformative power of research and public engagement in addressing the wellbeing of young people.

Led by Professor Neil Humphrey and a dedicated team, #BeeWell is an example of how research can move beyond the academic sphere to create tangible benefits for communities. #BeeWell is an innovative research programme that integrates academic expertise with

youth-led initiatives to ensure that young people's wellbeing becomes a shared responsibility. Through its annual survey, co-designed with 12–15 year-olds, the project assesses the key domains and drivers of wellbeing. Its reach is impressive, with over 85,000 young people from nearly 300 secondary schools across 14 local authorities having participated so far.

Congratulations to the #BeeWell team for their outstanding contribution to the field of educational research and public engagement. Their work not only enhances our understanding of young people's wellbeing but also inspires a collective effort to create a brighter future for the next generation.

More information is available at www.bera.ac.uk/engagement-impact-award-winner

Editors' Choice Awards

Two of BERA's journals – *British Educational Research Journal (BERJ)* and *Curriculum Journal* – have announced their annual Editors' Choice Awards, recognising papers published in the 2024 volumes. BERA and the editors congratulate the authors of all the winning papers.

The winning paper for *BERJ* paper is



Kay, L. (2024). 'I feel like the Wicked Witch': Identifying tensions between school readiness policy and teacher beliefs, knowledge and practice in Early Childhood Education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 50(2): 632–52.

The editors also commend the following papers:

- Clarke, E. (2024). Voices from the edge: Girls' experiences of being at risk of permanent exclusion. *British Educational Research Journal*, 50(2): 855–75.
- Azpitarte, F., & Holt, L. (2024). Failing children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in England: New evidence of poor outcomes and a postcode lottery at the Local Authority level at Key Stage 1. *British Educational Research Journal*, 50(1): 414–43.

The winning paper for *The Curriculum Journal* is



Smith, B. (2024). Curriculum as invader: Normalising white place in the Australian curriculum. *The Curriculum Journal*, 35(1), 108–12.

This paper was selected by the journal's 2024 editorial team, led by Mark Priestley and Stavroula Philippou. The editors also commend the following papers:

- Mouraz, A., Doyle, A., & Serra, I. (2024). The effects of international mobility on teachers' power of curriculum agency. *The Curriculum Journal*, 35(2), 237–53.
- Béneker, T., Bladh, G., & Lambert, D. (2024). Exploring 'Future three' curriculum scenarios in practice: Learning from the GeoCapabilities project. *The Curriculum Journal*, 35(3), 396–411.
- Swift, D., Clowes, G., Gilbert S., & Lambert, A. (2024). Sustaining professionalism: Teachers as co-enquirers in curriculum design. *The Curriculum Journal*, 35(4), 622–36. (The editors noted that all the authors of this paper are practitioners.)

BERA & Kusuma Trust announce winning proposals for the Neurodiversity in Mainstream Schools Grant Programme

BERA's Neurodiversity in Mainstream Schools Grant Programme, funded by the Kusuma Trust, supports innovative research aimed at improving the school experience and academic attainment of neurodivergent young people.

Following a rigorous evaluation process, BERA is delighted to announce that four outstanding projects have been awarded funding worth over £160,000. These projects reflect a diverse range of approaches to advancing inclusive practices, developing life skills and enhancing pathways to employment for neurodivergent learners.

This funding stream builds on BERA's ongoing commitment to fostering greater understanding and support for all learners. The outcomes of these projects will be disseminated through BERA's website,

publications and events to ensure the research findings reach educators, policymakers and stakeholders who can enact meaningful change.

Congratulations to all the principal investigators for their exceptional contributions to this vital area of educational research.

More information about these awards can be found at www.bera.ac.uk/bera-and-kusuma-trust-winning-proposals

CORRECTION

In *RI* 161, the photos credit on page 6 should have read: Nick Johnson and Joné Reed.



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BERA Expert Panel on Educational Research Funding



DAVID JAMES
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

As reported in a previous issue of *RI* (James, 2023), Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 submissions showed a significant rise in the quality of education research. However, they also revealed a marked real-terms decline in overall investment in such research since the period covered by REF 2014. A recent report from the Academy of Social Sciences (2024) not only confirmed this decline, but also showed it to be at odds with the general trend across the social sciences.

These observations, alongside BERA's own data-gathering and ongoing Education: The State of the Discipline¹ initiative, were behind the association's decision to commission an expert panel on education research funding. Formed in early 2024, the panel is investigating trends and patterns in the nature and volume of funding, while seeking a fresh understanding of contemporary research–policy–practice relationships and what drives them. Do current arrangements serve a balance of interests across the education landscape? Do they serve the public good as well as they might? Do they support the maintenance and building of capacity? The panel is due to report in spring 2025 and will seek to present clear recommendations for BERA and other major stakeholders.

It is my honour and privilege to chair the panel. The other core members are: Jo-Anne Baird (Oxford University); Huw Morris (Welsh Government and UCL); Daniel Muijs (Queens University Belfast); Gemma Moss (IOE–UCL); and Anthony Tomei (former CEO, Nuffield Foundation and affiliated with King's College, London). Ex officio members are BERA Chief Executive Nick Johnson, and current and former presidents, Marlon Moncrieffe and Vivienne Baumfield. We were assisted by Bridget Abuziuke during the first few months of our work, and the panel is supported administratively by Heidi Hollowbread.

Our work takes a mixed-methods approach, drawing together:

- insights from other recent key reports
- analysis of UK-wide data on research income, derived from REF submissions and from Higher Education Statistics Agency aggregates of institutional returns
- analysis of interviews, so far carried out with 22 individuals who hold pivotal roles in the education research landscape, such as in funding bodies, national and international policy roles, research, research usage and brokerage
- panel members' own experience.

Reflected in both panel membership and in the selection of interviewees, the approach also pays attention to opportunities to learn from key similarities and differences across the four nations of the UK.

EMERGING ANALYSIS

At the time of writing, the panel has almost completed analysis of the data on the nature, composition and trends in education research funding. This shows that over the past decade there has been a real-terms reduction in total education research investment of between 10 per cent and 16 per cent. It is interesting that the major sources of funding for education research differ in their contribution to this pattern. In a nutshell, while the value of that from charities, industry and others has remained roughly constant, that from the UK Government has seen a serious decline, especially since 2018. EU funding sources have also declined. At the same time (and notwithstanding fluctuations during the period), investment from research councils was around 42 per cent greater in 2021 than it was in 2013 and had become, by a considerable margin, the largest source. We are continuing to seek further information that will help us to fine-tune our understanding of these changes.

The interviews are rich and varied, and collectively they demonstrate how different elements, functions, relationships and interactions in this landscape are sometimes mutually supportive, sometimes at odds, sometimes conflicting.

The analysis of interviews is now underway. It is already clear that we cannot afford to underestimate the complexity of the education research landscape. The interviews are rich and varied, and collectively they demonstrate how different elements, functions, relationships and interactions in this landscape are sometimes mutually supportive, sometimes at odds, sometimes conflicting. The concept of ‘ecosystem’ is helpful, though difficult to use coherently: prior attempts to apply it have sometimes foundered, offering a sophisticated diagnosis but finding it difficult to reflect this sophistication in the presentation of recommendations and remedies.

The Academy of Social Sciences’ report (2024) argues powerfully that the UK does not make full use of its



world-leading social science capability. Education research demonstrates this point especially well. Across the social sciences, education research is one of only two areas in which there has been a real-terms reduction in income over the last nine years (the other being the social aspects of health science). In both cases, ‘the prime cause...[is] a fall in research funding directly from UK Government...[yet]...[both] are areas of considerable public expenditure, policy challenge and public concern’ (AcSS, 2024, p. 3).

Panel members are clear that their task is not simply one of pleading for more money for education research. Rather, it is to develop a better understanding of the synergies and tensions that characterise the ecosystem. A major goal is to bring a fresh perspective on what education research *could* and *should* be doing in a democracy. How can we build and sustain a forward-looking, generative education research that most of the major interests and stakeholders, most of the time, regard as important in shaping policy and practice?

¹ www.bera.ac.uk/project/education-the-state-of-the-discipline

For further information on the panel see www.bera.ac.uk/project/expert-panel-on-educational-research-funding

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BERA PRESIDENTIAL
SEMINAR SERIES 2024–2026

Seminar 1: Anti-racism in education

Actions for next steps – Learning from research,
policy & practice



MARLON LEE MONCRIEFFE¹,
JAVERIA CHAUDHRY² & RHIANNA MURPHY³

¹BERA, ²UNIVERSITY OF BEDFORDSHIRE &
³CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

The BERA Presidential Seminar Series 2024–2026,¹ ‘Advancing equity and inclusion in educational research, policy and practice’, stems from the actions laid out by Marlon Lee Moncrieffe in his presidential address (2024). The series will focus on sharing and discussing educational research for anti-racist education across the four UK nations. The objective is to consolidate existing knowledge towards critical considerations of the current curriculum and assessment review for schools in England (DfE, 2024), particularly concerning future teaching and learning about ‘issues and diversities of societies’, ensuring children and young people are represented. The central question for the seminar series is: ‘How might anti-racist education provide leadership for curriculum teaching and learning about issues and diversities of societies, ensuring children and young people are represented?’.

The first seminar² took place on 1 November at Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh. It attracted 70 delegates of ethnically diverse and broad professional backgrounds, BERA members and non-members from across the four nations, and was especially pleasing to welcome colleagues from the Republic of Ireland.

LEAD ACADEMIC & PRESENTERS

The lead academic was Emerita Professor Rowena Arshad, chair in multicultural and anti-racist education,

and a former head of Moray House. Rowena’s research has focused on the experiences of Black and minority ethnic pupils and parents, and what motivates teachers to take forward race equity and anti-racist work. Central to knowledge building in the seminar was Rowena’s article, *Anti-racist education: What next for Scotland?* (Arshad, 2024). This pre-seminar reading offered a historical and contemporary overview of leading educational research for anti-racist education in Scotland, including the emergence of new policy guidelines and frameworks for practice informed by public activism.

Presenting on policy was Méline Valdelièvre, senior education officer for equalities at Education Scotland. In her presentation on ‘An anti-racist Scotland’, Méline described the policy leadership occurring through the anti-racist professional learning programme, Building Racial Literacy (BRL) (Education Scotland, 2022). Further, in her role as co-chair of the Curriculum Reform subgroup of the Scottish Government’s Anti-Racism in Education Programme,³ Méline discussed the creation and promotion of Scotland’s anti-racist curriculum principles.

In his presentation on ‘Anti-racism at classroom and school level’, Kenni Hamilton, principal teacher at Seafield Primary – a small village school in West Lothian, discussed his experience of the BRL programme, framed by land acknowledgement and his Scottish identity, positionality and world

view. Kenni gave insights into his work to support others to undertake this essential professional development opportunity.

Our presenter of research was Heather Smith, professor of race and language equality in education at Newcastle University. Her input on 'The doublespeak of education policy in England: A janiform representation', provided a purposeful comparative perspective with a different UK nation.

DISCUSSION

Delegates' responses to the knowledge shared by the presenters illuminated a number of existing challenges of 'the prescriptive curriculum' and 'white supremacy in curriculum content'. However, in addressing these, significant discussion focused on the power of championing racial literacy as anti-racist education. For example, one delegate said, '...racial literacy needs to be a real focus... An awareness of white privilege needs to be part of that, and some of those uncomfortable truths need to be grappled with'.

Decolonising and diversifying the curriculum was also a significant discussion point, as captured by another delegate: 'As a whole curriculum, we can start looking at it through an anti-racism lens to modify what we've already done and of course, decolonising would be ideal'.

Presenter and delegate evaluation of the seminar articulated: high praise for the opportunity for the 'four country shared conversation', enabling 'comparisons between different nations'; the 'importance of communities of practice' in a 'co-ordinated approach' for seeing the 'powerful overlaps and absences, and safety (and impact) in numbers'; and championing policy and practice in next steps for anti-racist education.

Specific to Scotland, a number of responses spoke of possible challenges ahead, such as the 'withdrawal of Scottish Government support' and 'change of government emphasis'. Significantly, the power of the work by anti-racist policymakers and practitioners in championing the BRL programme, and sustaining this in action, was emphasised as an 'outstanding' approach



that 'should be rolled out as compulsory to all schools for leadership teams'.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In considering future discussions, delegates pointed to: the urgent need to prevent/tackle far right discourses in schools; decolonising education beyond the curriculum; and strategies for self-care while doing racial justice work.

A list of recommendation questions in advancing educational research also emerged, including:

- What does effective anti-racist education look like in practice for children and young people at different ages and stages, and what are the longer-term impacts of these emerging practices?
- What does effective anti-racist education look like in practice for white Scottish children (for example, what they gain from it), and in rural areas where anti-racism is often not seen as relevant or needed?
- How do we ensure that parents, carers and communities become committed and invested in the anti-racist work that we are doing in schools and wider communities?

These questions sit alongside the main question of the seminar series, that is ensuring the voices of children and young people are represented in discussion of anti-racist education.

¹ www.bera.ac.uk/event-series/presidential-seminar-series-2024-2026

² www.bera.ac.uk/event/presidential-seminar-series-anti-racism-in-education-2025

³ www.gov.scot/groups/race-equality-and-anti-racism-in-education-programme-stakeholder-network-group

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Celebrating 50 years of BERA

On 26 November 2024, we marked BERA's 50th anniversary with a celebratory event alongside our Annual General Meeting (AGM). Held in a festive atmosphere, the day highlighted the achievements of BERA and the wider academic research community in advancing educational research over the past five decades.

Thank you to all who joined us to celebrate. Here's to the next 50 years!

More photographs and videos of the event can be found at www.bera.ac.uk/news/bera-celebrates-50-years-of-advancing-educational-research



Members of the Expert Panel on Educational Research Funding updating the AGM on the panel's work



A panel presents updates on BERA's activities in 2024: (from left to right) Treasurer Diana Burton, Publications Committee Chair Ros McLellan, Conference & Events Committee Chair Mhairi Beaton, Vice-President Vivienne Baumfield, CEO Nick Johnson & President Marlon Moncrieffe

Photographs Joel Knight



BERA CEO Nick Johnson welcomes AGM attendees



Jeremy Olusola and Leon Andrews accepting the 2024 Equality in Education Award from Marlon Moncrieffe, on behalf of their colleague, Chantelle Haughton



From left to right: Avril Rowley, Beth Kemp, Jane Perryman, Katie Kilian, Elizabeth Walton, Samantha O'Sullivan, Gemma Moss, Alex Jones & Joseph Mintz collecting their BERA Annual Conference 2024 – SIG Best Presentation awards



Mark Priestley, speaking after winning the 2024 Academic Citizen of the Year Award



Mark Priestley collecting the 2024 Academic Citizen of the Year award from Vivienne Baumfield



Jo Hume, winner of the ECR Presentation Award second prize, with Mhairi Beaton



Kate Fox receiving the 2024 BERA Masters Dissertation Award from Marlon Moncrieffe



Outgoing *BJET* editor, Sara Hennessy (at the lectern) and (from left to right) Diana Burton, Ros McLellan, Mhairi Beaton & Vivienne Baumfield



The birthday cake



Mhairi Beaton in conversation with Lani Florian, the 2024 John Nisbet Fellow



Current and former presidents and office holders cut the cake: (from left to right) Ian Menter, Anne Edwards, Dominic Wyse, Gary McCulloch, Vivienne Baumfield, Pat Sikes, Marlon Lee Moncrieffe, Roger Murphy & Patricia Broadfoot



Marlon Moncrieffe with Dominic Wyse, Pat Sikes & Ian Menter during 'BERA at 50 – memories across the decades'



Cake, canapés and catching up – attendees at the awards reception

Elite Universities and the Making of Privilege

Exploring Race and Class in Global Educational Economies



This feature showcases high-quality educational research books, including an interview with the editor and a critical review. This review highlights the winner of the 2024 BERA Educational Research Book of the Year award.

EDITOR INTERVIEW

With Kalwant Bhopal & Martin Myers

Congratulations on winning the BERA Educational Research Book of the Year! Can you tell us what motivated you to write the book?

Underpinning all our research is an ongoing disquiet about the role education plays in society. Education has often been cited as the most effective means of redressing inequalities and engendering upward social mobility. However, in reality, those inequalities repeat over time. Understanding the role of universities in that repetition of outcomes is at the heart of this research. Specifically, we were interested in exploring how students were able to navigate the most elite universities and how identities of race and class impact their experiences.

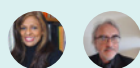
What one key message do you want readers to take away from the book?

The role of privilege is reproduced through elite universities for students from the most advantaged families. We identify how education has become the privilege of a few, rather than the right for the many. One message we therefore hope readers take from the book is to think critically and challenge narratives that are taken for granted. If education is understood to be a public good, why does it remain inequitable?

CRITICAL REVIEW

By John Preston, University of Essex

The study of elites has a long and controversial history in sociology. The homology between elites and conceptions of the ruling class are particularly problematic in elite theory, and the study of elites in education has been peripheral. This makes Bhopal & Myers' new book a welcome addition, not just to the sociology of education, but also to the wider study of elites and globalisation.



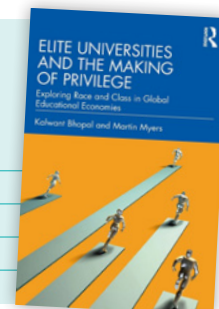
KALWANT BHOPAL & MARTIN MYERS

Routledge, January 2023

£93.75 (hardback); £26.24 (eBook or paperback)

160pp

ISBN 9780367466077



The authors map out a truly global field of HE where students, parents and global universities strategise to gain advantage.

The book shows that elite formation is complex and contested, and that elite universities play a role not only in status, but also in racial formation, emphasising the importance of elite conceptions of whiteness in this process. Through doing so, the making of a white, ruling elite, is shown to involve a more subtle form of privilege than was the case for preceding ruling elites. Being anti-racist, in a performative sense, is a skill that global elite universities impart.

Work on race in the sociology of education, and in sociology itself, has often been marginalised. The same elite gatekeepers that Bhopal & Myers discuss in their book are often (but not always) the editors of journals and sit on appointment and promotion panels. However, there is also work on race in the sociology of education that uses shallow qualitative evidence, and I would argue that there is a case for greater empirical rigor in this area. This is not the case in Bhopal & Myers' work. Combining Bourdieu with Critical Race Theory and using extensive, reflexive, qualitative evidence, the authors identify the cynicism at the heart of the marketing exercises of global universities. While universities present themselves as bastions of equality and diversity, the everyday suffering of minoritised people is evident as the entry price to an elite university.

The book feature is edited by Gihan Ismail (University of Bath) and Emily MacLeod (UCL).

International comparative education

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As universities worldwide strive to enhance student access, participation and success, this special section of *RI 162* brings together diverse insights into the philosophies, structures and practices that underpin academic advising and personal tutoring services.

In the opening article, **Gavin Farber** highlights best practices in academic advising and tutoring international students from enrolment through to graduation, and argues for the necessity of institutional investment in advising programmes to ensure international student success in managing new academic and social environments.

Alexandra C. Anton and **Miriam Cuccu** explore the use of arts-based methods in personal tutoring to stimulate critical reflection on social justice and biases. Their approach leverages artistic expression to enable students to confront personal and societal issues and promote an enhanced understanding through creative engagement.

Cynthia Fasola's contribution on the experiences of early career researchers from ethnically minoritised backgrounds, challenges traditional, hierarchical feedback models in academia. She advocates for a dialogic feedback approach that fosters mutual engagement and empowers researchers from underrepresented backgrounds.

Rachael O'Connor proposes a reciprocal mentoring approach to fostering supportive environments for marginalised students. Her model encourages tutors to learn from students' cultural insights, so they can provide more personalised and culturally competent support.

Chloe Morgan and **Claire Brown** addresses the issues experienced by white tutors working with racially minoritised students, highlighting the importance of self-awareness and a commitment to developing cultural competences.

Focusing on the needs of remote learners, **Eleanor St Hilaire's** article examines the challenges encountered by international students in virtual settings. She emphasises that inclusive tutoring practices are essential to mitigate isolation and foster success.

Shone Surendran, Sharon Ancy George and **Gauri S** explore how tutoring frameworks are influenced by Western and Eastern philosophical traditions in the UK and India, respectively. This comparative analysis reveals the ways in which tutoring practices can either reinforce or question philosophical hegemonies.

Anita Volkert and **Donia Keith** promote a values-based tutoring model focused on understanding, respect, value, connection and safety. Their framework reinforces the significance of compassionate, relationship-focused support that nurtures students' holistic development.

An interview with **David Grey** discusses the potential of AI and educational technologies within advising and tutoring. He suggests that these technologies could manage administrative and logistical tasks, enabling personal tutors to concentrate on the student-centred challenges that demand human empathy and understanding. Complementing this, an interview with **Oscar van den Wijngaard** provides a Dutch perspective on academic advising. He emphasises the role of fostering social responsibility and a sense of community within educational environments.



INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Empowering students globally

The role of academic advising & tutoring in international students' academic outcomes

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GAVIN FARBER

THE COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY, USA

Academic advising in American HE institutions (HEIs) plays an essential role in supporting students throughout their academic journeys. This article provides an overview of strategies that advisors use to enhance student learning outcomes, explores the diverse approaches to academic advising implemented across US campuses, and outlines the impact of advising on student success and growth.

ADVISING AGREEMENTS & LEARNING OUTCOMES

'The student learning outcomes of academic advising are guided by an institution's mission, goals, curriculum, and co-curriculum. These outcomes, defined in an advising curriculum, articulate what students will demonstrate, know, value, and do as a result of participating in academic advising. Each institution must develop its own set of student learning outcomes and the method of assessing them.'

NACADA, n.d.

I have worked at institutions with advising agreements that serve as a learning tool for new students. An advising agreement lists the expectations for both parties and is a guide for the first few advising sessions; for example, a student's responsibilities may include being aware of their academic programme requirements. It is vital for students to make their advising appointments, and if they cannot make a session they should connect with their advisor and reschedule. An advisor's responsibilities may include keeping accurate records and keeping confidentiality. It is essential to communicate with our students so they know we care. These agreements, in my view, keep advisors in check. Students should feel protected through these contracts as they are based on advising best practices and academic policy.

It is essential to communicate with our students so they know we care.

ACADEMIC ADVISING ON CAMPUSES

Eric R. White, a leading scholar in the field of academic advising, wrote the following.

‘Some configuration of academic advising is available at all American higher education institutions. In fact, academic advising is capable of reaching every single student enrolled at an institution, a claim not easily made by any other enterprise on a university or college campus. Within the context of academic advising, the goals and mission of an institution can be communicated to students, the rationale and structure of the general education program can be interpreted, and students can have the opportunity to blend together all aspects of the curriculum into a meaningful experience.’

2015, pp. 270–71

I believe White is correct that academic advising is part of the foundation of the student experience, but very different from institution to institution. For example, when I worked at City Research University it had over 30,000 students and the academic advising model was decentralised, with advising centres in each academic school. Specialised advising units focused on pre-health, honours and undeclared student populations. The university had over 100 professionals in advisor and advising administrative roles; it had the infrastructure to have advising units central to focusing on student success. The first interactions with many students began through new student orientation, where schedules for the incoming semester were finalised. Students were encouraged to have an advising touchpoint every semester through one-on-one advising appointments, group advising workshops or academic planning lectures in their first-year seminar courses.

STUDENT EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ACADEMIC ADVISING

The HE landscape is very different for students from the secondary educational environment. There is more independence, and some of it is newly found for many students as they begin to explore their new campuses. When it comes to advising, some new scholars have a difficult time adjusting to making their advising session with their advisors, creating their own schedules and knowing that on college/university campuses they are leading their own academic ships.

‘Either by mandate or by virtue of students finding their own value in meeting with an adviser, academic advising has been identified as the one endeavor in higher education that is structured in such a way as to have an impact on all students. Such a characteristic allows academic advising to take this central role in a student’s life.’

White, 2015, p. 271

I cannot agree more with White: advising can influence our students. We do not just discuss academic planning, course planning and goal setting – that just scratches the surface. We have deep conversations about what academic disciplines the students should study and where that may lead for their career development. We hope our advisees are picking a pathway that will offer them happiness in and outside of the classroom, connecting with their classmates and faculty to gain as much exposure as possible.

‘Student satisfaction with advising is not the only possible predictor of advising learning. If students believe a particular kind of advising is important to their success, they probably seek it by finding an advisor in the first place or, in institutions that mandate advising, initiating more contacts. Although learning is not guaranteed from exchanges with advisors, it is reasonable to assume students are more likely to absorb the advising curriculum if there is more rather than less contact with advisors.’

Smith & Allen, 2018, p. 271

Every advising interaction will be different. Each advising session will offer unique challenges and rewards – it is an opportunity for a conversation and to see where a student is in their educational journey. In any advising session, I aim to review academic requirements and add to the student’s learning. I also learn from my students: just as they are transforming during this process, advisors and tutors are also changing – continuing to educate ourselves on new best practices in the field. I am one of the many lifelong learner practitioners always interested in finding new theories, techniques and processes to help in my interactions.

CONCLUSIONS

The evolving landscape of HE prompts a debate on mandatory versus voluntary academic advising. I believe advising should be mandatory, as students need professional guidance to navigate curriculum, adjust to new environments and shape their future. Advisors can play a significant role in supporting students’ journeys and achieving their goals.

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Enhancing critical reflection through art in higher education

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Developing critical reflection skills in students' education empowers them to challenge biases, recognise systemic inequalities that sustain injustice, and develop and cultivate a commitment to recognise and address oppression. In contrast, failing to foster these skills reinforces and perpetuates stereotypes. Although some students may easily engage in critical reflection, most require deliberate practice with guidance and support. Educators must consider a range of techniques and approaches to establish a meaningful and individualised context for reflection.

Art has functioned throughout history as a reflection of society, including its social justice issues, with a purpose resembling critical reflection. In this context, art can be considered a mirror for social justice. Artistic languages open opportunities to design meaningful learning experiences across different ages and contexts, giving space to multiple ways of individual and collective expression. Considering our apparently disparate research interests in critical reflection and arts-based research, we collaborate to investigate how critical reflection designed with an arts-based approach addresses the challenges of 'inviting the uncomfortable and the unsayable into a lesson' (Link, 2022, p. 36), enhancing academic guidance and mentoring practices in tertiary education.

This article explores the potential of arts-based methods for critical reflection. It begins with an overview of arts-based research, its characteristics, and how it can address the limitations of 'traditional' verbal and written languages. We address how the arts contribute to richer reflection, which is beneficial for HE students (Martikainen et al., 2022).

ARTS-BASED RESEARCH & METHODS

The term 'arts-based research' describes a typology of inquiry that utilises artistic ways to better understand a particular phenomenon, process or experience. It is an umbrella term that includes multiple forms of representation such as novels, poetry, film, dance, photography, drawing, visual art installations or dramatic performance (McNiff, 2008). Art can be employed as a medium to communicate with a group of people, encouraging them to share reflections about their situations, experiences, concerns and challenges. There are multiple dimensions of arts-based methods. Coemans and Hannes (2017) highlighted that such methods are effective in overcoming power imbalances between researchers and the subject being researched; they can give a voice to participants beyond more 'traditional' modalities (such as writing or being interviewed) and promote richer reflection. By using the arts, it is also easier to explore more sensitive topics that are difficult to verbalise. Furthermore, these tools can increase individuals' interest, thus motivating their participation.

Artistic languages open opportunities to design meaningful learning experiences across different ages and contexts, giving space to multiple ways of individual and collective expression.

ARTS-BASED REFLECTION EMPLOYED IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

Engaging in reflective processes through the arts opens opportunities for thinking differently and expressing ideas, facilitating meaningful insights (McNiff, 2008) and allowing new perspectives. As McKay and Sappa (2020) point out, reflecting differently involves utilising arts-based methods to evoke deep thoughts and emotions. This approach combines people, materials and social interactions in a dynamic process that reveals ambiguity and uncertainty. Such reflective practices can spark creative thinking, which is essential for fostering new learning experiences, whether through problem-solving, establishing connections or developing innovative solutions.

Arts-based practices can support professional identity development in teachers or teacher candidates by promoting deeper and richer reflection processes.

Arts-based practices can support professional identity development in teachers or teacher candidates by promoting deeper and richer reflection processes. Indeed, many contributors have highlighted the embodied nature of arts-based reflection, which can include emotional and cognitive responses to the different neural pathways (McKay & Sappa, 2020). Considering the characteristics of the arts in enriching the learning process, it is considered useful for HE students to experiment with arts-based and embodied research methods (Martikainen et al., 2022).

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN ARTS-BASED RESEARCH & CRITICAL REFLECTION

Critical reflection distinguishes itself from other forms of reflection in that it involves understanding positionalities and facilitates the preparation of individuals for advocating educational and social justice. This process requires considering power structures while pursuing action through practice, activism or advocacy (Gorski & Dalton, 2020).

Several challenges may arise when supporting students in the process of critical reflection. First, critical reflection may be oversimplified as affective responses. Although emotions often prompt reflection, the objective of critical reflection is not to fixate on these emotions but to seek novel solutions and approaches that contribute to the transformation of attitudes and practices and the elimination of oppression and injustice (Saric & Steh, 2017). By facilitating critical reflection, teacher educators

balance challenge and support without prescribing specific steps. Second, critical reflection necessitates a secure environment in which students can explore and articulate personal thoughts without being criticised for their perspectives and opinions, allowing them to gradually develop confidence in their reflective practice (Reid et al., 2023).

ARTS-BASED CRITICAL REFLECTION

There is no single, definitive approach to fostering students' critical reflection skills, allowing for various strategies that involve collaborative efforts between educators and learners. Arts-based critical reflection methods not only enable a more profound comprehension of artwork through novel viewpoints, but also reduce the potential anxiety associated with expressing personal thoughts. An existing artistic work (painting, sculpture) can represent an anchor to unexplored personal challenges (such as exposure to discrimination). This holistic method provides an opportunity to explore a deeper understanding of how both linguistic and non-linguistic reflection conveys issues related to equity and justice.

When employing these techniques, art transcends its visual appeal and critical reflection extends beyond written expression.

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Feedback experiences of early career researchers from ethnically minoritised backgrounds



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Feedback is typically conceptualised as a unidirectional top-down process that early career researchers (ECRs) receive and action to ascend the academic ladder or hierarchy of relevance in academia (Chugh et al., 2022). Most traditional mechanisms for feedback, like peer review processes, are devoid of transparency and accessible only when the research activity has been concluded and disseminated. For ECRs from an ethnically minoritised background, this top-down structure fosters a feedback practice and experience that is a microcosm of the power relations in our larger society (Lynam et al., 2024).

Yadav et al. (2020) examined the factors influencing the career progression of underrepresented minorities from postdoctoral positions to tenure-track positions. Postdoctoral researchers reported that there was limited or no professional support available at the institutional level, and this was further compounded by the 'unclear expectations and little-to-no feedback' from faculty on their performance and research outputs (Yadav et al., 2020, p. 171). Moreover, these ECRs reported a lack of confidence in their ability to operate as independent researchers, identifying the lack of feedback as the key factor driving their low confidence (Yadav et al., 2020). Unidirectional processes are also likely to further situate the minoritised ECR with intersecting identities

as hypervisible within research, exacerbating the leaky pipeline of academics from ethnically minoritised backgrounds (Fisher et al., 2019).

Feedback is better conceived as a dialogic process (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017), particularly for ECRs from ethnically minoritised backgrounds. The ECR (including postgraduate research students and postdoctoral researchers) actively participates in a dialogic process that is multidirectional, providing real-time insight into feedback effectiveness (Dawson et al., 2019). ECRs, in a dialogic process, are also empowered by individuals and systems to provide feedback themselves on how relevant, applicable and actionable the feedback is (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017).

ECRs, in a dialogic process, are also empowered by individuals and systems to provide feedback themselves on how relevant, applicable and actionable the feedback is (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017).

Power dynamics often make it challenging for ECRs to give critical feedback and provide insight into what works (Debray et al., 2024). The helpfulness of feedback, and the capacity to action it, is a key component of high-quality feedback (Dawson et al., 2019). However, if ECRs cannot provide insight into what they can action or what is useful, then the feedback experience becomes a unidirectional, top-down experience, with ethnically minoritised students more likely to be negatively impacted (Debray et al., 2024). It is reasonable to acknowledge that effective feedback for ethnically minoritised ECRs should be a dialogic process that is interactive, dialectical, iterative and reflexive.

Conceptualising feedback as a dialogic process is a necessary step towards the development of the ethnically minoritised ECR's core academic skills, but also the development of the faculty and programmes that deliver this learning experience (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017). Scott and Johnson (2021) report that racialised dynamics in doctoral studies create environments that negatively impact the students' self-esteem and completion.

Equitable experiences for ECR students require structure in terms of frequent, regularly scheduled one-to-one meetings with clearly communicated and understood expectations from both parties (Debray et al., 2024; Fisher et al., 2019). Moreover, minoritised students are more likely to perceive feedback as positive if it comes from faculty who regularly dedicate time to their learning experience (Debray et al., 2024). This may foster a trusting environment where students may choose to contribute to the feedback experience in a way that moves from unidirectional to dialogic. Without these scheduled interactions, minoritised ethnic students are more likely to suffer and less likely to provide feedback on their experiences, particularly if they feel it will not be valued or actioned (Williams, 2019). If a student cannot meet frequently with their primary advisor, the issues and disparity this engenders can be attenuated with feedback from other researchers within the faculty or department, emphasising the multidirectional nature of effective feedback (Debray et al., 2024). Without structure and the overall investment of other researchers within a university setting, women, non-binary students and students from historically ethnically minoritised backgrounds are less likely to receive the attention and investment they need from faculty, contributing to the leaky academic pipeline (Debray et al., 2024).

The rhetoric that continually affirms the core issue with poor feedback experiences as a lack of consistent feedback from the primary supervisor, puts all the responsibility on the students and their supervisory team to continue to drive a disempowering

unidirectional process (Debray et al., 2024; Scott & Johnson, 2021). Moving towards a rhetoric of feedback as a dialogic process that is also multidirectional and sometimes dialectical spotlights the pivotal role that other faculty members and the university environment have in the overall success of ECRs. Universities should foster a space where minoritised ECRs can reflect on their racialised feedback experiences without fear of being deprived of crucial feedback on their work (Williams, 2019).

Universities should foster a space where minoritised ECRs can reflect on their racialised feedback experiences without fear of being deprived of crucial feedback on their work.

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INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Developing ‘safe spaces’ in personal tutoring through reverse mentoring

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‘This is a safe space, you can tell me anything.’ Have you used a similar phrase in your educational practice? A ‘safe space’ for personal tutoring can be vital, providing students with a rare opportunity to share their identity, values and what they aspire to become. But saying your office is a safe space doesn’t make it true and the greater likelihood, owing to hierarchical and ‘traditional’ academic–student relationships, is that staff-dominated spaces feel anything but safe, especially for students from minoritised backgrounds. Safe, one-to-one conversations with staff may be hard for students to come by, regularly reinforcing deficit messaging for minoritised students: ‘you don’t matter’.

How, as personal tutors, can we move towards facilitating truly safe spaces that are not just labelled safe, but which feel safe and breed safety between tutor and tutee, resulting in informed advice, moving towards equitable, ‘sacred truth spaces’ (UKAT, 2022)? Step one is finding out what we don’t know – personal tutoring should be evidence-informed (UKAT, 2020). Evidence can come through reading and training and, in part, should come via these means to demonstrate that we are

working to understand different forms of minoritisation and their potential impact, to inform our tutoring practice (for example, Walker, 2022). However, evidence should also come from opportunities to learn about the lived experiences of current students. Reverse, or reciprocal, mentoring is a potential vehicle for this, whereby staff carve out time to meaningfully listen to and learn from students’ lived experience expertise (for example, Cain et al., 2022).

In partnership with students, we co-designed a scheme pairing students from underrepresented backgrounds across disciplines with staff who have leadership responsibility for personal tutoring (O’Connor, 2023), for example a law student mentoring an academic in medicine. Reflecting on this experience, staff discussed how these ‘reversed’ conversations felt more organic than more typical tutee meetings. This created reflective opportunities, with staff asking questions such as, ‘If this student had been my tutee, what would I have done in that scenario?’ when student mentors shared ‘unsafe’ tutoring experiences.

‘...there’s always something I hadn’t thought about. This is one of the best things I’ve taken away from my meetings so far – [my mentor’s] background/ thoughts/opinions mean that [my mentor] has a very different view of the [personal tutoring] system and I really appreciate that from our discussions.’

Staff mentee

Staff reflected on their own tutoring experiences as former students and how this influenced current approaches, including the perpetuation of standard norms. They reflected on different methods of communicating with tutees and the need for continued flexibility, not just always assuming in-person and in-office is best. Staff also began to recognise their capacity to support all students, including those they do not share identity characteristics with.

‘I will try to think more about my students’ whole lives and the constellation of factors that they may or may not share with me. I have been aware that I am only seeing the tip of the iceberg, but having concrete examples of what people are dealing with (caring for parents, grandchildren, working, etc.) will stay with me as I practice my role as [a personal tutor].’

Staff mentee

Staff also discussed more personal things about themselves with students, opening new opportunities for the scope and reciprocity of personal tutoring. However, staff found this challenging and it took time for the more formalised and traditional approaches to staff–student relationships to dissipate.

Students shared the sense of needing time to build safety. This longer-term, purposeful engagement made them feel more confident to discuss their sense of underrepresentation and discover new facets of it.

‘...my views have developed in terms of acknowledging other areas of underrepresentation such as being female and working-class ... I began to realise how I overlook how these factors play a part in my life because the ones that cause the most impact for me are being Black and queer and I don’t even realise how much being female and working-class also plays a part in [my] underrepresentation.’

Student mentor

Students felt validated through the responsiveness of staff mentees and consequently more comfortable to share experiences. They enjoyed the icebreakers used in the reverse mentoring sessions (for example, opening a conversation with ‘gratitude practice’ where both shared something they are grateful for) to reduce formality and feel able to talk about personal topics without

being judged, because both participants were sharing equally. They also began dismantling the idea that seeking support is a weakness, instead recognising how empowering personal tutoring can be. They sought to pursue that beyond the project with their own tutors.

‘I’ve gained a lot of respect for [personal tutoring] through this [reverse mentoring] programme and am currently trying to re-engage with [tutoring] personally.’

Student mentor

Intentional effort to disrupt traditional hierarchical barriers brought safe spaces – and ‘brave spaces’ (Arao & Clemens, 2013) – to life, transcending personal tutoring ‘norms’. This safety may, over time, create personal tutoring relationships which contribute towards wider positive changes, such as reducing degree awarding gaps (Gabi et al., 2024). Students from minoritised backgrounds often have rich, intersectional life experiences. When we recognise them as experts, instead of relying on what we think the student experience is and what personal tutoring should be, we learn from our students and use that knowledge to build personalised, safe relationships, uninhibited by normative approaches and more inspired to be brave.

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INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Reflections from white tutors supporting racially minoritised students in the UK



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A historical issue presents a persisting problem in current academic practice: the normalising and lack of discussion of white privilege; a favoured state which includes unearned advantages and unearned assets for those who are white (Foss & Elliott, 2016). Many white personal tutors (PTs) see discussions on race (read as anything non-white) as taboo, feeling incompetent or uncomfortable grappling with such topics (Gabi et al., 2024). As white British PTs, we want to name and acknowledge the privilege we possess and the disparities we create. We argue that an ongoing process of unlearning and relearning is essential to the endeavour of reducing disparity issues. An example is the degree awarding gap, whereby despite entering UK HE with similar qualifications to their white counterparts, racially minoritised students are more likely to leave university with a lower degree classification (Gabi et al., 2024).

Entangled in the complex issue of how white privilege manifests structurally within education and subsequently, how this presents within the individual

experiences of racially minoritised students, is a resistance to change by many white academics, with decades of scholarship and citations in HE (re)producing institutional racism and sexism (Ng et al., 2020). We support contemporary arguments that it is timely for PT practice to rethink the methodological nationalism of European colonialism and racism present in academia (Gabi et al., 2024), where being white has become the default (privileged) identity (Chakravartty, 2020). We emphasise the key role that white PTs need to play in decolonising PT practice (Meghji, 2021). A rethinking, or more specifically a commitment to a process of unlearning and relearning, is needed for white tutors

We support contemporary arguments that it is timely for PT practice to rethink the methodological nationalism of European colonialism and racism present in academia.

to provide effective support and guidance to racially minoritised students in the UK. This process starts with drawing the academy's attention to white fragility, a form of privilege that goes beyond power status and class status and is imbued in everyday life, informing policies, laws, desires and habits within society (DiAngelo, 2018). Where white people become defensive or confrontational when faced with discussions about racial injustice, often controlling the narrative to place themselves as the perceived victim, white fragility is used to uphold privilege. Unsurprisingly then, racially minoritised students in HE frequently report being more likely to access support from their peers and families than from predominantly white PTs (Ferguson & Scruton, 2015).

Informed by our own experiences as white PTs, we recommend that our peers begin the process of sitting with their discomfort in taking accountability for their white privilege and educating themselves on the experiences of racially minoritised people. This would include a move away from the perceived need for 'racial kindergarten teaching', a term that refers to a labour of expecting racially minoritised people to correct and challenge white people to move beyond white privilege and racist boundaries of whiteness (Joseph & Winfield, 2019). This form of labour manifests as a burden placed upon racially minoritised people to educate (white) others (Maragh-Lloyd, 2024). An expectation from white people that they should be taught about racism and prejudicial practices by racially minoritised people feeds into a 'disrespectful sense of entitlement' (Sobande, 2020, p. 139). It is therefore important for white PTs not to place a presumptuous burden on racially minoritised staff or students to educate them about racism, as this is an aspect of assumed white racial innocence that reinforces problematic racial assumptions, presuming race issues are not a white person's problem (DiAngelo, 2018).

Within the unlearning and relearning process, we believe all white PTs should educate themselves on the importance of intersectionality in the workplace (Crenshaw, 1991). PTs should be looking to a bottom-up approach in their role, considering the vantage points of marginalised people (Nash, 2008), in this case, racially minoritised students. Intersectionality is a powerful concept to apply, as it recognises that people can experience oppression and privilege at different intersections of their identity. It is important for white PTs to understand the multifaceted ways in which privilege and oppression can impact racially minoritised students, instead of leaning on single-axis frameworks such as anti-racist policy discourse. Intersectionality offers PTs an approach that honours nuanced and heterogenous understandings.

Acknowledging inequalities faced by racially minoritised heterogeneous groups is just the first step for PT practice,

which should more widely invest in self-led learning and institutional training on race, racism, decolonising discourse, intersectionality and equity. When white tutors invest in an unlearning and relearning process, we believe this will increase the likelihood that white PTs and racially minoritised students will form a supportive and authentic relationship that encourages a positive trajectory for reducing the awarding gap for racially minoritised students (Alves, 2019). If white academics continue to reflect on how we understand the complex interplay of privilege and oppression affecting racially minoritised students, a positive impact can be made on the inclusivity of personal tutoring.

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INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Best practices in personal tutoring & academic advising for distance learning international students

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International students in the UK are increasingly enrolling on distance learning courses for their HE studies. This increased demand has been due in part to the effects of the Covid-19 global pandemic as well as students seeking increased flexibility of choice and crucially access to HE. Distance learning is most commonly delivered via the creation of virtual learning environments (VLEs) – digital platforms – hosted by universities.

All distance learning students use VLEs to access course materials, online lectures and seminars, as well as to submit assignments. VLEs are also one of the main mechanisms for students to access academic support, including personal tutoring, through which they receive academic guidance and support and their progress is monitored – all essential components for student success. Personal tutors typically maintain the most consistent contact with students and are crucial in helping them to navigate the academic system effectively.

Yet providing effective personal tutoring for international students in distance learning has been fraught with challenges and is typically often overlooked. Currently, international students frequently experience inadequate access to personal tutoring and academic advising, which hampers their ability to attain high-quality degrees. These issues arise from universities' limited recognition of the unique needs of international students, who often speak English as a second language, belong to racially marginalised groups and have educational backgrounds in non-UK systems.

Arguably, one of the most significant challenges that international students encounter is inadequate cultural competency. In the UK, there is substantial apprehension surrounding effective engagement and connection with people from diverse cultures, often rooted in concerns about inadvertently causing offence or being perceived as racist. This results in reluctance to participate in cultural competency training and workshops or ignoring the need to do so

entirely. Moreover, cultural competency training within universities is often labelled as optional, which can inadvertently suggest that it is not essential and thereby reduce staff uptake. As a result, personal tutors may often have a reduced ability to interact meaningfully with international students, leading to a failure to adequately address their unique needs and experiences.

For instance, international students are more likely to adhere to a variety of religious practices that influence their academic commitments and schedules. Muslim students, for example, are required to fast during the month of Ramadan and observe Islamic holy days which affect when they can study. Similarly, Jehovah's Witnesses observe the Sabbath and may not study on that day. These religious practices are not formally recognised in the UK to the same extent as Christian holy days. Universities have an expectation that students will engage in regular study throughout the academic year, including weekends, with absences typically acknowledged for significant events such as Christmas. Concerningly, international students can face racial bias when engaging in their religious practices, with a disregard for their cultural identities and the need to create an environment where their beliefs are respected or accommodated, thereby exacerbating their challenges in adapting to the UK academic system.

Consequently, this lack of cultural competency hinders the ability of personal tutors to accommodate the needs of international students during these important periods, which can impact on their academic experience, participation and sense of belonging. Universities must urgently prioritise mandatory cultural competency training for personal tutors as best practice. This would ensure more effective and tailored support for international students, thereby mitigating their marginalisation and enhancing their academic success and satisfaction. Moreover, providing such training significantly benefits universities by reducing the risk of higher-fee-paying international students, who represent a significant revenue source, withdrawing from their studies.

Another challenge that disproportionately negatively affects international students is the teaching and assessment methods used, which can be vastly different from in their home countries. In the UK, universities promote critical thinking and self-directed learning, commonly referred to as being an independent learner, which can differ from other parts of the world which value structured guidance, rote learning, respecting the teacher and a collaborative style of learning.

Often universities fail to adequately explain the complexities of the UK educational system and how it differs from other systems, placing the onus on the international student to already have an implicit

Often universities fail to adequately explain the complexities of the UK educational system and how it differs from other systems.

understanding of the established practices in the UK. This difficulty often manifests during assignment submissions, where international students are disproportionately flagged for plagiarism. In many cultures, copying a lecturer's words is seen as a sign of respect, reflecting the student's high regard for the lecturer's knowledge and authority. These differences in educational styles, combined with cultural misunderstandings, pose a heightened risk of international students being penalised or withdrawn from their courses for academic misconduct.

This risk is further exacerbated by the nature of distance learning, where the communication styles and practices of tutors may not be explicitly conveyed to international students. Typically, international students will encounter a Westernised method of communication from their teachers which emphasises indirectness and requires the student to interpret subtle verbal and non-verbal cues to signal errors or areas for improvement in their work. This can be incredibly challenging for international students from countries where being direct and explicit is common, such as Nigeria and Lithuania. Consequently, they may struggle to interpret these cues, hindering their ability to make the necessary adjustments to their work in order to achieve higher marks. It can also leave international students feeling isolated and alienated, as they often do not have spaces where they can discuss these issues due to limited opportunities for social interaction. They often rely heavily on the university to build friendships and support networks, but this can be a challenge when distance learning, and the sense of isolation can adversely affect their mental health, motivation and academic success.

Thus, it is essential that personal tutors receive training in order to gain an understanding of best practices, and develop increased adaptability and clarity in their communication styles, which in turn will foster a more comprehensive understanding of academic expectations for international students and tutors alike.

In sum, by comprehensively understanding these challenges, institutions can promote best practice for personal tutors and academic advisors that fosters an inclusive, welcoming and supportive distance learning environment, and also meets the distinct needs of international students, ensuring that they receive equitable and effective support.



INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Personal tutoring in the face of philosophical diversity

Critical voices & international perspectives



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This article examines tutoring in HEIs and its importance for students. Personal tutoring enriches students' learning experiences (McFarlane, 2016; Thomas, 2006); personal tutors are viewed as university staff who support student engagement in learning (McFarlane, 2016). As lead author, I reflect on studying and teaching in London-based universities and teaching a recently launched cognitive science postgraduate course at an Indian university. My co-authors provide student perspectives from an Indian context. Tutoring insights are drawn from the 'philosophy of cognitive science and mind' module. Student and tutor perspectives are discussed in relation to India and the UK.

UK UNIVERSITIES: A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Personal tutoring systems are employed widely across UK universities (Grey & Osborne, 2020). Having studied at a number of HEIs, I vividly recall my tutor interactions. In hindsight, I realise how many of them were laced with a specific academic homogeneity that excluded my philosophical perspective. For example, in reviewing my philosophical writing, a tutor discovered I studied Indian philosophy and suggested that when I do Western philosophy, I stick to doing Western philosophy. While this exclusivity was foreign to my personal understanding of philosophy, it hugely benefited my academic development. However, it simultaneously set up academic

philosophy as an exclusive enterprise. I find it rather refreshing to see how the current generation of Indian students exhibits a complete disregard for the academic segregation between Western and Eastern philosophy.

INDIAN HEIs: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Student 1: 'As a physics graduate, I am saddened that teachers mostly stick to textbooks and focus on testing memory. I was drawn to physics for its mysteries, but there was little opportunity for my participation. Personal tutoring was not available during my studies. However, in my final year, I had a teacher who used interactive methods to explain concepts. His approach highlighted why my perspectives on physics mattered in learning physics. My postgraduate course helped me realise how crucial tutoring on a personal level is to my learning and engagement. My tutors tailored sessions to my personal needs as a learner.'

Student 2: 'As an undergraduate in a medical college, personal tutoring was not a method of learning we experienced. My postgraduate experience was vastly different as it involved interacting with classmates and the teacher. Personal tutorials offered tailored opportunities for learning. For example, I had not prepared a draft for discussion and had no coherent

concept; I had no idea how it would turn out. Through a series of questions, the tutor helped me understand how to navigate where I wanted to go. My notion that tutoring sessions might not benefit me with only a vague idea, was eliminated. I felt heard and included throughout the whole teaching–tutoring process, allowing me to share my views about topics discussed in the class. Tutoring raises awareness of one’s own thinking process and traces one’s line of reasoning, allowing a clearer understanding of the concepts at hand.’

We, as Indian students, often feel our views are marginalised by a system prioritising exams while homogenising our knowledge. Postgraduate personal tutoring has served to engage us more deeply without limiting our thinking. Adaptive sessions tailored to each student has provided a sense of inclusivity in ways that recognise, value and validate our diverse and personal perspectives.

PERSONAL TUTORING: COMPARATIVE TEACHER REFLECTIONS

From these Indian and UK perspectives, a critical dimension of tutoring lies in the nature and quality of the tutor–student dialogue – dialogues that allow certain academic or systemic tensions to be acknowledged, articulated and made explicit. Above, I illustrated how personal tutors can serve to sustain a certain status quo in philosophy or academia more broadly – an academic hegemony. From a personal perspective, I recognise how tutoring can serve to challenge or sustain hegemony. I may be viewed as sustaining such academic hegemony in teaching philosophy within the Western canon. However, I had incorporated world philosophies into the course curriculum design, albeit to be covered towards the end of the module. It was the sheer curiosity and criticality of Indian students that prompted me to address Buddhist and Hindu philosophies almost from the start. These discussions led to philosophical dialogues I have rarely encountered in the UK.

Furthermore, these encounters became a critical part of tutorial discussions. Unlike my experience with Western philosophy, where I was told to exclude Eastern philosophy, these tutorials actively encouraged students to articulate their personal philosophical commitments. In class discussions, Indian students intuitively grasped non-dualist approaches to mind and world. This has been a profoundly problematic project in contemporary analytic philosophy and philosophy of education (Derry, 2013; Surendran, 2023; Webb, 2022). Personal tutorials served to challenge their philosophical commitments and test their ability to justify their reasoning¹. In these sessions, diversity was not merely an aspiration but was also present and embodied in classroom discourse and student questions.

EDUCATION WITH A PERSONAL TOUCH: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

A key revelation from our collaborative discussions on education was realising how embracing diverse perspectives in academic dialogue is not new, especially in India, which has a rich, diverse and non-dualist philosophical heritage. Such dialogues are considered an ongoing part of humanity’s collective exchange. While philosophical diversity has become the norm for this postgraduate course and tutorials, it begs the question why it is not the norm in academic discourse more broadly. Although we cannot delve into this issue here, we recognise how personal tutoring has played a crucial part in the inclusion of student voices and the promotion of philosophical diversity in teaching and learning. Personal tutoring and dialogues, especially in HEIs, can support students in making course content meaningful, but also relevant to their personal growth beyond academic learning.

¹ This approach to dialogue and educational communication draws inspiration from Jan Derry’s philosophical interpretation of L. S. Vygotsky and the non-dualist epistemology of neo-Hegelian philosopher Brandom – inferentialism; see Surendran, 2023.

Personal dialogues and tutoring, especially in HE, can support students not only in making course content meaningful and relevant but also in their personal growth beyond academic learning.

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INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Caring on Campus

Five key elements for successful personal tutoring

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Values-led personal tutoring in HE refers to a mentoring approach that is guided by ethical, personal and institutional values aimed at the holistic development of students. It goes beyond academic support to foster personal growth, wellbeing and life skills, promoting inclusivity and student success within a framework of intrinsic core values. While it can be described as a student-centred approach, values-led personal tutoring is at its most effective and sustainable when the tutor is first fluently ‘at home’ with how they harness their own values with proficiency.

How is this acquired and honed? Some things are better inculcated than learned.

Before we share suggestions, let us acknowledge some of the main reasons why a values-based approach is worthy of this up-front ‘inner work’.

- **Inclusivity & equity:** A values-led tutor prioritises diversity, equity and inclusion. In addition to making certain that there is equitable access to resources and support, the tutor ensures that all students show recognisable signs of inclusion in class, through the many various indicators such as attendance, engagement, body language and contribution (Gabi et al., 2024).
- **Ethical responsibility:** The tutor upholds high ethical standards, building trust through honest,

respectful and open communication. They adhere to confidentiality, set clear boundaries and maintain a strong sense of duty towards students’ wellbeing.

- **Individualism & the collective:** The tutor recognises, encourages and makes visible the individuality and unique abilities of each student, while cognisant of their personal development needs. Students are guided to develop respect, self-reflection and empowerment, and how to balance autonomy with collaboration (Xudong & Li, 2020).
- **Emotional & social support:** The emotional support and guidance that derives from a values-based approach enables the tutor to help students manage stress, build resilience and navigate challenges both inside and outside the classroom (Grey & Osborne, 2020).
- **Development of soft skills:** Beyond academic tutoring, the values-led approach indirectly also nurtures transferable skills, such as critical thinking, creative solution finding, communication and time management. These competencies are especially valued by employers.
- **Holistic development:** It promotes not just intellectual growth but also the personal and moral development that moulds character and purpose. This could include issues like career choices, life goals, ethical dilemmas or work–life balance (Grey & Osborne, 2020).

Within the Caring on Campus collective we simplify a values-based approach to five core needs as key elements always to be present: to feel understood, respected, valued and safe, with caring connections.

Caring on Campus¹ is a LifeRoute initiative involving collaborators in HE who share a vision for a values-based culture change that also addresses mental health and wellbeing. Within the Caring on Campus collective we simplify a values-based approach to five core needs as key elements always to be present: to feel **understood, respected, valued** and **safe**, with **caring connections**. These elements work like the fundamental colours in a paint box from which many other values/colours are derived, and through which a foundation for harmonious working relationships can be established.

As a tutor, what could some of the intentional approaches that create a supportive educational ecosystem look like – one that nurtures not only academic excellence but also the character and integrity of students, preparing them for life after HE?

Two suggestions are offered here.

Before the relatively more recent development of the neocortex brain, we especially relied on our feelings, especially feeling safe. As well as for self-survival, it is when we feel safe and comfortable in one another's presence that we can learn to our full capacity.

Atmosphere/Presence

Before the relatively more recent development of the neocortex brain, we especially relied on our feelings, especially feeling safe. As well as for self-survival, it is when we feel safe and comfortable in one another's presence that we can learn to our full capacity. Entering a personal tutoring session should feel like entering a warm and welcoming space, where the effective tutor is the lead creator and protector of atmosphere in the room. Mindset is fundamental to atmosphere. How the tutor 'shows up', their eagerness, creates an infectious presence, we suggest, to:

- show enthusiasm by always being the first to the arrive for the session
- personally greet and address each student by their given first name, and with a smile in the eyes that says 'I see you, and you matter profoundly'
- generate an expectation of mutual exchange that leads to meaningful learning for all, rather than to be regarded as the 'alpha' in the room with all the answers.

Engagement

There are no 'put downs', and comments are either to agree, to build upon what has been said or to offer an alternative without criticism on anything previous. There is consensual agreement of confidentiality.

To achieve this, the Caring on Campus approach invites educators to begin with an inward focus where, in using each of the five key elements as a separate lens, they explore and clarify how their own core needs are best met. Equally important, educators reflect on past situations when these core needs went unmet, so they can revisit both the negative and positive impact on their own wellbeing and therefore the motivation and capacity to learn.

When a tutor can be such a role model, this quality learning will remain long after any of today's facts and methods have become obsolete.

These insights help to secure a tutoring dynamic that always engages and is inclusive, that builds confidence in the ability for everyone to speak up in a way that gets things done, but in a manner in which no one is conflicted by their own values and needs. When a tutor can be such a role model, this quality learning will remain long after any of today's facts and methods have become obsolete.

¹ Caring on Campus <https://caringoncampus.org>

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INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Personal tutoring & academic advising

In conversation with David Grey

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David Grey is Chief Executive of UK Advising and Tutoring¹ (UKAT), an HE membership association focused on ensuring that every student experiences effective academic advising which personalises their learning and enables them to flourish.

Josephine: 'What excites you most about your work?'

David: 'Making a difference, knowing that we're supporting educators in a way that positively impacts students. It's about reaching a broader range of students by influencing those who work with them. Although we don't work directly with students, our efforts help students to thrive and succeed through the educators we support.'

Josephine: 'What are your thoughts on supporting international students?'

David: 'This is important because international students come with very different lived experiences. For many of them, it's their first time living abroad, so they're dealing with language barriers and adapting to a new culture. It's our responsibility to support them as much as we can to ensure they have every opportunity to succeed.'

Josephine: 'From your experience, what are some of the main challenges international students face in the UK?'

David: 'There are several. First, there's cultural adjustment; then there's navigating the expectations of HE in the UK, which can be quite different from what they're used to. For example, the grading system and even academic integrity standards can vary greatly – something considered acceptable in their home country might be seen as academic misconduct here. This can be confusing, and they can find themselves in trouble without understanding what they did wrong. It is even more challenging for postgraduate students who have to adjust in a much shorter timeframe. They may also face restrictions on working hours and types of employment, which can make it harder for them to support themselves financially, especially if they're trying to balance unsociable work hours with their studies.'

Josephine: ‘How does UKAT support personal tutors and academic advisors in helping international students with these challenges?’

David: ‘UKAT offers online learning, and our Professional Recognition scheme encourages advisors to reflect on their practices through the lens of global scholarship, which includes insights into supporting international students. We have a learning module on intercultural communication which helps tutors and advisors to understand the different cultural backgrounds of students while also developing their capacity to communicate with students from diverse cultures. We have an International Students SIG where members can discuss the unique challenges faced by international students and share strategies for supporting them. Our webinar series often includes international perspectives, and we’ve held webinars on supporting students from specific countries, such as China.’

Josephine: ‘How do you see AI and educational technologies playing a role in academic advising and personal tutoring, especially in supporting students, both home and international?’

David: ‘AI and educational technologies have a role, but I don’t think they’ll fundamentally change the role of personal tutors. AI is a tool; it’s great for transactional tasks such as providing information or answering routine queries. But for deeper issues, such as understanding a student’s emotional or mental health needs, or helping them navigate a cultural adjustment, AI falls short. It can free up personal tutors to focus on more complex, student-centred issues that require empathy and understanding, but it can’t provide the human connection or engagement of a personal tutor or academic advisor.’

Josephine: ‘Looking ahead, are there any international partnerships or initiatives that UKAT is particularly excited about?’

David: ‘One of the most exciting initiatives is our new journal, *Waypoint: The Reflective Journal of Student Advising and Development in Tertiary Education*², which aims to promote scholarship in student advising in the UK and across Europe. *Waypoint* isn’t just a traditional research journal; we want it to support academic research and also the day-to-day practice of advising and tutoring. We’re working closely with the Dutch National Association of Academic Advisors³ (LVSA) and colleagues from Scandinavia to make this a truly collaborative project (see pages 34–35 of this issue). Every year we host a joint symposium with LVSA, where advisors from the UK and the Netherlands share their experiences and strategies. We see the new journal and these partnerships as key to enhancing our understanding and practice of student advising and tutoring, particularly in a European context.’

Josephine: ‘How does UKAT work with policymakers to improve the quality of personal tutoring in HE?’

David: ‘We aspire to work more closely with policymakers. Recently, we’ve collaborated with the Department for Education’s HE Student Support Champion⁴ on a mental health toolkit aimed at equipping all student-facing staff with the skills to support students in distress. While this isn’t specific to international students, it’s highly relevant to the work personal tutors do. We’ve also been promoting the Disabled Students’ Commitment⁵ to ensure that personal tutoring includes support for disabled students.’

Josephine: ‘Do you see any significant changes in how personal tutoring will be structured in the future, especially with the rise of AI and educational technologies?’

David: ‘With the current funding pressures on UK institutions, we might see a shift away from the traditional three-year degree towards a different delivery of learning and teaching. Students might engage with multiple institutions over time to build up their own portfolios of education. If this happens, the way we support students would have to adapt, and technology, including AI, could play a role in tracking and supporting students across institutions.’

Josephine: ‘That’s a fascinating prospect. What can institutions expect from UKAT in the coming years, and how can they get involved?’

David: ‘UKAT is working to engage more deeply with personal tutors on the ground, while also strengthening our connections with senior leaders and strategic decision-makers to close the gap between policy and practice. We’re also increasing the activity within our SIGs so that they produce valuable outputs like training modules and written resources for the sector. We’re building partnerships with organisations around the world to promote cultural awareness and a better understanding of the challenges faced by international students.’

Josephine: ‘Lastly, does UKAT offer any open access resources for those looking to improve their practice?’

David: ‘As a charity, much of what we produce is freely available, including many of the resources on our website. Our webinars and *Waypoint* journal are open access.’

¹ www.ukat.ac.uk

² www.ukat.ac.uk/waypoint-journal

³ www.lvsa.nl/home/english-version

⁴ www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/governance/vice-chancellor/higher-education-student-support-champion

⁵ <https://advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/disabled-student-commitment>



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INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

Academic advising – a genuine sense of self

In conversation with Oscar van den Wijngaard



JOSEPHINE GABI¹ & DENISE MILLER²

¹MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY
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Oscar van den Wijngaard is Education Development Officer at EDLAB,¹ the Centre for Teaching & Learning at Maastricht University in the Netherlands.

Josephine: ‘Could you share how transitioning from University College Maastricht (UCM) to EDLAB has influenced your approach to curriculum development, innovation and academic advising?’

Oscar: ‘When I started at Maastricht University it was with UCM. The college followed a very new model; we were the second in the Netherlands to do that, in 2002. It was based on the idea of an open curriculum and liberal arts education; it is quite common in the US but not in the Netherlands. I joined the teaching staff of UCM, and my background is in history and philosophy. But from the start I was also appointed as the coordinator of ‘academic

advising’, which had a lot to do with the idea that, due to the way the open curriculum of UCM was designed, students continue to make choices about their curriculum throughout their undergraduate programme. I took a lot of that along when I went to EDLAB – particularly the notion of helping students to develop a sense of authorship. Maastricht is a problem-based learning institution with a longstanding focus on education and innovation. Now, as an educational developer at EDLAB, my role is different. We are not directly serving students but are helping programmes and individual academics, course coordinators and tutors to develop new ideas and enhance their professional development.’

If academic advising is done well, it's more than just reactive problem-solving for students. It involves engaging students with questions such as: What matters to me? What do I want to accomplish? What obstacles do I face? How do I deal with them?

Josephine: 'How does academic advising contribute to fostering social responsibility in students?'

Oscar: 'If academic advising is done well, it's more than just reactive problem-solving for students. It involves engaging students with questions such as: What matters to me? What do I want to accomplish? What obstacles do I face? How do I deal with them? This type of reflection builds critical thinking and agency. In that way, academic advising helps students to develop a genuine sense of self, which I think is important for them to become socially responsible citizens.'

Josephine: 'Your work with the LVSA and NACADA² gives you a global perspective on academic advising. What are the most significant challenges or trends you see today?'

Oscar: 'I see a few positive and maybe a few not-so-positive things. What I think is really positive is that this kind of thinking, where advising or personal tutoring is an integral part of the learning experience, is increasingly being recognised. Linked to that, there are growing opportunities for people interested in advising to learn more. There's much more being written about it and many more professional development opportunities compared to when I started at UCM in 2003. But there are also challenges. In the Netherlands and elsewhere, we're seeing fewer international students than expected. There's also a change of government here, which frowns upon having many international students. As well as leading to a less diverse environment, fewer international students could mean less funding, and that may impact advising budgets. We'll have to deal with budget cuts in the next few years anyway. Even though many acknowledge the importance of advising, when push comes to shove, it might be one of the first areas affected.'

Josephine: 'It sounds like there are both financial constraints and growing concerns around student wellbeing. What innovative practices or strategies have you found most effective in supporting student persistence and success, particularly in difficult times?'

Oscar: 'The essence of our problem-based learning is that students, most of the time, meet in small groups when they have contact hours. The idea is that by discussing, challenging each other and deciding what they need to know more about, they learn. This setup creates fewer boundaries between students and staff. Even during the pandemic when group meetings shifted online, this model provided some level of interaction. In more general terms, finding ways to create community within the curriculum is key. Students need to feel recognised and that they belong to a community, not just socially but academically. It's about making sure they don't disappear into the mass.'

Josephine: 'What do you anticipate for the future of academic advising, particularly with the integration of technology? How will this affect advising, especially for diverse student groups?'

Oscar: 'We're becoming increasingly data-obsessed with technology. I'm not against it, but if you combine a data-based approach with the financial constraints and the medicalisation of wellbeing issues, it's a bit worrying. Measuring is not the same as understanding. There's a trend of delegating advising to AI which could flatten the experience. Even if AI becomes more advanced and can provide students with reflective responses, it's not the same as speaking with a real person. AI could turn advising into offering quick solutions rather than facilitating meaningful reflections. Students might feel less acknowledged, and that could worsen wellbeing issues. Instead of feeling supported, students might feel like they're just talking to another screen.'

Josephine: 'Finally, let's talk about the *Waypoint*³ journal, which UKAT has recently launched (see pages 32–33 of this issue). How does it contribute to the academic advising field?'

Oscar: '*Waypoint* is an exciting project. We've been thinking for a while that there's so much knowledge, expertise and dedication to advising, it would be nice to have a platform for all of that. We didn't want another traditional academic journal but something slightly more open. *Waypoint* is more like a magazine – it's still rigorous, but we want it to be accessible for anyone interested in academic advising and personal tutoring, whether they're academics or people in advising roles who don't usually publish. We're aiming to recognise the value of a scholarly approach to advising, mentoring and tutoring, and to encourage more people to share their insights. The first issue is to be published in spring 2025.'

¹ www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/about-um/education-at-um/edlab

² <https://nacada.ksu.edu>

³ www.ukat.ac.uk/waypoint-journal



Embedding evidence-informed practice in schools

A pathway to professional growth & educational excellence?



JULIANA MANDRA
PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER

In this first article for the BERA Teacher Network, I explore the implications of evidence-informed practice, focusing on how this guiding principle is reshaping both educational thinking and how the profession is perceived.

A META-NARRATIVE IN EDUCATIONAL RHETORIC & WORKING KNOWLEDGE TALK

Evidence-informed practice has almost become a meta-narrative in educational rhetoric and policymaking. It currently underpins the development of continuing professional development (CPD) programmes for teachers and school leaders, including England's *Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework* (DfE, 2024). More importantly, the concept has made its way into staff meetings and staffrooms up and down the country and, in addition to justifying educational decisions, it is even cited to lend greater weight to opinions about educational choices. Whether realised or not, the notion of evidence-informed practice is shifting teachers' thinking about decision-making, and on a wider scale it is changing the identity of the profession. Teachers are no longer seen as just classroom practitioners and pastoral caregivers; instead, they are required to possess professional inquiry skills, engage in ongoing professional learning and make evidence-informed decisions about all aspects of their work.

THE REALITY OF IMPLEMENTING EVIDENCE-INFORMED PRACTICE

While the principles of evidence-informed practice would seem to direct the profession towards more scrutinised teaching strategies, applying it in schools is not without its challenges. As research-derived theories move from academic contexts to applied settings, they are, unavoidably, subject to reinterpretation and oversimplification. At present, evidence-informed practices in schools are enforced by policymakers and introduced in the field by so called 'knowledge brokerage intermediaries' (KBI) – organisations that enable the use of research evidence in educational settings (OECD, 2022). However, the process of selection and dissemination of research for use in evidence-based practice can lead to a misalignment between the original research and its application. One such instance is the widespread adoption of cognitive load theory (CLT), which has been widely embraced by teacher training and CPD programmes. Interestingly, CLT and its implications for direct instructions in the classroom have long been criticised as presenting an oversimplified model of memory and as conceptually weak from a theoretical perspective (Ellerton, 2022; Murphy et al., 2016; Schnotz & Kürschner, 2007). Hence, a key challenge in using evidence-informed practice for schools lies in selecting

evidence that is up to date and enjoys consensus within the research community. A second challenge stems from the nature of research itself: the landscape is vast, constantly evolving and often highly specialised. Educational leaders and teachers are often faced with a plethora of studies, concepts and frameworks on a single topic.

A key barrier to the widespread adoption of evidence-informed practice is ensuring that research is accessible, relevant and useful to teachers (van den Beemt et al., 2018). At present, the research that captures the attention of the profession is primarily that disseminated by KBIs such as the Education Endowment Foundation and the Chartered College of Teaching who present complex research in formats that are accessible and actionable.

While evidence-informed and research-informed practice aim to bridge the gap between academic research and classroom practice, academic research does not necessarily address the immediate needs of schools or students.

While evidence-informed and research-informed practice aim to bridge the gap between academic research and classroom practice, academic research does not necessarily address the immediate needs of schools or students. It is no coincidence that some of the most popular schemes of work within the sector have been developed by organisations and educators with a deep connection to classroom practice. These schemes are often designed to directly address the educational needs of students across various subjects and reflect a nuanced understanding of what works in real-world teaching contexts.

THE NEED FOR RESEARCH LITERACY AMONG TEACHERS

Considering the substantial changes in the professional identity and educational decision-making brought about by evidence-informed practice, it is crucial that teachers are supported to develop a high level of research literacy. This includes the ability to critically evaluate, interpret and apply research findings in a meaningful way. Currently, engagement with evidence-based practice appears to be the privilege of a few professionals who are highly invested in their work and equipped with the knowledge and critical skills to navigate the process of evidence making. Those who

lack research literacy may reinforce pre-existing beliefs or practices rather than challenge them or offer new insights. For example, a recent review of common interventions implemented in primary schools – which were assumed to be evidence-informed – found that, for the majority of these interventions, there was either no published research to support them or studies deemed them ineffective (Pegram et al., 2022). This highlights another pressing issue within the sector: the widespread adoption of schemes of work that claim to be evidence-informed but which, in reality, have not been subject to independent research.

CONCLUSION: BUILDING AN EVIDENCE-INFORMED PROFESSION

Embedding evidence-informed practice in schools involves more than simply adopting a set of best practices based on research; it primarily calls for the development of research literacy in the profession. By fostering professional learning communities – something that the BERA Teacher Network aims to achieve – teachers are supported to increase their research literacy and its application in practice by engaging with and critically considering research. Ultimately, the goal is to raise the status of the teaching profession by equipping teachers with the tools, knowledge and confidence they need to make informed, evidence-based decisions in their classrooms. In doing so, schools can provide a richer, more effective educational experience for all students, grounded in the best available evidence.

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EARLY
CAREER
RESEARCHER
NETWORK

Finding & using your academic voice



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Early in my career as a secondary school teacher, I learned that if I wanted to gain the attention of my class it was more effective to lower the pitch of my voice, rather than raise the volume. Lowering the pitch cuts through the noise, making our voices more resonant, and enables the sound to reach the back of the room. In the classroom, after a few attempts, this adjustment is easily mastered. The challenge of finding and pitching one's academic voice is a little trickier but is of equal necessity.

The BERA ECR Network hosts several online coffee conversations throughout the year, providing a chance for ECRs at all stages (master's level to postdoctorate) to get together and share ideas. At a recent event, I was struck by the diversity of experiences and confident voices on the call. Yet, finding your distinctive voice as a researcher is no small undertaking.

Academic voice can feel at once omnipresent but elusive. As ECRs, we are surrounded by words and often have supportive supervisors and tutors with their own voice and style. There's the voice in our own minds,

which sometimes nags at us to write, and the imposter voice which worries that what we write is not good enough. But sometimes knowing what we want to say or how we want to say it feels just beyond our grasp.

WHAT IS ACADEMIC VOICE?

Noting the absence of a definitive definition of academic voice, Robbins (2016) surveys multiple definitions of the concept and, in doing so, draws out its various hallmarks, which include crafting an academic style of writing, saying something distinctive, and having the confidence to express these original ideas without being overly reliant on the words of other scholars. Gray (2017) meanwhile highlights that the matter of what comprises or should comprise an appropriate academic voice also prompts questions relating to epistemology and representation. Discovering one's academic voice is thus related to discovering oneself as an academic, a point neatly summarised by Potgieter and Smit (2009, p. 222) who observe that 'if we do not have a voice, we also do not have a scholarly identity': it is about us 'being there' in what we write.



Discovering one's academic voice is thus related to discovering oneself as an academic, a point neatly summarised by Potgieter and Smit (2009, p. 222) who observe that 'if we do not have a voice, we also do not have a scholarly identity': it is about us 'being there' in what we write.

HOW CAN YOU FIND YOUR ACADEMIC VOICE?

In order to explore how you might find your academic voice, I asked a selection of ECRs who have recently completed their doctorate in education for their advice.

- 'Make sure you are using language that brings clarity to your argument, rather than language that is overly verbose.' (Adrian Copping)
- 'Don't be afraid of "I" – there is a fine balance between a "soap-box" and demonstrating positionality and interpretation – stay close to the literature, but do not be afraid of showing your own critical subjectivity through your perspective, influence on thinking, or implications for future research.' (Lisa Reed)
- 'Be more Jamie (Oliver) and less Heston (Blumentahl), make your understanding accessible to everyone so that the reader is on the journey with you from start to finish.' (Phil Wright)
- 'Immerse yourself in the academic writing styles within your field. This will enable you to get a sense of how writers typically structure arguments and how they build and develop lines of argument.' (Nicola Marlow)
- 'Structure your paragraphs effectively: lead with your main idea. Present your argument upfront, then use the rest of the paragraph to support and elaborate on it, rather than building up to your key point at the end.' (Sin Wang Chong)

Striking among the advice I gathered is the emphasis which is placed on using your personal voice. While comfort with the use of personal pronouns may vary across disciplinary areas, in a review of 66 academic journals, Sword (2012) found only one which explicitly disallowed the use of 'I', suggesting that we should all feel at ease to attribute our voice to ourselves. Coupled

with this is the importance of clarity. Academic writing is not necessarily good writing. On the contrary, it can be jargon-filled, colourless and hard to follow. In order to be clear, we must know what it is that we want to say. On this point, Sword (2012, p. 44) observes that the most engaging writers are those who pay close attention to their readers, be they strangers or esteemed colleagues, 'in whose ears their own words will echo'. To me, this concept of echo is critical. It is not only the words that we use and how we use them which are important, but also thinking about how and where they will reverberate after they stop.

While comfort with the use of personal pronouns may vary across disciplinary areas, in a review of 66 academic journals, Sword (2012) found only one which explicitly disallowed the use of 'I', suggesting that we should all feel at ease to attribute our voice to ourselves.

For myself, although superficially comfortable using 'I', the ability to have conviction in what 'I' was arguing took longer to emerge. It takes a degree of courage to truly take ownership of the argument you want to make. However, it is doing so that conveys that conviction to the reader. As researchers, we occupy a privileged position, spending our time working on and generating ideas and concepts. In the midst of geopolitical tensions, the climate crisis and ongoing economic uncertainty our privilege demands not only that we find our academic voices, but that we have the courage to use them.

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UPCOMING EVENTS 2025

ENGLISH ACROSS THE DIVIDES: INVESTIGATING PERCEPTIONS OF 'ENGLISH' ACROSS THE KEY STAGES IN ENGLAND

This event provides an opportunity for dialogue and an exploration of perspectives between experts across phases in England. The four presenters are all English specialists working in primary, secondary and further education (FE).



19 MARCH

EXPLORING PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT AND UNDERACHIEVEMENT BY PLACE AND SOCIOECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE IN ENGLAND AND WALES

The event will focus on the varying impact of urban, rural, coastal and other regional environments on student performance, emphasising how place and socioeconomic status intersect to influence both achievement and underachievement.



28 MARCH

PERSPECTIVES ON ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION - PERSPECTIVES FROM IRELAND

BERA's Alternative Education SIG convenors propose a tentative typology of alternative education. This research spans five years and involves 24 projects operating within the alternative education sector and youth mental health sectors approaches. This event will share learnings from the study.



2 APRIL

TEACHING THROUGH DIVISION: IMPLICATIONS FOR WORLDVIEWS AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

This event discusses the ongoing issue of educational inequality in Ireland, despite the constitutional guarantee of the right to education. It focuses on alternative education, which addresses unique community challenges and provides flexible, innovative programs for students facing barriers such as socio-economic, cultural and behavioural difficulties.



7 APRIL

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES IN TEACHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGING THE STANDARD EDUCATION MODEL

The conference will focus on a number of important themes related to the impact of globalisation and internationalisation on sustainable teacher education, such as inclusion, curriculum and its impact on knowledge generation, developing evidence-informed practice and self-improving systems, global citizenship and intercultural education.



26-27 JUNE