

A PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PROJECT EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH WHITENESS, WHITE PRIVILEGE AND DEVELOPING ANTI-RACIST PRACTICE

Educational Psychology as a profession, and set of related practices, needs to develop more insight into 'privilege' (including 'White privilege') and related commitment to anti-discriminatory practice. Through participatory research methods, the current research aimed to contribute to this endeavour.

By Alice Bateman, summarising her thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of East London for the Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology (June, 2023).



INTRODUCTION

Prevalent race related issues, the resurgence of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement and the profession's commitment to a social justice stance encapsulated the rationale for the current research (De Oliveira, 2020; Gillborn et al., 2021; Health and Care Professions Council, 2016; Thornton et al., 2020).

Whilst the profession had acknowledged the Whiteness of psychology and inequalities in historical practices (Williams, 2020), there remained a desire for more than anti-racism position statements. Rather, dedicated actions to bring about meaningful change to develop insight into 'privilege' (including 'White privilege') and related commitment to anti-racist practice (ARP) (M'gadzah, 2020).

An anti-racist is different from a 'not-racist'. To be anti-racist is to be an active part of the solution, whereas a 'not-racist' is a bystander of the problem (The Law Society, 2023). For many, the growth to becoming an anti-racist requires profound unlearning. Part of this education involves recognising the historic economic, socio-political and psychological effects of colonialism and advocating decolonisation to embed an alternative way of considering the world, knowledge, and political praxis (Bhambra et al., 2018; Doran, 2020; Wright, 2017).

OBJECTIVE

The aim was to facilitate research that was transformative, culturally responsive and inclusive, without relying on those who had lived experiences of racism to educate others (Mertens, 2021). Instead, the research aimed to facilitate joint effort whereby White professionals reflected on their position, privilege and worked in collaboration to advocate for transformation (Hobson & Whigham, 2018). Respectively, it was hoped that introspections of discomfort and uncertainties would be exposed to vulnerability and advanced into open discussions in the interest of meaningful change and anti-racist development (Gillborn et al., 2021; Hobson & Whigham, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

The research team included three Educational Psychologists (EPs) and four Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs). Through a participatory approach, they explored what research could be undertaken to add value to understanding and engagement relating to Whiteness, White privilege (WP) and ARP in educational psychology. Three Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) in the UK volunteered to participate. A person-centred planning tool 'PATH' (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope) was used to collect data (Pearpoint et al., 1993) and a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was undertaken by the research team (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019).

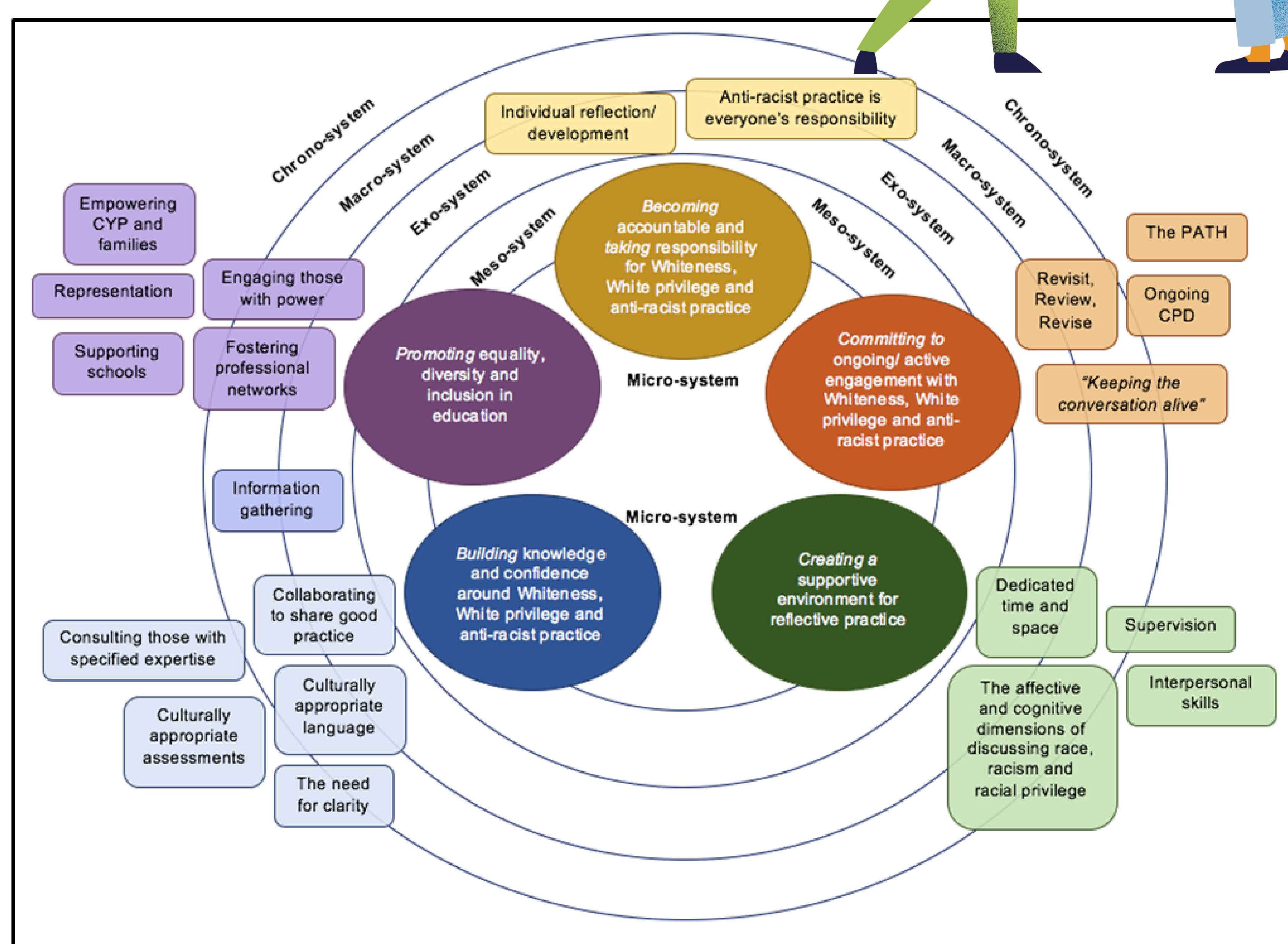
THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Five theoretical perspectives guided the current research: Critical Race Theory; Critical Whiteness Studies; White Racial Identity Development Theory; Intersectionality; and Ecological Systems Theory. Collectively these situated the primary researcher's understanding of race, racism and racial privilege in an ecological context and aligned with her critical realist research position.

FINDINGS

The findings highlight contemporary barriers and facilitators to developing understanding and practice for the participating EPs. Encouragingly, they suggest that EPs are equipped with the skills to develop their understanding of Whiteness, WP, and ARP. PRPs recognised the need to explore the complex relationships and interactions amongst the systems involved in education, with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory helping to frame the essence of the RTA.

The Thematic Map illustrates five superordinate themes. The use of active verbs to name the themes is purposeful. Similarly, the circular arrangement aims to highlight the relationships between the themes and demonstrate that developing understanding of Whiteness, WP and ARP is not a linear process.



CONCLUSIONS

Through PRM, PRPs were encouraged to have ownership of their own change and development facilitated by PATH. PRPs' previous efforts to develop their understanding of Whiteness, WP and ARP were emergent and it appeared that unearthing these, through collaborative, solution-focused methods, contributed to PATH being a catalyst for change. The findings show that some EPs have recognised Whiteness, WP and racism within practice but have not known how to challenge or change it. To contribute to this endeavour, the Thematic Map is proposed as an emergent model for the profession to encourage reflection, discussion and inform understanding of Whiteness, WP and ARP. This is not intended as a prescriptive or linear model but rather a broader praxis to encourage reflective cycles and subsequent action for EPs.

Considering the origins and etymology of PATH, did the tool reinforce White Western models and approaches to psychology?

Did the group context disable open discussions about race, racism and racial privilege? With particular consideration to systems-psychodynamics, the presence of anxiety amongst participants was not unlikely; neither were the defence mechanisms mobilised to manage it (Eloquin, 2016).

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