Editorial: special issue TVET race and ethnicity in the global south and north

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Editorial: special issue TVET race and ethnicity in the global south and north

The papers in this special issue (SI) comprise a range of scholarship, illustrating divergent approaches to examining technical and voactional education and training (TVET), race and ethnicity in the global south and north. In a number of respects, this SI follows on from an earlier issue, 'VET, Race and Ethnicity' 69(3) published in 2017. While much has changed since 2017, many of the themes and concerns expressed remain current. These have been brought into starker relief by the Black Lives Matter and Rhodes must fall protests,[1] by campaigns to decolonise the curriculum and challenges to white supremacy as well as the crisis of care engendered by Covid-19 (Avis et al. 2021; Bathmaker and Pennacchia 2022 SI; Elias 2021 SI; Joncas et al. 2022 SI). In short, our concern was – and remains – racialisation rather than ethnicity. By this, we have in mind the process whereby black and minority ethnic groups become racialised and othered, which in turn is reflected in institutional racism and structural relations.

The salience of race and ethnicity is apparent in ongoing research taking place in secondary schooling and in particular in analyses of higher education. In the latter, questions of white supremacy, de-colonisation, neo-colonialism, as well as indigenous knowledge and the lived experience of race and racialisation, are pivotal. However, as far as TVET is concerned, there is a limited and uneven discussion taking place in both the global north and south that focuses on race and ethnicity. Frequently, race and ethnicity are treated as subordinate or secondary within the political economy of TVET. Narrow definitions can tie TVET to an instrumentalism that places employers' interests centre stage, limiting engagement with questions of social justice, at best, to social democratic sensibilities or, at worst, dominant neo-liberal discourses. This is not, however, to gainsay TVET as a site of struggle in which participants seek to move beyond social democratic tropes. While this SI foregrounds race and ethnicity, it seeks to go beyond the rhetorical call for an acknowledgement of the interrelationship of race, ethnicity, class and gender, seeking to foreground critical race approaches to studying race and education. In short, the papers in this SI, while theoretically diverse, avoid equating issues of race and education with superficial notions of diversity and inclusion that are liable to be co-opted by neo-liberal interests.

Can TVET address a social justice agenda while attending to technical and vocational education and remain TVET? Or do we need to re-imagine TVET so that it can seriously address questions of well-being, social and reparative

justice, thereby constituting an emancipatory project that extends beyond the workplace? How broadly should we construe such a reparative project? Historically western capitalism has been wedded to colonialism, a relation that continues as a feature of neo-colonialism and racial capitalism. Can we re-imagine a decolonised TVET without aligning this project with anti-capitalism (see for example Sriprakash et al. 2021, 32–35 discussion of racial capitalism)? Nancy's (1991) notion of community might provide the space in which an education for reparative futures could be set. Sriprakash et al. (2021, 3) argue that such an education,

> would embed the practice of asking ongoing and difficult questions with the past: cultivating spaces to remember, create, explore and discuss injustices; fostering an ethics of listening and dialogue capable of generating new perspectives; seeking to understand the histories, voices, and experiences that have been silenced or erased through assimilative forms of education; and grappling with the irresolvable difficulties of redemptive thought.

The eight SI papers that we introduce here range across three continents and despite their different settings and subjects, they illustrate the intersectionality of themes referred to above through their insights into: the racialised spaces of UK educational settings (Kaur 2022 SI); (non) diversity in TVET governance in the UK (Bathmaker and Pennacchia 2022 SI); policy on adult literacy and access in Canada (Elias 2021 SI); youth internships in Singapore (Mirchandani and Bhutani 2022 SI); youth stereotypes and racial profiling in the USA (Shapiro 2022 SI); immigrant families' aspirations in Switzerland (2021 SI); indigenous people in VET in Canada (Joncas et al. 2022 SI); and refugees and immigrants in dual education in Germany (Rusert and Stein 2022 SI). While institutional types, programmes and student characteristics vary, the experiences of ethnic minorities in VET show distinct commonalities.

Kaur, for instance, draws on her research among South Asian Muslim women living in an area of high deprivation in the UK. She mobilises conceptualisations of an agentic spatial hybridity as well as a cultural hauntology arising out of what is perceived to be the absence of a 'third space', i.e. the educational space. She relates her analysis and its potential contribution to theorisation of contextual complexities in TVET. Citing Neely and Samura (2011), the writer holds that race and space have always been intertwined:

The social links between race and space are not new phenomena. Most notably, there are long-standing historical roots of the race-space connection in the process of imperialism racialising bodies and groups has always been linked to the theft of land and the control of space (Neely and Samura 2011, 1934). Bathmaker and Pennacchia delve deeper into VET institutions and the processes and practices of governing bodies of FE colleges in the UK. In light of increasing scrutiny of governance and management more generally, they investigate the composition of governing bodies and the involvement of governors

from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Their research uncovers the unstated but persistent assumptions about who ought to govern, and suggests that attempts at creating diversity by appointing black and minority ethnic board members may be little more than tokenism.

In Canada, Elias explores the experiences of adult learners at educational sites that implement federal literacy policies incorporated into the programme 'Skills for Success', formerly known as 'Essential Skills'. She argues that Essential Skills, which comprises the prescribed skills (and occupational profiles) for Canadians to participate in work and society, rely on an ideology of race and ethnicity, and serve to uphold a racialised division of labour. The article highlights that by fragmenting labour processes and associated skills, adult learners, mainly from ethnic communities, become locked into a racialised division of labour, with little attention paid to the social relations that reinforce the status quo.

Continuing on the theme of social justice in VET in Canada and other settler colonised territories; and aligned with UNESCO's strategy with regard to access to VET for vulnerable people, Joncas et al. present an international literature review focused on indigenous people's involvement in VET programmes. The authors critically analyse scholarly literature in terms of the interventions for indigenous people; the perspectives of social justice on which the interventions were based; and the success outcomes of the initiatives for indigenous people.

Turning to opportunities for youth in VET, the article by Mirchandani and Bhutani explores how internships, which are often seen as positive and necessary experiences in vocational education, also expose youth in Singapore to more negative kinds of experiential learning, related to social and economic disparities. While internships are widely acknowledged as essential for the transition from institutional learning to work, for students in the stratified Singaporean society, there are also engrained gendered, classed, and racialised practices associated with power and privilege to contend with in workplace cultures. The authors are of the view that acknowledging such 'disparity learning' might enable internships to build in the awareness to counter these pervasive practices.

In similar vein to the foregoing critique on internships, Rusert and Stein give readers a glimpse into the dual VET system in Germany, a traditionally successful establishment that many developing VET systems aspire to. In the German dual system, vocational learners obtain a solid vocational foundation together with practical experience in authentic workplace settings. The authors caution, however, that the dual vocational system is 'based on the assumption of a normal educational biography', which is often not the case among refugees and migrants in Germany, and increasingly also among German youth. For young people suffering displacement and broken education pathways, the highly structured dual education system can be, according to the interviews conducted, an alienating and disadvantageous experience.

In an article based in the USA, Shapiro reports on a training programme for loss prevention officers in the retail industry, aimed at assisting students to overcome racial stereotyping and innate prejudices. When shown a series of shoplifting vignettes about different perpetrators and asked to make decisions about identification and surveillance, the trainee officers were seen to engage in racial profiling, more often than not selecting minority juveniles for surveillance. The article points to how such profiling reveals almost unconscious racial stereotyping and deep seated prejudices that have to be recognised in order to be addressed.

Finally, within another established European dual vocational system, Kamm et al. examine the phenomenon of immigrant parents and their second generation's higher education aspirations in Switzerland, a country with a robust and popular VET system. In a comparative study that compared second generation aspirations and pathways with that of Swiss nationals, migrant families appear to have stronger aspirations for their children to attend university rather than VET. However, the authors note too that for both second generation and nationals, idealistic aspirations often differ from what is possible in reality. Furthermore, they cite research showing that second generation young people often face discrimination in transitioning to and accessing education and training. In examining the permeability and resilience of higher education aspirations, the research found that for parents of the second generation, education had high value, and was perceived to be a 'game-changer'. Interestingly, here VET was seen to be hierarchically lesser valued than university education. The SI closes with a critical review of debates that address race/ethnicity and TVET (Avis 2022 SI).

Note

1. 'Rhodes must fall' – 'the fallist movement' sought to remove statutes of colonialists, slavers etc from public buildings as a representation of colonial oppression and exploitation. In addition the movement drew attention to the continued significance of neo-colonialism, a complacency towards the past and a failure to acknowledge its brutality.

Papers in the Special Issue

Kaur, B. Connecting the racial to the spatial; migration, identity and educational settings as a third space.

Bathmaker, A-M., Pennacchia, J. Who governs and why it matters. An analysis of race equality and diversity in the composition of further education college governing bodies across the UK

Elias, B. Race, Ethnicity, and Literacy and Essential Skills in Canada

Joncas, J, A. Edward, K. Moisan, S. Grisé, X-M. Lepage, J. Indigenous People in Vocational Education and Training from a Social Justice Perspective: An Overview of International Literature

Mirchandani, K., Bhutani, A. Disparity Learning During Youth Internships in Singapore

Rusert, K. Stein, M. Chances and discrimination in dual vocational training of refugees and immigrants in Germany

Shapiro, L. Educating college students for loss prevention jobs: Understanding stereotypes and their role in surveillance and punishment decisions regarding juvenile shoplifters

Kamm, C. Gomensoro, A., Heers, M.,Hupka-Brunner, S. Aspiring High in a VET-Dominated Education System: Second Generation Young Adults and Their Immigrant Parents

Avis, J. A critical review of debates surrounding race/ethnicity and TVET

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