'Changing the context': tackling discrimination at school and in society

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Abstract: In this paper we propose a social psychological framework for studying the role of schools in promoting positive intercultural relations. We draw on data from schools in England where addressing issues of cultural diversity is a key aim of educational practice. We focus specifically on the role of social context in educational activities that tackle discrimination. We consider the socio-political context, local community context, and immediate school context from a social representations theory perspective. Using data from interviews with staff and focus groups with students in schools from three very different localities, we show that the socio-political context may limit schools' ability to promote positive intercultural relations but also that it is possible for schools to promote broader change from the bottom-up, acting as agents of change at a societal level, i.e. in terms of changing the local and broader societal contexts in which they are located.

Keywords: educational policy; discrimination; social representations; context; intercultural relations

Highlights:

- Schools can play a key role in reducing discrimination and so act as agents of change.
- Research informed by Social Representations Theory allows a focus barriers to change and social mechanisms for social and contextual change.
- We need to examine interconnection between the macro socio-political context, the meso local context and the micro context of social encounters.
- Best practice models should be located in particular contexts and so address local issues and challenges.
- Research needs also to move beyond education to address the causes of discrimination in local and broader socio-political contexts.

Introduction

The negative impact of stigma and discrimination on young people has been largely documented. Direct as well as more subtle and institutionalised forms (e.g. Crozier, 2009; Howarth, 2004) of discrimination and stigma can lead to lower achievement (Crozier, 2005; Zirkel, 2004; Steele, 1997) and academic disengagement (Ogbu, 2003; Schmader et al., 2001) for minoritised students, contribute to their wider marginalisation (Crozier & Davies, 2008) and damage their sense of self-worth and positive identity (Howarth 2002; see Goffman, 1963). Moreover, 'multicultural' school practices in the UK and elsewhere are often shown to unintentionally perpetuate rather than resist racialisation (Andreouli, Howarth & Sonn, 2014; see also, Schofield, 2004, 2009; Gorski, 2008). On the other hand, students in schools with a constructive approach to cultural diversity benefit from "enhanced learning, higher educational and occupational aspirations" (Frankenberg et al., 2003) and more secure identities (Race, 2011). Together this points to the need for continuing to search for appropriate educational practices in contexts of discrimination and social exclusion. Schools can indeed play a key role in reducing discrimination (Banks, 2006) and in protecting vulnerable children facing stigma. In other words, schools can act as agents of change (Zirkel, 2008). Often it is assumed that schools are 'change agents' in terms of changing the attitudes, aspirations and achievements of individual students; that is, facilitating change *within* the context of the school. Here we consider a more ambitious possibility: how far schools can be agents of change at a societal level, i.e. in terms of changing the local and broader societal contexts in which they are located.

In this paper, we present a social psychological framework that positions educational practice, discrimination and approaches to tackle prejudice in their local and broader socio-political context. We suggest that this analysis of context allows us to move beyond models of 'best practice' and develop targeted guidelines for specific educational and community settings. As others have also argued, it is important to "ask how psychological processes are constituted through and operate in social context" (Subašić, Reynolds, Reicher, Klandermans, 2012; p. 6; see also Israel & Tajfel, 1972; Jovchelovitch, 2007; Andreouli & Howarth, 2013). Here we focus particularly on approaches to tackle discrimination and prejudice in schools. We argue that considering the complexity of the social context is necessary in order to appreciate the challenges that schools face in their efforts to tackle discrimination and thus also for developing efficient practices against discrimination for the protection of vulnerable children. This paper is divided into three parts. We first outline a social psychological perspective for the study of context (part 1.1) and focus particularly on how the theory of social representations can help us conceptualise context (part 1.2). We then present empirical findings from a study on multiculturalism in English schools. After outlining the methodology and analysis of the study (part 2), we discuss the findings (part 3). In line with the theoretical discussion, our data show that the process of r-epresentation – where hegemonic representations of difference

are maintained and defended but also sometimes challenged and reworked into more emancipatory representations – needs to be understood not only as a product of context but also as a process that sometimes may actually alter this context. We conceptualise context in our study in three key ways discussed in these sections: the broader socio-political context (3.1), the local community context (3.2) and the school context (3.3). These layers are interrelated, but examining them in three separate sections allows for analytical clarity. We conclude with a discussion of how schools may tackle discrimination and promote positive change through practices that enable the development of emancipatory representations, while recognising that contextual factors at the social and community level often restrict these efforts for change.

1.1 A social psychological approach to the study of context

The discipline of social psychology is valuable for an analysis of context as its focus is precisely the dynamic relationship between individuals and their social context. This context can be the immediate context of a social interaction (such as for discourse psychology and conversation analysis approaches), it can be the group or intergroup context (as for Social Identity Theory), or it can be the broader social and political context, incorporating beliefs, values, norms and other forms of knowledge that circulate in a society (as for Social Representations research). Social psychology should deal with all these layers that shape social-psychological phenomena, integrating the intra-personal, the inter-personal, inter-group and ideological levels of analysis (Doise, 1986). As Howarth et al. (in press) have recently noted, despite the ongoing individualism of the social sciences, and psychology in particular (Farr, 1991), the politics of context should be at the core of social psychological study (see also Gaskell & Himmelveit, 1990). This was indeed the original vision of Wundt, the father of the discipline, for social psychology (Farr, 1996) but something that is sometimes less evident in some current psychological research (Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson & Sammut, 2013; Reicher, 2004).

In light of this, we argue that social psychology is ideally positioned to study the context that shapes social phenomena and social projects, such as anti-discrimination strategies - the focus of this paper. There are many ways of conceptualising the notion of context; different studies emphasise different aspects of context, such as the physical, social and psychological (Howarth et al., 2013). For the most part however, mainstream psychology treats the context as a background for the phenomena or individuals that it studies. In this paper we aim to move beyond this somewhat one-dimensional and static construction of context. We show that the context not only shapes and restricts efforts to reduce discrimination, but also that such micro-level efforts have the potential to have an impact on

the broader context. Our focus is thus on both stability and change, in line with theory and research in the social representations tradition (Kessi & Howarth, in press). Since in this paper, our interest is on discrimination and stigma, we understand context here in terms of societal processes of representation which mediate social relations and permeate institutionalised practices of stigmatisation (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013; Howarth, 2011). We suggest that the theory of social representations, originally formulated by Moscovici in the 1950's, can help us conceptualise and study the relationship between the micro context, the specific local community context and the macro context of broader systems of representation.

1.2 Social representations and social context

Social representations are "systems of values, ideas and practices" (Moscovici, 1973, p. xiii) that provide a framework of thinking about the social world and a common frame of reference for groups and communities. What make social representations social is not simply that they are collectively shared, but that they are socially constituted, resisted and transformed through communicative processes and that they serve social functions by orienting social behaviour, communication and social change among people (Rose et al., 1995; Moscovici, 1961). Social representations therefore mediate the relationship between self and other. In is indeed the difference between the self and the other, the need to make familiar what is strange, that motivates the construction of social knowledge (Jovchelovitch, 1996). Thus, otherness, in the sense of engaging outside the self, is constitutive of social representations. However, one could say that there are two sides to otherness: a) a constructive process of engaging with others in the development of self and the development of social knowledge; b) a divisive process that is about the delimitation of 'us' and 'them', in ways that 'otherise' or stigmatise other groups and individuals (Howarth, 2006).

While Moscovici differentiated between modern 'dynamic' social representations and Durkheim's collective representations that function as social facts, there remain today hegemonic forms of knowledge that continue to hold a 'truth status' in that they are rarely challenged. Otherising representations, such as 'race' is an example of a social representation that is heavily naturalised, i.e. when considered as a biological category that can differentiate people (Lott, 2010). Modern forms of 'cultural racism' continue to be based on the rarely challenged assumption that cultures are essentialised (and unalterable) features of different communities (Leach, 2002). Essentialisation is a representational tool that establishes social categories, such as race and culture, as discrete and impermeable (Wagner, Holtz & Kashima, 2009), so that intergroup differences are consequently understood as incompatible (Chryssochoou & Lyons, 2011). Several social representations studies

have highlighted forms of othering through representational processes: for example, on race (Augoustinos & Riggs, 2007; Howarth et al., 2013), immigration (Deaux & Wiley, 2007) and poverty (Chauhan & Foster, 2013). Such representations are often hegemonic (Moscovici, 1988; Howarth, 2011) or belief-based (Marková, 2003). They are based on the 'us-them' thema (Marková, 2003), a fundamental and relatively stable opposition that underpins social representations about social groups. They are harder to change as they have become habitual ways of making sense of social groupings. To put it simply, such representations are prescriptive: they are not easily re-constructed but they are a type of knowledge that is 'passed down' with little opportunity for debate, critique or change.

However, such hegemonic representations do sometimes change, becoming emancipated representations (Moscovici, 1988). In fact, all representations contain the 'seeds of change' insofar as the ability to debate and argue is part of the representational process of human thinking (Billig, 1987; Howarth, 2006). Moreover, although asymmetries in dialogue and recognition help to maintain dominant representations, they are also the starting point for the negotiation of existing knowledge because they create the possibility for debate and contestation (Howarth, Andreouli & Kessi, 2014). It follows that more 'dialogical' contexts are conducive for the development of more 'open', knowledge-based representations (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Emancipated representations reflect more heterogeneous social systems whereby different sub-communities construct different versions of the world (Moscovici, 1988). This is a matter of the possibility of social recognition of different perspectives. While lack of recognition in social relations tends to produce more 'monological' and resistant to change knowledge, in dialogical and inclusive settings, there is the possibility for more emancipatory representations (Philogène, 2001) and the democratic co-construction of knowledge. Howarth and colleagues (2002, 2010; Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson & Sammut, 2013), for example, have shown that children can actively negotiate racialising representations, claim recognition of their perspectives and achieve positive social identities. Bottom-up resistance towards established ways of constructing knowledge about the world, on a smaller-scale local level, can create the possibilities for social change by actually altering the initial context which promotes discrimination and more racialised social relations.

Hence, on the one hand, social representations are prescriptive because they are historical and connected to collective memory and culture in a way that informs people's way of thinking; the more conventional and 'taken for granted' they get, the more resistant to change they become. In this sense, we can see them as a 'given' background context to social relations. On the other hand,

however, social representations are not only structures of meaning but also processes for the construction of new meaning. Through processes of communication and debate in settings that allow dialogue, resistance and innovation, social representations can be reconstructed. Therefore we need to develop a two-directional understanding of the relationship between representations and context: as both the background of social relations and so as mechanism for social stability and also as a process by which social change and so contextual change is possible.

In this paper, we draw on these ideas to discuss anti-discrimination practices in schools. We examine the interplay between essentialising representations of 'us' and 'them' and the development of contestory representations that challenge cultural and racial dictotomies. To do this, we consider the role of context in inhibiting as well as allowing for social change. We examine context in terms of the general societal context, the particular geographical or community context, as well as the very particular context of interactions at school. At the more general societal level, we have broader representations that essentialise difference between 'us' and 'them' (Wagner et al, 2009). Such representations, as shown above, dominate lay thinking about 'race' and culture. At the community or meso level, these representations are appropriated locally (depending on the demographic constitution of the community and the history of social relations) and embedded in local norms of contact, that is, norms that regulate the interaction of different groups. Finally, we consider the micro-context of school interactions. As we will show in some detail, this context is embedded in (and restricted by) the broader societal and more local community representational system that defines norms of contact but also presents the possibility for contesting dominant representations and so actually effecting the local and more general social contexts. Before outlining these three different ways of examining context, we shall now outline the methodology and analysis employed.

2. Methodology and sample

Six schools from the north (Yorkshire) and south of England (London and Sussex) took part in this study in order to capture the dynamics of very different local contexts. We selected schools that were seen as being successful in promoting positive intercultural relations, based on Ofsted reports and on having achieved cultural diversity school awards. Our rationale was to move away from exploring intercultural relations as a potential 'problem' (by focusing on what does not 'work') and instead examine what 'works', i.e. the factors that enhance positive social relations.

We conducted a total of eleven focus groups between April-September 2012 with 72 students (one or two groups in each school). The students were in Years 8, 9 or 10 (12-14 years old). We also

conducted a total of 13 individual interviews with teaching staff who were involved in cultural diversity activities in the schools and with head teachers. The aim of the focus groups and the interviews was to explore general views on and everyday practices relating to cultural diversity and intercultural relations in the school and the local community. We also sought to map out the types of cultural diversity activities that schools organise (within the framework of the formal curriculum, e.g. citizenship education, and other types of extra-curricular activities, e.g. specific school and community events) and the views of students about such events and practices. All the data were thematically analysed with the method of thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

We ensured that the six schools that took part in the study were different in terms of the socio-demographics of the local community and also in terms of the challenges they faced in promoting positive intercultural relations and tackling discrimination. Two of the schools were in South London. Both served areas of significant socio-economic disadvantage and both had a majority of ethnic minority students, predominantly Black from Caribbean and African background. The two schools were also both Christian and high achieving. In West Yorkshire, we selected three schools, two from an urban location and one from a more rural area. All schools were good or average in terms of student achievement and all served socio-economically disadvantaged families (e.g. the number of students eligible for free school meals were above average). All three schools served White British and Asian British students (predominantly from Pakistani heritage), with an increasing number of East European students in one of the schools. Reflecting a strongly segregated local context, the schools in the area were somewhat divided into schools that mostly serve White British students and schools that predominantly serve Asian British students. Finally, we included in our study a school from rural East Sussex which was assessed as good in terms of student achievement. This school was predominantly White British, with a very small number of ethnic minority students, and served a socio-economically advantaged area.

3. Findings

Below we present our findings on the three levels outlined above: broader societal context, local community context and school context. We show that schools in their efforts to tackle discrimination deal with challenges on both a societal and a community level, as social representations that circulate in the society at large become appropriated into particular communities, taking the form of local norms and practices that regulate inter-cultural relations. Therefore, in order for school-level initiatives to be successful, they need to be placed in their

macro, meso and micro contexts. Efforts to tackle discrimination should be located on all three levels.

3.1 The societal context: Broader societal-level challenges for tackling discrimination

When social scientists discuss context they often mean the broader societal and ideological context of systems of knowledge, social categorisation and identification. This includes hegemonic representations that racialise and essentialise difference – and so support systems of discrimination. Such representations were evident in all the schools we visited, such as this one in London:

> Kainda[1]: One time I walked into a shop, this is like in the summer time, so I was a bit darker and my friend was like really, really white. And we walked into this shop together and they started to follow us and then when we separated they started to follow me, not my friend. They didn't worry about her, just me. And like they normally follow the black people and then when the black people say "why are you following me?" they kick you out the store. (London, Year 9)

> Saad: I think they stereotype. Like for example Islam, if one person is a terrorist doesn't mean all of us are. So they just stereotype just based on one person, so I think they should look at everyone, not just judge one person. (Yorkshire, Year 10)

In their general interactions, at school, on public transport, in shops, on the street, students such as these are aware that there are representations of different cultural, ethnic or religious groups that have real consequences for their social interactions, relationships and identities. Some of them, such as Kainda who looks Black and whose heritage is mixed, feel targeted by representations that link blackness and criminality (see also, Howarth, 2002; Hall, 1996). Similarly Saad discusses the impact of Islamophobia and racism against people of Asian and/or Muslim descent on their everyday lives. In these ways we see that an ideology of difference produces an 'us/them' binary, situates minoritised groups as threatening and criminal and simultaneously makes them the target of racist attack. Hence difference is generally essentialised in an 'us-them' framework that constructs rigid boundaries between cultures, collapses religious and cultural difference, and locates difference as being foreign or a long way away – such as London for non-Londoners, as we see below, or countries overseas such as Mexico.

> Henry: I went up to London in year five on a school council trip to Tower Hamlets. And I went into a school which there were mostly children from the Hindu religion. And it, it's quite hard to settle in if you know what I mean, because you're like – you're the – you're sort of

[1] Names of the participants have been anonymised. We use here pseudonyms.

like the only one from that religion in a different like school where many people are from the same religion. …

Eleni: How was it different? In what ways was it different?

Henry: Well, like down in our area, like mostly like people are English, so it's like you sort of like fit in better. But like when I went to London, it wasn't – it was just like hard – not hard to settle in, but like it was – it was…

Eleni: It wasn't what you expected?

Henry: No, it was like– it was like hard – not hard to make friends, but like it would have been harder to make friends up there than it was down here and so it's because like people from different religions, you don't want to disrespect what they normally do, so you don't want to like say anything which might disrespect what they do in their normal lives. (Sussex, Year 8)

Such hegemonic representations of 'us' and 'them' as distinctly different and unrelated to one another have been prevalent in Britain for many years. They are hard to change as they are embedded in both everyday ways of thinking and acting and in institutionalised educational practices (Howarth, 2004). As the extracts above show, these representations mediate social relations. For example, in Kainda's extract we see that otherising representations of black youth create tension between the police and these young people. Also in Henry's extract we see that the perceived divergence between Hindu and Christian ways of life limits the quality of contact between Hindu and Christian pupils to the extent that ordinary everyday interactions are seen as inherently problematic or conflictual.

In this section, we have shown examples of hegemonic representations regarding race and cultural difference. Although such representations are also challenged by ideas that stress tolerance and respect (as our data also show), they are still very much dominant. These broader hegemonic representations of difference filter into constructions of difference in particular areas or communities. These representations are not then simply located on an abstract societal level. They are appropriated in real community and micro-contexts of social interaction. Hence there is a connection between the broader societal context of hegemonic representations and the spatial aspects of local communities, as we now turn to.

3.2 The community context: local challenges for tackling discrimination

The hegemonic representations of cultural otherness described above were appropriated in different ways in each geographic context that we studied. In West Yorkshire, the most important issue the schools faced in their efforts to tackle discrimination was the physical segregation and intergroup tension in the local community. Here essentalising representations of difference create and support an almost visible 'line' between White British and Asian British cultures.

> Geoffrey: You know, where I come from there is like a visible line between where the white people live and where the Asian people live. Well, some Asians live in the bit where most of the white people live in, some white people live in the bit where most Asian people live. It is really like, it's like a line. (Yorkshire, Year 8)

This issue was mentioned by all participants (teachers and students) in that area. We see that broader dichotomising representations of 'us' and 'them' are expressed in a very material way in this local community. The essentialisation of cultural difference translates into practices of physical segregation. The local community was often described by students as being strictly divided into two 'territories': the white British and the Asian British communities. Hence there is a very harsh reality to social construction of difference and in this context it translates into divided neighbourhoods and a physical geography of segregation, social exclusion and discrimination, as Ken, Richard and Shin discuss.

> Ken: But if I went to (a particular neighbourhood) and I were walking past a group of Asians then you might feel more uncomfortable and try and cross the street 'cause you don't know if you're gonna walk past something like that, you know, they'll fight you or something.
> Eleni: They don't respect you?
> Richard: No.
> Ken: They might not respect you for being 'cause they think that, that that's their area and we've gotta stay in our area and they've gotta stay in their area.
> Shin: So it's territories.
> Ken: Yeah it is real weird, it's very stupid yeah.
> Richard: It's like you're trespassing. (Yorkshire, Year 8)

The challenge for teachers in this area is to ensure that their students generally get on, despite their sense that there is a disconnect between the values of tolerance and intercultural respect that they try to teach and the reality of divided communities, racism and tension outside of the school grounds in the local community. Everyday, habitual forms of racialised contact and segregation can be very hard to change (see Dixon, Durrheim & Tredoux, 2005) despite efforts by schools.

> Head teacher: And we cannot change people's perceptions out there. This is an area where there are very strong views on people that aren't white British. If you walk around some of the houses around there you would see Union Jack flags, you would say British National Party stickers and things like that. (Yorkshire)

Hence for some schools, change beyond the school community can be seen as difficult if not impossible. But each school has a different set of issues and representations of difference to tackle,

and these are very much linked to the particular local context of the school. What we have seen so far is that for some schools in Yorkshire, the challenges are the almost concrete divisions between Asian and White British communities. Regarding South London, as mentioned previously, these schools were in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. In this context, race and class created a double stigmatisation that hindered positive intercultural relations. Stereotyping against the Black local community as criminal and underachieving was the most evident problem that schools had to tackle in their efforts to promote anti-racist education and create inclusive school communities. As we saw above, black students recognise that they are sometimes seen as criminal and being routinely targeted by the authorities. The following extracts show the local, spatial dimension of these hegemonic representations. They show how dominant representations of race and class are objectified in ideas around gang crime and are embedded in representations of place – here South London local communities.

> Sofia: I live in Stockwell and like when I say that I live in Stockwell most people get scared because they've heard things about how there's gangs in Stockwell and all the crimes that have gone in Stockwell but I don't think it's like a bad area because normally it's quite safe but then like some people just turn up at the wrong time and they get caught up in a bad situation. But there's nothing wrong with Stockwell because in other places it's much worst. Like in Hackney. (London, Year 9)

> Head teacher: Because I think there are lot of people genuinely around here living in fear and I think therefore people become entrenched because there is stereotype. So, you know, every young 17 year old black boy is now gang member… they are all considered to be violent and revengeful and I think that's the big problem. (London)

Finally in East Sussex, the biggest local challenge reported by teachers and students was the lack of ethno-cultural diversity in the local community. This meant that students had little knowledge of and contact with 'cultural others'. As such, multiculturalism was considered as largely irrelevant for them, which led to the perpetuation of representations about 'cultural' others as distant and 'different'.

> Eleni: What do you think people here think about multiculturalism?
> Megan: I don't think they really do think about it.
> Tyler: People round here don't really think about it, so there's not that many different ethnic groups around here, so it's not a big part of their lives. (Sussex, Year 8)

> Teacher: I think some children that perhaps are in towns have more experience, personal experience. I mean, obviously they all learn about it here. But to be in such a rural area, I don't think some of the children really are that aware of different, diverse communities.

> You know, especially children that have grown up in the sticks, I notice that perhaps they don't have such an opinion on it really. Some of the younger ones have potentially quite an immature opinion on things. When we get to key stage 4, they have built what they really believe. But generally I don't think I've had anything that is a negative opinion towards, you know, diverse communities. (Sussex)

In this section, we have shown how hegemonic representations about difference (which can be found at a broader societal level) are anchored into specific local contexts. In Yorkshire, stigmatising representations about Islam and Asian British communities are expressed in terms of the local politics of space and 'postcode wars'. Such divisions in the local community become a great challenge for schools that try to promote community and respect. In South London, stigmatising representations about blackness and gang crime create an atmosphere where young black students are expected to be marginalised academically and socially. In East Sussex the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' was perpetuated and strengthened by exoticising cultural difference as something located far away and thus as irrelevant to the local community.

3.3 The school context: developing emancipatory representations against discrimination

Schools have been conceptualised as 'micropublic' spaces of interaction and intercultural engagement (Amin, 2002). They are a site where the 'local micropolitics of everyday interaction' (Vertovec 2007, p. 1046) take place and as such, they constitute the third layer of context studied in this paper. In parts 3.1 and 3.2 we have described challenges for schools at the local and broader societal level. Here we discuss how schools cope with and try to overcome these challenges, in other words, their efforts to protect their pupils against discrimination and so produce some social change at the local or societal level more generally. Indeed, for the most part, the schools' ethos and their practices were not just about what happens in the school (e.g. anti-racism school policies and practices that promote intercultural contact within the school) but also about connecting with the local community (through cultural events, engaging with parents and community leaders for example) and trying to challenge stigma and racialization on a broader societal level.

Particularly following the Crick report (1998), schools in England have been expected to address issues of cultural diversity though citizenship education and other activities within and outside the official curriculum. In the schools that we visited such activities were often formalised, for example annual cultural diversity events often in 'black history month' where parents and the community would be invited and students would explain something about their inherited culture or country of origin, wear their national dress, bring food from their country of origin and so forth. Other activities were part of the curriculum, for example school projects as part of a geography or religious

education class – such as visiting a mosque or a church. Other school practices were more informal and subtle, being more about the overall ethos of the school or the manner of interacting with students in the classroom. The aims of these activities varied within and across the schools.

In attempts to develop more inclusive practices within the school, school activities aimed to create a more inclusive and tolerant school community that allows for intercultural contact, as this teacher describes.

> Teacher: …what used to happen before is we used to have separate faith assemblies, so say it was Tuesday, every Tuesday all the Muslim kids would have a faith assembly on Islam, the Christian kids would go off and have an assembly on Christianity, the Hindu kids would go off and I personally was against that because I said, we're not working together, we're actually segregating, and I said, a lot of our kids who are Muslim go to the mosque on a night so they're getting their Islam from the mosques, the Christian kids go to church, so they're getting their Christianity from the church and I said, as a school, I would actually really like it, if we had everybody together and we just did an assembly on morals, on all faiths, and we invited everybody into it together. (Yorkshire)

The schools we visited also tried to engage directly with parents and with the local community in general. Again there is range in these kinds of activities, from offering English classes to parents to holding 'coffee mornings' where parents can become familiar with the school and the staff. Very often schools organise 'cultural diversity' events where the local community is invited. Such events mainly aim to enhance cultural awareness and celebrate diversity. In Yorkshire this was a key objective in light of high levels of segregation in the locality.

> Head teacher: For example, on Saturday, I was watching our gypsy Roma pupils doing gypsy dancing for the benefit of our community. [part omitted] when we opened our doors and let anybody into our mailer event, what you saw was a real mixing of the community with people who lived in the area who just wandered along to see what was happening and had no particular contact with the school other than it's nearby. And we had very very committed families and people who wanted to see a little bit more. We got police officers who do the beat around here who came to see what was happening to gain more knowledge of what was happening in their community. (Yorkshire)

Positive affirmation of minoritised cultures, such as the one above, was a common approach that schools adopted for tackling discrimination. However, there is a fine line between empowering students and making them feel secure in their identity, and targeting them as 'others'. This is the danger of celebratory activities that actually perpetuate representations of difference because they maintain distance between self and other instead of exploring interconnectedness (as we have

argued elsewhere, Andreouli, Howarth & Sonn, 2014). From a social representations perspective, it is not just cultural awareness and celebration of otherness that can create dialogue, but also the possibility for reflection on perceived difference and similarity.

A strategy that some schools adopted was to encourage critical and reflective thinking about difference. In line with what the theory of social representations suggests, this can allow students to develop more open and dialogical knowledge about 'others'. In the extract that follows, the invisible, taken-for-granted alignment of Britishness and whiteness is interrogated and reflected upon in a class discussion initiated by a black student. This creates a rupture in dominant understandings of Britishness that can potentially allow for the development of new, more inclusive (if sometimes challenging) representations of Britishness.

> Teacher:… in the debate we had about Britishness it led to some very passionate discussions and debate about, you know, what it meant to be British … Some people were actually shocked that that person didn't see themselves as British; 'well you're one of us, Emmanuel!' 'Yeah, but I don't feel it'. And Emmanuel's a very tall black boy, very good at football; he's now got a placement with Sheffield. So he … you know he's very cool, very much the boys wanna be him, black is always seen actually as quite social in the hierarchy scene – as a quite cool colour to be, if you like. But for him then to turn round to the people who he's been friends with for five years and say 'well actually no, sometimes the things you say insult me, sometimes the views you have of other groups hurt my feelings' and they were like open mouthed in shock and it was a really interesting process. (Yorkshire)

The extract above shows that giving voice to normally marginalised perspectives can pave the way for processes of re-presentation. This can allow for constructing emancipatory representations that resist prejudice and racialization and promote hybrid identities and intercultural dialogue. The example above as well as the one that follows represent efforts to change the broader societal context of stigmatising representations. Below we see how re-imagining British history in more inclusive ways can help achieve this aim.

> Head teacher: For example when it is Remembrance on the 11th November, now you see people would say once again that it is important that they all remember this because it is important to recognise how much sacrifice in Britain went on and that is true. But at the same time we do it from a much more multi- effort, so we actually, you know, we have stories from the West Indian or Caribbean servicemen who came over to fight. We look at, you know, Italy where there are huge numbers of graves of Indian fighters. And trying to recognise this is everybody's history… therefore it becomes shared experiences as well. (London)

Creating cultural awareness (of different religious cultures or the Roma community – as above) is therefore very different from inviting critical and transformative knowledge (as in the two extracts above) and so challenging representations of difference. Encouraging critical reflection and participation can help create more emancipatory knowledge and challenge the racialised local and societal context. For example one of the schools in Yorkshire placed much emphasis on citizenship and helping students develop into engaged members of their community.

> Teacher: So it's been a journey, the kids are brilliant but they face enormous difficulties and barriers to their learning and we're facing that each day and each year we're making progress in terms of overcoming these barriers – not in terms of just students coming out the end with some worthwhile exams, but in terms of them coming out with a different attitude towards education, a different attitude towards what they can get out of life and try and make them see that they fit into a broader and wider picture than just their locality; that they were part of a wider world or wider community and to try and equip them with skills that a modern 21st century citizen of the world needs. (Yorkshire)

However, in trying to adopt a more holistic approach to tackling prejudice and the marginalisation of children seen as 'cultural others', schools are constrained by contextual factors: hegemonic racialising representations and by the politics of local intercultural relations. Schools in other words, need to fight battles in different fronts, and recognise the different challenges in different contexts, as one of the head teachers aptly puts it:

> Head teacher: We've got our political masters who appear to be seeing a very narrow view of what education is about. So education is about standards and it is about attainment and it is about, you know, helping young people to make the progress that they can, the best progress that they can make. I absolutely agree with that, but it is not just about that, it is about people and it's about, about society and if you, if you don't have balance then I guess the anxiety is, is that you are going to create a two tier system. So schools working in the most challenging circumstances such as ours are constantly fighting battles on lots of fronts really. So I, I think, I don't think we're gonna address the issues fundamentally of multiculturalism until we have addressed the issues around social deprivation. (Yorkshire)

Hence, we need to place schools in their local and socio-political context – and so connect the contexts of schools, communities and the broader ideological representations in society. Concerted efforts that connect these three layers to context – and so involve schools, the local community and the society at large need to be developed to help schools develop emancipatory activities against discrimination – which, may actually come to transform the contexts in which schools are located.

Discussion: Beyond best practice: Towards a more contextual approach to tackling discrimination

Schools are a key site for socialisation. They are the primary institution established to prepare and integrate young people into the wider society. What is more, it is in schools that young people first encounter the 'other' and engage with cultural difference. As such, schools have the potential to bring about social change and it is thus essential that they develop appropriate practices that promote positive intercultural relations.

We have seen that the schools in our study engaged in a range of different activities but that these projects reflected the different local challenges that these schools faced. On the one hand, activities that focused less on difference and more on exploring interconnections between diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnicities seemed to be more easily organised in the London schools where a degree of 'convivial multiculturalism' (Gilroy, 2004) has developed and intercultural relations are interwoven into the fabric of daily life to a greater degree than in other parts of England. On the other hand, in East Sussex, the local area and the school were quite ethnically homogeneous, so seeking to enhance awareness about ethno-cultural difference (and so emphasising difference) was seen to be more appropriate by teachers in that context. Similarly, in West Yorkshire, in an area characterised by segregation and intergroup tensions, creating the opportunities for intercultural contact was much more urgent from the perspective of many of the teaching staff. While some research has already discussed some of the potential unintentional and undesirable consequences of practices that focus on difference, i.e. exoticising and perpetuating essentialised difference (Andreouli, Howarth & Sonn, 2014; see also Schofield, 2004, 2009), we show here that these practices often reflect local norms (from the local context) and broader representations that mediate intercultural encounters (from the broader societal context).

We acknowledge that we did start this research on how schools may support children vulnerable to discrimination with an awareness that contextual features would be part of any explanation. We sought out schools in very different contexts – from the monocultural schools of predominantly white and middle-class rural Sussex, to the intense multiculturalism of South London, to the divided communities of Yorkshire. Our analysis highlights some important lessons about context: 1) it is important to be clear about which aspects of context are relevant to programmes of change and how these aspects interconnect (here we have discussed societal, geographic and school contexts), 2) different geographic contexts bring quite different challenges into the context of school which means that different strategies are needed in these different contexts and 3) any program of social change or emancipation needs to engage across all three layers of context. Hence claims to 'best

practice' need to be located within particular contexts and attempts to transfer lessons from one context to another need to be treated with great care.

Different contexts require quite different educational strategies for positive social change and encouraging more emancipatory representations. In other words, there is not one, single 'best practice'. While on the one hand, hegemonic representations (Moscovici, 1988) that essentialise difference are present in all contexts we studied, these are translated through different histories and politics of intergroup contact in different local communities. In other words, schools face quite different challenges. For example, in Yorkshire the separation of local communities in terms of race and religion led some teachers to create inclusive faith assemblies where there is space for the expression, celebration and possibility interconnections between different religions. Similarly, a lack of cultural awareness can be a real problem in some contexts. In these cases cultural awareness activities may be well placed, although as we argued here schools need to be careful not to essentialise difference through such awareness and celebratory activities (see also Andreouli, Howarth & Sonn, 2014). Our data show that critical reflection and engagement with otherness, on the one hand, and empowerment/recognition of minoritised identities, on the other hand, is a good starting point for schools. Such recognition and engagement can promote dialogue and therefore allow for more emancipatory representations, forms of knowledge and forms of knowledge production. Schools can also take lessons from other local schools which have shown to be successful in reducing prejudice in similar contexts.

What is clear across the different schools we worked in is that problems in schools relating to discrimination and exclusion have their roots and consequences far beyond the school gates (Crozier & Davies, 2008; Gorski 2008). Therefore tackling discrimination and exclusion cannot be seen as solely the responsibility of teachers but needs to include local and national government initiatives in order to engage with the complexity of the social context that creates and shapes these problems. This is one of the main insights from our data: hegemonic representations of difference (layer one) and local contextual constraints (layer two) are sometimes too strong for schools (layer three) to overcome. In cases where schools seem to be more successful it is partly because they have fewer challenges; it is easier, for example, to promote multicultural values in London than in Yorkshire, as the local community defines itself through multicultural practices.

Hence educational development programmes need to start within an appreciation of context (Gorski, 2008) – in all its different forms and ensure that 'best practice' models are located in

particular contexts and address localised issues and challenges. This is very much the lesson of Social Psychology and a social representations approach in particular: knowledge processes, possibilities for dialogue and exchange and the experiences of inclusion and exclusion are shaped by but also *come to shape* the contexts in which they develop (see also Jovchelovitch, 2007). There are important insights in this approach that allow us not only to understand the context at play and the contextual challenges relevant, but also that there is the possibility to *change the context* itself. Hence it is important to challenge one-dimensional accounts of context – where context appears more as a backdrop; what social research should do, we suggest, is take context seriously by showing how contexts can and do change. For individual schools and teachers, this is a more ambitious and demanding agenda that asks the question how do schools change discriminatory and exclusionary local and societal contexts (Banks, 2006). However, we need to be cautious here, the role of schools does and should extend beyond the school itself, but we would not argue that schools bear the burden of responsibility for reducing discrimination and for solving such societal problems on their own. This would absolve governments and other social institutions of privilege from their part in maintaining unequal and unjust social relations and the ideologies that support them and also be very close to a conservative politics that asks citizens to fix their own problems. Therefore we need to develop a two-directional understanding of the relationship between representations and context: as both the background of social relations and so as mechanism for social stability and also as means by which social change and so contextual change is possible.

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