

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

0123

K1 | Beaumaris Lounge

Chaired by Helen Walkington

Thu 12 Dec 2019

11:30 - 12:00

Is Geography for Me? Evaluating the impact of a pilot widening participation intervention aimed to encourage Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) participants to consider studying geography at The University of Manchester.

Danielle C. Chavrimootoo¹

¹*Kingston University, Kingston-upon-Thames, United Kingdom*

Research Domain: Access and widening participation (AWP)

Abstract: The intervention was designed to enthuse participants to consider studying geography at The University of Manchester. The intervention included culturally relevant content and, culturally responsive teaching approaches delivered by a majority BAME project team. The study adopted a participatory action research approach and, four major themes emerged from research data, perceptions of geography, experiences of geography, how geography relates to ethnic identity and, understanding geography at university. Participants felt that teaching and learning strategies need to be engaging, interactive and culturally relevant in order to attract more BAME participants to study geography at university. The post intervention feedback confirmed pupils had developed an interest in the subject and were surprised at the type of jobs accessible if you studied geography. Recommendations include pre-GCSE entry engagement through school outreach and community work to influence family aspirations and knowledge of careers in geography to assess if this results in more BAME applications

Paper: There has also been “a long recognition that the discipline of geography needs to be more gender, racial and class diverse in a range of contexts (McIlwaine and Bunge 2018 p 1). Debates around the need to diversify geography have gathered momentum most recently as the “need to decolonise and engender geography and geographical knowledge’s are now firmly on the agenda” (Radcliffe 2017 cited in Mcilwaine & Bunge 2018 p.1). Simultaneously, the lack of diversity concerning geography academics and students appear to be a longstanding concern. As “British geography is characterised by its whiteness among academic staff and, undergraduate students; decolonising geography socially and institutionally is hence an uphill struggle to confront and dismantle the ‘unbearable whiteness of geography” (Derickson 2017, p. 236). As are approaches in learning and teaching in higher education geography are continually shaped by and perpetuate racism (Daigle & Sunberg, 2017; Jackson, 1989; Kalapula, 1984; Kobaya-shi 1999 cited in Esson 2018). The whiteness of the discipline is well acknowledged whiteness within the subject has been the proliferation of white geographies (Esson 2018).

Currently the percentage of BAME students studying on full-time undergraduate geography programmes nationally which is around 7 per cent (Desai, 2017). Worrying low numbers of BAME staff employed in geography account for 4.3 per cent of UK geography academics (Desai, 2017). Furthermore, the lack of ethnic diversity in the staff and student population has ‘implications for who produces geographical knowledge and how it circulates’ (Esson 2018, p2). The Royal Geographical Society (RGS) widely acknowledges the challenges for the discipline in the areas of gender equality and ethnic diversity across all roles and especially Senior Management (RGS 2016). However, there has been limited progress to diversify the student and staff population despite the RGS recruiting a number of BAME Ambassadors. Whilst the University of Manchester has pledged in its access agreement approved by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) to enhance its outreach activities applications to study geography continue to be dominated by white, middle-class applicants. BAME new starters on the BA and BSC geography programmes at the university in 2014/15 accounted for 9 per cent and 11.1 per cent respectively and numbers have steadily increased since 2012/13 (The University of Manchester). The relative lack of BAME geography undergraduates impacts on the supply of graduates who choose to go on to teach geography in the compulsory educational sector. BAME Secondary educators are disproportionately underrepresented in teaching (Guardian 2016). It is important that the teaching profession increases BAME role models to influence and inspire the next generation (Business in the Community Report, 2010). Whilst geography continually fails to attract BAME students this paper aims to evaluate the impact of a specific targeted intervention. It will additionally consider if culturally responsive strategies enhance BAME pupil perceptions and experiences of potentially studying geography at university? Conducting this project enabled the researcher to directly engage with BAME school pupils and gain in-depth accounts of their perceptions and experiences of studying geography. No previous study has evaluated a range of targeted widening participation interventions designed to attempt target BAME applicants to study geography. Developing an understanding of BAME pupil perceptions of geography will inform universities widening participation activities and schools to effectively promote the subject to BAME students. The project aims to understand if culturally responsive teaching engages BAME students.

The following research questions were addressed;

1. What are a group of BAME participants perceptions and experiences of geography prior to the intervention?
2. How has this changed following accessing the interventions?
3. Does culturally responsive content and teaching influence BAME

The research project had two overarching aims, firstly, to capture BAME participants perceptions and experiences of studying geography and secondly to evaluate if their perceptions of geography had changed after accessing the intervention. Thirdly, the research sought to understand if employing culturally responsive strategies engaged BAME participants. A pre-intervention focus group was held to gather data on participants perceptions and experiences of geography at school. The post intervention focus group provided participants the opportunity to reflect and evaluate the impact of the interventions and if their perceptions of studying geography had changed. This was employed to gain an understanding if the intervention had made an impact on participant’s perceptions of studying geography. A short post intervention questionnaire was used to evaluate the participant’s

experiences of engaging in the interventions. Evaluation of the post intervention focus group data and questionnaire included reflections on the challenges and solutions which were encountered during the project and what practical strategies could improve the student learning experience within the widening participation interventions.

Participants were asked about they liked about the subject, and to specifically think about how this differed from other subjects. One participant spoke of the enjoyment of the factual nature of geography, *"I like geography because, unlike maths, there's no wrong answer it's mostly facts"*. A number of participants enjoyed the outdoor nature of the subject and, spoke of the experiential aspects of learning geography. *"Like when we went to Wales in September. We went in rivers and learnt about erosion and stuff like that"*. *"You get to explore geography is about outdoors, whereas another participant agreed about exploring the outdoors but did not experience this in practice. "I've just done it indoors and it's not the same. But if you go out and experience it, it makes it a whole lot better"*. The lack of experiential outdoor learning concerned participants and this may have impacted on their motivation. Motivated behaviour is higher when students find the task and/or subject domain important, interesting, and useful," (Kumar et al 2018, p.82).

Further analysis of the post intervention feedback suggest participants had gained a deeper understanding of geography and had an insight into the possibilities of studying geography at university. What was also evident is that participation and pupil engagement with the activities was high, through observations and feedback from teachers who accompanied pupils on campus. Focusing on identity and culture and, utilising culturally responsive teaching strategies worked well with this diverse group of pupils.

Derickson K. (2017) UUrban geography in the age of Ferguson Progress in Human Geography. Urban geography II: Vol, 41 230–44.

Desai, V. (2017) 'Black and minority ethnic (BME) student and staff in contemporary British geography', Royal Geographical Association. Vol 49, (3) 320–323.

Esson, J., Last, A. and RACE Working Group., 2018. Learning and teaching about race and racism in geography. IN: Walkington, H., Hill, J. and Dwyer, S. (eds.) The Guardian: BAME Teachers are still marginalised in a system that refuses to change. [online] Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2018/mar/20/fight-bame-teachers-senior-positions-diversity> [Accessed 27 November 2018].

Kumar, R. Zusho, A. & Bondie, R. (2018) Weaving Cultural Relevance and Achievement Motivation Into Inclusive Classroom Cultures, Educational Psychologist, Vol 53 (2), pp.78-96.

McLaughlin, Juliana M. and Whatman, Sue L. (2007) embedding indigenous perspectives in university teaching and learning: lessons learnt and possibilities of reforming / decolonising curriculum. In Proceedings 4th International Conference on Indigenous Education: Asia/ Pacific, Vancouver, Canada

Radcliffe, S. (2017) Decolonising Geographical Knowledges. The Royal Geographical Society. Vol 39, 329-333.