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Identity, Learning, and National Narratives:
A qualitative review of how a pupil's ethnic, racial
and/or national identity impacts learning perceptions

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Abstract

In a country as heterogeneous as England, where growing migration is creating a patchwork of diversity in primary schools, understanding how children's identity impacts their learning can be pivotal to understanding how best to nurture acculturation between groups. Already, research has shown that national, ethnic and racial identities and associated stereotypes can impact learning. How such identities impact pupils' perspectives on their learning remains to be fully understood. As a theoretical study, this article aims to make a case for why researching identity formation during the primary years is integral to understanding national cohesion. This theoretical qualitative case study would interview a diverse Year 4 class in a Church of England School. Analyses of the interviews would be done through transcription and coding to pull out emergent trends which may indicate a parallel between pupil perspectives on learning and their identity. This article concludes that the impact of such identity research may lead to a better understanding of how cohesive identity forms amongst a diverse population. The outcome of this research may contribute to a broader understanding of acculturation within heterogeneous societies. Additionally, it may support - or oppose - efforts by governments to create a cohesive national identity on the primary level. Future research on this subject must include interviewing a broad selection of primary-aged pupils in order to obtain a well-rounded overview of pupils' learning perspectives and identity.

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Introduction

A pile of paper cubes - found at the back of a year 4 classroom - carefully coloured in and drawn on to represent the artist, reflects more than just a simple, artistic task. Drawings on the outside show the colourful and diverse reality of the 27-pupil classroom while writing, haphazardly scrawled inside the cubes, paint a story of yet-to-be-realised conflicting identities. 'I am a Muslim', reads one. 'I am from Pakistan' reads another. Understanding who one is, is a life-long process. Beginning in early childhood, individuals learn from early on how to define themselves. When living in a multi-ethnic and heterogeneous society, one's ability to define themselves takes on a new meaning. Identity is not just something created internally, but it is also bestowed on someone through external factors and influences. Children learn early on that racial, ethnic and national group membership is a defining factor of their 'self'.

These sentiments scribbled on the paper cubes appear to juxtapose that which the school perpetuates. A Church of England School whose walls are littered with crosses, paraphrased, biblical revelations, and descriptors of 'British Values'. The diversity of this student body mirrors the growing reality of England: an increase of immigration means an increase in diversity. Already, schools are being confronted with how to best support students whose identities appear to conflict with or contradict the 'English norms' established over the past century.

Globalisation has created a political climate rife with division as well as unity. Increased migration has increased racial, ethnic, and religious tensions while simultaneously creating an opportunity for multicultural cooperation and growth. As globalisation plays an increasing role in the lives of everyday people, understanding the impact this development may have on the population is vital for establishing a cohesive nation.

How then does a country, known for its ethnic, racial and religious heterogeneity, create a cohesive identity that could withstand protectionist and tribalist ideologies all while maintaining an inclusive space for their growing population? Some nations turn to education as a way of answering this conundrum. By integrating individuals early on in their life, it is believed that societies can grow to be more cohesive. For children who come from minority backgrounds and are faced daily with national narratives of the majority population, these sentiments could have unforeseen consequences.

In a country as heterogeneous as England, where growing migration is creating a patchwork of diversity in primary schools, understanding how children perceive themselves and their peers can be pivotal to understanding how best to nurture acculturation between groups. This essay breaks down how to research the role of ethnic, racial and national identity in how a child perceives their learning. The research outlined in this proposal would conduct semi-structured interviews with a diverse class of 27 Year 4 students. It would attempt to answer whether ethnic, racial and/or national identity plays a role in a pupil's perspective on their learning. Along with how children of minority ethnic or racial categories may perceive their learning in relation to their peers of white, English and/or British origin.

Literature Review

Given the broad scope of this research, the literature review will be broken down into subcategories. This is to help with identification of themes which this research covers.

What is Identity?

The ability to ask oneself 'Who am I?', makes one undeniably human. What informs the answer is a conglomeration of personal experiences, internal and external influences, and social factors. Researchers looking at the 'I' often attempt to unpick the concept of 'identity' and the various factors which determine its form. Identity "receives a focus" in childhood when the "child learns its name" (Rouse, 1988, p.22). The use of a name, adopted long before any "subjective inwardness" is developed, is what Mead (1974, as cited in Rouse, 1988, p.22) coins the 'Social Me'. "The 'Social Me' is a structure of attitudes learned from others", it is only in reaction to the social me, that the 'I' appears (Rouse, 1988, p.22). Once an 'I' has been established and understood, identity can be formed and moulded along societal labels.

Within the research on identity formation, there are two broad categories. The psychogenetic paradigm postulates that identity forms from the inside out, it is "self-created and self-realised" (Levitan & Carr-Chellman, 2018, p.143). The sociogenetic perspective on the other hand argues that identity is a "socially constructed phenomenon" whereby identity develops externally before being internalised (p.143). The sociogenetic perspective draws on the work of Henri Tajfel (1970) whose Social Identity Theory informs current research on identity in society.

Social Identity is an individual's self-image which has been created and influenced by social groups which the individual belongs to (Bliuc et al., 2011). Strong emotional attachments are subsequently formed, whereby the individual associates strongly with their group or category (Bliuc et al., 2011). Social Identity Theory places identity within a social frame. Individuals self-classify themselves based on the archetypal characteristics of group members (Dean & Jolly, 2012); they are then inclined to perceive their group in a positive light in relation to other groups (Tajfel, 1970). Individuals are able to take on multiple different identities through various group memberships, each with their own "values, goals, demands and norms" (Dean & Jolly, 2012, p.233). This research will use Social Identity Theory to inform its definition of identity. It acknowledges that identity can be both socially created and internalised, while assuming that individuals perceive themselves - and other group members - idealistically. This helps to inform how ethnic, racial, and national identity may impact a pupil's perspective on themselves and subsequently their learning.

While research on identity is ongoing, there is a general consensus that this type of research occurs in a vacuum. It often comes across as "disjointed from the world", with greater disconnect when identity research concerns children (Scherer, 2016, p.392). Scherer determines that it may not be "possible to map concepts theorised in relation to adults onto the child, nor onto the ways the child is produced and produces themself as a social actor" (p.392). And while research involving children has a long tradition, the "actual involvement" of children in the research process has been lacking (Kutrovátz, 2017, p.66). It is clear that in research on identity children are rarely considered "distinct social actors" (Scherer, 2016, p.391). Therefore, defining a theory on identity which has the child as the focus is quite difficult.

Research looking at the study of identities has noted that identity is multifaceted (Ross, 2007), elastic, and - to some researchers - meaningless (Jamieson, 2002). Young people, it has been argued, tend to reject attempts to categorise themselves based on their identities (Widdicombe & Woofitt, 1995, as

cited in Grever et al., 2008). Given that identities come about in early childhood (Rouse, 1988) and morph throughout lives to fit an individual's social group (Bliuc et al., 2011), it is no surprise then that youth refrain from static identifiers. However, research on racial preference amongst children has shown that preferences for one's own racial group emerge in infancy (Kelly et al., 2005).

While all children form their identity throughout their early years, children of colour are often forced to develop an identity that is grounded in their group membership (Iruka et al., 2021). Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) determine that identity is influenced by minority children's identification with, preference of, attitude towards, and orientation towards their group. These are defined more fully below (adapted from Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990):

1. Racial and Ethnic Identification - Identifying oneself as being a part of a racial or ethnic group

2. Racial and Ethnic Preferences - Having positive feelings towards one's racial and ethnic group

3. Racial and Ethnic Attitudes - Understanding the stereotypes of a particular group within society

4. Reference Group Orientation - Indicates how children who are racially or ethnically diverse determine their identity vis-à-vis their ethnic-racial group.

For the purpose of this study, focus will be given to Reference Group Orientation to allow for children to self-identify without being externally classified. Due to the sensitive nature of children and their development, preferences, attitudes, and orientations will not be mentioned unless brought up by the children themselves.

Understanding Ethnic, Racial, Religious and National Identity

Nationhood as an identity is becoming a progressively salient form of identification, particularly amongst Western nations. In addition to national identity, ethnic, racial and religious identity continue to play a prevalent role in how people identify themselves, particularly in minority and migrant populations (Grever et al., 2008). Due to the strength of these identifiers, forging a sense of national identity amongst a heterogeneous population, such as that of England, is not a clear-cut process (Grotenhuis, 2016). Some minority populations can perceive the attempt to create a national identity as threatening as it may appear to impede existing networks that they rely on (Grotenhuis, 2016). Therefore, defining a cohesive national identity can unintentionally harm minority and migrant populations especially when states attempt to define themselves in relation to other states.

By positioning itself in relation to other states, a nation is able to create imaginative boundaries which define an 'us' and a 'them' (Gürsel, 2018). According to Benedict Anderson (1983/2016), nations and nationhood are imagined communities. These communities exist solely in the minds of the population, as nations are too large for personal and individual relationships to exist between all members. Therefore, it is necessary for individuals to see themselves as members of a nation through 'memories', which bind diverse people together through "a shared past they themselves have not experienced" (Tormey, 2006, p.313). Arguably, such shared memories have their greatest impact when learned during childhood, particularly as children move through a shared, communal school system.

Regardless of a state's desire to create a common, national identity, the heterogeneity of a country - among other variables - could influence the effectiveness of such measures. Racial, ethnic and religious identity, as alluded to previously, all play a role in a person's identity. These identities are not mutually exclusive and can often overlap. Therefore, when researching identity, it is important not to pigeonhole an individual based solely on one defining identifier. Humans should be afforded the capability to define themselves through a variety of descriptors and overlapping identities e.g. Feminist, Pakistani, and Christian.

For the purpose of this research, an emphasis will be placed on ethnic, racial and national identifiers. Though self-identification along religious lines will not be discounted, as there is recognition in the overlap of religious affiliation and ethnic, racial and national identification. Ethnicity as an identity is based on descent and "often based on self-identification" (Grotenhuis, 2016, p.145). It is a group who shares "real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past, and a cultural focus on symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood" (p.141). The contested notion of race, on the other hand, has been inconsistent throughout history. Race has been "based on physical differences [and] originates in the assignment by others" while referring to "intrinsic differences in human worth" (p.145). Today, while the topics of ethnicity and race continue to be contested, a need to categorise people, based on defining characteristics, continues. Arguably, the increasing diversity of many western states has placed pressure on a need for strict, national identification in order to bind distinct groups of people under a single, national, label.

What is English National Identity?

Given the complex history of England and the United Kingdom as a whole, defining English national identity is no straightforward process. In order to reduce the scope, this research will focus solely on national identity as Englishness or Britishness and will therefore not be looking at Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish national identities. Reference of the 'indigenous population' refers to children of white/British origin who live within England. British identity will therefore only be mentioned as a form of State identity where one's citizenship is associated with Britishness. Some overlap in terminology does exist between Englishness and Britishness, but these mostly have to do with values and norms.

How then does one define Englishness as a national identity? Research on English national identity has found that "being English is much less overt, more implicit and diffuse" with its use being partially developed (Bechhofer & McCrone, 2013, p.545). Whereby most western states perpetuate a sense of national identity through symbol (e.g. flags) and culture (e.g. national traditions), the "English do not have a straightforwardly 'cultural' view of their national…symbols, preferring…to see national identity as defined by its external institutional shapes than its cultural substance" (p.547). According to Mann (2012), the class-based system, which sprung up in England at the end of the 17th century through the establishment of parliament, has made English nationalism difficult to separate from class-based ideologies. Additionally, national identity, to be effective, requires a non-hierarchical system where all individuals see themselves as equal parts of the nation. Therefore, it is difficult to separate English nationalism from its hierarchical system. The subsequent growth of the far-right movement in England could be attributed to a lack of communal, national sentiment (Mann, 2012). Thus, making these far-right groups perceive the rise of immigration as a threat to an already fragile national identity.

The desire to strengthen and define English national identity is not a new phenomenon. The belief that a shared identity needs to be established during primary years came about during Margaret Thatcher's time as Prime Minister. During the 1980s, the Conservative government concerned themselves with a national curriculum meant to increase Britain's competitiveness on the global stage (Sheldon, 2012). In addition to focusing on core subjects (maths, English, and science), "Thatcher wanted a return to the national narrative" which focused on British history being taught "as factual knowledge" whereby a "sense of belonging" to the nation was shared amongst the polity (p.266).

These changes were implemented during a time of increased tensions brought about by growing migration and multiculturalism (Sheldon, 2012). By using schools as a tool for creating a shared sense of national identity, national values and a common history could be instilled in the children of migrants and future British citizens. Even today, the teaching of 'British Values' in schools is used as a tool for creating commonality and connectedness amongst a diverse student body.

A 2006 study comparing the teaching of history as a method for instilling national identification in the Netherlands and Britain found a stark delineation between indigenous pupils and pupils from an ethnic migrant background. One part of the study found that 67.7% of indigenous English pupils who were questioned considered their national identity to be their primary identity. Compare this to the 15% to 20% of students from various ethnic minority groups who considered their national identity as their primary identity (Grever et al., 2008). Additionally, this study also found that over 70% of 'British-Indian' (Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan) pupils considered their religion to be their primary identity, this compares to 3.2% of indigenous English students (Grever et al., 2008). Literature on the subject, though limited, has a clear consensus that children are able to - and do - use ethnic identity as a method of classification. It can be argued that pupils do not merely reject their identifiers upon entering mainstream schools. Rather, any identity which schools may wish to instil in their students would need to find its place amongst already established group memberships and classifications.

How has Identity been studied in the context of schools

Identity research within the context of schools is far from complete. Current research studies are often subject specific, with researchers closing gaps related to identity formation and history as a subject (Grever et al., 2008; Tormey, 2006), and reading as an influence on identity (Scherer, 2016). Other identity research looks at identity formation in secondary schooling (Bliuc et al., 2011; Okeke et al., 2009) and higher education (Dean & Jolly, 2012). Research that does look at identity and education as a force for integration unpacks national narratives within the population's collective memory (Gürsel, 2018; Sheldon, 2012; Tormey, 2006). However, it is clear that a gap exists in how pupils perceive their learning in relation to their ethnic, racial, and national identity.

Students are confronted with both conspicuous and innocuous national narratives when attending mainstream schools. These national narratives form collective memories which bind populations together through a 'shared' history (Tormey, 2006). For students who are a part of England's indigenous population their association with these national narratives may not feel foreign. These

students may have had grandparents, or great-grandparents, who participated in and/or lived through these 'historic' moments which are taught in schools and discussed on a national stage (e.g. The Great War).

How then do ethnic and racial minorities perceive their learning when surrounded by such national narratives? In the United States, researchers have found that negative stereotypes surrounding racial minorities can negatively impact the academic performance of group members (Okeke et al., 2009). This phenomenon of 'Stereotype Threat' is apparent in school settings where academic performance is linked to individual identification with school subdomains (Steele, 1997). It is in school that students could be made aware of - and internalise - racial stereotypes. Research has shown that individuals who are relegated to their group's negative stereotypes perform worse on standardised tests (Steele, 1997). Some research indicates that even children as young as five can fall victim to stereotype threat (Ambady et al., 2001) when "primed with a stereotype" (such as Black students are not smart) (Iruka et al., 2021, p.5). Research on primary school students' identity and their learning, however, has yet to be fully developed. Whether students of ethnic and racial minority backgrounds perceive their learning differently from their indigenous counterparts has yet to be fully understood.

What is learning

Learning in its most basic form is a chemical reaction. Upon learning something, students "allow some new thing into their brains" whereby emotional, chemical reactions are triggered (Dean & Jolly, 2012, p.231). Because learning is a chemical reaction, the method in which new learning is created can influence lasting associations. Positive experiences with learning, for example, can bring about feelings of pleasure, while negative experiences - which trigger stress and fear - can potentially damage the parts of the brain where learning takes place (Dean & Jolly, 2012). In education, this can have a lasting impact on students' self-esteem and therefore their ability to learn. As Dean & Jolly (2012) state, "public shame and humiliation are relative death sentences on educational self-esteem and…on students' ability to productively cope with educational failures" (p.231). Given the importance of self-esteem on learning, group membership to a stigmatised group may lead students to have a negative self-perception (Bliuc et al., 2011; Okeke et al., 2009; Steele, 1997) and subsequently have low academic performance. Though this is not the case for all pupils or all groups. Research in the United States has since found only a small link, if any, between African Americans' and European Americans' perception of their academic self (Graham, 1994). If any link does exist

between perception of self and social stereotypes, it may be dependent on a conglomeration of developmental status, social status, and social group (Okeke et al., 2009). Therefore, one cannot assume that a pupil's academic performance is due to their group membership.

Research on learning has identified two different types of learning. The first is 'Deep Learning' where students' goal is to obtain a "personal understanding of new ideas and information and are more likely to respect pedagogical intentions" (Bliuc et al., 2011, p.418). The other learning type is 'Surface Learning' which is when students care only to complete the task requirements at a surface level (Bliuc et al., 2011). Bliuc et al., (2011) found that some approaches to learning in adolescents are associated with a student's social identity. Simply said, a 'group' may attach a stigma to education which may impact a student's academic ability and whether they prefer deep approaches to learning or simply surface level learning. Whether group membership impacts primary-aged pupils' perspectives on their learning is what this research hopes to uncover.

Learning as a process is as much a social process as an independent one. Research on learning found that students may perceive the same learning activity completely differently based on their learning styles (Dean & Jolly, 2012). Therefore, the effort of a teacher, school, or national curriculum to instil certain learning into students, needs to be mindful that effective learning occurs if the preconceptions students bring to their learning is accounted for (Grever et al., 2008). What is learned in school can subsequently impact students' perceived ability on their own learning depending on the pupils' backgrounds. Research in the United States has found that those pupils who have learned about systemic racism are more likely than their less-informed peers to attribute academic success to systemic racism rather than an individual's ability (Okeke et al., 2009). Therefore, learning - however beneficial - can still influence one's perceptions of ability.

Methodology

This research will look at how a pupil's ethnic, racial, or national group membership may impact their perspective on their learning. Qualitative interviews along with content analysis will be conducted in order to assess the impact of group membership on perceptions of learning in primary pupils. Qualitative methods will be chosen because of the nuances of the human condition (Bengtsson, 2016). In addition, given that the interviews will take place in informal settings (e.g. in school), ethnographic field notes will be taken in order to "show, rather than tell the reader what is

happening", such as making note of where the participant is looking, their body language and their tone (Scherer, 2016, p.390). The interviews will be designed for primary-aged pupils by asking age-appropriate questions.

A case study using semi-structured, narrative interviews was designed around a Year 4 class of 27 pupils from a Church of England primary school in the east of the country. This class was chosen due to its diverse make-up and location. The make-up of the class is as follows: 53% of the students have English as an Additional Language (EAL) and a third of the students have records identifying them as non-Christian. The interview questions will focus on self-identification, group membership and learning (see Table 1, next page). Questions will be adapted from Phinney's (1992) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM). Such questions include 'I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to', 'I have a strong sense of belonging to my ethnic group', and 'I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background' (Phinney, 1992). While questions will be drawn from the MEIM, they will not be scored using quantitative measures (such as on a Likert Scale). The reason for this being, as mentioned above, is the invaluable information which can be gleaned from non-verbal cues, such as body language and tone. Additionally, interview questions will be adapted to allow for questions associated with learning. By priming pupils to think about their group membership before discussing their learning, pupils may be more likely to consider such variables when reflecting on their learning. Table 1 (next page) shows a non-exhaustive list of questions which will be asked to respondents in a semi-structured manner. These questions allow for flexibility and are listed to represent a flow of topics rather than specific questions to be asked.

It is hypothesised that ethnic, racial and/or national group-membership will play some role in how students perceive their own learning. However, given that identity is not fully formed as a child, this research posits that group membership will not be the sole influence of a pupil's perspective on their learning. That does not mean, however, that parallels will not be found between learning perceptions and group-membership.

Study Question	Questions to be Considered
What forms of self-identification/group membership emerge?	Tell me about yourself.
	Where are you from? Where is your mom from? Where is your dad from? Are you proud to be [group membership]?
	Do you enjoy school? What do you like about school?
What feelings are associated with group-membership?	Do you feel good about your [group membership]?
	Are you happy to be a [group member]?
	What makes you a [group member]?
How is Learning and (In)Group-membership perceived?	Do you think people from [group] are good at learning? Why?
	Do you think people from [group] like to learn? Why?
How are outgroup members perceived in relation to learning?	Who in your class is smart? Who learns the best? Who in your class isn't the best learner? Why?
	Tell me about them? Where do they come from?
How is individual learning perceived?	Do you enjoy learning? Are you a good learner?
	What makes you good/not good at learning?
	What makes someone good at learning?

Table 1: Study Questions

Methodological structure

The methodology for this research will be conducted in two parts. The first will be the carrying out of semi-structured interviews with the class of 27 students. By conducting semi-structured interviews, children are allowed the chance to share their views without forcing them to conform to narrow categories which may have been defined by the researcher (Prior, 2016). Additionally, semi-structured interviews are uniquely flexible, whereby the questions are open-ended yet deliberate (Galletta, 2013). This allows participants to narrate experiences within a focused frame (Galletta, 2013). Making the interviews semi-structured means all participants will be asked similar questions, regardless of ethnic, racial or national background, while allowing the interviewer the flexibility to

ask follow-up questions and push for elaboration. Additionally, the researcher will ask 'why do you think so?' after yes/no answers, in order to draw forth greater elaborations. The order of questions is purposeful, as group membership and identity is to be established before learning perspectives are uncovered.

The researcher will audio record the entire interview, making detailed notes of the children's body language and non-verbals. The recordings and written notes will create a well-rounded ethnographic record of the interview and will support the researcher in their findings. The ethics protocols as laid out by the UK Research Institute (UKRI) (see the Ethics section) will be upheld to the highest standards, including obtaining consent from the parents, pupils and school.

In order to build a rapport with the students, the researcher will spend time in the classroom setting. Building a strong relationship with the interviewees will help the students feel more comfortable when conversing with the researcher (Noble-Carr, 2006). To do this, the researcher will work alongside the pupils in a low-stakes setting, playing games with, conversing with, and observing the students. The researcher will undertake the interviews only once they believe a strong enough relationship has been built and the students are comfortable engaging with the researcher. The interviews will take place 1-on-1. This is so that children are able to express their unique views without the influence or input of their peers. The interviews will take place in the school setting. This allows the researcher to converse with multiple students in one day, while also keeping the children in an environment they are comfortable with.

The second part of the research process will be to transcribe the interviews based on emergent trends. Before the interviews take place, trends can only be hypothesised. The research will maintain flexibility for any trends which may emerge that have been unaccounted for. However, this research could 'potentially' code for trends which fall along the following lines:

1. Ethnic Identity/ Racial Identity / Group Membership

2. English/British National Identity and membership

3. Individual perspectives on learning

4. Group membership and learning

By coding for these narratives, it is hypothesised that trends having to do with learning, group membership, and individual perspectives will emerge.

Methodological Implications and Considerations

Interviewing primary-aged children can come with challenges. According to Prior (2016), using semi-structured interviews with children allows for a "more bespoke and tailored setting suitable for the individual child" (p.112) where they can discuss issues which are sensitive; facilitates participation with children who may be shy or anxious; allows for flexibility when arranging the interview to best suit the needs of the individual child. Additionally, adults will never be able to assess the world through the eyes of a child and rather are forced to look through various lenses into their experiences (Kortesluoma et al., 2003). Along with the stringent ethics requirements of working with children as research participants (see the Ethics section), there is hesitancy that children are unable to give an accurate view of their world. Assumptions are made regarding a child's linguistic abilities, reflectiveness, and accuracy when giving their accounts (Prior, 2016).

While all of this must be considered by the researcher before the interview takes place, during the interview the researcher must be mindful of other challenges. Interferences, according to Kortesluoma et al. (2003), are something children are highly sensitive to and can put strain on the interview process. Some of these being 1) the ability of children to respond to questions, 2) developmental capacity, 3) their ability to negotiate the interview process and cope with what is being asked, 4) their language and vocabulary ability, and 5) an ability to abstract feelings and beliefs to effectively answer questions (Prior, 2016). While these considerations must be made by the researcher before, during and after the conduction of the interview, from the perspective of children the participation in interviews can be a demanding process.

Children, especially primary-aged children, are primed to provide a 'correct' answer when answering a question rather than give their own opinion (Prior, 2016). Therefore, children may not provide a truthful answer and rather give an answer which they believe is expected of them by the adult. Power imbalances are also a barrier to conducting effective interviews with children. Researchers who wish to interview children must be mindful of the imbalances between children and adults (Kellet & Ding, 2004) such as when/if the researcher takes on a role similar to that of a teacher. Therefore, the researcher should establish a rapport with their interviewees before embarking on the interviewing process.

Establishing a rapport with children before conducting an interview is vital to making the pupil feel comfortable as well as to extract accurate responses. Before conducting the interviews, researchers

should spend time with the children in a friendly and welcoming way, where the interviewer explains why they are there and what will occur during the interview process (Greig et al., 2013). Scheppingen et al., (2008) suggest that researchers reinforce to children that they are experts in their stories, and that the interviewer does not know the answers already. The questions being asked should also be open-ended and descriptive in nature, in order to avoid monosyllabic responses (Noble-Carr, 2006). Another suggestion is to interview the children in their own home so as to keep the children in a familiar environment (Prior, 2016), however the practicalities of this are not always possible. Researchers should also allow the children to pace the interview themselves, so they do not feel rushed due to signs of impatience (Kellet & Ding, 2004). Differences in children's behaviour can also inhibit effective interviewing. In order to overcome inhibitions, which some shy children may experience, researchers should engage the child in a shared task, activity or conversation (Prior, 2016). This could help strengthen the bond between the researcher and the interviewee and elicit more information when questioned.

Researchers need to take time to design effective interview questions. Researchers should avoid over-simplistic language which may come across as patronising to the student, overly complicated or lengthy questions - where children are inclined to answer only part of the question - and complicated jargon and abstract concepts (Prior, 2016). Interview questions should ask children how they feel rather than what they would do in a given scenario. Questions should focus on the "here and now" (p.116). Primary-aged children are consistently able to answer questions which have to do with the 'who', 'what', and 'where', while questions which ask about the past or future should be avoided (Prior, 2016).

When conducting the interviews, the researcher should keep in mind that children respond differently compared to adult participants. They tend to answer questions in a quick and rapid manner, prompts and probes are vital to keep children on task, understand their opinions, and give children time to think of a response (Prior, 2016). By following up short responses with 'tell me more', interviews with children can potentially elicit more information. Due to the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews, the length of the interview process can be difficult to estimate ahead of time (Prior, 2016). The interviewer should be mindful of the child's body language during the conduction of the interview (Flewitt, 2013). Often, children will continue answering questions out of a sense of duty, while exhibiting signs that they wish to be done - or need a break - through their body language.

Ethics

As with all research involving the use of people as subjects, ethical considerations need to be made. To assure that the best interests are maintained for the research participants and the researcher, plans will be submitted to a Research Ethics Committee (REC) before the research takes place. The research will not be able to go forward without approval from an appropriate committee. In order to meet ethical standards, this research will set out to prove the following:

1. That this research will maximise the benefits to society, while minimising any risk and harm

2. That individuals' rights and dignity will be respected

3. All participation is voluntarily approved and participations will be appropriately informed

4. Integrity and transparency will be maintained throughout the process

5. Conflicts of interest will be reported

In addition to adhering to the guidelines of the REC, this research will take special care to maintain the ethical standards needed when working with children.

Given the sensitive nature of working with children, the ethics involved in the process must be considered and rigorously applied. The UK Research Institute (UKRI) in conjunction with the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (henceforth referred to as the MRC/ESRC Joint Guidance) published a set of protocols and considerations researchers must keep in mind when studying children. Additionally, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) published guidelines in 2018 for researchers who conduct education research. This research will abide by the guidelines laid out in both of their publications.

This research will conduct a risk/benefit assessment before execution. For example, it is vital that the researchers consider all the implications surrounding identity research (e.g. avoiding uncovering suppressed or negative feelings relating to stereotypes and/or previous experiences). Safeguarding is another issue that must be considered in research with children. The researcher will uphold all safeguarding standards associated with working with children and be aware of both school and national policies. The MRC/ESRC Joint Guidance recommends seeking assent from the child participants who are not able to give legal consent when it comes to their involvement in research.

Before giving their assent, the pupils will be provided with age-appropriate information regarding the research and will be allowed to ask questions before the research takes place.

Before the research takes place, it is necessary to obtain approval from all involved parties. This includes the school, staff members, parents, and the pupils themselves. Before the research participants, or their parents, are informed of the potential research, the researcher will sit down with the school leadership and class teacher to discuss possible ethical considerations. The researcher will discuss the purpose of the research, the process involved, timeline, and the standards which will be upheld. Once approval from the school is given, the researcher will seek parental permission of all the pupils who may take part in the research. The researcher and the school will then discuss how best to present the research topic to the parents and students. Given the relationship between parents and staff, the researcher will request that the class teacher and school make direct contact with the parents to notify them of the potential research. Those parents who agree to participate, will be asked to discuss the research process with their children before the pupils come to school. Once all parties have been informed of the research and have submitted their written, provisional consent, the researcher will begin the research process. Provisional consent is consent which is provided at the onset of the research process (Flewitt, 2005). However, provisional consent does not imply ongoing consent. Rather, consent which is ongoing is continuous. Meaning, consent needs to be continuously negotiated throughout the entire research process with all involved parties (Flewitt, 2005). The researcher may be required to go back to participants and obtain consent if there are any unforeseen consequences (BERA, 2018). As per the BERA guidelines, the participants, parents and school will be allowed to withdraw their consent at any point, up until publication of the findings.

Conclusion and Implication

Identity is who we are. It shapes our understanding of ourselves as well as the world. In a world of immense heterogeneity, identity has grown to take on a more prevalent role in society. Primary-aged children are often at the centre of the identity debate. Nations who wish to instil a homogeneous feeling and narrative around national identity begin to do so during the early stages of primary years. It is believed, and hoped, that by instilling a sense of national identity on children, that they will grow to be adults who adhere to and identify with a cohesive national narrative. The effect this has on children and their learning has yet to be fully understood.

Children from any background begin primary school with a basic understanding of who they are. Their identifiers have already been placed upon them by external influences. They may see themselves as belonging to a certain ethnic, racial, religious, or national category long before entering mainstream schools. Therefore, any systematic attempt to imbue a different identity within them may be met with dissent on the part of the children. This research hopes to uncover whether a dissonance exists between the implementation of an English/British national identity and ethnic and racial minority children. It will do so by looking at the perspectives pupils have on their learning to determine whether such trends exist.

If a nation wishes to create cohesion amongst its polity, it needs to be ready to implement - or forgo - a cohesive national identity. Which direction it should take is dependent on the outcome of research in this field. While the research essay laid out is far from providing a concrete answer to this query, it nonetheless believes to be an important piece of a much larger puzzle. Only time will tell if a state-mandated national identity can become the dominant identity amongst a population as diverse as England.

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