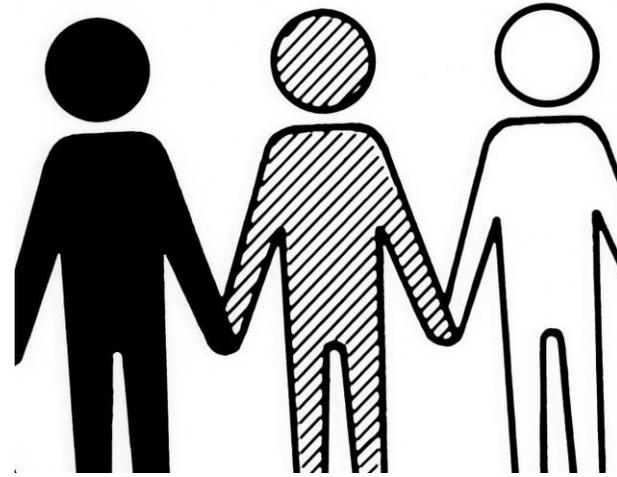


Institutional Racism

The issue of racism in any form is a contentious one. Teachers are unlikely to admit to it directly and this limits the types of research that may be undertaken. Institutional racism is more likely to be observed or reported than admitted.



Investigating institutional racism can take the place of analysing secondary sources, such as school documents and policies to see if they disadvantage one or more groups in favour of others. Gaining access to these documents would be difficult without the permission of a gatekeeper and the finding could be criticised as being the subjective interpretation of the researcher.

Institutional racism takes many forms according to research. Many teachers may be unwittingly acting racist but not think they are (liberal chauvinists). This could have both implications for their career and their emotional well-being if it were discovered they acted inappropriately. Any findings may need to be kept confidential to avoid this.

Students may be more vocal on whether or not they believe that the school is treating them differently because of their ethnic background. However, some of these views may be highly subjective and could be for alternative reasons such as low attendance, lack of focus or poor behaviour. Similarly positive discrimination may go unnoticed by students, such as favouring Chinese and Indian students.

Gatekeepers are less likely to allow access for researchers to enter the school if they know the issue being investigated is institutional racism. Moreover, if teachers know that the research is taking place then they are more likely to alter their behaviour. Even if the research is covert, the presence of a stranger in the staff room would necessitate a longer term study in order to obtain trust of teachers. This may then lead to issues of deception and breach of trust when the research is over.