



Book review: Campbell, P. (2024) *Race and assessment in higher education: from conceptualising barriers to making measurable change*. Leeds: Emerald.

Slow and steady wins the 'race'

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Paul Campbell's *Race and assessment in higher education* is amongst the landmark texts in the race awarding gap (RAG) literature. Earlier iterations of Campbell's text are firmly established across the higher education policy landscape. Campbell's text is equally inviting to practitioners and academics due to his 'post-academic writing' style that is 'academic and accessible. It is academic in the sense that it addresses key issues in each discourse community. It is accessible in that it can be read and understood by broader audiences' (Badley, 2019, p.180). Regrettably, Campbell's approach is rare. Authors tend to write about such topics in an overly complex and 'author-vacant' way; even though they profess to be writing on behalf of the voiceless and marginalised, their style of writing reveals who they are really trying to satisfy (Geertz, 1988).

At its core, Campbell's publication seeks to identify and tackle the racial exclusions and barriers in assessments. He takes a three-pronged approach that begins with his analysis of the experiences of British White, South Asian, and Black undergraduate students. Second, he uses their experiences to develop interventions to reduce the RAG that exists in assessment outcomes between South Asian and Black undergraduate students and their White peers. Finally, he reviews the experiences of the staff who piloted the interventions; we hear how the intervention enhanced their teaching practices and what changes they saw in their students' attitudes towards assessments. Taking a reflexive turn, we also learn how using the intervention impacted their own understanding of the experiences of students of colour.

All four of the interventions are under the umbrella of the Racially Inclusive Practice in Assessment Guidance (RIPIAG). Learning Developers will recognise these four interventions: they have been used in Learning Development for many years. RIPIAG would be categorised as 'academic socialisation' in the academic literacies discourse. However, Campbell's approach is new in the sense that he explicitly connects these tried and tested interventions with the RAG in an extensive, focused, and empirical manner.

To gain a better understanding of Campbell's text, it is important to situate it within the broader RAG scholarship. Essentially, there are three periods of research on the experiences of Global Majority university students in the UK. The first period, culminating in the 2000s, was typified by the invisibility of Global Majority students in the literature. We know little about the RAG or the experiences of Global Majority students in this period, with the few articles that were published bemoaning the absence of any source material. Ramindar Singh wrote in 1990 that he had more questions than answers. Similarly, at the end of the last century, Mantz Yorke's study on undergraduate non-completion reported that the small numbers of non-White responders meant that his findings could not be tested for statistical significance (Yorke et al., 1997; Yorke, 1999). The period that followed 'discovered' Global Majority students; however, as soon as they were discovered, they were blamed for their lack of participation, academic achievement, retention, and social and cultural capital. They were invisible in plight but visible with blame — it is a familiar story. This leads us to the present period: the era of 'accommodation'. Research on the Global Majority student experience usually recommends a series of accommodations, which are adjustments to access, environment, or curriculum to allow Global Majority students to complete assigned tasks. Broadly, accommodation is about saving Black and Brown students. Whether that is saving them from themselves or our problematic university practices: save them we must. Individuals working to close the RAG — barring a select few — are in the business of accommodation or the business of saving. My reading of Campbell's text sits within this period.

Accommodation is important, but we need to acknowledge that it rests too comfortably with the status quo. It does little to alter what is being taught: we merely introduce students of colour to the very same system that others them to begin with. Although Campbell's text stretches the status quo as far as it can be stretched and the RIPIAG will most likely

enhance assessment outcomes for all students, it does not offer a new approach. There are no fundamental shifts. Ontologically, we are still in the same business of accommodation.

This prompts a question: how can Campbell's text be considered a 'landmark' text if it does not venture too far from the status quo? Simply put, Campbell's text is an informative bookend to all that has been achieved in the accommodation period. Before this text, one would have to make their way through a patchwork of journal articles to understand the RAG. Second, since RIPIAG is within the realm of the status quo, it is more likely to be appreciated and supported by senior leadership teams, as evidenced by its uptake by several universities across the UK. This provides a sturdy empirical base for Learning Developers, other third space professionals, and academic staff to launch more extensive actions, either through hybrid approaches or by increasing the volume of activity. Third, while far-reaching activities require momentum and even periods of trial and error, RIPIAG interventions are tried and tested methods that will work now. There should not be an either-or approach. As Campbell notes, RIPIAG focuses on just one aspect of the puzzle of addressing the RAG.

Campbell ventures off the beaten track in the closing pages of his text. He allows himself to breathe out and reflect on his 12 years as a Black race inclusion academic in the academe. Exasperated by it all, he uses an 'autotheory' approach to recount the 'cold wars' and paradoxes of higher education. Through his account, we witness the 'violence' of polite conversation and the normalisation of racist sentiment. It felt that this section was for 'us'. It was for our parents. It was for our communities. Campbell had taken a detour from the main road to talk directly to us. This serves as a lesson for 'us'. Although we inhabit institutions that demand our entire being, we must hold on to a sense of 'us'.

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