Race, culture and all that: an exploration of the perspectives of White secondary student teachers about race equality issues in their initial teacher education

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Race, culture and all that: an exploration of the perspectives of White secondary student teachers about race equality issues in their initial teacher education

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This research explores the racialised perceptions of White students teachers who are preparing to teach in secondary schools in a diverse society. Student teachers' views about Black and minority ethnic (BME) pupils are often cast in the language of otherness. This research was conducted in a post-1992 university in the south of England where the majority of students on initial teacher education (ITE) programmes are White, which reflects the ethnicity of serving teachers in England (95.5% of whom are White). In England all student teachers are required to fulfil the Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status 2007 which incorporates statements on the understanding of cultural and linguistic issues. It could be argued that the inclusion of such standards would result in student teachers who are competent in these aspects. But this is not borne out in the annual survey of newly qualified teachers. This research draws on critical race theory as a theoretical framework to analyse how the students' ethnicity influenced their initial perceptions and how notions of White privilege might inform their positions and responses to race-related issues in school. The interviews with student teachers revealed the inadequacy of their initial preparation to deal with the 'scary' situations associated with race issues in school. There are implications for ITE policy, the curriculum and practice with particular reference to the institutional and school-based interface of ITE programmes.

Keywords: initial teacher education; critical race theory; Whiteness

Introduction

Teacher education in England is set largely within a White majority context. This research originates from my experiences and observations as a British Indian woman working on ITE programmes in a predominantly White institution with mainly White student teachers. Solomon and others (2005, 149) note that with such demographics it is imperative that teacher education students examine personal attitudes related to their 'racial ascription and social positioning,' noting how it informs their classroom practice. The Professional Studies course prepares student teachers for the broader aspects of their role and is linked to the Training and Development Agency's (TDA) Professional Standards for Teachers for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The wide remit for such courses presents a challenge for tutors and students alike because the constraints of time and content militate against developing a conceptual understanding of equality issues.

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    The existence of the QTS Standards and compliance with them does not guarantee that student teachers understand the associated rationale or concepts underpinning them. In fact, the TDA's own survey of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) over the last five years (2003–7) shows that approximately one third of NQTs felt well, or better prepared to teach pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds (30% in 2003 and 37% in 2007) and pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) (20% in 2003 to 34% in 2007). This is by no means an indication of how NQTs felt about issues of race equality but the survey is the only national benchmark on NQTs' preparation regarding race-related issues. These statistics have shown little percentage increase over the last five years. The TDA (2007) note that:

> …the Sector continues to make progress in both these areas, although ratings were still lower than for other aspects of initial teacher training. (www.tda.gov.uk)

Some teacher educators would argue that the question related to race and ethnicity is ill-conceived since the NQTs' satisfaction will be determined by the ethnicity of the pupil population in the schools used for their training. This may be the case. From another perspective 63% of NQTs felt their preparation to teach pupils from BME backgrounds was satisfactory or worse. The low satisfaction and slow increase in the statistics related to preparation in this area has led me to explore the reasons for such ratings. The training of new teachers to prepare pupils to live in a culturally and ethnically diverse society cannot merely be dependent on the locality of the teacher training provider and its partner schools.

    Student teachers' individual predispositions related to issues of race and ethnicity, their interactions with pupils and actions in the classroom will affect the attitude, and outcomes of the children they teach. This research aimed to explore:

> How race equality is addressed on ITE programmes in a mainly White institution? How do White student teachers preparing to teach in secondary schools reflect on this part of their training?

> What are the student teachers' professional and personal views and reflections on the race equality component and to what extent are their perceptions influenced by their own ethnicity?

Theoretical framework

This research is framed within an antiracist approach but as Gillborn (2006, 13) acknowledges, this broad perspective lacks a 'conceptual map' and has not developed adequately to address the persistence of racist practices which still exist despite policies designed to address racial inequality. Critical race theory (CRT) is described by Gillborn (2006, 19) as 'not so much a theory as a perspective.' Parker and Roberts (2005) note that CRT provides a framework centred on race to examine and explain policy and practices within institutions. Gillborn (2006) argues that CRT is still developing within the field of education and its American origins should not preclude its applicability in post-9/11 Britain. The points below are designed to highlight the main tenets of CRT and in doing so the intention is not to simplify a complex perspective, or to present it as a straightforward approach, but to represent its key aspects. The points are a summary of work by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), Ladson-Billings (2004), Fishman and McCarthy (2005), Gillborn (2005, 2006, 2008). CRT advocates

that society is naturally racist, that it is a normal part of our society which is largely unrecognised in its implicit or subtle forms; racism is still thought to involve acts of violence or name calling; there is a White hegemony which is exemplified by a silent unacknowledged and unrecognised White privilege; White people do not recognise the power and privilege associated with their ethnicity and skin colour; liberalism and its associated philosophy and practice have not worked and that liberalism is not colour-blind, nor neutral, or objective or meritocratic. In addition it asserts that Black and minority ethnic (BME) people are subject to White hegemonic structures enshrined within law, policy and practices.

CRT acknowledges the experiences of BME people. It employs the use of 'story-telling,' not works of fiction, but stories of encounters in an everyday racialised world from the perspective of BME people to explore their experiences and to examine the pervasive nature of racism. In this way it provides the oppressed a voice with which to construct a different reality from the dominant White discourses prevalent in society (Ladson-Billings 2004). The above points begin to question the liberal context which frames ITE within England and its failure to prepare NQTs to teach pupils from BME backgrounds.

The persistence of racism and inequality within educational structures despite the outward compliance with legislation such as the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 continues to exercise scholars within the field of race equality. The main strands linked to CRT and relating to teacher education include the ideas that White student teachers do not see themselves as racialised; they are unaware of the privilege which their ethnicity affords them; there are varying reactions and responses when they engage in examining race issues which range from anger and guilt through to denial. King (2004, 71) explores the position of teacher education students who are placed within a context where they are asked to address or celebrate diversity. She questions how student teachers in her institution who are from 'relatively privileged monocultural backgrounds' with little experience of diversity, or inequity can enact such an ideal. She describes how the students' ideas and beliefs about inequity represent as she calls it 'dysconcious racism' (King 2004, 72) which manifests itself in an uncritical approach to how racism operates to produce unequal outcomes and how cultural structures have advantaged White people. McIntosh (1990, 31) describes how White privilege is like an invisible, weightless knapsack of, 'special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.' Whilst acknowledging the power of such privilege it is interesting that McIntosh balks at the idea that such recognition would shake her belief in meritocracy, thus encapsulating the tension that some 'informed' White liberal people feel about their position with respect to race issues.

The process of revealing the assumptions and processes which lead to racial inequity with a group of White student teachers is, for the facilitator – whether they are White or from a BME background – a very uncomfortable event (as I have experienced) because the very nature of the students' White identity and its associated privilege is challenged (Aveling 2006). Wagner (2005) describes how the examination of anti-racist practices runs counter to the neutral objective positions assumed by universities – the site of most teacher education course – and challenges the assumed 'traditional dichotomies which keeps us entrenched in us/them, White/other…' (Wagner 2005, 264). Giroux (as cited in Aveling 2006) and Wagner (2005) argue that tackling challenging issues, such as race, threatens the students' identity. This process of challenge needs to also provide support or a space within which

White student teachers can position themselves as allies in changing the status quo represented by White privilege. Solomon and others (2005) note that it is the reduction of teacher education to a skills-based curriculum which results in the perpetuation of liberalist notions of education and schooling which is evident in the student teachers' thinking and articulations of equality. Marx (2006) describes how White student teachers in her institution found it difficult to define White or Whiteness, for them it was invisible, neutral and normal. Marx (2006) and Solomon and others (2005) indicate that Whiteness and racism are connected. Put simply if we begin to examine the taken for granted privileges associated with Whiteness then this reveals the lack of privilege experienced by others. The exposure of such inequity leads to a backlash exemplified by defensive language or acts; in denial; in accusations of 'having a chip on your shoulder' if you are a BME presenter and most disturbingly and disarmingly in polite silence. Mazzei (2008) describes how student teachers engage in inhabited silences which are a means of protecting the normative position of Whiteness. She notes how such silences are a means of protection and indeed I have noticed that if members of my teaching group are not vociferous in their opposition to the arguments presented in the session on race then they exhibit a protective silence, a silence in which they remain enveloped, cocooned, untouched and untroubled; a shield of silence to hide behind.

The examination of Whiteness, just one aspect of CRT, is not intended to divert the debate from the nature of racism and the experiences of BME people, but to examine how White identity is socially constructed, reinforced and embedded within power structures (Gillborn 2008). Gillborn (2005, 2008) argues that the exercise of White power and privilege results in a White hegemony which is evident within all institutional practices. In a critique of CRT particularly the idea of White supremacy and the centrality of race, Cole and Maisuria (2007) argue in a Marxist analysis that the disadvantages associated with class override those linked to the exercise of White privilege. They note that White privilege is a concept applicable to those from privileged classes but not those from working class backgrounds or Eastern European migrants. However, CRT does not deny the intersectionality between class and race but seeks to examine the pervasive nature and effects of passive racism which arises from the centrality of White privilege which cuts across class. In my experience White working-class student teachers tend to demonstrate White privilege when talking about race, especially in their well-intentioned yet naive everyday interactions which can disadvantage BME pupils regardless of their class.

Methodology

This small-scale research employed a constructionist epistemology since as a researcher I believe there is no 'truth' waiting to be discovered, but that meaning is socially constructed through interaction. Socially constructed meaning is mediated through some sort of cultural lens which will be influenced by the students' social and cultural background. It is this aspect which is the key to this research. How do the White student teachers engage with issues of race equality given their own background and experience? In addition to this broad epistemological stance CRT formed the framework for analysing the data.

Unstructured interviews with eight postgraduate students preparing to teach in secondary schools were used to reveal the student teachers' reality regarding race issues and their reflections on the effectiveness of their initial preparation related to

their needs regarding race issues. Shah (2004) notes the epistemological resonance in the use of interviews to explore cultural issues. It is important to note the cultural dynamics of this research situation which in itself is complex and may affect the self-selection of students to participate in the research and the participating students' responses in an interview. I am a BME female teacher educator researching her own predominantly White institution, working with White students to understand their perceptions of race equality within ITE. Brown and Dowling (1998) note that moving from one role in a context to that of researcher causes a change in perspective. As a BME researcher there is no doubt that my own professional and cultural framework may inadvertently influence the interpretation of the findings. But as a researcher within my own institution I adopt a more critical stance about practice related to race equality. Ladson-Billings (2004) confirms how researchers using critical race methodology can be influenced by the researcher's experience of being the 'other' since they recognise the presence and effects of racism. In more than one way I was in the position of an insider and the outsider, in terms of my race and position as a researcher stepping outside my 'normal' professional role.

I chose to work with secondary students rather than my own primary undergraduate student teachers to ensure that issue of power relations regarding the tutor–student relationship was minimised. After the initial invitation to participate in the research I also talked to groups of secondary students as they arrived for a session. This was an interesting experience as a BME researcher with some students being receptive to my approach and some, albeit the minority, displaying negative body language and gestures to stop me in my tracks. One White male student teacher (a non-participant) raised his hand fairly close to my face and said, *'Can I stop you right there I'm really not interested in this.'* This was unsurprising since I had assumed that it would be students who were well disposed to the issue who would express an interest in participating in the research. I relate this incident because this student did not exercise professional discretion and from the perspective of this research perhaps he was one of the students who just 'didn't want to get it' [race issues] or deal with the issues.

The students (four males and four females) were interviewed at the end of the first term after their first placement in a secondary school. Their consent to participate in the research and for the unstructured interviews to be recorded was gained in advance. Each interview started with sharing the national NQT Survey results for the previous year with particular reference to the questions about BME pupils and pupils with English as an additional language. This was done to initiate a conversation with the student teachers. The approach enabled the student teachers to follow their own line of thinking and this was largely related to their early experiences of the course and their recent school experience. The interviews for each student lasted at least one hour allowing time for reflection and analysis. All the student interviews were transcribed. Reflecting on the interview process one student said, *'I haven't told anyone about this* [his reflections on the racist incidents in school]. *This* [the interview] *has helped me think through it* [race issues on school experience].' One student noted that the interview helped her clarify incidents related to 'race' in school. She said:

> It's good that you didn't tell me too much about what you were going to ask because it meant…OK I had things hovering in the back of my mind but I didn't specifically know what angle to think about them.

Findings and analysis

The following discussion will examine each student's starting point with respect to the research questions for example how well the PGCE course addresses and prepares students for issues of race; how the students reflect on this aspect and how the students' starting points may reflect their own ethnicity within the first part of their course and after their first placement in schools. The interviews each took a unique track, but presented the participant's current reflections on race, since some could reflect in depth on the issues they had encountered in school, whilst others could talk about what they had seen and what they thought about the issue in school. This research did not set out to identify typologies but four groups emerged from the data and the following key themes were prominent in the interviews: course content; exposure to BME people; handling racism and articulations of the students' position regarding race issues.

The naive, but well intentioned

Shelley and Sebastian had little experience of BME people and their perceptions illustrate this perspective. Shelley was not conversant in the language of race and diversity. She describes her placement school as having a '*reasonably high proportion of children from other cultures and quite a lot of them have English as an additional language'.* In my experience the use of the term 'other cultures' implies a politeness evident with students who have little experience of BME people and are located in largely White areas. Sebastian appeared to be naive with respect to race issues he used the term '*coloured*' in his interview without any recognition that this is no longer an appropriate term in the UK. His position is illustrated by this extract on how well the course has prepared him for diversity. Firstly he notes, *'there has not been a huge amount',* and then he says,

> Not very well so far…if I were to go into a classroom tomorrow that had pupils that really struggled with English, other than trying to talk quietly and have things written, not talking quietly, talking slowly. And just hope I can get by, I really wouldn't know what else to do.

He seems unaware how *'talking slowly'* could be construed as patronising or demeaning by pupils and adults from linguistic minorities.

The two students comment on the content of the course with respect to race and note the early parts of the PGCE course when they considered inclusion issues and undertook a group presentation on one aspect. Shelley felt that it would be useful to have *'checklists of different requirements within different cultures compared to the cultural background of the teacher'.* When asked how the course could better prepare students for race and diversity issues Sebastian comments, *'sources of information…things that we need to know about their culture, their language etc'.* Again, for these students the need for a checklist of 'differences' seems necessary and from their perspectives they see nothing wrong with lists which can imply a homogeneity within minority ethnic cultures, and that they serve to lead to, or reinforce stereotypes. Certainly such lists can serve to create an 'us and them' divide, and reinforce a deficit model which still prevails amongst teachers and student teachers in mainly White areas. The students considered this list to be part of their preparation to teach pupils from BME backgrounds. A comment such as this is also indicative of students who

have little experience of BME people. It indicates a lack of awareness of how such a well-intentioned request places the minority ethnic child in place of the 'other' as exotic and different from the 'norm' which is never articulated, but implied to be 'White' so inadvertently underscoring the relative power positions of the 'other' and the powerful 'White norm'. This is a perfect reflection of White privilege in action.

Shelley raised the issue of exposure to BME pupils in relation to the statistics on the NQT survey:

> Maybe some of it is the opportunity for exposure. I mean I have had the advantage that because I am in a city school, there's a reasonable subscription from other cultures.

When asked:

> VL: What is it that exposure does then?

Shelley responds,

> I think it is perhaps if you have a class of 30 children and 1 child from an ethnic minority in there they are almost invisible…whereas with exposure, because the proportion is higher you cannot help but recognise there are differences.

This almost contradicts her earlier claim to want to meet individual needs, yet one BME child is *'almost invisible'* but the idea of a critical mass of 'them' appears to underlie this comment. Later, she says:

> …personally it's [exposure] heightened my awareness but has also triggered this need to find out more because I need to be the best that I can for them.

Throughout her interview Shelley presents a tension in really wanting to do her best for her pupils, yet she is unaware of her powerful position as a White teacher with BME pupils which are implicitly perceived as 'other' in her use of language. Sebastian noted that he had *'not a huge amount'* of exposure, he notes:

> …in terms of ethnicity it is quite rare to see Black children or coloured children in [name of town] because most of the ethnic groups are actually European, Polish, Scandinavian…. They don't seem to have much in the way of trouble.

When asked about visible minorities in his school Sebastian has to think hard and says:

> There are some but not a huge number. I almost have to stop and think to work out who they were because it just didn't stand out if that makes sense.

VL: Why is that then, talk me around that?

Sebastian responds:

> If it was the kind of school where being coloured meant you were going to be bullied, you would have a very keen awareness of ok who have I got in this class that I need to be keeping an eye on, make sure that he has not got problems with the other pupils. But because they were no problems there is no reason to actually focus on race at all. So they don't really stand out as a minority in any way because they are not treated as a minority, therefore you don't think of them as a minority I suppose.

This illustrates Sebastian's naivety, or as King (2004) would describe it, his 'dysconscious racism'. He uses the term coloured again, but this time he 'white washes' the minority children, or as Jones (1999, 45) would term it he makes them 'White by proxy'. They are not really there, he has to try hard to think of who they are, ethnicity as depicted by skin colour seems to be associated with having problems and because the pupils he recalls do not have problems (or so he thinks) they are not treated as a minority and become invisible. A wonderful example of White privilege which has the power to ascribe labels or erase them! For Sebastian being a minority seems to be a disadvantage or he is drawing on the commonly accepted deficit model of BME pupils prevalent within education, associating ethnicity as potentially problematic. He admits that he has not thought *'a huge amount I must confess'* about race or diversity issues noting that *'it mainly comes up as how do I deal with this in class rather than anything more.'* Sebastian does not have a critical or deeper understanding of why it is important to recognise a child's ethnicity. We want teachers to positively recognise pupils' ethnicity and be sensitive and attuned to when race may be an issue for the child, for example racist bullying.

To educate student teachers to use appropriate language to refer to a child's ethnicity and to develop their awareness of race issues in a predominantly White area is a function of ITE. We need to be aware that educating student teachers in a predominantly White area poses additional challenges in terms of their starting points regarding race and need to educate some of them to develop a positive disposition to the presence of pupils from BME backgrounds, or those for whom English is an additional language and not to perceive them as a problem to tackle or ignore. The nature of the area and institution merely serves to exacerbate the normality of Whiteness and the deficits, or differences of the 'other.' Solomon and others (2005) and Marx (2006) concur that deficit talk serves to further normalise Whiteness and provide protection. Simply using a CRT framework (Marx 2006) the thinking which underlies Sebastian's articulations may run as follows, '***I*** *don't see colour because if* ***I*** *do* ***I*** *may discriminate and then* ***I*** *will be called a racist. So if* ***I*** *don't see it,* ***I*** *can't be racist and* ***I*** *don't have a "problem"'*. The use of bold text exemplifies how the centrality of his Whiteness determines this student's possible perception of the situation.

It's scary stuff – the rabbits

The term 'rabbits' has been used to describe the perceptions of two other students, Stuart and Stella, because they demonstrated startled shock which was evident within the interview data, but mostly apparent in their facial expressions which conveyed shock and discomfort during the interviews. Stuart describes how racist language and attitudes in school shocked him. Stella typifies the dilemma that Stuart articulates about whether or not to classify an incident as racist based on the level of malice. Yet in her own stance she finds it difficult to reconcile 'political correctness' with aspects of racism. She appears stuck in an 'in-between' position.

Stuart felt that he was aware of issues related to race from his experience rather than any preparation from the course. He surmises that the lack of focus on race issues at the University may be due to its location in a low ethnically diverse area. Then he describes coverage on the course:

> We are told to be aware of gender issues and race issues but you weren't told necessarily what they were or what to do when they arose…no specifics, no sort of case study type thing.

Later he mentions that the students have not received any training on how to deal with racist incidents and that as a student teacher he *'didn't really have a foot to stand on,'* in terms of his status in school indicating that a student teacher has a lowly status and they are further disadvantaged by their lack of knowledge about how to deal with racism in the classroom or the staff room. Here Stuart indicates the need for the course to prepare the students better for the first placement but also to empower them. At the start of the interview Stella is complimentary about the course. Later when asked if the University had prepared her cohort to deal with racist incidents she acknowledges that it had not adding:

> …every school is different, policy wise, I wouldn't know how they would want me to handle it. I wouldn't know how I would like to handle it either to be fair.

Later she adds that she would like guidance on how to handle racist incidents in school, for example, how to talk to the perpetrator and the class who may witness such an incident.

For Stuart the most shocking aspect was the presence of overt racism in school.

> There have been a few instances in school which I thought I would have been prepared for but they took me aback … some of the language heard used by students [pupils] and non-teaching staff I found quite shocking. I wasn't sure how to actually deal with it, especially the staff because that is something you don't expect and it took me aback.

Stuart's shock he explains is:

> …because I feel people in this area aren't as well educated towards the differences so it seemed like what would be the motive for it.

By this he means the use of racist language since there are no apparent 'targets' in the locality. He describes it as:

> …it almost seemed quite nostalgic racism, sort of why can't we say this anymore. What's wrong with saying…we are not being nasty.

His shock also stems from his belief that, *'everyone likes to believe they are neutral and not racist.'* Stuart demonstrates not only surprise at encountering racism, but indecision regarding how to deal with some incidents. He describes an incident with one child who constantly disrupts the lesson by mimicking an Indian accent after watching a DVD featuring a BME person. Stuart says:

> I was trying to work out whether that was malicious or just because it was different… I hadn't a clue how to deal with it. I didn't know whether I was meant to take it further…so I had to ask around what would you do and different teachers said different things.

His feeling of confusion and inability to deal with it directly are indicative of firstly his shock that such things still take place, secondly the lack of guidance from the course about dealing with racist incidents; finally his confusion is compounded by

differing advice from the professionals in situ. It is no wonder he appears to be a rabbit in the headlights of an oncoming vehicle not knowing which way to go.

Stella presents 'rabbit-like' tendencies in term of her position regarding racist incidents. She is unsure whether it is about intent and malice, or whether it is a lack of awareness that determines if an incident is racist or not. For instance, one child said, *'all Black people should stay where they belong in Africa.'* In her reflections Stella tries to explain the remark as:

> …what he meant is why can't they stay in their own country and work out their problems. He didn't mean it in a harmful way.

She goes on to note that as long as the perpetrator of the incident expresses remorse then that should be the end of the matter. Whilst she appears unequivocal about denouncing *'people who say things about certain cultural groups or religious groups'* she professes to dislike political correctness, *' there are far too many terms we can't say'*. She is aware of her position because she says, *'I think I am sending out mixed messages here because I don't like political correctness.'* Here Stella demonstrates a position of ideological incongruence (Solomon et al. 2005) between what she believes to be wrong (racism), but then can explain away a racist view and profess to dislike political correctness. She represents someone who is unaware of her privileged White position which enables her to hold one view whilst acting in another described by Henry and Tator (1994, in Solomon et al. 2005) as 'democratic racism.'

Stella and Stuart represent the position of some student teachers who clearly know that racism is wrong and needs to be tackled but require clear direction on how to recognise and handle incidents. An element they both acknowledge which had not been addressed at that point in the course. The articulations imply that as White student teachers both Stella and Stuart do not 'problematise' their own ethnic position, nor understand the nature of passive racism. In noting this White neutrality (Stuart does not use the term White) he alludes to position of White being the 'norm' and without ethnicity. In other words, Stuart sees 'White' as a colour-blind, neutral, liberal position which CRT seeks to expose as a privileged stance that contributes to the passive racism in society (Gillborn 2008). These two exemplify liberal passivity evident in every workplace.

Getting there with guilt

Shirley's and Steven's responses illustrate this particular typology. Both are critical of the course regarding their preparation to teach BME pupils. They showed a good level of awareness of racism and school practices which could be construed as institutional racism, but neither of them use this phrase. Shirley describes an incident with a boy of African origin, whose grade reviews showed that he was average across all subjects:

> …it was extraordinary that one pupil in a class seems to be absolutely average for everything. When I talked about it in the staffroom and said do you think teachers are sensitive to his race? To have said that, everyone closed down. It was quite amazing…. This is what I have found in a very White area that when you try to be open up about it, everyone is incredibly defensive, amongst Whites only…. I think people are worried about saying the wrong thing…of being labelled as racist'.

Shirley explains how the boy was very upset about the results and she says:

> Well I was upset for him, not upset with the school in terms of what a terrible school because its a 98% White school, with 98% White teaching staff, it's, I think, just a lack of experience, rather than racism.

The course at this stage had not prepared her to analyse the situation with regards to institutional racism so the unwitting racism is explained as lack of experience. However, she does recognise the powerful effect that the school's collective action had on this child when she describes finishing the lesson and as she is tidying the room under the boy's desk she finds a screwed up piece of paper and as she unravels it she recognises it as the sheet with his grades on. She notes, '*it spoke volumes.*'

Steven is very perceptive in his analysis of a situation where two newly arrived African boys are placed in his lower groups. He describes how he feels '*uncomfortable*', '*guilty*' about the situation. This response is based on firstly his position, as an inexperienced student teacher he is unable to meet the needs of these pupils; secondly he felt '*they were in the wrong groups for the wrong reasons*' and finally he recognises that in placing them in the lower groups with poor learning and behaviour role models,

> …they are then tarred with the same brush as everybody else in that group, all the problems start at that setting stage or whether they are deep rooted I don't know.

Here he is perhaps alluding to passive racism. He is also surprised that his efforts with these students and their presence in his classes go unrecognised by his school mentor. Both Shirley and Steven encounter institutional racism as embedded in practice, yet whilst Steven appears to recognise it, he seems unable to name it. Shirley explains it away as teachers' lack of experience with BME pupils. Neither felt that they were in a position to question or challenge school practice, there was too much at stake! But the experience left them feeling uncomfortable and guilty perhaps in terms of their complicity with institutionally racist practice and the impotence of their own positions. This would have gone unrecognised had it not been for the opportunity to participate in this research.

Get it, but frustrated

This perspective is illustrated by Sean's and Shauna's responses. Both understood issues of race as evident in their reflections about the course and experiences in school. Sean talks about White privilege and challenges a trainer on a teachers' professional training day in school for her use of the term 'Black' to allocate negative thoughts. He is dissatisfied with the postgraduate teacher education course with respect to training on race issues because:

> …people are scared, people are conditioned to think politically correctly therefore conditioned to think around it to seem that they are not racist.

He describes most student teachers as of '*this ilk*'; paying '*a lot of lip service to racism*' and that they hide behind a '*pc shield*', a defence mechanism which protects them from criticism whilst holding alternative views to those that they articulate in public. Sean notes that '*a lot of these things need to be addressed at PGCE level in much more rigorous detail*'. By his own admission he is a '*good leftie*' (indicating his

political position) who clearly has knowledge and experience of aspects of power and inequality.

Similarly, Shauna is very dissatisfied with the coverage of race issues on the course, particularly the early task on inclusion where she says her colleagues' use of language and their perpetuation of stereotypes *'made me cringe'*.

> I feel we are unprepared…you don't have a framework…the University has a responsibility to challenge and make sure people have at least considered their own positions…people need to understand the wider issues as to why as a teacher it is your duty to challenge that [racism].

Shauna was prepared to challenge the racism she found in school, particularly Islamophobia, by organising a trip to the mosque. This was vetoed by the staff who suggested that *'it wouldn't go down very well with parents and children because it was a mosque'*. She was not in a strong position to take this any further but recognised the institutional response as racist.

Both Sean and Shauna felt they had learnt nothing new from the course about race issues, thus their starting points remained unchanged and the coverage left them frustrated and wanting more.

Recommendations and conclusions

This research is only the beginning. It reveals the embedded nature of Whiteness and how it shapes student teachers' responses to race. Sean's exclamation to look behind the 'pc shield' is apposite. For behind it, as revealed by the data, lie at best unexamined, or unchallenged notions and confusions about Whiteness and the 'other', or naive perceptions of equity based on deficit thinking about the 'other' and disturbingly the protective shield may serve to hide the student teachers' developing realisation about how the power and privilege ascribed to their ethnicity is best left unexplored, or uncharted for fear of exposing how it has contributed to the disadvantaging of the 'other'. Solomon and others (2005) underline how the failure to examine Whiteness further embeds its position of power. The contribution of the majority of these student teachers reveals the embedded nature of Whiteness within ITE and its practices. Their articulations and starting points indicate the normative nature of Whiteness as neutral, colour-blind and liberal. It is not until we begin to question the neutral White position promoted by ITE policy and practice that we will begin to make a real difference to how student teachers perceive themselves in relation to their BME pupils and their position as educators in a multiracial society. It is no wonder then that 63% of NQTs felt unprepared to teach pupils from BME backgrounds. They were perhaps, like Sebastian and Shelley waiting for the checklist; or like Stuart and Stella waiting to be told what a racist incident was; or perhaps like Steven and Shirley waiting to be acknowledged for their work in terms of supporting BME pupils, but not prepared, or even empowered to challenge the implicit assumptions which constitute passive, institutional racism and how it impacts on the educational opportunities of the Black youngsters in their schools. It would be cynical to question whether these students would challenge such assumptions one has to believe in the power to do good at times! For Sean and Shauna they were waiting for initial teacher education to get to the real issues of how the invisible power of Whiteness affords privilege and a position of superiority to White teachers and how this affects their attitude and actions in the

classroom and ultimately affects the educational experiences and outcomes of BME pupils.

The students felt that the course did not provide sufficient grounding, or progression from their starting points on issues of race equality. If we recognise CRT as a legitimate perspective then issues related to race, culture, ethnicity and Whiteness need to be embedded within the course and to be revisited through various components of it. For example, it has to feature in the different subjects offered on the secondary programme and not just feature within the Professional Studies component which includes one lecture and seminar on race and one on teaching pupils for whom English is an additional language. The integration of the topic would require staff development but most importantly recognition amongst tutors that this is an important and necessary dimension of initial teacher preparation with wider educational consequences. Early discussions about race issues and preparing student teachers for the classroom should be included in the first part of the course especially in a predominantly White area. The University training for mentors who support student teachers in school also needs to integrate race equality issues. This research provided the basis for pen portraits about the students' reflections on race which were used in a training session with secondary mentors. This was positively received and mentors requested further training in this area. But most importantly the early integration of race, culture and ethnicity issues could implicitly develop greater reflection on the issues in school and promote professional dialogue with the mentor and student teacher which Steven would have benefited from.

These steps are pragmatic solutions which will go some way to address the lack of understanding on the part of some students. But the fundamental aspect that student teachers do not have a conceptual framework related to race issues needs to be addressed via the PGCE course. ITE needs to move beyond the skills-based Standards. An anti-racist CRT based framework would challenge most students' 'everyday' understanding about notions of power, equality, diversity and racism. Using a CRT perspective the course needs to develop the students', tutors' and mentors' understanding about their own White ethnicity and how it is linked to power and the perpetuation of White power structures. This is a 'tall order' because training involving the destabilisation of the status quo will result in a backlash of denial, defence or silence. This is the real hurdle which needs to be jumped in terms of initial teacher education and practice. Perhaps a starting point may be to examine the notion of identity and how this influences opportunities and achievements. This may be a more 'palatable' and less contentious way to examine race and other issues related to identity. Teacher education needs to develop a framework for supporting student teachers beyond their initial training and into their first and subsequent years as teachers to revisit and analyse issues related to race, culture and ethnicity.

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