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‘Against the odds’; a study into the nature of protective factors that support and facilitate a sample of individuals from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds into the teaching profession

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This paper reports on a small scale, qualitative study, located in England and Wales, with the goal of advancing fairer teacher representation. Deploying a positive lens, the research shines a light on the lived experiences of 12 individuals from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, all of whom successfully entered the teaching profession during a period of up to 5 years before the study. Against the current backdrop of unfair teacher representation, the achievements of these individuals in becoming teachers, are deconstructed and analysed, to determine whether there are any commonalities in their circumstances. Drawing on the theoretical frames of capital and critical race theory, the study aims to establish whether a set of protective factors exist that may have supported and facilitated their journey into teaching. The study finds the achievements of these individuals in joining the teaching profession can be attributed, in part, to the nature of the cultural wealth each possesses. It concludes these teachers, acting as critical pedagogues, are not the sole benefactors of their cultural wealth, with benefits afforded both the minority and majority population. In spite of intentions to frame the teachers’ narratives positively, the study reveals troubling evidence of embedded racial processes, which serve to threaten the teachers’ sense of belonging in the profession and inhibits others from joining. Recommendations to further boost teacher representation for minority groups are offered.

Keywords: teacher representation, BAME teachers, protective factors, interest convergence

Introduction

The stark disparity in representation between the number of teachers from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds in primary and secondary schools in England and the pupils that they teach is well documented. Individuals from BAME backgrounds are overrepresented when applying for post graduate teacher training courses in England, however, by the time they enrol, complete their training, and achieve qualified teacher status (QTS), they are underrepresented compared to the wider population, (Worth et al 2022). In the academic year 21/22, 34.8% of primary pupils and 34.1% pupils in secondary state funded schools in England were from BAME backgrounds (Gov.UK, 2022); compared to 14.9% of teachers who identified as being from an ethnic minority background (Gov.UK, 2022). 26% of schools in England have no BAME staff of any kind and 46% of schools have no teachers from minority ethnic groups, (Tereschenko et al.2020). This paper reports on a dedicated, small scale qualitative study with the ambition to advance the goal of fairer teacher representation. The author is a former teacher educator whose mother was mixed race, of north African and White heritage. Although the research was carried out in England and Wales, the implications and conclusions drawn have an international reach and will be of interest to all readers who are committed to racial justice.

The reported study purposefully shines a light on the lived experiences of a sample of 11 teachers from BAME backgrounds located in England and 1 teacher in Wales who, arguably against the odds, successfully entered the teaching profession. At the time of the study 11 were in the early stages of their career and one of the participants, after a few years in teaching had gone on to study at doctoral level. Although the teachers' stories reveal troubling evidence of the continued existence of macro and micro racist aggression and its impact on their lives and those of their

families, the endemic problem of racism is positioned as a backdrop rather than presented centre stage. The paper's originality lies in the rejection of a deficit methodology in favour of what is viewed to be a more constructive approach to address the problem of teacher under representation. To this end, the featured study homes in on the sample's early career period with a focus on the nature of the factors that enabled progression. The career stages examined are: pre-application; enrolment and completion of initial teacher training (ITT); the achievement of QTS; and a period of 3 subsequent years working as a qualified teacher. The reported study's primary research question is what are the nature of the enablers or protective factors that facilitate and support the sample of teachers' journeys into the teaching profession?

Although there is a substantial body of research on the challenges and barriers faced by BAME teachers in career progression, (Lumby and Coleman 2017, Bush 2019, Miller and Callendar, 2018), there are limited studies which shed light on the nature of perceived enablers or positive factors that support progression. Miller (2019) makes a valuable contribution to this field; his scoping study summarises evidence from four research projects, conducted in England over the previous decade, on the perceived enablers to BAME teacher progression. Four cross cutting themes were found to emerge from an analysis of the studies. Firstly, BAME teachers featured in the studies were found to possess 'meritocratic agency'; a belief in their own self-worth, which manifested in a determination to keep applying for jobs in the hope that their value would be recognised. Secondly, possession of 'contrived or expedient agency' revealed BAME teachers' chances of progression or promotion was enhanced by becoming part of a network or club. In other words, they stood a greater chance of promotion or progression if they looked like, had similar cultural patterns of behaviour to White teachers and were prepared to adopt, adapt and adjust their behaviour accordingly.

Thirdly, the progression or promotion of BAME teachers was found in many cases to be linked to the support and endorsement of a white colleague. The fourth enabler or common factor found to support BAME teacher progression, was an institutional habitus of equity and fairness, where school leaders' actions challenged the status quo. School leaders were proactive in implementing strategies to improve the recruitment, development, retention and progression of BAME teachers and used their position to influence and lead change in BAME staffing within their school. Miller draws on the findings to propose a powerful model of career progression for BAME teachers, which acknowledges both the complexity and interrelationship between the four themes. He concludes that without deep institutional changes to culture, practices and structures, career progression for these teachers will remain flatlined or restricted.

This paper builds on Miller's 2019 research as it also examines the nature of enablers or protective factors that support teacher progression of BAME individuals but with a particular focus on foundational aspects that might shape and influence their entry to the profession. The study investigates, the participants' motivation to want to train to teach, their family's attitudes towards teaching, role models that influenced their career choice and the availability of sources of support to enter the teaching profession. With intent to disrupt the majoritarian status quo and to contribute to the anti-racism movement, the paper thus embarks from a positive vantage point, building on Yosso's (2005) stance that communities of colour possess multiple strengths and assets, which contribute to a distinct cultural community wealth. The array of resources and capitals, which feature throughout these 12 teachers' stories and underpin this cultural wealth, are deliberately foregrounded and celebrated. The author builds on the premise that a recognition and affirmation of these empowering capitals brings benefit to both the world of education and wider society and, as a corollary of the positive exposure,

more underrepresented groups may be encouraged to consider teaching. With intentional positive framing or positioning of BAME individuals within a racialized society, the research reported here identifies the commonalities in the lived experiences of these individuals who have successfully navigated their way through any potential 'oppressive structures' Lynn and Jennings (2009,174) and arguably, against the odds, have qualified and work as teachers.

Reporting on the achievements of these teachers of colour supports the aim of building an empirical base with which to challenge stereotypical thinking pertaining to the somatic norm (Puwar 2004). The paper presents a challenge to White supremacy; an entrenched and pervasive constant that according to Gillborn (2008) is imputed in the design of the educational system which serves to sustain race inequality at manageable levels rather than eliminate it. In order to contextualise these narratives and pay due respect to the significant achievements of these teachers and their families in overcoming potential barriers, consideration will now be given to the two main theoretical frameworks that underpin and serve to illuminate the study, namely critical race theory and capital theory.

Critical Race Theory

Drawing from a diverse range of disciplines, epistemologies and constructs such as postmodernism, post-structuralism, radical feminism, Marxism, and cultural studies, the fast-growing anti-racist movement Critical Race Theory (CRT) is both difficult to define and confine. While the disparate writings that fall within the CRT rubric may be lacking in theoretical cohesiveness, a common thread that characterises almost all the literature is a commitment to embrace the ideology of anti-subordination in some form, Calmore (1992). Although rooted in traditions of independent Black Atlantic political thought, such as Dubois (1903) and Fanon (1967), the foundation for CRT has been

traced back to a more recent anti- racist movement known as critical legal studies (CLS) (Taylor, 2016). Emerging in the mid 1970s in the USA, out of frustration over the slow pace of racial reform in the wake of civil rights legislation, critical legal scholars such as Derrick Bell and Kimberle' Crenshaw draw on Gramsci's (1971) core construct of hegemony to frame analytically the 'continued legitimacy of oppressive structures in American society' (Ladson Billings 2009,20).

CRT begins with the premise that 'racism is normal not aberrant' (Delgado, 1995, *xlv*), With a long tradition of resistance to the perceived unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources, CRT scholars advocate for social and political change to bring about freedom and equality for all, with the hope that scholarly resistance will lay the groundwork for wide scale resistance. According to Bell (2016, 34), the majority of the members of this scholarship are people of colour who are ideologically committed to the struggle against racism. Those members who are white are usually cognizant of and committed to the overthrow of their own racial privilege.

Warmington (2012) describes CRT as an analytical framework for addressing the endemic presence of racism within society. He explains CRT's key analytical principles are aimed at making visible, taken for granted racialized processes embedded in society. CRT presents a challenge to the dominant ideology, countering claims towards race neutrality, meritocracy, objectivity and equal opportunity. These, according to Solorzano (1997) act as a camouflage for the self- interest, power and privilege of dominant groups (such as white men). There are essentially two opposing schools of thought within CRT - realism and idealism. Inspired by the pioneering intellectual father of racial realism Derrick Bell (1992), realists, often referred to as economic determinists, maintain that racism is a means by which society allocates and sustains privilege and status. Realists hold that racial advances can only be made if the

progress or racial equality advocated, converges with the interests of the majoritarian elite White. For historical illustrative insights here see the *Brown v Board of Education* supreme court decision to end state mandated public school segregation in the USA (US Reports, 1954). This landmark decision, Bell (1980) contended, was based not on the immorality of racial inequality but because it helped ‘provide immediate credibility to America’s struggle with communist countries to win the hearts and minds of emerging third world peoples’ (1980,524). Idealists, in contrast, argue that race is a social construct and not a biological reality. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) explain idealists hold that racism and discrimination are matters of thinking, mental categorisation, language and discourse.

The second theoretical frame deployed in the study is capital theory, chosen specifically for its challenge to deficit thinking and its close alignment to CRT. A summary of the key constructs within capital theory follows.

Capital Theory

A well-known aspect of capital theory is social capital, a construct which is open to wide interpretation and also difficult to define and confine. Fine (2000) describes it as ‘a totally chaotic, ambiguous, and general category that can be used as a notional umbrella for almost any purpose’ (5). Halpern (2005) draws on the metaphor of an intellectual Rorschach test, to highlight how the construct is open to multiple interpretations depending on certain interests. Although the phrase was coined nearly a century ago by Hanifan (1916), more recently, Woolcock (1998) foregrounded its potential for society as a powerful collective resource. Gilchrist (2009) suggests social capital recognizes that the relationships of everyday life between neighbours, colleagues and friends, even casual acquaintances, have value for the individual and society as a whole.

Allied to the social construct of social capital are the twinned concepts of ‘cultural capital’ and ‘habitus’. Originating from the theorising of Pierre Bourdieu (1977), cultural capital represents an essentially agentic currency or resource, which has the potential to either advantage or disadvantage individuals on the basis of the type of knowledge, behaviours, dispositions and habits acquired from the home background. According to Bourdieu, educational systems have tended to perpetuate inequality on the grounds that they privilege or legitimize particular types of cultural capital over others. Students, whose habitus or ‘ways of being in the world’ (Lingard et al. 2011) that are perceived to be consonant with the middle-class values (integral to educational institutions), will likely be accorded greater status than some working-class students or minority ethnic students. This hegemonic practice can lead to an internalization of a social order where students become acculturated into believing the inequitable treatment to be completely normal. Children are thus tacitly and explicitly reminded of their assigned social destinies, with often negative consequences for their life trajectories, (Riehl 2000).

A significant challenge to Bourdieu’s power laden interpretation of cultural capital can be found in Yosso’s (2005) influential paper that draws productively on CRT to highlight the potentially expansive wealth possessed by communities of colour in the form of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts. At the heart of her seminal reconceptualization and positive reframing of communities of colour is a rejection of deficit thinking or assumptions that apportion blame for poor academic performance on the families of students on the basis of a lack of the normative cultural knowledge and skills.

Yosso argues cultural wealth comprises multiple forms of capitals, many of which are not always traditionally valued or recognised. In contrast to income, which

includes salaries, wages and payments, Yosso defines wealth as the total extent of an individual's accumulated assets and resources. Drawing on a range of critical theorists to substantiate her perspective, she curates the various forms of capital that serve to nurture and sustain community cultural wealth and presents them in the form of a model of community cultural wealth, comprising: aspirational; navigational; social; linguistic; familial and resistance capital. For further illustrative examples and details of the empirical base on which the categorisation was created, see Yosso's 2005 paper.

Methodology

The study took place in 2021 and received ethical approval from the research and ethics committee at the researcher's institution. A convenience sample of 12 participants was used (see Table 1 for further details). A total of 180 students from a BAME background, who had studied for a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in the five years prior to the study were initially contacted by email and provided with details about the study's aims, data collection methods, an information sheet on the background to the project and the ethical considerations taken. PGCE students from the current year of study were not contacted to mitigate the risk they would feel obliged to take part. Of the initial sample of 180, 11 agreed to take part. Each participant was interviewed individually by the researcher via a digital platform for between 45 to 60 minutes. Each narrative interview was recorded, transcribed and sent to the participants to check for accuracy. All participants were sent a debrief form which signposted to sources of support should they need it. One participant asked if a friend who had studied for a PGCE at another institution could take part. She subsequently received the same details about the research project and was also interviewed, following the same procedures. 11 of the participants were based in England and one was in Wales. The sample of convenience was 11 out of 12 female,

which equates to 91.6%. Although this is heavily female skewed, the population of female teachers in England is 75.7% (Gov.UK, 2022). Future research might be conducted to determine whether this slight over representation has impacted the findings. The participants were asked the same ten interview questions, (see below) with scope to ask further clarifying and probing questions. This paper speaks to the first eight questions; the remaining two will be addressed in a future paper.

- Contextual details, such as their role, when they studied for a PGCE and their ethnicity
- The origins of their interest and motivations for teaching and other possible careers
- Their family’s attitudes towards their choice of teaching as a career
- Sources of support and role models for entering the teaching profession
- Skills, dispositions and attributes they drew on in teaching
- Perspectives on the PGCE course
- Means by which they may have overcome barriers to enter the teaching profession
- Their views on possible protective factors at play
- How to boost underrepresented teachers
- Design of outreach work to attract more teachers from their ethnic background

Table 1: Characteristics of Participants

| No | PGCE year of Study | Age phase/ subject | Gender | Ethnicity |
|----|--------------------|----------------------|--------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | 2018/19 | Primary | Female | British Pakistani |
| 2 | 2018/19 | Primary | Female | Mixed White British/ Jamaican |
| 3 | 2019/20 | Secondary Biology | Female | Mixed White British / Trinidad |
| 4 | 2017/18 | Primary | Female | Asian |
| 5 | 2015/16 | Secondary Maths | Female | Bangladeshi |
| 6 | 2018/19 | Primary | Female | Black African |
| 7 | 2015/16 | Primary | Female | Black Caribbean |
| 8 | 2019/20 | Primary | Female | Nepalese |
| 9 | 2015/16 | Primary | Male | Mixed White British/ Black African |

| | | | | |
|----|---------|-------------------|--------|--------------------------------|
| 10 | 2018/19 | Primary | Female | Mixed Jamaican/ White British |
| 11 | 2019/20 | Primary | Female | Mixed Jamaican/ White British |
| 12 | 2016/17 | Secondary English | Female | Mixed Caribbean/ White British |

Findings

Components of a Protective Framework

The data reveal evidence of common forms of capital drawn on universally by the teachers in the study. The capitals are not mutually exclusive but cohere in a complementary and overlapping manner to constitute a supportive foundation or protective framework for the individuals in the sample. This empowering collective resource was found to contribute to the successful transition into and continued employment within the teaching profession. Evidence of the capitals that featured most frequently in the data are social, aspirational and agentic. A further component of the protective framework was that of cultural knowledge.

Social Capital

The data show each of these individuals drew on the resource of social capital to support their move into the teaching profession. The vast majority described the positive familial relationships, impact or influences of their families, as exemplified in the following comments:

I think other families were told you can't do things because of your skin colour, I was never told I couldn't do it - if you put your mind to it I would do it. (P7)

My family are really supportive of everything I've done... really proud. (P11)

A number acknowledged the practical and emotional support provided by their parents helped to remove any potential barriers they may have encountered to enter the teaching profession. This specific, targeted and pragmatic support enabled them to navigate what one described as ‘the system’, for example, driving them to interviews, getting them tutoring, securing work experience. Another example of the nature of support provided is illustrated here:

My dad would sort of lift us up over any stumbling block... he’d always be there fighting your corner (P3)

When asked about the nature of the individual strengths and skills they drew on when teaching, the majority of respondents attributed personal qualities such as determination, commitment, passion and drive to the role modelling of at least one parent, as exemplified here:

My mum is a fighter, I mean she never gives up never. She will fall and she rises up again... so you grow up around her and you don’t have any excuses to fail. That’s the thing you just don’t (P6)

I think my mum’s been quite a strong female role model...My mum was influential in terms of her encouragement and her reasoning, you know she’d say just because I couldn’t do something doesn’t mean you can’t, in fact you do it more (P1)

Aspirational Capital

When asked their reasons for wanting to become teachers, ten of the participants talked about the lack of representation in their own schooling and how this motivated them to positively influence the next generation of children. Many participants saw themselves as role models, who could be the teacher they had lacked, growing up in predominantly

White schools. The nature of these aspirational drivers is illustrated in the following comments:

They need to see that this teacher is brown, who is from the same community, who had the same upbringing, who was born in poverty or in a very low working-class household with one income and he's here - so I can do it too. (P5)

I felt I could be a role model to some children, some black children who want to see the same skin colour as them in their classroom. You owe it to them... to boost their confidence and let them know they all have a future. (P6)

I think it's probably just a small rebellion ... I've never been taught by anyone who wasn't white ever. (P2)

It was important to me as a woman of colour to give representation ... it's almost about making a statement, because it's all about representation, it benefits not just people that look like you but everyone really. (P11)

A number acknowledged the aspiration to improve the lives of the next generation had been passed on or transmitted by at least one of their parents. The vast majority referred to the overt racism and oppressive structures suffered by at least one parent. For example, one described how her black Caribbean father was held down as a child by a White man so that his son could beat him up. Another talked about her mother, also Black Caribbean, who, as an experienced nurse, had to relay the information to doctors through White colleagues as they'd invariably dismiss or question what she'd say first hand.

Another example of intergenerational aspiration is evidenced here, with reference made to the importance of the school as a site for transformation:

My mum didn't want me to grow up in the same society as she did so she changed a lot for me but there are people in my age range that don't see it as a problem. That's why it's schools that need to be advocates. (P5)

Agentic Capital

The majority of the participants acknowledged the doubts they initially experienced about the prospect of becoming teachers, on the grounds they might not fit into the profession as ethnic minorities. The nature of some of these concerns are illustrated here:

You almost sort of feel, do I belong here? Is it going to be somewhere I'm going to be able to thrive? It didn't feel like it was a sphere I was able to enter. (P2)

Most people don't like to feel different do they? So I guess they're not going to put themselves in a career where they know they're in a minority. (P3)

I see so many minorities and they're thinking why would I? They're thinking I'm going into an old traditional profession where I probably won't be welcomed. (P10)

When asked what helped them overcome such worries, the majority highlighted their passion and self-belief in their capacity to make a positive difference and to bring about change. The drive or self-determination to pursue what felt right, substantiated by a range of positive personal qualities they attributed to themselves such as, high self-worth, self-efficacy and determination constitutes agentic capital, also known as agency. The existence of this empowering resource, which is referred to as the ability to exert control over one's work and development, (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015), is characterised by the following comments:

I thought I'm going to do this, I'm not going to let anyone stop me. You need to be determined... I'm doing it for the greater good. (P1)

It's really strange because you go through this sort of battle with yourself because you think no, actually I **am** capable. (P2)

It's about knowing your worth and your values. (P3)

The agentic reframing of potentially negative interactions featured in a number of the respondents' stories, with examples given of how the respondents were able to take a philosophical perspective without taking offence, as illustrated here:

Some of the questions were so basic and if I didn't know otherwise it would come across as offensive but I know they didn't have that exposure. (P10)

When someone tells me to go home it's never bothered me cos, it's such a nonsensical statement...if I hear a ridiculous comment, I break it down and it somehow becomes just laughable. (P9)

The agentic capital from which the participants benefited, was strengthened by their parents' endorsement of their choice of teaching as a career. Although some of the parents were initially apprehensive about their children entering the teaching profession, importantly, they afforded them the freedom to pursue whatever career they chose. A number described how, in contrast to friends and family members from the same cultural community, their parents did not dictate or impose on their career choices but gave them the freedom or agency to make their own decision, which they ultimately respected and validated. The type of unconditional support received is illustrated in the following comments:

My father he's free-spirited man, so whatever his children wanted to be, he backed them up 100%. (P6)

My parents were quite happy with whatever I chose to do in life. (P5)

I'm lucky my family is relaxed and whatever I wanted to do they'd be happy with it to be honest, they're very supportive. (P1)

She never pushed anything and was very supportive. (P7)

Mum said I don't care if you're someone in an office or you're a doctor or you're working in a shop or you're a nurse or whatever as long as someone gives you the respect that you deserve then I'm happy. (P4)

Over half of the participants admitted their parents' approval of teaching as a career choice went against the grain and did not align with the views of the cultural community or extended family, to which they belonged. Typically, in their community, they explained, teaching was viewed as a lower status career compared to other professions such as accountancy, law or medicine that were advocated. The views offered here differed according to the ethnic subgroup, for example, one described how teaching, in her birth country, did not require a university degree, was viewed as a steppingstone to most people and that anyone who went to university would want to be something else. Another described how in her parents' country of origin there were no female teachers, which made it difficult for them to conceptualise her ambition to teach. Beyond the immediate family, participants described how their decision to go into teaching was met with incredulity by their extended family and the wider community; views expressed through the following:

It was the biggest shock of the century... you're doing a degree why are you going into teaching? (P8)

It was like oh gosh what is she doing? (P5)

I don't understand why would you go into a field that isn't yours? (P4)

Cultural Knowledge to navigate an unjust society

In contrast to the empowering and positive nature of the social, aspirational, and agentic capitals, the respondents also engaged with a specific form of cultural knowledge with less benign roots. Although highly supportive and aspirational for their children, the vast majority of participants reported how their parents did not sugar coat things; making explicit the lengths they would need to go to, to successfully navigate their way through an unjust society. The data reveal these parents protected their children by preparing them. They did not shield them from the realities of racism but gave them what they thought was the best possible advice or knowledge; namely, the need to work harder than everyone else and prove society wrong. A number of the participants described how they enacted the parental guidance they received, as exemplified here:

We were raised being taught that we do have to work harder to prove ourselves because people might disregard us because of our skin colour. You always have to keep pushing so that you don't give them a reason to not hire you... you need to keep pushing to overcome those prejudgments. (P7)

It was kind of drummed into me from an early age like people ask, people are looking at you anyway, so make sure they've got nothing to look at ... it's just that you're being scrutinised in a different way. (P8)

I just had to go in, and it's terrible, but do what my dad said and just you need to be twice as good to be just as good. (P2)

Discussion and Conclusions

The participants' success in entering the teaching profession can be attributed, in part, to the quality of cultural wealth each possessed. Perhaps the most impactful component of this valuable repertoire is that of social capital; a potent, multi-layered resource generated through the positive role modelling, strong relationships and unconditional

support received from their respective families. Although an inherently benign resource, paradoxically, the origins of this empowering resource are influenced by the disempowering experiences of their parents. At least one parent of each participant suffered from racist oppression; their parents acted in a protective and invested way, to ensure the next generation did not suffer the same fate. The families deserve dual, interrelated credits - for the quality of their nurturing parenting and for the robust efforts made to break the chain of intergenerational injustice.

The cultural wealth from which the participants benefitted, represents an array of protective factors. In a self-repeating, or fractal way, the participants' presence in the site of the classroom also manifests as a protective factor, with scope to achieve positive outcomes for their pupils, particularly those who may be in danger of oppression. Acting as agents of change, the participants maintained their families' aspirational momentum, channelling it purposefully to the conduit of their own transformative ambitions to disrupt patterns of injustice. The politically and racially conscious nature of these diverse participants suggests they have the critical disposition of heightened sensitivity to the range of injustices that can present in the educational arena. This perspective is substantiated by the findings of a study conducted by Su in 1996. Exploring differences between entering preservice teachers of colour and White preservice teachers, Su concluded that the ethnic minority candidates demonstrated a "strong awareness of the unequal educational opportunities for the poor and minority children, the irrelevance of the existing curriculum and instruction for minority students and the need to restructure schools and society" (p. 130). With first- or second-hand insights into the effects of racism; these teachers possess an enhanced, self-referral and ontological understanding of the deleterious impact of oppressive behaviour. A teacher who can relate to and bring nuanced insights to the lived experiences of marginalised or

oppressed pupils is well positioned to not only empathise, but to nurture, guide and educate against all forms of injustice any pupil may experience in a compassionate manner.

The capacity to act as authentic agents of change or ‘critical pedagogues’, (deMarrias and LeCompte, 1999), who can ‘interrupt historical, situated systems of oppression’, (Lather 1991: 121), does not, of course, preclude those teachers who have not suffered from injustice, however, the strong intrinsic motivation of those who have, is considered a potent driver that can galvanise and strengthen transformative commitments. Through their presence in the potentially emancipatory site of the classroom, these teachers aspired to be role models for the children they taught; a responsibility that many teachers of colour readily accept, (Guyton, Saxton and Wesch, 1996). As well as helping to close the achievement gap for BAME pupils (Demie and Huat Beng 2022), a diverse teaching workforce has the means to develop their pupils’ ‘narrative imagination’, a human capacity, defined by Nussbaum (1997, 23) as an ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of someone different to us. These teachers with cultural mediation abilities are well positioned to promote intercultural understanding and curiosity, with all children benefiting from the expansion of horizons afforded them. Acting as social mirrors to affirm and validate the identity of their pupils, these teachers, in established positions of authority, are ideally placed as agents of change to foster aspiration and, of foundational importance, a sense of belonging and affiliation for all, particularly, those from non-majoritarian backgrounds, if lacking. Yet as shown, this fundamental human dimension was jeopardised for many of the participants themselves who, unsure whether they would belong in the teaching profession, had to draw on their sense of agency to boost their feelings of self-efficacy. The reported existential concern around belonging in the teaching profession invites

rebuke and, sadly, substantiates Puwar's (2004) ground-breaking, ethnographic research, which highlights the existence of entrenched spaces in society where racialized (and gendered) bodies can operate under the lens of suspicion and surveillance, and are all too easily seen to be lacking the desired competencies.

The majority of the participants reported the pathway into teaching was complicated and not without tensions or risks. Grappling anxieties and concerns around whether they would belong, with many fielding discouragements from their extended family or community, they nonetheless pursued their ambition and succeeded. This success in the face of adversity, presents as a positive indicator of the characteristic of teacher resilience. Resilience is just not a personal attribute but a complex construct, resulting from a dynamic relationship between risk and protective factors (Benard, 2004). Resilience can be viewed as a process of adaptation, (Castro et al, 2010). In the adaptive process of becoming teachers, these racialised individuals, boosted by an array of protective factors, are regarded as active agents who are effective in employing strategies to overcome adversities faced in their environment. With continued high rates of teacher attrition, (Tereseschenko et al, 2021), the resilience shown by these teachers stands them, ergo their pupils, in good stead.

Whilst the findings support the author's aim to frame these teachers' narratives positively, it would be naive and immoral at this concluding juncture to ignore the external, inhibitory societal forces that continue to exist, and which may deter others from similar backgrounds (in less favourable circumstances) from entering teaching. It cannot go unheeded that at least one of the parents of all the participants felt the need to provide explicit cultural knowledge to their children to educate and guide on the importance of proving society wrong (manifesting in the advice to work harder than

everyone else). The continued need to impart this demoralising imperative points to a classic manifestation of ‘double consciousness’. Exposed at the start of the 20th century by African American, Du Bois (1903), this embedded, hegemonic, cultural process involves the oppressed looking at oneself through the eyes of a racist White society, always second guessing what the latter might be thinking and modifying one’s behaviour accordingly. In stark contrast to the empowering capitals highlighted, the unchallenged acceptance by the participants of the need to heed this navigational advice, presents as a deeply problematic and disconcerting indictment of the racist cultural reality that persists in some societies. Given the disproportionately low number of teachers from BAME backgrounds in some communities, coupled with higher rates of attrition than their White counterparts (Allen et al., 2016), begs the question whether some schools warrant inclusion in the list of racialised sites where minorities are positioned potentially as ‘space invaders’, (Puwar 2004).

Fortunately, by virtue of their presence, status and the transformative role they play in the site of the classroom, these critical pedagogues are well positioned to mount an implicit and explicit challenge to these malign forces and to thus offer a unique contribution to the teaching profession and ultimately, wider society. Fair and accurate rates of teacher representation would add further reinforcement in disrupting the inegalitarian and oppressive societal structures that sustain double consciousness and other malign racial processes.

Of course, these teachers and their families, along with other members of minority groups, who may or may not be teachers, cannot and should not, take sole responsibility for this critical mission. It behoves those in the majoritarian population

(who are culpable of contributing to and sustaining these unjust conditions) to play an active role in helping to liberate the oppressed from oppression. Whilst the scope of this paper does not permit details of the nature of this complex undertaking, the following is offered as a well-intentioned starter. Those ‘racially privileged’ or naive readers who may be incognizant of the existence and detrimental impact of double consciousness, are invited to reflect on the serious implications and toll to one’s well-being of living one’s life under the threatening gaze of a highly judgmental examiner who must be pleased at all costs. Readers’ reflections may be enhanced by a reminder that this small-scale study has been offered as a concrete example of ‘counter storytelling’; writing defined by Delgado and Stefancic (2001, 144) that ‘aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority.’

It is helpful at this point to return to a central tenet of CRT, namely, the principle of interest convergence, which holds that advances can only be made if the progress or racial equality advocated, converges with the interests of the majoritarian elite White. This paper has argued that the teachers of colour in this study are not the sole benefactors of their cultural wealth; its scope has a broader reach, serving both the interests of the minority and majority population. Given the current problematic context of teacher under-representation, it would appear the principle of interest convergence has not been enacted or accorded sufficient status or endorsement from all stakeholders for it to positively impact the diversity of the teaching profession. Or put another way, if the majoritarian population fully appreciated the value of a diverse teaching force to all then much needed change would have been actioned. Although morally questionable, as a means to an end, the promotion and expansion of the

convergence of interest argument arguably offers the greatest scope for the time being for advances to be made in this field. The following recommendations are offered to support further progress towards fairer rates of teacher representation.

Teacher training providers, guided by national policy makers, should invest more in attracting those community members who typically attribute low status to teaching. Rigorous research into the negative perceptions held by each ethnic subgroup and how to counter them, would enhance the design and efficacy of a strategically targeted marketing and recruitment campaign.

The successes of the teachers in the study can, in part, be attributed to the secure and empowering foundations built through the strong and supportive parenting received. Further research is needed into the nature of culturally responsive family support and intervention models required to enhance the well-being and agency of future generations and their prospects of transforming society as teachers.

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