

Black male pre-service teachers: Tomorrow's teachers?

Abstract

England's school population is ethnically diverse yet the teacher workforce is predominantly White and female. While Black teachers are in short supply in England, Black male teachers are even fewer in number. This article seeks to understand the shortage of Black male teachers through the qualitative experiences of a small group of Black male pre-service teachers. Utilising critical race theory the article seeks to understand the preparation that a group of Black male pre-service teachers during their teacher training course and its impact on their willingness to commit to entering the teaching profession. The article questions whether Black pre-service teachers experience of a lack of acceptance in schools during their pre-service training contributes to the under-representation of Black male teachers in English schools.

Key words: Black males, race, teacher training

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Introduction

This article starts from the premise that multi-ethnic societies should have a teacher workforce which is representative of the student population (Miller, 2016) which in the case of England is rising with over a quarter of the student population being from a Black and minority ethnic background (DfE, 2015a). Teacher representativeness should be by ethnicity as well as gender. However, in England teaching is a White female dominated profession; though this is not unique to England (UNESCO, 2011). Of the female teachers (74 per cent) teaching in England in 2014, 85 per cent taught in primary schools compared with 62 per cent in secondary schools (DfE, 2015b). In 2014, combined the White teacher population accounted for 92.8 per cent of teachers in England compared with a 7 per cent Black and Minority Ethnic teacher population (DfE, 2015b). Crucially, although the British government collects data on teacher ethnicity and gender, the precise number of Black male teachers is not known because as the overall number of Black teachers is small the data is not disaggregated nationally by ethnicity and gender (DfE, 2015b). This contrasts for example with the USA, where despite having a comparable Black teacher population (7 per cent - Goldring *et al.*, 2013; NCES, 2014), Black male teachers account for 2 per cent (Lewis, 2006; Matheson, 2009) of Black teachers.

In England, limited attention has been given to the experiences of Black male pre-service teachers. This article seeks to understand the impact of teacher education on the teaching ambitions of a small group of Black male pre-service teachers in England. Before exploring some of these issues, the literature review contextualises Black male teacher recruitment and associated experiences within the wider context

of Black teacher representation in the English teacher workforce with comparisons drawn from other countries. The theoretical framing and study are then outlined and conclusions drawn.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Black teacher recruitment

Much has been written about the underrepresentation, positioning, roles and experiences and value of Black teachers in primary and secondary schools in England (e.g. Blair, 1994; Osler, 1997; Maylor *et al.*, 2006; Coleman and Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Boyle and Charles, 2016), Canada (e.g. Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Howard, 2014) and the USA (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 2005; Ingersoll and May, 2011; Ahmad and Boser, 2014; Brown, 2014; Kohli, 2014; NCES, 2014; Santoro, 2014; Cherng and Halpin, 2016). Howard observed that Black teacher recruitment in Canada is affected by experiences of racism, reflected in terms of racist student behaviour, students being educated in a colour-blind context (including being channelled into lower streams and the devaluing of the abilities of Black students) - and/or colour-blind discourses and implementing a Eurocentric curriculum in schools. Such experiences would also seem to be affected by “institutional denial of racism” (Howard, 2014, 498). Secondary analysis of 32,000 middle school teachers (from White, Asian, African-American and Hispanic backgrounds) responses to annual teacher surveys in New York City between 2008-2012 suggest that the school contexts in which teachers teach alongside organisational factors (such as leadership and professional development, motivating and having high academic expectations for students, teacher relationships and collaborations) can impact on the ability of Black teachers to be recruited and retained in teaching (Kraft *et al.*, 2016).

Concerns about the lack of Black male teachers in English schools in the early 2000s contributed to local government and teacher recruitment agencies encouraging the recruitment of Black male teachers from Africa and the Caribbean. But such recruitment has not addressed the shortage of Black male teachers in English schools. What accounts for this? Black teacher recruitment may offer some insights into school recruitment of Black male teachers. According to Blair (1994) neo-liberal market ideologies and skin colour are both detrimental to the employment of Black teachers in English schools as market ideologies construct notions of the 'ideal' teacher, whilst teacher "skin colour is constructed as a significant marker of difference [in] nationalistic ideologies of 'us' and who constitutes 'them'" (Blair, 1994, p. 277). Informed by racism Black skin colour on the "scales of desirability" in schools may position Black teachers as 'outsiders', not part of 'us'" (Blair, 1994, p. 277), that is the White majority. Positioned in opposition to White teachers, Black teachers continue to be constructed as racially less desirable/unacceptable in some schools than White teachers (Boyle and Charles, 2016). Notions of Black teacher un/desirability are not straightforward as Black teachers may not be desirable in predominantly White classrooms whereas they are desired or considered appropriate to teach Black students because they are "seen to be naturally equipped to manage, minister to, and deal with issues relating to Black students" (Blair 1994, p. 281). Positioning Black teachers as capable only to teach Black students, begs the question why Black male teachers are under-represented in schools? Blair's (1994) contention about Black teachers in general could be applied more directly to Black male teachers, with stereotyped racist constructions of Black males as 'aggressive', 'troublemakers' and

‘lacking discipline’ (Maylor, 2014) inadvertently reinforcing conceptions of Black male teachers as undesirable in English schools.

Rather than overt racism, Howard (2014, p. 498) found Black teacher recruitment in Canada affected by “institutional denial of racism”, reflected in terms of racist student behaviour and colour-blind discourses which impact on Black students’ abilities being valued and channelled into lower streams. Secondary analysis of 32,000 middle school teachers (including African-American) responses to annual teacher surveys in New York City between 2008-2012 suggest that the school contexts in which teachers teach alongside organisational factors (such as leadership and professional development) can negatively impact on the ability of Black teachers to be recruited and retained in teaching (Kraft *et al.*, 2016). Examining teacher recruitment in the USA, Engel *et al.* (2014, p. 68) found that Black teachers are “more likely to apply to schools close to their homes and schools that serve more students who match their own race or ethnicity” and where they are viewed positively (Dee, 2004; Ingersoll and May, 2011; Cherng and Halpin, 2016; Wright *et al.*, 2017).

Clearly, much is known about the schools that attract Black teachers, but why do schools need Black male teachers?

Why do schools need Black male teachers?

There are several reasons why schools need Black male teachers. Chief among these is that they have ample to contribute in terms of their knowledge and skills (Lynn, 2002; Lynne and Jennings, 2009). Black male teachers are considered salient to

meeting the needs of Black male students (Lewis and Toldson, 2013). Specific roles advocated for Black male teachers relate to addressing/counteracting the educational inequality/lower attainment experienced by Black children, but especially Black boys (Bridges, 2014) who according to hooks (2004) from a very early age in American schools “have been assaulted by the cultural genocide taking place in early childhood educational institutions where they are simply not taught” (p. 39) and/or are placed in low streams or special educational classes. A similar concern was echoed by Gilliam *et al.* (2016) who found that early years’ educators hold implicitly biased views about Black boys. According to Bristol (2014, p. 1128) Black male teachers can “bridge the social distance Black students, specifically males, experience in schools [that is] ameliorate the ... social outcomes for this marginalised group, Black boys”, and “create socioemotional environments in schools that can shelter Black boys from societal and institutionalised racism” (p. 120). Bristol’s (2014, pp. 125-126) research suggests that Black male teachers “are more apt to relate to some of the personal problems faced by their male students of color by having experienced similar challenges as an elementary or secondary student, or in everyday life”. Understanding the reality of being un/under-educated, similar sentiments were echoed by a Black male teacher who reported taking responsibility for connecting with his Black male students by “relat[ing] to the students as a brother, father, and a mentor” as part of developing analytical/critical minds to ensure their survival (Bridges, 2014, p. 221).

The feminisation of the teaching profession (particularly at primary school level where the shortage of male teachers is the most acute) has led to gendered assumptions that Black male teachers are necessary to nurture patriarchal notions of masculine identities amongst Black male students (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2010;

Howard, 2012) even where Black male teachers/pre-service teachers question their own expected masculine gendered identities/performance (Brockenbrough, 2012a; Woodson and Pabon, 2016). Research also points to the way Black men negotiate their identities and gender performance as being much more complex than a simple dichotomy between masculine and feminine (Brockenbrough, 2015). Other gender defined roles for Black male teachers include being role models, mentors and father figures. Such roles are associated with perceptions of Black boys being raised in a female-headed household and lacking access to a father or male relatives (Lewis, 2006; Yates *et al.*, 2008; Goli *et al.*, 2010; Brown 2012; Brockenbrough, 2012b; Howard, 2012; Bristol, 2014). Although some Black male teachers and Black male students may question a role model expectation (Maylor, 2009; Brockenbrough, 2012b), mentoring Black boys has been identified as crucial especially to counteract institutional and teacher racism (Macpherson, 1999) which are key contributors to Black boys in the UK (Gillborn, 2008) and USA (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015) being more likely to be the victim of low teacher expectations and being constructed as/considered to be aggressive/violent and as a consequence to pose a behavioural threat in classrooms. Such behavioural perceptions or biased views leads to Black boys being treated more harshly than other ethnic groups, even at pre-school (Gilliam *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, in the UK and the USA Black boys are three times more likely (than White students) to be suspended or excluded from school (US Dept. of Education 2016; Stetser and Stillwell, 2014; Hoffman, 2014; DfE, 2015) and in the USA twice as likely as White students to receive a deferral to law enforcement or school-related arrest (US Dept. of Education, 2016; Rudd, 2014). In both countries, higher numbers of Black men in the criminal justice system is taken for granted by policymakers and educators that Black boys are automatically destined to form an

integral part of criminal/prison statistics (Bridges, 2014; May, 2016), rather than obtain good education qualifications at ages 16-18 which means they are less likely to enter university or get a good job with the subsequent knock on effects this will have on their future lives/careers. Such potential outcomes contribute to Black male teachers being deemed not just essential to preventing/neutralising discipline problems exhibited by Black boys (UNESCO, 2011; Bristol, 2014), but as key agents of change (Howard, 2012).

The next section explores conceptions of Black masculinity and Black male pre-service teachers' experiences.

Black male pre-service teachers and teacher education

Pre-service teacher experiences during their preparation programmes appear to impact on pre-service/teacher performance, retention and teacher effectiveness in school (Bastian and Marks, 2017). Drawing on data from six teacher education programmes in Washington State, USA between 1998-2010 Goldhaber *et al.* (2017) observed that the school in which pre-service teachers undertake their pre-service teaching has important implications for teacher outcomes.

Concerned by the numbers of Black men graduating as teachers Yates *et al.* (2008) sought to understand the factors which contributed to Black male pre-service teachers completing their studies at a historically Black university and entering teaching.

Through the study they associated Black male teacher resiliency and determination to succeed when faced with stress and adversity during their teacher preparation with protective factors such as their family (parent/siblings), communities, the individual

(personal drive to succeed, influence of faith or religion) and the school including schools having high expectations for student performance (Yates *et. al.*, 2008, p. 13). Also, central to this process is mentoring which Yates *et al.* (2008, p. 2) regard as necessary in “foster[ing] a feeling of hope, build[ing] confidence, as well as acclimat[ising] students to college environments and expectations”. Added to this, Lewis and Toldson (2013) advocate the need for teacher education courses to be equipped with the requisite teaching and learning materials suited and/or tailored specifically to meet the needs of Black male students. On the one hand, this means preparing Black male pre-service teachers to be culturally responsive (i.e., equipped to educate students who are culturally/ethnically different to themselves (Gay, 2002; Lambeth and Smith, 2016). On the other, teacher educators need to demonstrate understanding of how different genders are positioned and the impact of the intersection of race, gender and class and deficit positioning on Black male pre-service teacher identity and lived experience(s) within and outside of the classroom when designing teacher education courses to be experienced by Black men (Lewis and Toldson, 2013). The need for such teacher preparation of Black men raises questions such as how are Black masculinities rationalised by society and Black men themselves? According to Pelzer (2016, 16) Black men are labelled as “hyper-sexualised, criminal-minded, degenerate”, and should counteract negative media “depictions of Black “maleness” [which] offers Black men little hope to succeed and provides high expectations of failure”. Such characterisations as well as Black men’s own self constructions can negatively impact on Black male student experiences as argued by Pelzer, (2016, p. 16):

The way Black men interpret perceptions of Black maleness, and demonstrate what it means to be a Black man has implications on the way Black men navigate the college environment and has ramifications on the way institutions engage them ... Black men experience the university through their masculinity.

Of key interest to this article is whether, or not, Black men's commitment to teaching is affected by constructions of Black male masculinity?

Theoretical framework

This article draws on critical race theory (CRT) as it provides a lens for examining and understanding the experiences of Black male pre-service teachers. Critical race theory developed from legal studies in the USA which was concerned with the slow pace of racial reform and the failure of civil rights legislation to make a difference to the experiences of people of Color (Bell, 1995; Tate, 1997; Ledesma and Calderon, 2015). CRT contends that racism is normal, endemic and a permanent feature in American society (Bell, 1995; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). As such racism is viewed as informing and impacting on individual and group identities, experiences and assumptions made about people of Color, but as it is so commonplace it often goes unnoticed. Within CRT race and racism are denoted as intersecting "with forms of subordination, based on gender, class, sexuality, language, culture, immigrant status, phenotype, accent and surname" (Smith, Yosso and Solórzano, 2006, pp. 301). CRT aims to situate race and racism within knowledge production, by exposing and challenging racism and hegemonic structures and power systems that reinforce injustice, racial inequality and White dominance. Further, CRT acknowledges:

The centrality of experiential knowledge [and] recognises that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate and critical to understanding analysing and teaching about racial subordination ...' (Smith, Yosso and Solórzano 2006, p. 301).

Thus CRT “is a framework that can be used to theorise, examine and challenge the way race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures practices and discourses” (Yosso 2005, p. 70) and is useful in understanding dominant ideologies which serve to keep Black people oppressed. CRT rejects contentions of objectivity, meritocracy, race neutrality, colour blindness and equal opportunity believing that “these claims hide the self-interest, power and privilege of dominant groups” (Solórzano, 1997, p. 5). CRT is also committed to social justice which includes uncovering and challenging the role that schools and teacher education play in legitimating and maintaining racial inequality through discourses of colour-blindness, objectivity and meritocracy. A commitment to social justice also allows the voices of the voiceless to be heard when Whiteness is disrupted (Ledesma and Calderon, 2015).

In terms of research method CRT advocates illuminating Black experiences using storytelling (Bell, 2003) which is also referred to as the counter-narrative (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002) as it provides an opportunity for Black people to share their experiences in their own words, and at the same challenge White/dominant perspectives of Black people. Through privileging experiential knowledge CRT allows the Black voice to be fore-fronted and Black subjective perspectives/experiences to be valued. Put simply CRT rejects colour-blind discourses and assists individuals/groups in naming their own reality through sharing their

experiences of racism. At the same time, it enables subjective experiences to be interrogated and “told in multiple and different ways” and for the complexities of Black experiences/realities to be uncovered (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 417). As both a methodology and analytical framework (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002) CRT has been used to examine educational experiences in school and higher education (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). As such it offers a gateway into understanding Black teachers’ perspectives and experiences (Bell, 1983; Cook and Dixson, 2013) and, Black male teacher counter narratives which challenge master narratives of Black men as deviant (Lynn, 2002; Brockenbrough, 2015).

Though an American informed theory, CRT affords an opportunity to examine Black male pre-service teachers experiences because of the institutionalised nature of racism evident in educational spaces (Macpherson, 1999; Gillborn, 2008) including pre-service teaching in the UK (e.g. Lander, 2011, 2017).

The study

The study was conducted in an ethnically diverse university in East England. Anecdotal evidence from teacher educators who had taught on pre-service teaching courses for several years at the university suggests that most of the students who had previously studied for a pre-service teaching course at the university were from White backgrounds. Participant numbers on the post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE) courses in 2014 (when the research was conducted) reinforced teacher educator perception and teaching statistics of teaching being primarily attractive to White students.

When utilising CRT as a research method, Ladson-Billings (2005) emphasised the importance of the narratives unfolded to be contextualised. The study was fuelled by concerns former Black and minority ethnic (BME) students had raised about experiences of racism they had encountered whilst undertaking PGCE teaching qualification at the university, and senior staff at the university wanting to understand the nature and prevalence of such experiences. In addition, the current study sought to understand the factors which influenced BME students to undertake either a primary or secondary PGCE course at the university. BME student perceptions of the university's institutional culture, their pre-service school placement experiences and their experience of PGCE course assessment, feedback and progression were also sought. These foci were intended to identify practice that could usefully be adopted by the university to better support BME students to successfully complete their PGCE course. While the focus of this article is Black male pre-service teachers, it is important to note that the study did not specifically seek the views of Black male pre-service teachers. However, their voices emerged strongly in the dataset, and hence they are reported here. Further, the experiences of the four Black male pre-service teachers discussed here would seem to offer some insight into the influence of racism on the underrepresentation of Black men in teaching.

Methods

Qualitative methods are useful when trying to understand racialized human experiences and perspectives (Cresswell, 2009) and are known to be particularly effective when studying Black male experiences (Bonner, 2001; Smith *et al.*, 2007; Lewis, 2016). Moreover, given that previous pre-service students at the university in

question had shared experiences of racism, it was decided that qualitative interpretative methods (focus groups and interviews) were the best way to get BME pre-service teachers to share their experiences.

Qualitative data was collected via three 45-60-minute focus groups comprising 8 students each, and 12 semi-structured face-to-face individual interviews. Focus groups (covering student recruitment, placement, course progression and pastoral support experiences) were conducted following the pre-service teachers' practicum school placement in the spring and summer terms. Individual semi-structured interviews (following the same topics as the focus groups) were conducted face-to-face with students who were unavailable to attend a focus group discussion. In two cases, the respondents having initially declined to participate in the study contacted the researcher at the end of their course to share their experiences. These interviews lasted for nearly three hours. The focus groups and interviews were conducted on campus in safe spaces (that is spaces where the respondents felt their voices would not be overheard by their course lecturers). Both methods allowed the respondents to share their experiences of racism.

Participants

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) PGCE students were initially identified from primary and secondary PGCE course lists which included student ethnicity. Following discussions with course lecturers as to the best way to access potential participants, purposive sampling was used to invite BME students to participate in the study at the beginning or end of course lectures where information about the study was outlined.

The study comprised 17 BME pre-service students out of a student population of 127 students enrolled on the primary PGCE, and 19 BME students out of a total of 122 students on the secondary PGCE programme. The total study population was 36 BME students. However, this article concentrates on data from 4 Black (self-identified) male pre-service student teachers (2 each on the primary and secondary PGCE programmes). They were the only Black male pre-service teachers registered on their respective courses. They were aged between 25-40 and included one overseas-trained teacher who was undertaking the PGCE to gain UK qualified teacher status.

Ethics

The study complied with the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Association (BERA, 2011). As such, participants were provided with information about the study prior to taking part which enabled them to give informed consent. This included their right to withdraw from the study at any time, that the data would be anonymised with each participant given a pseudonym and that their confidentiality would be maintained. All data was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

Initially, the data was thematically analysed using the constant comparative method (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). This helped to identify similarities and differences in BME pre-service teacher experiences and university support by gender and ethnicity. For the purposes of this paper, through using CRT the data analysis has emphasised experiences the Black male pre-service teachers identified as racism.

Findings and discussion

Ladson-Billings (2005) encourages researchers not to focus on storytelling to the exclusion of the central ideas that need to be conveyed. Thus, the findings are presented through key points with illustrative supporting quotes from the respondents.

Pre-service teacher experiences encountered during teaching placements were a key part of the study. None of the Black male pre-service teachers reported positive practicum placement experiences. In part, this was attributed to having insufficient information provided by their university as to what was required of them in their teaching practicum school, and a lack of support from their practicum school mentor, which would have helped them to develop their practice as Joe explained:

If you look at the [qualifying teaching] standards at the beginning of the course you might have wanted them to say, 'ok to be able to meet standard one you need to be able to do this and this', so that by the time you go into your first placement you already know what to expect. You kind of have a plan of how you're going to meet those standards instead of going there, not knowing and then just finding out for yourself or having your mentor, your school mentor coming up to you and saying 'I'm going to put you on a cause for concern because you're not meeting the standards', when you were not given the information previously. (Joe)

Being designated “a cause for concern” was worrying for these male pre-service teachers as ultimately it could lead to them failing their course. This was particularly

concerning for Frederick who although was studying on the secondary PGCE came to England as an overseas qualified science teacher:

I was basically a science teacher in another country for 3 years and I have experience working with secondary school students ... when I came to this country I thought I would enhance my career by doing the PGCE course and follow a teaching career and my postgraduate in science. I thought I can enhance my own skills and share that with students so that they can love science too but instead I found the school mentor constantly interrupting and pointing out my teaching weaknesses, weaknesses I never knew I had.

(Frederick)

The constant interruptions Frederick encountered may have been related to negative perceptions the UK government holds of overseas-trained teachers as not having the same standards and teaching ability as UK qualified teachers (DfE 2014). However, such interruptions were experienced as micro-aggressions (Smith *et al.*; Yosso 2007) reinforced by teacher perceptions of Black male ‘inadequateness’ which were never questioned but accepted as fact. Such dysconscious racism (King, 2004) served to denote Black male pre-service teachers as somehow ‘defective’ (Iverson, 2007); a point clearly echoed by William:

As a Black person, a Black man - it resulted in me not really being able to sort of... be developed in certain areas at the expected level. You know there were issues that I was put as a cause for concern, to do with, behaviour management, saying I couldn't manage the class. (William)

William's experiences would seem to support Pelzer's (2016) arguments concerning negative constructions of Black masculinity becoming normalised and pitted against 'good'/effective White male teachers (Fanon, 1967).

The male pre-service teachers complained about mentor and student racism in their respective teaching practicum schools. When asked to explain why they considered their experiences to be one of racism Dudley responded saying "it's embarrassing" and "controversial". Dudley was so embarrassed that he asked for his experiences not to be tape recorded, stating that he preferred not to share his experiences in a focus group with other students on his course. During his interview Dudley said:

You've met me, but the pupils don't like me, or my colour and all that rubbish. They said so. At the moment, I am going through a horrendous time, it's hell so I just want to leave teaching. (Dudley)

When asked why he did not complain about the children's remarks and the "hell" he was going through Dudley remarked, "I didn't want to be in anybody's bad books". By this he meant his school and university mentors. Referring to White children's racism he said:

The students look at me left ways, sideways, is he approachable? Isn't he approachable? They just don't know how? There's students that go red just walking up to them, they really need some sort of mentoring in how to speak to a Black person, that's the only way I can put it....um, I go with the tutor group

to lessons, and um, she's [the teacher's] telling me they are unbelievably shy.

Their words were not shy! (Dudley)

Saliently, Dudley was concerned that his university lecturers had emphasised that students “mustn’t be prejudiced or stereotyped towards [their] pupils” yet they had not given any “warning that actually you might need to expect people to treat you differently” as the children in his class had done. The experiences of pupil racism and hostility recounted by Dudley are not usual (Siraj-Blatchford, 1991; Hick *et al.*, 2011; Howard, 2014; Boyle and Charles, 2016). Notwithstanding, they were turned on their head by Dudley’s mentor, who rather than accepting that the pupils were rude and racist suggested he was “aggressive” when responding to “shy” students who needed to be treated “gently”. These White supremacist views highlight the power of mentors to use pejorative views to dictate to Black male pre-service teachers the type of experiences they were privy to, and how they should respond. While there was a misalignment between the mentor and the mentees perspectives (Feldon *et al.*, 2015), the perception of Dudley’s mentor that Dudley was aggressive not only echo wider stereotypical perceptions of Black males as aggressive (Pelzer, 2016), but contributed to a climate of classroom fear, with the result that the mentor advocated pupils needing to be treated “gently”. Racial and gender stereotyping such as this is also known to negatively impact the educational experiences of Black men and their sense of belonging (Smith *et al.*, 2007; Strayhorn, 2008; Newman *et al.*, 2015). In this study, such stereotyping contributed to William believing a future in teaching to be hopeless and consequently he opted to withdraw from his PGCE course, and not enter teaching.

Myself particularly, I didn't have a fantastic mentor um, I wasn't able to get what I needed from my mentor when we sat down to go over my lesson feedback, there was nothing so my professional development was delayed, ...

You know I've completed withdrawal forms? (William)

Interviewer: No, I did not.

Contributory factors to these men's negative experiences were school-based mentors who were found to be unsupportive. Teacher education involves pre-service teachers being allocated a school-based mentor (during their six-week school placement experience) who is tasked with guiding, developing and nurturing a graduate student's knowledge, teaching skills and practice so they can complete their teaching practice placement. Feldon *et al.* (2015, p. 338) contend that "mentors must themselves be well versed in the target skills and must accompany their modelling, scaffolding, and coaching with articulation that makes their thinking visible to the mentee" and to "effectively articulate instructional guidance" as well as the ability to identify the mentees strengths and weaknesses (Zambrana *et al.*, 2015). CRT critiques meritocracy and liberalism in education and their ability to create equal outcomes for Black people (Gillborn, 2008). Teacher education is supposed to develop and nurture pre-service teachers, yet these Black male respondents reported not receiving the guidance necessary from both their school-based and university mentors that would have helped them to develop their practice. The experiences of these Black men support Redding and Smith's (2016) contention that having a mentor is no guarantee that pre-service teachers are more likely to enter/remain in teaching. The injustice suffered by these Black male pre-service teachers at the hands of White female

mentors, may have been the result of dyconscious racism (King, 2004) informing White mentor perceptions of Black men as not having the intellectual ability to critically reflect to generate new understandings and enhanced practice.

These Black male pre-service teachers identified negative assumptions made about their ability to teach by both staff and pupils. Within the university questions were consistently raised about their ability to attain highly. There was also an absence by teacher educators and placement teachers to challenge conceptions of 'White' knowledge as being the only legitimate knowledge that should be represented in schools. This lack of acceptance of different ways of knowing (hooks 1994) served to undermine the mentor perception of the ability of these Black male pre-service teachers.

Labels of "hypersexual" and "degenerate" (Pelzer, 2016, p. 16) generate fear and possibly account for Joe finding himself 'isolated' by White women on his course:

When I sit at a table everybody else sits in their own little groups, and I could probably end up sitting on my own on a table and it doesn't look good ... I don't want them to think I am not a member of the team or I don't integrate, but I generally look like a melon most of the time trying to sit on tables that I don't feel too welcome on ... it's not a very nice experience [when] people [white students] don't talk to me, don't include me. (Joe)

Experiences of isolation such as those reported here while not unique to these Black male pre-service teachers (Hick *et al.*, 2011; Bhopal and Rhamie, 2014), nevertheless

point to the need for teacher education courses to provide the support necessary to ensure Black male pre-service teachers feel welcome and have positive experiences.

Conclusion

Over 25 years ago Siraj-Blatchford (1991) concluded that Black students' trainee teaching experiences in the UK needed to be as positive as those of their White peers and that it was incumbent on higher education institutions and schools where they undertook their teacher training to address any racism they encountered. Though a small-scale study, the findings highlighted here raise concern as they point to the entrenchment of Whiteness and White mentor power which serves to maintain teaching as a White female sphere, and contributes to some Black men blaming themselves (rather than institutional and educator racism) for the difficulties encountered in trying to successfully complete their pre-service teaching. The experiences of racism these Black men identified in their practicum schools suggests structural/institutional racism remains entrenched in schools (Wilkins and Lall, 2011; Pearce, 2014). As such these Black male pre-service teachers were viewed as "inadequate" and therefore, deemed both ineffective and irrelevant to educating all children.

By focusing on Black male pre-service teachers this article has shown how the teacher education process (in other words White female race privilege) rendered Black male pre-service teachers inconsequential to the education process, such that they reverse their own stated commitment to become teachers. The study highlights the continued need for Black men to be seen and valued as an essential part of the teaching

profession, and for children to experience the qualities that Black men bring to teaching. To redress the under-representation of Black male teachers, it is imperative that institutional racism and systemic failures in pre-service teacher assessment are eradicated such that Black male pre-service teachers experience inclusion on university courses, and positive practicum experiences as well as school mentors being prepared to provide effective support to enable their teaching skills to flourish.

Ultimately, the near absence of Black men in teaching combined with the early withdrawal of Black male pre-service teachers may lead young Black men to believe that teaching is not a job that can be done by Black men. Clearly, this is a message which needs to be avoided at all costs.

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