

Race, fitness-to-practice and the experience of trainee educators

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the reasons behind Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students' over-representation within fitness-to-practice (FTP) processes at a university in the north of England. Referrals to FTP are intended to rectify the underperformance of students, acting as a workplace misconduct procedure, applied in an education context. The phenomenon itself replicates trends of racial disadvantage across education and the workplace. Some suggested causes for these trends include capital, racial discomfort and structural inequality discussed in the literature review.

In this study, the experiences of BAME students on placement in education settings are examined to provide insights into the disparity in FTP referrals, using a phenomenological approach. This involved semi-structured interviews to capture subjective first-person accounts from the target sample. These were evaluated using thematic analysis, and the findings were considered using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a lens.

The findings demonstrated two opposing accounts that were united by their conception of racial identity. The research found that BAME students' placement experiences may be in response to an intersectional convergence of race and the status of the role they occupy within the placement.

A clear link between FTP and placement experiences could not be established, but the CRT perspective points to issues around racism, white neutrality and supremacy active in BAME students' placement settings.

Introduction

This study aims to investigate the experience of BAME students at a Northern University (NU) during their work placements in the education sector. It was proposed in response to ethnicity monitoring carried out by the School of Education in the NU. It revealed that although BAME students represented 26% of students in the school, they accounted for 63% of fitness-to-practice (FTP)

investigations into professional practice on placement (McMahon, 2019; *Personal communication*; Ward, 2020; *Personal Communication*). This indicates they are over-represented in the process.

Fitness-to-practice

FTP refers to the standard of practice expected of

student practitioners (students) and the process by which alleged shortcomings are investigated. The students are involved in the care and education of children, young people and adults (learners) in placement settings. The aim of FTP is to ensure that the needs of the learners are met and are not adversely affected by exposure to students; and to protect the reputation of other stakeholders such as the placement setting, profession and the course provider. The investigations provide students with an opportunity for due process, and to possibly rectify their practice (NU, 2019; Office of the Independent Adjudicator [OIA], 2020). However, FTP can result in exclusion from the course or university, should concerns be upheld. In such cases, students' aspirations for professional entrance or graduation can be permanently denied (NU, 2020; UCAS, 2020). While there are many facets to this phenomenon, this study focuses on BAME students who have experienced placement. The research approach aims to centre the voice of BAME students on education courses with placement, to understand why they are over-represented in FTP investigations. It will seek to explore how their experiences are understood through CRT, a philosophy that suggests racialised experiences are part of a system of social power.

The BAME experience

The findings that BAME students are over-represented in FTP investigations reflects national patterns in the BAME experience. In Higher Education they are over-represented at enrolment, yet they are less likely to complete their course, attaining poorer grades when they do. This is despite acquiring the required entry qualifications. (Alexander & Arday, 2015; Department for Education [DfE], 2019; Office for Students [OfS], 2020). As employees, they are more likely to be overqualified, overlooked for promotion and over-disciplined. (Archibong et al., 2013; McGregor-Smith, 2017; Runnymede, 2017). Despite this picture, there is an obligation to address racial inequality (Wilkins, 2014).

Throughout this article, the term Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicities (BAME) is used to describe racialised minorities, as it is the term used within the research setting. Where research is referred to that uses other terms to represent these groups, they will be used as stated by the author, but their ambiguity and controversy are recognised.

Literature review

This research sits at the intersection of race equality, work and education. Therefore, literature across these areas is considered to understand the theory and practice of the context. In addition, FTP in educator training is under-researched, so literature examining FTP in the workplace and in health and social care training, have been considered as a proxy to the research context.

Fitness-to-practice

FTP describes the standard of acceptable practice and the process to ensure it is maintained. It applies to student educators, but also to students and qualified professionals in health and social care (Archibong et al., 2013; McLaughlin, 2010). The purpose of FTP is the protection of multiple interests: that of the learners (or service-users), organisations and professions. The learners are to be protected from harm to their education or selves (Haycock-Stuart et al., 2016; McLaughlin, 2010). The organisation or course is protected from reputational damage, expected to shape student recruitment, university revenue and regulator sanctions (NU, 2018; OfS, 2019). The placement setting's stake is closely linked to learner interests, for which they are regulated (Greaves et al., 2019). Lastly, FTP should facilitate student improvement where concerns are upheld but protection priorities are not at an unacceptable risk (OIA, 2020).

As a process, the fairness of reporting and decision-making in FTP have been questioned. The scrutiny of students' FTP appears limitless, with anyone having the authority, if not necessarily the awareness, to report concerns. For example, students working in a setting related to their course are more vulnerable to being reported than those

who work outside the sector, or those who do not work (McLaughlin, 2010). Whereas in the NHS, it has been applied in a discriminatory manner, with BME (Black Minority Ethnic) staff twice as likely to be investigated in FTP than their white peers. Line managers are thought to use formalised disciplinary action on the first occurrence of concern with BME staff, when white peers would gain feedback and the opportunity to rectify their practice (Archibong et al., 2013). This is significant as the NHS is one of the largest employers of BME people in the UK. There are further concerns about the appropriateness of professional and ethnic composition of panels, with some claiming ethnically diverse panels result in fairer decision-making (Archibong et al., 2013; McLaughlin, 2010). Therefore, students may be vulnerable to unequal treatment due to assumptions of the FTP process and the decision-maker's objectivity.

Standards of FTP are problematic for their coherence and interpretation. The language used to define standards is often ambiguous which could lead to subjective judgements (Haycock-Stuart et al., 2016). Common terminology includes 'capability', 'conduct' and 'competence', with more ambiguous terms such as 'suitability' and 'character' (Haycock-Stuart et al., 2016; Lo et al., 2017; McLaughlin, 2010; OIA, 2020). Despite its vague nature, terms such as 'good character' typify the issue, understood as innate and beyond acquisition (Haycock-Stuart et al., 2016). This means a subjective measure could be used to determine if an individual is permanently unsuitable. Outcomes of FTP reflect the terminal nature of judgements which can lead to exclusion from a course, profession, university or even HE (NU, 2020). This indicates a process that is subjective in its measures and final in its outcome.

Tensions in placement

There can be a conflict between the placement setting, students and learners/service-users. The process is arguably emotionally draining for mentor practitioners as well as FTP subjects, who feel stigmatised by its application (Archibong et al., 2013; Haycock-Stuart et al., 2016; Lo et al., 2017).

Whereas a tension is caused by the intended gains of placement. Acquisition falls into two categories: assimilation of professional identity and professional autonomy (Blackmore et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2017; Dyer & Taylor, 2012; Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002). Assimilation may be understood to ensure learners' needs are met, their rights safeguarded by a standardised provision. However, this stifles the autonomy which is seen as the pinnacle of professional development. A practitioner should not passively accept standards, but resist terms of practice and policy that contravene their professional values. Resulting in students that no longer look to their mentors for validation, but would self-direct (Brock, 2006; Dyer & Taylor, 2012; Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002; Woods & Bennet, 2001). Yet, to enable that, mentors are required to provide opportunities for independence and experimentation (Blackmore et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2017). The challenge for mentors is to instil standards while providing opportunities for autonomy, which entails risk.

The experience of BAME people

Race in the workplace, education sector and placement will be considered alongside the FTP process and standards to uncover explanations for racial disadvantage. These include capital, behaviours driven by racial discomfort and structural impacts.

Capital

Bourdieu's theory of class disadvantage argues that the social and cultural capital, (knowledge of social rules, behaviours and networks) of the working class, do not have salience in the dominant culture of the middle and upper classes. This theory has been extended to understandings of race, with the suggestion that students' difficulties on placement are due to a deficit of the right capital (Fairtlough et al., 2014). The expectation that capital should be assimilated reinforces oppressive ideas of supremacy and victim-blaming. Victim-blaming occurs when the initial victim is construed as responsible for the primary victimisation (Moody-Ramirez & Cole, 2018). Whereas, cultural

differences are stated to excuse structural disadvantage, framing racial disadvantage as an issue of meritocracy, where notions of white supremacy are claimed to be earned (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Runnymede, 2017). Counter-narratives suggest that racism explained differential outcomes (Archibong et al., 2013; Fairtlough et al., 2014).

Racial discomfort

White supremacy is an ideology created to justify the oppression of those it defines as 'black'. It is based upon a visually and culturally defined social hierarchy, known as race, which positions black people at the bottom and white people at the top. To establish this, stereotypes were created to suggest black people possessed a host of negative characteristics, which justifies the inequality they experience. For BAME people, despite their varied identities, it is their departure from the white ideal that unites them in positions of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). By existing in this culture, BAME people experience negative psychological and cognitive impacts. Their awareness of the negative way they are perceived contributes to a stereotype threat; a state of hypervigilance triggered when entering white spaces. Fears of being perceived stereotypically are reinforced by microaggressions, coded insults that invoke negative tropes to reinforce white supremacy (Bohonos, 2019; Sue, 2010). This state is thought to deplete cognitive resources, and contribute to the under-attainment of People of Colour (POC) (Steele, 1997; Verschelden & Pasquerella, 2017). As BAME people represent visibly marked ethnic minorities in the UK, most public spaces they enter will be dominated by white people. This may explain why the majority of BME employees in the UK experience the workplace as a hostile environment (McGregor-Smith, 2017). They may respond to this with resistance or ambassadorship. If sustained, fighting against racism can cause Racial Battle Fatigue, psychological, cognitive and physiological exhaustion. This was a feature of a black teacher's experiences in the US (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Whereas in the UK, trainee BME

teachers experiencing hypervisibility in white settings felt compelled to become racial ambassadors. They took on the burden of representing all BME people in their school (Bhopal, 2015).

Incidents of racial discomfort may affect decisions about BAME people. For example, BME staff were referred to formal disciplinary procedures early because line managers do not feel comfortable critiquing BME staff, so they refer them to a higher authority (Archibong et al., 2013). This phenomenon was found to be particularly pronounced when the employees were international, with colleagues and patients expressing discomfort at foreign accents. This is echoed in research about student placements, where those with foreign accents experienced negative comments on this basis (Fairtlough et al., 2014). This may indicate that xenophobia contributes to the over-representation of BAME students in FTP. This and other aspects of identity can interact to impact on a person's rights and opportunities, known as 'intersectionality' (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Professional status is an identity which attracts benefits for its members, creating another social hierarchy (Noordegraaf, 2007). In this way, it could be part of the intersectional identity. Therefore, racial discomfort on placement or in the workplace may be a reaction to those at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, seeking, or gaining, professional status. This creates a conflict as an identity with privileges could be applied to BAME people who are positioned as undeserving, by the racial hierarchy. This may explain the over-qualification of BAME workers and why BAME teachers are allocated the least prestigious work (Bhopal, 2015; National Education Union [NEU], 2019; Runnymede, 2017).

Structural inequality

The majority of BAME students live in economic difficulty, often needing to work alongside their studies (Reay, 2015). This and their over-representation in the student body may expose them to more scrutiny than their white peers, as

there is greater opportunity for their practice to be observed (McLaughlin, 2010; Alexander & Arday, 2015). Furthermore, BAME people are more likely to be providing care for relatives, contributing to a depletion of time and energy, which may impact their placement practice (Carers UK, 2011; Fairtlough, 2014; McLaughlin, 2010).

Placement regulation is varied with potential for discrimination. The quality of settings is often the responsibility of training providers or judged by Ofsted ratings. However, settings can be rated outstanding while having reported equality problems (DfE, 2020b; Fairtlough et al., 2014; The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2019; Wilkins, 2014). Further to this good practice, name-blind applications are not always used, leaving applicants exposed to discrimination on the racial perception of their name (Fairtlough et al., 2014; Wood et al., 2009).

This review has examined FTP purpose and procedure including standards, outcomes and tensions. It finds the concept and measures ambiguous and subjective. The causes of the over-representation of BAME students include capital; racial discomfort; and structural elements.

Methodology

This research sought to understand BAME students' experiences on educational courses in NU, how this contributed to the FTP phenomenon, and how this can be interpreted by applying CRT. As the critical element of the research was race, CRT was used to guide the design. It was chosen as it provides an evaluation of race and a framework to explain the experiences of POC, using subjective narrative. This offers a rebalance to the objectivity in which FTP is positioned, which CRT would critique as white subjectivity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; OIA, 2020). A phenomenological approach is appropriate for appreciation of participant perspective and the mediated effect of identity (Ryan, 2018; Woodruff Smith, 2013).

Research conduct

Feminist Memory Work was chosen as a data collection and generation method because it is sensitive to the perspectives of individuals who have experienced oppression. It was designed to respond to gender as a structure of oppression but has also been applied in the study of race. It considers participant memory as subjective and reconstructed, influenced by an adherence to or a rejection of dominant ideologies. (Berg, 2008; Kennedy-Macfoy & Nielsen, 2012). In this study, the oppressive ideology would be whiteness.

Much of the data collection method required changes due to problems with the recruitment of participants, access was limited due to a national industrial strike and a national lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Russell, 2020; Universities and College Union [UCU], 2020). The purposive participant sample was students on education courses at NU who are placement-experienced and identify as BAME, with two recruited. To accommodate this, the interview method was adopted. Video calls were used to provide immediate visual and audio feedback to enable confidence to share accounts. A semi-structured method was used, based on Tomlinson's (1989) approach. This enabled focus on subjective experiences of placement and the incorporation of some FMW principles, while providing an opportunity to harness unexpected information. The philosophy of the interview question and the focus of the analysis were shaped by FMW. This included the recognition of memories as partial and reconstructed and the influence of dominant narratives which may present in hackneyed accounts (Jansson et al., 2008). In this context, this could include prominence of accounts of old racism, overt acts of racism, representing the limited understanding of racism by the majority (Bohonos, 2019; Runnymede, 2017). These may be presented to adhere to dominant perspectives of what constitutes racism. The FMW perspective is also alert for mundane everyday experiences as more productive for understanding systems of oppression. This aligns with 'new racism' which is

understood as subtle, everyday and undetected in mass held understandings of racism (Bohonos, 2019; Jansson et al., 2008).

Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen for this project because of its sympathies with other elements of the methodology. It enables the identification of themes using a systematic framework with a specific theoretical framework, for which CRT will be used (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2017). It agrees with the methodological view of researchers as subjective in the analysis process. The latent approach embraces dialogue and the underlying assumptions they may represent, enabling the examination of new racism (Bohonos, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Research quality

The aspects of this research that affect the reliability and validity of this study include the interviewer effect, subjectivity and subject awareness. The interviewer effect concerns perceptions of the researcher influencing participant testimony, particularly around race (Denscombe, 2014; Mizock et al., 2011). However, this can be rejected as participant accounts differed so markedly. The subjective nature of their testimony and thematic analysis is appropriate because of the phenomenological approach and the application of CRT. To account for this, at times, I followed the CRT tradition of writing in the first person. Lastly, as the literature and questions were decided prior to commencing analysis, this can limit the scope of themes found. The resonance of the findings with some literature may indicate this or a sensitisation to relevant issues in the field (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethics

To adhere to the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines (2018), several measures have been built into the research. Firstly, as this study concerns a contentious topic and an unusual methodology, informed participation is

particularly important (Fraser & Michell, 2015AQ:). Therefore, information about the study including participant rights were provided in advance and at commencement, verbally and in writing to provide multiple opportunities for questions and withdrawal. Further to this, as a practitioner-researcher, participants may know the researcher in a dual capacity. To ensure participants understood the difference between these roles, when each was occupied, this was included in communication of the study. As interviews regarding race can be traumatic, I remained vigilant for signs of distress to provide opportunities to withdraw if needed and ensure participants were signposted to relevant support when necessary to safeguard their wellbeing (Mizock et al., 2011). Lastly, to protect participant identity, pseudonyms were used to record and refer to those taking part in this assignment.

Findings

This research had two participants, pseudonyms Fatima and Dione. Dione had a positive experience, providing a brief narrative, with some resonance with Fatima's account. Whereas Fatima's experiences generated the most analysis due to the volume and detail provided. In her testimony, sentences often stopped mid-sentence and changed direction (I have sought to signify this in quotes with a dash). Where Dione shares or differs in her testimony, this is indicated.

Racial identity

When describing their race, Fatima and Dione include their nationality, with Fatima emphasising that she was born locally. This approach is also used when describing other BAME people. It is common practice in the UK to describe ethnicity in this way in equality monitoring (Office for National Statistics, 2012). This could reflect the confusion surrounding ethnicity and race, which are often conflated (Warmington, 2011). However, when describing white people, participants did not invoke nation. This and the taken-for-granted approach to describing BAME identities may be the reproduction of a dominant ideology (Jansson et al., 2008). This could signify what Critical Whiteness

Studies describes as the neutrality of whiteness, which is positioned as normative, invisible and universal (Bohonos, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This self-othering may contribute to a feeling of conspicuousness in white spaces and trigger stereotype threat. Both participants expressed expectations that they may be perceived in stereotypical ways, supporting this idea.

The behaviour of others

A hostile environment

‘the whole session, she didn’t even say anything, not even a “Hi”’

‘I asked her about swapping schools and she, she literally blew up in front-, in that classroom and I remember there were other teachers there’

‘And she was just going off like, “oh no you, I don’t-I told you-, other stu-, other train-, these other two trainees are not doing that, then why are you doing that?”’ (Fatima)

Fatima states that she felt controlled and stifled on placement. When she asks questions, she senses the member of staff’s irritation; when she has her first observation she is mocked for her stutter; when she enters a room, staff stop speaking. Part of the purpose of a placement is to create independent confident teachers (Blackmore et al., 2018; Dyer & Taylor, 2012). However, these behaviours serve to assert the trainee’s subordination. While many hostile behaviours have been described, the reaction to observation may be revealing. Observations are often used as accountability measures, with the surveilling of teachers usually carried out by senior members of staff or external inspectors (Page, 2017). This suggests observations are perceived as an enactment of power. Fatima’s attempts to observe may threaten white supremacy as it connotes an authority that transcends her racial position. White supremacy is thought to provide white people with psychological benefits from an assumed superiority over other races (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Therefore, hostile reactions to Fatima observing may be a reaction to the conflict between her racial position and the power-laden action of observation.

Race and religion

It is believed that Muslims have become racialised (Miah, 2019); for this reason, incidents where race and religion have been discussed together in Fatima’s placement. In one placement she overheard comments in the staffroom about ‘women who cover’. She does not explain the content, but states, ‘as someone who wears their religion on their head’ she is uncomfortable. She knows one staff member is Muslim but does not wear a head scarf and is often teased. Furthermore, she overheard one staff member worrying that a learner might complain after she told the learner to ‘go back to their own country’. These incidents may be deliberate or impulsive acts triggered by the BAME presence in these scenarios. While white supremacy is widely held, it is suppressed in favour of equality, causing microaggressions which leak out in individual interactions with POC (Bohonos, 2019).

Guidance and improvement

Fatima describes her experience as affected by how she receives information, which is often from multiple sources, incomplete, untimely or unforthcoming. Assumption of prior knowledge and the hostile reaction to information requests made it difficult to rectify what was not known. She reflects on her experiences, recounting comments from a BAME peer:

they just told me do this, and they didn’t give any, like, support, and he compared it to the way he was, he trains people in the gym. So, he said, ‘If I tell somebody to do a squat, do a squat now, but I don’t tell them how to do it’ ... he said, ‘I don’t understand why people can’t be nice’.

An extreme consequence of feedback problems occurred in Fatima’s second placement in an incident where she was withdrawn from her placement for mispronouncing a word. It is good practice to provide opportunities to improve, but this is not always extended to BME people

(Archibong et al., 2013). She is frustrated at not getting an opportunity to improve and she questions her Placement Mentor's (PM) repeated assertion that the decision was 'nothing personal'.

Conflict

'She planned out the lesson for my tutor observation and I was criticized for following the order of the plan.' (Fatima)

A feature of Fatima's experience is conflict of advice, expectations and support. There are occasions where she is advised to take contradictory actions by placement and university staff, leaving Fatima compromised. This may reflect a disconnect between the rhetoric of academia, which discusses soft skills, whereas Teaching Standards focuses on technical outcomes (DfE, 2013; Dyer & Taylor, 2012). The structure of the course also presented problems when she was required to carry out work that her course had yet to cover. Between the university and the placement, Fatima states she is in the middle of a blame game, with managing staff adding to her workload. Lastly, she notes a disconnect between demands on trainees and support in the placement. She believes they are financially motivated to offer placements but teacher workloads prohibit appropriate support. Much of this may be the experience of any trainee, which may contribute to the doubt she expressed in the judgement of her experiences. For this reason, she looked to others for support, the responses of which will be discussed next.

(Dis)Belief

One response to Fatima's experience was disbelief, expressed by university staff. She recalled her experiences were responded to as 'odd' or 'bizarre', even questioning whether they had happened. This may have been distressing as disbelief can retraumatise victims (Essed, 2004; Kelly, 1991). However, Fatima did find belief and an explanation from a BAME university staff member (BUSM), who was unrelated to her course. They linked the experience of 'difficult mentors' with her identity as a BAME person. By linking her personal

experiences to her racial status (BAME), this may have reduced self-blame (Michell et al., 2017). If a mentor becomes difficult because you are BAME, then this may be a coded way of implying racism is the cause.

Abandonment

'I mean, even the Head of English would have known, because...she came into-, when I was having one of my feedbacks for my first lessons...'

'you are left to your own devices, go and do things yourself and go through all these experiences of bias and labelling' (Fatima)

Alongside disbelief, Fatima's experience seemed to be marked by betrayal or abandonment. For example, at one point when her PM belittled her, another member of staff stumbled into their conversation. Fatima described their response to the conversation, an expression which was understood as an acknowledgement that the conversation could be traumatic for Fatima. While this story served as a memory where her experience was acknowledged as harmful, there was no further intervention from the member of staff. Fatima supposed there was nothing the staff member could do. This seemed implausible as they were the Head of English and the PM was an English Teacher. This resonates with admissions from Human Resource Managers that they were reluctant to challenge problematic behaviour and attitudes of line managers who oversaw BAME staff (Archibong et al., 2013).

When ejected from her second placement, Fatima was disappointed by her University Tutor's (UT) agreement with staff from placement that she should change career. This advice legitimated her withdrawal for mispronouncing a word. Fatima had reasoned that this error was a minor issue, the kind of which she had witnessed experienced teachers make on several occasions.

Victim-blaming

'When I had to tell this situation to the person who is in partnership with [school name], it was turned

onto me in that I was incompetent and perhaps that's why this happened' (Fatima)

In Fatima's contribution, she is hesitant to label her experiences as racist or Islamophobic, only commenting that the media and her childhood featured racism. Even when she used the term '*bias*' she follows this up with an explanation that bias can be unintentional. Throughout her interview she appeared to be at pains to choose her words carefully, often stopping mid-sentence and changing direction. This may be because discussing racism is unpalatable (Ahmed, 2015). It is also subtle, hard to prove, often denied, and causes retaliation (Bohonos, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Eddo-Lodge, 2017). Despite never describing her placement experience as racist, Fatima has experienced victim-blaming as though she had. The existence of racial inequality undermines meritocracy, the comforting thought of fairness. Therefore, when presented with evidence to the contrary, victims are retraumatised with blame (Bohonos, 2019; Correia et al., 2012; Essed, 1991).

Coping strategies

It was so strange because of my experiences, the way they unravelled. It made more sense. Like, when afterwards, after it happened, why-, what-, why it happened and what I've been through. Um, but it might not have been as obvious to begin with because I was thinking this is normal. Maybe this is the situation everybody's going through. (Fatima)

Fatima's first response to her placement experience was to persevere. This decision was influenced by her UT and the BUSM. On hearing of her experience, Fatima reported that her UT said, 'Oh, student trainees have experienced similar things, but some trainees have been completely fine with this um, this mentor'. Whereas the BUSM advised her, 'your job is just to focus on passing, and to make sure that, you know, it doesn't affect you'. These comments encouraged endurance without remedy. This could explain why Fatima commits to improve, while acknowledging her uncertainty as to how to achieve this. She reflects that by approaching it this way, the extent of her suffering was obscured.

'So, it turned out that my friends weren't going through the same experience, um. They had completely different experiences. And it took my friends to point out that you're going through systematic bullying' (Fatima)

Fatima reappraised her experience in a way that provided some restorative benefits. Firstly, she used her friends' response to her experiences to counter the other judgements. They deemed her experience 'abnormal' and refused to swap schools, to avoid interacting with her PM. This locates the problem in the setting and staff, reducing self-blame. Further to this, she accrued stories to depersonalise her treatment and give hope. This included experiences of other BAME student and professionals, as well as professionals with other commonalities. She was also able to reappraise the view of her PM identifying her own areas of good practice and signs of their incompetence. For example, she learned that one of her PMs had recently been rated poorly in observations, which Fatima felt explained their hostility. By gathering varied points of view of her experience and evaluating these, she was able to achieve the reflective and autonomous qualities desired of teachers (Dyer & Taylor, 2012; Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002).

Conclusion with critical race theory

The themes discussed are grouped as racial identity, the behaviour of others and coping strategies, with the interaction of the three indicating the experiences of these BAME students on placement. Dione and Fatima shared the format for describing their race and stereotype threat expectations. Where they differ is their experience of others, with Dione feeling included and appropriately directed for her course and role. Whereas Fatima's testimony featured behaviours and statements that are hostile and conflicted, featuring victim-blaming, abandonment or disbelief. This led to discussions about the interpretation of her experiences and how this was shaped by those around her.

The accounts may differ due to the variance in settings and individuals. Yet CRT's insistence on

the mediating effect of white supremacy upon the perception and ensuing treatment of BAME people may counter this (Bohonos, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Their differing experiences could relate to their intersectional identities, with Dione identifying as Black and Catholic, the latter being a religion that is not visually identifiable. Whereas Fatima is Pakistani and Muslim (with visual signifiers), compounding of Islamophobia upon racism. Comments that she heard in her second placement suggest that her faith was rejected in the culture of the school. Another intersectional aspect of their identities is their roles in placement. Dione was acting as a Teaching Assistant, a position that is at the bottom of school hierarchy, whereas Fatima was acting as a teacher, the dominant role in schools. For Fatima, the contrast between her personal identity markers and her professional status, demonstrate a mismatch in social hierarchies. Whereas Dione is congruent across social hierarchies, being beneath the dominance of whiteness and the teaching profession. The intersectional combination of Fatima as a teacher, Muslim and a BAME person, may be an affront to white supremacy. Her aspiration to join the ranks of a white dominated profession in what appeared to be white dominated schools, deemed unacceptable (DfE, 2020a).

When the treatment of BAME students is negative there are psychological and cognitive challenges in enduring the behaviour of others. This may relate to higher referrals to FTP as these burdens could undermine performance. The perspective of CRT may suggest bias against BAME students contributes to their treatment including over-representation in referrals to FTP, which these findings cannot rule out.

Conclusion

This project was designed in response to findings that BAME students in the School of Education, at NU, were over-represented in FTP. The research sought to understand BAME students' experiences in the setting, how this contributed to the FTP phenomenon and how this can be interpreted by

applying CRT. This was important to investigate as it may affect the inclusivity of the education sector as a learning environment and workplace.

A phenomenological methodology was adopted to gain knowledge of the subjective experiences of participants. This approach is deemed appropriate because of its sympathies with CRT. Both value subjective narrative to understand specific group experiences. Semi-structured interviews replaced FMW due to recruitment problems. The purposive sample was two BAME students who were placement experienced, chosen as a proxy for BAME students who had experienced FTP, as the latter group was considered problematic to recruit. Thematic analysis was applied to participant accounts to identify concepts that relate to the findings of the Literature Review, CRT and the research questions.

The Literature Review examined FTP standards, and sector practices. This comparison was used to understand the significance of FTP, which was found to be a fallible process and concept. Literature regarding BAME individuals' experiences in work and education were examined to locate explanations for disadvantage. This was compared to analysis of FTP to understand how these interact in the research setting. The explanations for racial disparities included social-cultural capital, racial discomfort, and structural inequality, with the latter two appearing the most credible explanations.

The analysis portrayed two varying accounts of placement, where themes included participant racial awareness, the behaviour of others and participant coping strategies. It demonstrated an account of a successful placement experience for Dione. Whereas Fatima's account described how negative experiences can burden students with emotional work. This may contribute to BAME student underperformance but may not necessarily result in FTP referrals. What the findings did indicate is perceptions of BAME students may be understood intersectionally, between their racial identity, school culture, and the status of their destination profession. Perception of the coherence of identity markers may be liable to contaminate judgements of

competence, particularly as FTP measures are vague and subjective.

Recommendations

The recommendations are separated into two areas: further enquiry; and practical approaches.

I have assumed that BAME placement experiences may be indicative of the reasons that BAME students are overrepresented at FTP, but this relationship can only be tentatively suggested. Despite the dissatisfaction of PMs in both settings, Fatima was not referred for formal FTP proceedings. Therefore, her experiences and the over-representation of BAME students in FTP may be unrelated. There is still merit in research sampling FTP experienced BAME students to provide an explanation of the phenomenon. Fatima reported that others had found her first placement mentor problematic. If there are problems with specific settings, a systematic review of FTP referrals, examining student race and placement provider, may be useful. This could be used to ring-fence placements that work well with BAME students, an approach that has already been used by others (Fairtlough et al., 2014).

Despite it being unclear if BAME student placement experiences relate to FTP referrals, practical action should be taken to prevent experiences like Fatima's. The impact of such experiences may contribute to BAME student attrition from HE and the education sector. One issue that seemed to intensify Fatima's suffering is that she felt doubted, misunderstood and abandoned, which I think can be rectified by the approach of staff in responding to such accounts. It may be understandable to respond neutrally to such reports as UTs must balance the need to retain students and placement providers. However, UTs may favour this approach due to misconception of racism as overt and rare, and the culture of white neutrality (Bohonos, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Runnymede, 2017). Yet, faced with national and local trends of racial disadvantage and discrimination, this needs to be overcome. When presented with a BAME student who is

experiencing a challenging time on placement it should be assumed their experiences are racialised. The commonplace nature of racism and statistics around this should be shared with the student to reduce self-blame. As I write this, I am metaphorically looking over my shoulder, as I have throughout this study. I am envisaging my colleagues remarking anxiously, 'but it was only one student', 'but we have no proof', 'it is not fair on the placement providers'. Yet, it is not one student, in the same way that it is not only about FTP. There is a catalogue of evidence about related phenomena, referred to throughout this study, which should challenge the relentless pursuit of evidence for individual accounts that replicate broad trends. The system is not currently fair to BAME students who receive an inferior product to their white counterparts.

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