**Race and Education: Supporting Trainee teachers from all ethnic backgrounds**

N.B. The terminology used to identify ‘minoritised communities’ (Gillborn 2008, 2020) is contested and currently in flux. This paper will use the term ‘minoritised communities’ (see the ‘Terminology’ section below for a discussion of this).

While the majority of students thrive in the Graduate School of Education, some do so despite experiencing racist incidents or attitudes. One of the reasons for this paper is that whenever we deal with racist incidents colleagues in placements school and university are surprised and shocked. The low ethnic diversity in the South West creates an environment where the vast majority of people do not encounter racism and therefore it is easy for them to assume that it does not exist. The events in 2020 after the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota and strength of support for the Black Lives Matter movement, have highlighted the existence of endemic and systemic racism in society. At the Graduate School of Education(GSE), we stand with people everywhere who are experiencing or have experienced racism. We choose unity, justice and peace and stand against hate, injustice and racism. We recognize that institutional racism continues to impact upon BIPoC/Black Asian Minority Ethnic[[1]](#footnote-1) communities in the UK, including in those education. The work of the RERO is one of the practical strategies that we deploy, in this case to learn about racists incidents that might otherwise go unreported, support students affected by those incidents and seek ways of prevent recurrence of similar incidents

As educators, we have both opportunity and professional responsibility to promote positive policies and practices in schools to properly support pupils' learning and safety, irrespective of their ethnicity.  We have the opportunity to challenge stereotypes and change narratives with our students: from narratives of the victim vs the coloniser (or oppressor) to narratives of resistance and freedom won.

The effective support of all trainees requires that university based and school based tutors are aware of the additional and unnecessary hurdles facing some of our BIPoc trainees. Many former BIPoC trainees cite effective support by university staff and school based tutors as having been crucial to their success in their PGCE year. This article aims to capitalise on that support and enable all involved with teaching trainees from ‘minoritised communities’ (Gilborn, 2008) to understand the key issues and additional factors that may be affecting their trainee

**Terminology**

Within GSE we have recently been considering the complex choices made by colleagues and students in the terminology employed to talk about issues of race, racism and racial injustice.   Black Minority Ethnic (BME) has its roots in the anti-racism movement in the 1970s as groups combined together to fight racism under the banner of ‘political blackness’ (Cantle, 2001). Yet others objected to being grouped together implying a homogeneity where none existed. Attempting to include different people under one label, such as 'black', may well be confusing and give undue prominence to some groups above others (Modood, 1994). In the 1990s, this was amended to include pupils from Asian backgrounds with the edition ‘Black, Asian and minority Ethnic backgrounds’ (BAME). Yet this too failed to address previous concerns and was not employed by individuals themselves as a form of identification. The term is additionally contested particularly in its abbreviated form as it bears a similarity with ‘blame’ or ‘bane’, both negative terms. Further, it is attempting to describe people who are not a homogenous group, which this term might imply[[2]](#footnote-2).[[1]](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Foutlook.office.com%2Fmail%2Fdrafts%2Fid%2FAAQkADMyYmQ1ZGMxLWUzMjktNGZhZC05NTIwLTA0NDNhNjNjY2NmNAAQAB%252BGj0h7iMlGi4HGuE9rlyw%253D%23_ftn1&data=02%7C01%7CH.Knowler%40exeter.ac.uk%7C9cd3b11507a24f6d837a08d85f8e049a%7C912a5d77fb984eeeaf321334d8f04a53%7C0%7C0%7C637364410856691725&sdata=z1OB2etoS0IMsYSQJYwykAwClN0grD0eE4mcjMpOFMI%3D&reserved=0) Successive governments and the Department of Education have imposed this term from above for use in data and for statistical analysis and collecting school census data.

More recently the term Black, Indigenous People of Colour (BIPoC) has emerged from a grass roots, activist and civil rights movement in Canada and the USA. This has therefore not been imposed on the community by external authority but rather they have chosen and developed it themselves. This speaks to the ways in which in it important to think about how members of minoritised communities would describe themselves. In a similar vein, Traveller and Roma communities who have reclaimed the term ‘Gypsy’ as part of their heritage and identity (citation needed). The term indigenous is appropriate in the USA, Australia and New Zealand as Native American Indians; Aboriginals and Maori people are indigenous to those countries. However, in the UK indigenous people may well have been Celts, before the invasion and settlement of Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and Normans. ‘People of colour’ may be a more pertinent term in the UK context. Gillborn (2008) proposes the term ‘minoritised communities’ to reflect the power play at work in the act of labelling people.

*"These are very complex issues. in general terms I try to emphasize that all these terms are approximations; they try to capture something with social meaning - but those meanings are constantly shifting and redefined. So, BAME, minority ethnic, people of colour - these are ways of trying to capture something about not being 'White' (which is itself redefined over time). Personally I use 'minoritized' because it gives a sense that these are not debates about numbers - White people are the minority globally, but not in power-terms. So minoritized captures the sense that these are groups that have been rendered as a power minority." (email correspondence to EDI officer, GSE, 2020)*

Debates around terminology are ongoing and we are listening to the voices of those who are being labelled to talk about and hear how they wish to be refereed to. However, we recognize that the University, many schools and the Department for Education(e.g.see <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships/2020-21>) are still employing ‘Black, Asian and minority ethnic’ and will ensure that our trainees are aware of the term but also the challenges to that term.

John Baugh, Professor of linguistics, (1991) cited the Rev Jesse Jackson’s (1988) impact on self-identification of African Americans:

'Just as we were called colored, but were not that, and then Negro, but not that, to be called black is just as baseless, every ethnic group in this country has reference to some cultural base. To be called African-Americans has cultural integrity. It puts us in our proper historical context. Every ethnic group in this country has a reference to some land base, some historical cultural base. African-Americans have hit that level of cultural maturity' (cited by Baugh, 1991: 133).

This demonstrates the ever-changing nature of language and the challenge educators face in knowing which terms to employ without causing offence. In a recent interview Baugh recalled, ‘someone asked him “What are you people calling yourself these days?” Baugh responded, “Call me John.” That interaction perfectly illustrated the challenges language’s mutability presents. “For a lot of people, the very thing we're talking about is an annoying moving target that they feel is politically correct,” he explains. “They're annoyed by it and they feel that it's divisive, but for the people who innovate these things, they're actually trying to be inclusive. So, what you see is emerging terminology on a political collision course” (Schumer, 2020).  This further demonstrates the challenge facing minoritized communities who are seeking to gain ownership of how they are categorised by institutions.

The issue of labelling has a long history but as early as 1928 Du Bois stated that changing a name will not change attitudes. The challenge is not the name with which individuals are termed but rather the way they are treated. As teachers, we have the opportunity to demonstrate respect and kindness for all of our pupils and promote respect, kindness and inclusive practices in our classroom and school community.  We have the responsibility to diversifying our curriculums, develop anti-racist pedagogy and identify and eliminate structural racism within our institutions.

When it comes to terminology, it is useful for White educators to remind ourselves that the key characteristic common to all the communities described variously as BME, BAME or BIPoC is that they are all potential targets for White Racism.

**Stereotyping**

It is important to understand that

* “the BME population cannot be viewed as homogenous as the challenges within and between groups vary starkly”[[3]](#footnote-3).
* it is unhelpful to assume that every BIPoC trainee will experience racism while on the course, or to adopt any other “deficit model” of their ethnicity (e.g. a model that assumes victimhood or disadvantage)

The role of schools includes enabling “British children …to be well prepared to be global citizens and successfully compete on the world stage.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Education has an opportunity to challenge inaccurate assumptions and celebrate the impact of centuries of intermingling of culture and ethnicity throughout the world.

*“It is not enough to teach children how to read, write and count. Education has to cultivate mutual respect for others and the world in which we live, and help people forge more just, inclusive and peaceful societies.”[[5]](#footnote-5)*

*“...while it is important to understand another person’s religion, ethnicity and culture in order to appreciate more fully who they are, it is then simplistic to define them by one of these alone. Stereotyping often goes further than that. Many African Caribbean boys, for instance, feel defined in school just by their blackness; a crude popular definition of what it is to be a Muslim is now developing”[[6]](#footnote-6)*

It is important that a school’s duty to prepare pupils to live and work in an ethnically diverse society does not automatically become delegated to colleagues from minority ethnic backgrounds. This has happened to some of our minority ethnic student teachers, who have found themselves perceived as the token BIPoC representative, or used extensively ‘to tick the diversity box’, or assumed to be an expert in Equality and Diversity.

At the other end of the spectrum other minority ethnic trainees have found themselves quite pointedly excluded from intercultural activities- even in cases where one of the cultures being taught about IS their own heritage.

**Racism:**

Over the years, some of our minority ethnic trainees have experienced racism, discrimination and stereotyping from peers, university staff, school staff, pupils, pupils’ parents, landlords and the regional community. Some have been reluctant to report, fearing that they might be accused of ‘playing the race card’. Giving minority ethnic trainees confidence to report concerns promptly in the expectation that they will be heard and taken seriously can allow all concerned to resolve issues quickly, strengthen working relationships and avoid escalations. While we do not welcome racial incidents, we do welcome knowledge of them-indeed, Devon & Cornwall Police think that the rise in reported race hate crimes[[7]](#footnote-7) in part reflects a greater willingness to report following police efforts to strengthen relationships with minority ethnic communities. Between June 2019 and May 2020, Devon & Cornwall Police received 1,856 reports of hate crimes, the vast majority race-related. These include a rise in reports of hate crimes in the region and after several Asian people were targeted in covid-

related incidents at the start of the pandemic.

It is important to be aware of the possibility of ‘stealth racism’[[8]](#footnote-8), which is implicit rather than being explicit. Trainee teachers themselves are wary of labelling situations or comments as “racist” but when they share their experiences, it can become clear that they had been treated differently not because of their performance or engagement but because of their perceived ethnicity.

A social network campaign from 2014 “I, too, am Harvard” has highlighted the racism faced by BIPoC students throughout the world. The Guardian published a photograph of a Cambridge University student holding a board saying “Yes, I do have the right to be offended when you confuse me for the only other black girl in my year”.[[9]](#footnote-9) One of our trainees was regularly mistaken for the only BIPoC teacher in her school by staff and pupils: the only similarity was that they were both female and both Black.

**Culture:**

Schools have an ‘enculturation’ role; that is, they are agents of cultural and social reproduction, preparing students for the roles they will take in their adult lives (Apple, 1990; McCarthy, 1998).[[10]](#footnote-10) Culture consists of customs, values and beliefs that are reinforced and expressed through institutions. GSE and its partner schools are institutions which express and reinforce culture; struggles can occur when trainee teachers from a different cultural background try to find their place within GSE/placement school culture.

The Runnymede trust noted that the fear of “getting it wrong” reflected “*a wider inability of white NQTs (on their training) to view themselves as part of an ethnic group where ‘race’ is seen as only relevant to Black and minority ethnic groups. This lack of understanding about their own ethnicity and diversity within white groups results in race equality and cultural diversity being viewed as an insurmountable challenge at odds with and irrelevant to their own experiences.”[[11]](#footnote-11)* It is therefore very useful for individuals and institutions to recognise their own culture this can assist in dialogue with and support for those from a different cultural background. It may be pertinent to consider whether the teaching profession has a specific culture and whether it can adapt or whether individuals must learn to immerse themselves within that specific culture

**Isolation:**

Isolation in the South West can be acute as a student may be a “community of one” in their subject cohort, in their place of residence, their placement school and on public transport. The figures from the 2011 census demonstrate the demography of the South West with only 4.59% of the population declaring a “BME” ethnicity; within our placement catchment, this reduces to 2.76%. When census data is published in 2022 from the 2021 census they may display higher percentages than those found in 2011. One trainee commented that “I had never felt like a minority before I came to Exeter”. Some trainees have reported repeated exclusion from conversations in the staff room, staff social events, for social events, extra-curricular activities and social events organised by other PGCE students in their subject. Others have reported inappropriate questions about what they eat which seemed to be an attempt to draw conversation but which actually left them feeling more isolated.

**Bilingualism:**

Research has demonstrated that some minority ethnic teachers felt their language skills were not valued or used; at the other extreme some felt that unreasonable expectations were held of them in terms of unremunerated responsibilities pertaining to their language skills[[12]](#footnote-12).

**Curriculum:**

The mono-cultural, Eurocentric and inaccessible nature of the National Curriculum has led some researchers to question what is accepted as ‘knowledge’ (i.e. incorporated into the curriculum).[[13]](#footnote-13) A leaflet “Ethnic and Cultural Diversity throughout the curriculum” in primary schools has been written and is sent to all primary trainees in GSE and is available on ELE. A similar leaflet is underway for secondary subjects, which will be available on ELE on its completion.

The Primary and secondary PGCE course will tackle issues of diversifying the curriculum and pedagogy in sessions in the autumn term. Malcolm Richards and other academics ran a seminar series throughout the academic year of 2020-2021, which was open to partnership colleagues to address these issues in more detail. PPTs on diversifying the curriculum are available on ELE.

**Religious requirements**

Religious requirements include provision of prayer rooms and absence allowances and GSE students have reported that these have been forthcoming. The issue of fasting and school placement may become more critical when Ramadan falls during term time. Whilst recognising the importance of religious observance a compromise needs to be found in which students can complete their placements in an outstanding way whilst maintaining their religious observance. A key concern for some Muslim trainees will be close access to a mosque to enable them to participate in daily services and prayer as well as the breaking of the fast. A QTS ITT case study found that for one Muslim student “As a result of a change in body clock and routine it was very difficult for her to work at normal times due to lack of energy, loss of sleep and dehydration”. It concluded that “The impact of Ramadan can… have detrimental outcomes for achieving higher grades.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Jones et al concluded that “undertaking final teaching practice at the same time as Ramadan may present some extra difficulties, which will not be a problem for an experienced teacher.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

The College of Medical and Dental Sciences in Birmingham has wrestled with the issue of medical placements during Ramadan and concluded that they are “aware that long distance travel may become considerably more difficult for students who are fasting, particularly for those without recourse to personal transportation.” However, the report maintained, “it would be impossible for the College of Medical and Dental Sciences to reallocate all fasting students to closer placements solely for the duration of Ramadan”.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Oosterbeck and Van der Klauw’s research on the impact of Ramadan on Undergraduate economic students results “indicate(d) that academic achievement of Muslim students is harmed by exposure to Ramadan. One additional week of Ramadan exposure reduces the final grade by almost 10% of a standard deviation, with similar effects for Muslim men and for Muslim women.” They conclude, “Our analysis establishes a negative causal effect of Ramadan exposure on performance on a course taught during Ramadan”. [[17]](#footnote-17)

Placements near to the trainees’ home or mosque where possible would be the most beneficial for supporting students during Ramadan particularly in the year 2014/15 due to the dates of Ramadan falling in the midst of the second placement.

Research by NASUWT discovered that discrimination in relation to faith was four times more prevalent against teachers from Pakistani backgrounds than any other ethnic group.[[18]](#footnote-18) An article in the Metro cited an NAT CEN survey in which over a third of Britons describe themselves as “very” or “a little” prejudiced against people of other races which their chief executive concluded stemmed from the impact of immigration in their area and the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks.[[19]](#footnote-19) The Runnymede report on racism in secondary schools (2020) cites racist incidents and calls for a need for ‘racial literacy’ for teachers.[[20]](#footnote-20)

**The constantly changing focus and location of racism**

We have learned that racial discrimination /harassment/prejudice are fluid and responsive to circumstances; an increase in localised racial crime often follows or coincides with:

* Local or national elections in which immigration or diversity feature in campaigning
* Outbursts of extremist violence associated - accurately or otherwise - with particular faiths or ethnic groups and peaks in racialised experiences reported by our trainees have been associated with international sporting events in which national identity develops as a major theme (some trainees experienced the sharp end of this during a particular Football World Cup)
* combat engagements between British armed forces and combatants associated with particular faiths or religions (this can be more immediate when some pupils’ parents are on active service)
* Pandemic related attacks on students from South East Asian backgrounds.

Additionally, some changes in racial crime appear to take place in the absence of any obvious cause e.g. 2010-11 there was a sharp increase in racialised physical violence towards our female minority ethnic students.

**Conclusion**

The key to teaching trainees from ‘minoritised communities’ is the same as for all trainees:

 to respect them, get to know them as individuals, hold out high expectations, identify their strengths and areas for development, identify potential barriers to learning, select and use appropriate teaching and learning strategies to best serve their learning and progress, and use assessment to monitor progress and inform our ongoing planning and teaching.[[21]](#footnote-21) There are, however, additional factors to be aware of:they are not a homogenous group and there are a plethora of issues that may or may not affect them.

As Initial Teacher Educators, we need to embrace and celebrate diversity in every area of the curriculum to facilitate the educational development of all trainees regardless of ethnicity to enable them to become outstanding teachers and positively influence the pupils they go on to teach.

Ruth Flanagan, Graduate School of Education

Exeter University,

Original text written by RF and Nick Givens, September 2014

Updated December 2021.

1. We acknowledge the contentiousness of the term ‘BAME’ and discus this in the section on terminology [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more discussion see [https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2019/07/08/please-dont-call-me-bame-or-bme/](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fcivilservice.blog.gov.uk%2F2019%2F07%2F08%2Fplease-dont-call-me-bame-or-bme%2F&data=02%7C01%7CH.Knowler%40exeter.ac.uk%7C9cd3b11507a24f6d837a08d85f8e049a%7C912a5d77fb984eeeaf321334d8f04a53%7C0%7C0%7C637364410856701720&sdata=ERUciU44hfmqQ8KBqTt3479RF2TV8fJikX8Ol6teS3Y%3D&reserved=0)   [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Wells, H. North West Regional Development Agency (2010) *Unlocking the potential of the BME population*. North West Regional Development Agency. Final Report. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. #  Mirza, H. cited by Boffey, D (2014) ‘Only three black applicants win places to train as history teachers’. *The Guardian.* [Only three black applicants win places to train as history teachers | Teacher training | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/mar/22/black-graduate-history-teachers-institutional-racism)

 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. UN secretary General Ban Ki Moon, at the 100 day countdown to the Day of World Peace: cited by INEE 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ajebo et al, 2007:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hate Crimes and Incidents 01/04/2013 to 31/03/2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Wilson et al, pg9 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Boffey, D. March 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cited by McNamara, pg 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Rollock, 2009,9 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Osler, *The Education and Careers of Black Teachers* (1997) Cited by McNamara, pg 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Cited by McNamara, pg 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. QTS ITT case study 2007. Pg 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Jones, C et al. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Jones, J. *College Guidelines for Religious Observation Amongst Muslim Students* College of Medical and Dental Sciences

University of Birmingham. July 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Oosterbeek , H & van der Klaauw, B. *Ramadan, fasting and educational outcomes* Economics of Education Review 34 (2013) 219–226 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. NASUWT & NCLSCS (2009) *Supporting the Leadership Aspirations and Careers of Black and Minority Ethnic Teachers* [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Marris, S. *Racism on the rise as a third admit prejudice*. The Metro. Thursday 29th May 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Runnymede report (2020) [Runnymede Secondary Schools report FINAL.pdf (runnymedetrust.org)](https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/Runnymede%20Secondary%20Schools%20report%20FINAL.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Givens, N & Flanagan, R. Preparing to teach pupils from BME backgrounds. June 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)