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Published version

EDWARDS, Martyn (2015). Racism and cultural identity: the reflections of two Black trainee teachers' engagement with the Stephen Lawrence Symposium. Student Engagement and Experience Journal, 4 (1).

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Research Article

Racism and cultural identity: the reflections of two Black trainee teachers' engagement with the Stephen Lawrence Symposium

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Abstract

The Stephen Lawrence Symposium held in London in 2013 provided an opportunity for academics and educators to reflect on changes in education and wider society resulting from the legacy of Stephen Lawrence over the 20 years since his racist murder. A Black African trainee teacher and a Black Caribbean trainee teacher in post-16 teacher training at a large university in the North of England participated in a series of lunchtime discussion groups as part of their university-based training. This led to them presenting a workshop at the Stephen Lawrence Symposium in London based upon artefacts that conjured up memories of racism for them. Reflections on their experiences of engaging with the Stephen Lawrence symposium suggested that family-support and support from the wider Black community was important to them in sustaining their engagement. Such family and community support may ameliorate the sense of alienation that Black trainees may experience from their predominantly White-British peers in university-based teacher training. Whilst such support may be more significant for Black trainee teachers than that provided through formal student support systems, it is not widely recognised as such by universities and may be seen as contrary to university-culture. Personal experiences and memories of racism were key to the Black trainees' engagement with the Stephen Lawrence Symposium. Capturing those memories through the writing of personal narratives was more problematic than presenting at the Symposium itself. Structured support with collaborative writing is needed if the 'student-voice' on student-engagement is to be heard. Recommendations for future work on racism that resonated with the particular interests of the four participants have been made along with some wider recommendations that may be transferable to other contexts. Recommendations for further research are made.

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Introduction

This article draws on the reflections of two Black trainee teachers who engaged with the Stephen Lawrence Symposium in London. It begins by outlining the events that immediately followed the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence on 22 April 1993 and the repercussions of the Macpherson Inquiry (Macpherson 1999) that followed. It draws on a literature review into 'student engagement' conducted for the Higher Education Academy (Trowler 2010) that identified the beneficial effects of student engagement for Black students because of its compensatory effect on 'non-traditional' learners who may experience a sense of alienation from university study. The methodology used was an interpretivist case study approach using data collected over the 12-weeks of engagement with the Stephen Lawrence Symposium including artefacts brought in by the trainees that conjured up memories of the experiences of racism for them. Data is presented as 'Cynthia's story' and Moses' story' and explores the motivations of the trainees to engage with the Stephen Lawrence Symposium and the factors that sustained that motivation over time. Key findings relating to identity, family and community support and the importance of capturing the student-voice are discussed as concluding remarks and the need for further research identified.

Context of the study

The racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 and the subsequent bungled police investigation was a significant event in Britain and provided a frame of reference for the way public services tackled racism (London South Bank University 2013a). It led to a public inquiry commissioned by Parliament with terms of reference "to inquire into the matters arising from the death of Stephen Lawrence on 22 April 1993 to date, in order particularly to identify the lessons to be learned for the investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes" (Macpherson 1999, para 3.1). The Inquiry was led by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny and reported on initial police failures to gather evidence at the scene of the fatal stabbing; police failure to interview prime suspects identified in the days following the murder; the poor treatment of the Lawrence family by police family liaison officers; the racial stereotyping by the police of the Black witness Duwayne Brooks; and the failures of individual police officers at different levels of seniority to provide leadership.

The Inquiry described the manner in which Stephen Lawrence was attacked and fatally stabbed on 22 April 1993 as he waited for a bus on his way home. The perpetrators were described as a "group of white murderers ... young men bent on violence" (Macpherson 1999, para 1.5) and the murder itself as "simply and solely and unequivocally motivated by racism" (Macpherson 1999, para 1.11). It concluded that "There is no doubt whatsoever but that the first MPS [Metropolitan Police Service] investigation was flawed and deserves severe criticism" but went beyond that obvious finding to describe the Metropolitan Police Service itself as being 'institutionally racist'. Institutional racism was defined for the purposes of the Inquiry as "the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin" (Macpherson 1999, para 6.34).

The racist murder of Stephen Lawrence has been widely reported in the British media. In many ways the British public developed an emotional attachment to the Lawrence family that belied the underlying racist attitudes that existed at that time, and still exist, in British society. Such contradictions were symbolised by the Daily Mail, a right-of-centre newspaper that often pursues an anti-immigration agenda, launching a campaign to bring the killers of Stephen Lawrence to justice. Figure 1 shows the front page of the Daily Mail from 14 February 1997 with the headline "Murderers: the Daily Mail accuses these men of killing" and bearing photographs of the five chief suspects who had not been brought to justice for the killing (David Norris and Gary Dobson were later successfully prosecuted after new forensic evidence became available and were sentenced to life imprisonment in 2012). The image of Stephen Lawrence shown in figure 2 has appeared frequently in the Daily Mail and elsewhere in the media and has become a visual tag for the British public to the Stephen Lawrence case and the injustice experienced by the Lawrence family.

The former commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Lord Blair, in commenting on the sentencing of Norris and Dobson claimed that the legacy of Stephen Lawrence had led to the most enormous change in policing which had seen the police move from a 'colour-blind' approach to policing to one which understood the previous experiences and expectations held by different communities (BBC 2012). Changes in educational policy could also be attributed to the legacy of Stephen Lawrence and recommendations made by the Macpherson Inquiry. These included amending the National Curriculum to value diversity and better reflect the needs of a diverse society; establishing a duty for local authorities and schools to create and implement strategies that prevent and address racism; and that Ofsted inspections report on the implementation of such strategies (Macpherson 1999, para 47:67-69).

Fig. 1: Daily Mail front page from 14 February 1997 (© [Associated Newspapers Ltd](#))

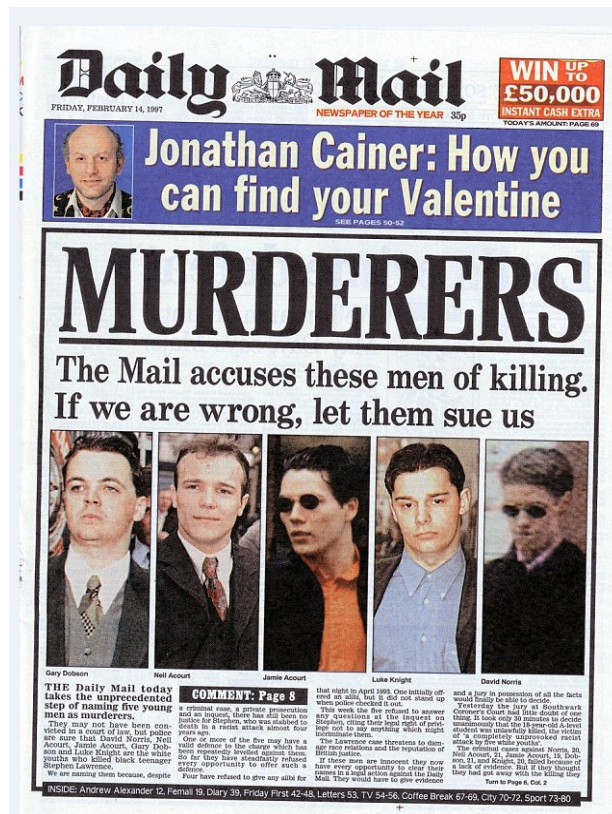


Fig. 2: Stephen Lawrence image as 'visual tag' to the Stephen Lawrence case (© [Reuters](#) cited by wikipedia.org)



2013 marked 20 years since the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence and a memorial service was held on 22 April -the date Stephen Lawrence was killed. The service was attended by senior members of the three main political parties in Britain and was widely reported in the media. The Centre for Culture, Media and Racism at London South Bank University hosted a Stephen Lawrence Symposium in the same year with the title 'The legacy of Stephen Lawrence 20 years on' and this provided an opportunity for academics to reflect on issues of racism and the media. Details of this Symposium were circulated to all trainees (n=60) on a full-time PGCE course in post-16 and further education at a large university in the North of England, along with an invitation to attend a lunchtime discussion group. The expectation in circulating the invitation to all trainees was that the Symposium would interest trainee teachers of all ethnicities, particularly those training as teachers of media studies, sociology, law, public services and similar subjects likely to feature in the Symposium. In reality only two trainee teachers engaged with the lunchtime discussion group. These two trainees were the only Black members of a cohort that was otherwise predominantly White British [ethnicities self-declared for equal opportunity monitoring purposes]. The engagement of the two Black trainee teachers with lunchtime discussions was sustained over a twelve week period alongside their hectic work, study and family lives. This engagement led to them presenting a workshop at the Symposium in London based on reflections of their experiences of racism as learners, parents, and now as trainee teachers.

The next section will review the wider literature on student engagement before returning in subsequent sections to consider the engagement of the two Black trainees with the Stephen Lawrence Symposium in particular. The motivations for these two Black trainees to engage whilst other trainees did not, and those factors that sustained that engagement, will be examined.

Literature on student engagement

A literature search of 'student engagement' conducted for the Higher Education Academy (Trowler 2010; Trowler & Trowler 2010) drew upon a body of some 1,000 publications and identified three strands in the literature. These were student engagement in individual learning, student engagement in university governance and course design, and the importance of identity on student engagement. The

overwhelming majority of the literature addressed individual student learning with the benefits of student engagement on positive outcomes (such as improved degree classifications) uncontested. Specific aspects of student engagement associated with positive outcomes for individual students included staff-student contact time, active learning approaches, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, respect for diverse learning styles and co-operation among students (Trowler & Trowler 2010).

Coates defined student engagement as being “... based on the constructivist assumption that learning is influenced by how an individual participates in educationally purposeful activities” and identified the importance of agency in student engagement where “... individual learners are ultimately the agents in discussions of engagement” (Coates 2005, 26).

Links between engagement and particular student characteristics, such as ethnicity, were not consistently found in the literature. Nevertheless it was apparent that students from ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds benefited more than others from student engagement because of the compensatory effect of such engagement for those least prepared for higher education due to factors such as a sense of alienation from university study. These included international students, students with disabilities, LGBTQ [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning] students, ethnic minority students, gender minority students in different contexts, part-time students, mature students, and low-income first-generation students (Trowler & Trowler 2010).

UK studies into student engagement were often qualitative in nature with a reliance on single case studies. These contrasted with the North American and Australian studies that drew on quantitative data available through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) amongst higher education institutions in the USA and Canada and the Australian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) in Australia. Trowler & Trowler identified a dearth of longitudinal studies into student engagement and found that where case studies were found they were “situated by country, region, institution and sometimes discipline ... so that findings may not be transferred, or completely transferred, to a different context” (Trowler & Trowler 2010, 5).

Trowler & Trowler concluded that robust evidence exists that student engagement in educationally purposive activities leads to more favourable educational

outcomes for individuals, but found little evidence of impact beyond individual learning for institutions, the higher education sector or wider society (Trowler & Trowler 2010). The student-voice in the debate about student engagement in higher education was striking by its absence.

Instead, literature was written about students for managers, policy makers, researchers, funders or teachers, with occasional briefing guides for student leaders, by other managers, policy makers, researchers or teachers. Where student voice appeared, it was as data in the form of quotes to illustrate arguments being made by others about them. (Trowler 2010, 50)

The notion of student engagement as the antithesis of alienation was traced back to Mann's (2001) engagement-alienation dyad as an alternative framework to understand students' relationship to their learning than Marton & Saljo's (1976) surface-strategic-deep triad. This was seen to be important in the literature since both surface and strategic learning can be conceptualised as responses to alienation from the content and process of study. Krause (in Trowler 2010) identified two analogies of student engagement found in the literature. The first of these was where engagement was used in the same way as appointment, suggesting engagement to be just another activity to be slotted into the diary. The second was where students conceptualised engagement as if being in a battle or conflict where the culture of the university was seen as alienating.

Coates (2007), whilst recognising student engagement as a broad construct, identified the following five aspects of student engagement measured by NSSE:

- active and collaborative learning;
- participation in challenging academic activities;
- formative communication with academic staff;
- involvement in enriching educational experiences;
- feeling legitimised and supported by university learning communities.

To these five aspects a sixth was added for AUSSE as:

- work-integrated learning (integration of employment-focused work experience into study).

Trowler & Wareham (in Trowler 2010, 41) identified four ideological perspectives for teaching and their implications for student engagement in higher education. These are shown in figure 3. The social reconstructionist perspective that seeks to engage students in learning beyond the classroom by challenging and changing structural inequity could be seen as being parallel to the critical-transformative strand of educational research practice. Taylor (2012, 118), for example, describes her orientation to research as a post-structuralist feminist “as a moral space for a form of partisan inquiry in which researcher and participants are research allies in a horizontal-democratic-dialogic relationship ...”. Whether conceptualised as teaching through the orientation of social constructivism or a critical-transformative strand of educational research it is clear that engagement with the Stephen Lawrence Symposium was influenced not only by the need to achieve academic purposes but also to challenge social injustice by 'speaking truth to power' so as to affect change.

Fig. 3: Conceptions of teaching as ideological and implications for engagement (© Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.)

Ideological perspective	Educational ideology in relation to teaching	Role of students	Implications for engagement
Traditionalism	Teaching is about transmitting information, induction into the discipline. Information transfer/ teacher-focused approach	Learning through absorbing information provided to them.	Students need to be interested in the content. Students participate through attending lectures and complying with behavioural norms.
Progressivism	Teaching is about developing students' minds so they can better appreciate the world, about making them autonomous. Conceptual change/ student-focused approach	Learning through co-construction of knowledge	Students need to be engaged in, and with, learning – both in and out of the classroom.
Social reconstructionism	Teaching is about empowering students to see the inequities and structured nature of advantage and disadvantage in the world, and to change it.	Learning through questioning, challenging and 'speaking truth to power', and effecting change.	Students need to be engaged with the world beyond the classroom, challenging and changing structural inequity.
Enterprise	Teaching is about giving students the skills to thrive in their careers and to contribute to the economy.	Learning through application of knowledge across disciplinary boundaries to real-life practical problems	Students need to be engaged in work-based/ vocational learning

Methodology and methods

The following sections return to the particular experiences of the two Black trainees. Data was collected from the time of the email invitation to the first lunchtime discussion group through to the final debriefing meeting where reflections in presenting at the Symposium were discussed. This data consisted of documents related to the Symposium, records of email correspondence, papers discussed in the lunchtime meetings, artefacts brought in by the two Black trainees, the PowerPoint presentation developed for the Symposium, and a transcript of reflections from the final debrief session.

The two trainees have been referred to as Cynthia and Moses (not their real names). Cynthia was a trainee teacher of Black Caribbean ethnicity. She completed her practical teaching placement at a large further education college in an urban setting with an ethnically diverse student intake and a predominantly White British teaching workforce. Moses was a trainee teacher of Black African ethnicity and also undertook his practical teaching placement at a large further education college. His college was situated in a large market town and had a predominantly White British student intake. The teaching workforce was also mainly of White British ethnicity. The two teacher trainers will be referred to as Gregory and Jasmine (not their real names) and data collected throughout their engagement, whilst not central to this study, will be drawn upon by way of contrasting the motivations and experiences of the White British teacher trainers from those of Cynthia and Moses.

The data has been presented as "Cynthia's story" and "Moses' story" in the sections that follow. Whilst these 'stories' have been created for them by the writer from a synthesis of the collected data, rather than narratives written by Cynthia and Moses themselves, the methodology was originally intended to follow a narration of personal histories approach. Such an approach has become well-established as a form of social inquiry (Cortazzi 1993; Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou 2013), particularly where issues of personal identity and agency are at the forefront. It is significant that whilst Cynthia and Moses collaborated fully and energetically in presenting at the Symposium, that engagement was not sustained into the intended collaborative writing of this paper. Other pressures and demands militated against such collaborative writing. This could be

seen as perpetuating the finding of Trowler & Trowler (2010) mentioned earlier that student voice is absent in the debate about student engagement in higher education, with academics writing about students being more prevalent in the literature. Nevertheless, the methodology that informed the study was seen to be consistent with an interpretivist case study approach (Yin 2009).

The focus of the case study on personal experiences and the creation of personal narratives required a careful consideration of ethical issues. Whilst participants self-selected to engage and were informed that they could withdraw at any time with no detrimental consequences if they chose to do so, it was clear that the group of participants did develop a sense of duty to each other that might have made a decision to disengage difficult in practice. The responsibility to minimise detrimental impact was seen as shared between the participants as a 'community of practice' rather than there being an overt researcher-participant relationship. It is, however, pertinent to consider the roles of the two teacher-trainers in relation to those of the two trainee-teachers. This involved responsibility for the professional and academic achievement of the trainee-teachers whose success as trainee teachers could potentially have been compromised by involvement in the lunch-time discussion group and the associated additional work alongside the demands of the teacher training course. Ethical approval was obtained from the University where the study took place and this provided a degree of oversight that all participants felt was appropriate for a study with professional learners who were not considered vulnerable and where there was very little risk of causing harm or reputational damage to others.

The findings that emerged from the case study and the implications of these for teacher trainers will be considered in the sections that follow.

Discussion

The fact that only the two Black trainees attended the first lunchtime session in spite of the topic being more relevant to trainee teachers of media studies or sociology than to them was itself significant. Whilst no follow up was undertaken with the predominantly White British trainees to ascertain why they did not attend (to do so could have been interpreted as coercive) it was clear that Cynthia and Moses felt no sense of loss by missing out on informal contact time with their predominantly White British peers

during the lunchtime.

“It was during the lunchtime which was quite convenient and I didn't feel any restrictions in attending. I really didn't feel any restrictions”. [Moses]

“I think for me it was just the meetings were held in lunchtimes and we were already in the building so we didn't have to go out of our way to attend so that was useful”. [Cynthia]

The readiness of Cynthia and Moses to give up their lunchtime may relate to previous research findings (Wilkins & Lall 2011) that Black trainees' experiences of the University-based aspects of their initial teacher training may be marked by feelings of isolation due to being seen as 'an outsider' by their peers. Further research into the experiences of Black trainees and the attitudes of White British trainees towards them is needed.

The first lunchtime session included the use of emotive images of racism in the USA that conjured up memories of racism (e.g. Black Power salute at 1968 Mexico Olympics; OJ Simpson photographs on the covers of Newsweek and Time magazines; photograph of Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King that resulted in the Los Angeles riots). A journal article (Anagnosopoulos, Everett and Carey 2013) that analysed American High School students' discussions on contemporary images of racism in the United States media was drawn upon in the second lunchtime session and led to a discussion on the notion of 'new racism'. In the third lunchtime session a report published by the National Union of Students (2011) into Black students' experiences of racism in further and higher education in the UK was considered. The focus changed for the fourth lunchtime session where a more active and participative approach than circulating papers for reading and subsequent discussion was used that involved asking the participants to bring in artefacts of their own experiences of racism in the UK experienced through their identities as learners, parents, teachers and teacher trainers. Each of the participants brought artefacts along and discussed the memories of racism that these conjured up for them.

The two teacher trainers involved in the lunchtime discussion groups will be referred to as Gregory and Jasmine (not their real names) as mentioned earlier. They were both White British and acknowledged that the reasons for their engagement did

not derive from personal experiences of racism but rather from their identities as university lecturers.

“It wasn't necessarily racism that interested me, it was the case of working collaboratively with students ... and it was an overriding interest in scholarship and actually I enjoyed it, as opposed to racism as an issue.” [Gregory]

“Yeah, I think I'm coming from a similar position to Gregory that I think I would have come whatever the topic because my initial interest was working with students and student engagement and research and also because I thought Gregory had picked up a really good thing and I wanted to support Gregory and offer any encouragement and support that I could, ... it wasn't so much the topic more what we were doing.” [Jasmine]

“I think I benefited from engaging in something at a national level because I've done lots in the University but it's about having a national and ultimately an international voice. Racism is not my area ... but having said that I think it's important as a university lecturer to have a bit of a national profile.” [Gregory]

“I did hope to learn more about racism ... I also thought it would develop my own research skills and perhaps also, I've called it 'leadership skills', but working with others ...” [Jasmine]

In contrast to the teacher trainers seeing racism as an interesting topic from which to engage in academic work, the trainee teachers declared racism as being the primary issue that engaged their interest to participate in the first place.

“For me it was just basically my interest in the case and the whole Stephen Lawrence murder and just to see what had changed twenty years on if anything had changed, ... I just wanted to see what's changed twenty years on.” [Cynthia]

“For me I think it was mainly personal experiences of say racial issues and also that I've got children that's why I was mainly motivated to attend.” [Moses]

“I've got two boys who obviously come through the education system at primary school now, but obviously there are things that could happen through the years that could impact on them, so I just wanted to be involved and gain exposure to wider academic thinking on racism in education, and to inform my personal development as a trainee teacher as well.” [Cynthia]

Whilst the anniversary of the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence was the catalyst for the lunchtime discussion group, the activities of the lunchtime sessions themselves focussed on subsequent events that illustrated the persistence of racism up to the present time, rather than an on the Stephen Lawrence case itself. This was so as to focus on the impact of racism and memories of racism on trainee teachers' personal identities as learners, parents and trainee teachers rather than on the specific details of

the Stephen Lawrence case. Nevertheless, both Moses and Cynthia were able to consider the particular circumstances of the Stephen Lawrence case in some depth through attending the Symposium in London. This featured presentations from a member of the Macpherson Inquiry, a panel discussion with Doreen Lawrence (the mother of Stephen Lawrence), and presentations from community representatives directly involved at the time. Cynthia's reflection on her attendance at the symposium confirmed her understanding of the need to combine personal experiences of racism with an understanding of historical contexts in order to affect lasting change.

"The day [at the Symposium in London] was very informative and the time used to reflect on my own experience was very cathartic so it was quite good to reflect on it. However I was quite saddened to see that not much had really changed because, obviously, looking at what's come through from our research, and what was detailed on the day it's just that not much has changed it seems." [Cynthia]

In response to the different positionalities of the participants in the lunchtime discussion group it has been decided to focus primarily on the reflections of the two Black trainee teachers rather than on those of the teacher trainers for the rest of the article. This reflects Taylor's (2012) orientation towards 'partisan inquiry', where objectivity was not seen as being dependent upon being removed from the phenomenon of racism but rather enhanced by personal experience of it. Such an approach may be seen as consistent with critical theory "which views society from the position of the 'injured' and the 'vulnerable' ... and ... conceives itself as a 'moment' in a transformative practice directed toward creating a more humane world" (Blake et al. 2003, 39).

Cynthia's story

Cynthia was a trainee teacher of Black Caribbean ethnicity as described earlier. When given the opportunity to bring artefacts to the lunchtime discussion group that conjured up memories and experiences of racism Cynthia took this as an opportunity to bring in photographs and news articles that reflected racism in London (figure 4). These artefacts had the effect of moving the discussion of racism away from being a purely academic discussion about the emergence of 'new racism' in the US to it being an issue of relevance in contemporary Britain. Poignant images used by Cynthia included photographs of white police officers conducting mass 'stop and search' operations on young Black men in London, a community demonstration with the banner "NO MORE

DEATHS IN CUSTODY” and a photograph of the Tottenham riots that had taken place a few months earlier. These images clearly held personal significance for Cynthia as a member of the Black Caribbean community with connections to London and evoked memories of racism for her.

A further artefact brought in by Cynthia was a newspaper article reporting on primary age children in Lewisham being lined up according to skin colour by school staff for the benefit of the school photographer. This brought home the reality of racism in education, even though the motives of those acting in discriminatory ways may not have been malevolent in this case. An image brought in by Cynthia with personal resonance was a photograph she had captured on her mobile phone of a poster displayed in the classroom at the college where she completed her practical teaching placement (figure 4). This photograph purported to challenge prejudice but had the effect of reinforcing racial stereotypes where the image of black people consisted of a caricature of two large black women singing into a microphone. The use of this image captured from the display board on teaching practice powerfully brought home the reality of racism in Britain today, including that experienced by students and teaching staff in educational settings. These artefacts brought in by Cynthia were all incorporated into the presentation made at the Stephen Lawrence Symposium.

Fig. 4 Artefacts brought in by Cynthia





In reflecting upon her involvement during the debrief session following the Symposium Cynthia emphasised the importance of support from her friends and family in helping her to persevere with the work she did.

“For me it was mainly family and friends really. When I spoke to them about what I was doing they were really interested and were quite proud of me that I was actually going down to London and going to present at a conference and what have you. And I ran through my presentation with some of them and they were like “O my Gosh, I never thought of it like

that". It raised awareness and I think that was the main encouragement aside from the whole University support that I was getting." [Cynthia]

A further significant factor for Cynthia, after support from family and friends, was recognition from the wider community she was a part of.

"I think it was quite encouraging that people thought it was a good thing that I was doing and it helped people consider things that they may not have considered before. That was it really for me ... and the fact that Doreen Lawrence was going to be there and it was quite high profile I think, it was encouraging." [Cynthia]

Moses' story

Moses was a trainee teacher of Black African ethnicity as described earlier. When invited to bring in artefacts of racism Moses focused upon cultural memories of racism drawing upon attitudes to colonial rule that have persisted over generations in a post-independence nation state of Southern Africa that he was familiar with. This focus on Black African cultural identity was continued into his consideration of Black British identity where he used images from the Daily Mirror (2012) that portrayed a twitter feed from Rio Ferdinand describing fellow Black footballer Ashley Cole as a 'choc-ice' (a pejorative term meaning 'Black on the outside and White on the inside') and a sell-out to the white dominated football establishment investigating an allegation of racial abuse amongst players during a Premier League football match in England. Moses' choice of image shown in figure 5 relates to how Black people seen to be part of the White establishment are perceived or see themselves as being perceived by the wider Black community.

Reflections on participating in the Symposium discussed in the debrief session that followed it emphasised the importance of recognition from the wider community, particularly the Black community, as being important for Moses. In contrast with Cynthia this community recognition took precedence over family support for Moses.

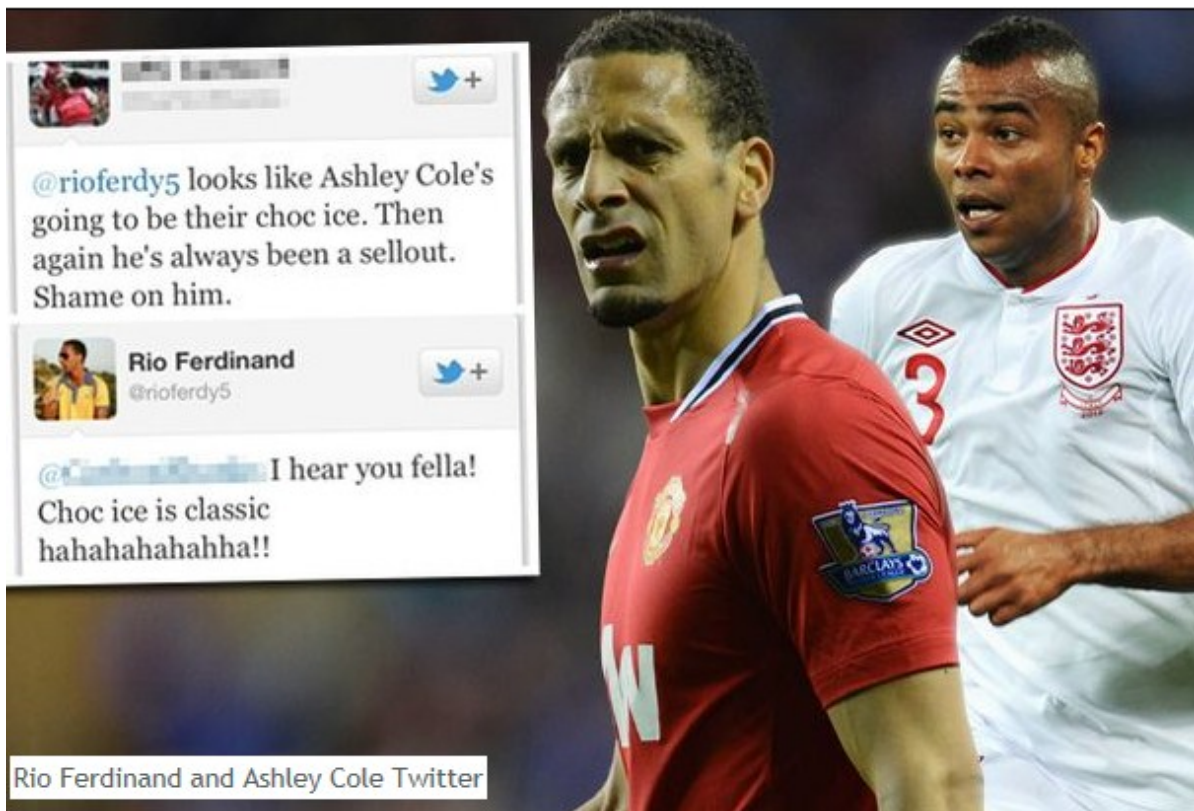
"I think for me it was mainly what was happening around. Because in the community we were discussing this thing, what was happening in football ... I think my main reason [for engaging with the Symposium] was based on what was happening around me and what people were talking around about it and I thought that if I attended I might be able to bring back something valuable." [Moses]

"I was secretary for our community involvement. It was part of that agenda for me to present what I found out from that conference which I'm writing [into] the minutes which I'll be circulating." [Moses]

The idea of gaining knowledge from more experienced academics in order to bring something back to the community was a key motivation for Moses.

"So it was just the experience of working with experienced academics which was something that I gained, and also networking. I didn't even know I've not networked before. So that was quite a good way of networking, meeting the new people, getting new ideas." [Moses]

Fig. 5 Artefact brought in by Moses (© [Getty/Twitter](#) cited by Daily Mirror.)



Concluding remarks

The stories of Cynthia and Moses provided a powerful and authentic voice at the Symposium that was well-received by the participants in that event. The process of developing and telling those stories was also experienced as empowering by Cynthia and Moses themselves. Whilst it was originally envisaged that participation in the Symposium would be written up as a piece of collaborative writing undertaken by the

four participants, there were significant barriers that prevented the collaborative writing from taking place. This resonates with Trowler's (2010) finding that the student voice is absent from the literature on student engagement. There has been an increased focus on barriers to writing amongst university academics (Murray 2015; Stivers & Cramer 2013) and teacher educators (Weston & Roberts 2014) but little research has been undertaken into how to support non-doctoral students to write for publication. This is an area that would benefit from further research.

The shortage of longitudinal studies into student engagement has also been identified (Trowler & Trowler 2010, 5) with an emphasis instead in qualitative research on case studies "situated by country, region, institution and sometimes discipline ... so that findings may not be transferred, or completely transferred, to a different context." It is suggested that further research into the experiences of Cynthia and Moses may be useful to determine whether the development of their 'stories' had a lasting impact on their professional identities and hence on their classroom practice.

Whilst accepting that the findings of case studies are seldom transferable unproblematically to other contexts, there may be some lessons from Cynthia's and Moses' engagement that may be tenuously made:

Personal experiences of racism (and an awareness that their children may similarly experience racism) was a compelling reason to engage with the Symposium not shared by trainees without such experiences even though their teaching areas (media studies, public service industries, sociology) appeared to suggest a reason for them to engage;

The shared experiences of racism by Cynthia and Moses as Black trainee teachers creates a risk that their heterogeneity may not be recognised (male and female; African and Caribbean; British-born and 1st generation immigrant; community-active and family oriented; teacher of accountancy and teacher of business studies). This serves as a warning against assigning Black teachers to roles that identify them as Black teachers rather than firstly as teachers. The dangers of pigeon-holing Black trainees into ethnically-defined roles was identified in research undertaken by Wilkins and Lall (2011) as being experienced as patronising and having the potential to restrict career progression for Black trainees;

Support for Black trainees from families and the wider Black community is particularly important and may be seen as 'trumping' that provided by Universities through their formal student support systems. This may reflect both the close extended family ties in Black African and Black Caribbean communities and also feelings of alienation experienced by Black trainees from predominantly White British peers on their university-based training and White British colleagues within their placement settings. Drawing on extended families and community networks as sources of support may reflect a distinct cultural perspective of Black trainees that is different from the culture of White British trainees. The importance of family support may not be sufficiently recognised by universities, and indeed may be inadvertently discouraged as contrary to university culture, to the detriment of Black trainees.

Cynthia and Moses can be encouraged to engage with further work on racism and cultural identity by considering their personal motivations. For Cynthia this may be the desire to engage in evaluation of educational contexts to see "if anything has changed". For Moses it might be to work with experienced academics to support him to "be able to bring back something valuable [to the community]". The two teacher trainers also had their own motivations to engage in scholarship and develop leadership skills, and these also provide an impetus to further collaborative work. If Cynthia and Moses do choose to engage further in academic work on racism and cultural identity in the future it is likely that some forms of structured support in writing collaboratively for publication would be required in order for the student voice to be heard in the literature on student engagement.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the four participants for their active collaboration and open reflections throughout their engagement with the Stephen Lawrence Symposium. I thank Mark Boylan for constructive feedback delivered through group mentoring he led and Gill Adams for further support through a group writing retreat she organised. I also thank Tahira Aziz for hosting the Stephen Lawrence Symposium in London and providing opportunities for practitioners to contribute to it.

Note

The terms 'Black African', 'Black Caribbean' and 'White British' have been used to identify ethnicities self-declared by trainees for equal opportunities monitoring purposes. The term 'Black' has also been used to collectively define the racial identity of 'Cynthia' and 'Moses'. Within the literature the term Black is commonly used more widely to refer to members of African, Arab, Asian and Caribbean communities.

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