

**The Experience of Black Ethnically-
Minoritised students in higher
education in the UK**

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the award of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY

February 2014

Revised: June 2014

Abstract

“Is there a link between the **Black ethnically Minoritised (BEM)** student experience in higher education in the UK and degree attainment, retention and progression?”

Aims of this study:

- to investigate the experiences of BEM students on the **youth and community development (YCD)** course at **Riverside University (RU)**
- to provide a conduit that would enable BEM students to tell their stories
- to analyse the BEM students’ narratives and discuss implications for key stake-holders.

Methodology:

The overall aim of this study was to explore and gain insights into the experience of BEM students in higher education in the UK, using qualitative research methodology. It sought to provide descriptive and interpretive accounts from BEM students at , in Leicester. Student dialogue groups and facilitation were the primary methods used. The process was underpinned by a commitment to group processes as well as working towards a tangible outcome that could be presented to the three stake-holders: BEM students, BEM communities and the university. The research methodology was based on a process of attempting to research ***with***, rather than ***into***, or ***about***. The overall concern in this study was with processes, rather than content or outcome. The research approach adopted to capture BEM students’ experiences was a post-positivist (subjectivist) methodology. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) were also used.

Outcomes:

Overall, the BEM students regarded their experience in HE as “**a struggle that exposed vulnerabilities and presented opportunities for change.**” This study demonstrated the necessity to create space to facilitate the articulation of the BEM “student voice”. Their experience in HE was mirrored by their experiences in wider society and underscored by “**discrimination**”. The BEM students’ experiences heightened their appreciation of “**positionality**”. This is reflected in terms of how they were situated, or how they situated themselves, based on perception and experiences. Their encounters with “**discrimination**” and “**positionality**” in HE and the opportunity to dialogue and reflect led to an emerging “**consciousisation**”, where BEM students were “**more determined to succeed and to challenge for positive change**”. BEM participants wanted HE institutions to be “**accountable**” and to “**acknowledge their role and responsibility in addressing the negative impact of policy and practice**”. BEM students “**desired safe spaces**” and they were prepared to use various methods (“**self-determination**”) to achieve their objectives. The BEM students identified strategies they believed would contribute to making a significant difference to their HE experiences, specifically “**learning contracts**”, “**Peer Support & Mentoring System (PSMS)**” and “**radical curriculum**”.

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Author Declaration

I declare that the main text of this thesis is entirely my own work. This work has not previously been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Carlton Thomas Howson

2014

Signature ... 

Date ...4 February 2014.....

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the Black ethnically-minoritised students who enabled me to develop my research ability and to become a better learning facilitator, and equally, to Black ethnically-minoritised academics, who work tirelessly to make a difference.

To the memory of my Grandmother, Catherine Daley and Melvin Downs, who was like a father to me. Both believed in me, but were taken before I was able to complete and share this moment with them. I know they are proud, even though I was unable to spend as much time with them as I would have liked to.

To my mother, Annie Howson, and to my sisters and brothers, to Marcus, Jordan, Dawn, Akil and Aisha, all of whom have encouraged, supported and inspired me. The importance of family and community is often not appreciated. You have all provided the odd word of encouragement and a sympathetic shoulder when it was most needed.

To those who persist in struggle for a better tomorrow.

The struggle continues...

Acknowledgements

Professor David Gillborn, Dr Angela O' Sullivan, Jean Hine, Ann-Marie Lawson, Rik Kennedy, Professor Roger Smith, Ray Fabes, Professor Simon Dyson, Dr Perry Stanislas, Dr Momodou Sallah, Sonia Davies , Dr. Gurnan Singh, Craig Pinkney, Kemi Folarin, Dr Martin Glynn, Leesa Naidu, Annie Britton, Dr Nick Allsopp, Julie Flett, Julie Kent, Sherma Patel, Marcia Stewart, Babita Kumah, Patience Majuru, Surfia Massadar, Professor Heidi Mirza, Professor Ann Phoenix, I-Chun Chloe Hsiao, Lei Dai, Joyce Frank, Odetta Carter, Jitesh Pandya, Stephen Robinson, Claire Gregory, Dr Jason Wood, Sarah Hargreaves, Ben Brown, Dr Christine Nightingale, Kaushika Patel, the Black Minority Ethnic Staff Group, all colleagues in the Faculty of Health & Life Sciences, the Society for Research in Higher Education, Higher Education Authority, National Union of Students, De Montfort Students' Union, De Montfort Student societies, particularly the African-Caribbean Society, Equalities Challenge Unit, the Research Office, the Retention Attainment Ethnic Minorities Group, all the participating students, Margaret and the staff at Café Mbriki, the World Peace Café, Leicester, and the Meditation Centre, Leicester, Bikram Yoga Leicester, Sansa Yoga and members of the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Leisure Centre, Catherine Quin, Anna, Alex, and Sam, who helped me recover from surgery during the time of study.

Thanks to everyone who contributed in any way - the omission of your name does not reflect the gratitude I feel for your contribution; it is perhaps more a reflection of my memory and the stress of the moment. To George Dryden, for providing professional, objective and critical comment, proof-reading and encouragement.

A special, deep and sincere thanks to Heather Cole (External Facilitator), who brought a wealth of experience and wisdom to the group, to Professors Robert Canton, Cecile Wright, Gus John and my supervisors, Dr Julie Fish and Professor Mark Johnson, who had to put up with me as they sought to guide me. Even though I remained true to who I am, I recognise and truly value the contribution you have made.

But most of all...

To my family: without their love, encouragement and support during my life and the last seven years working on this PhD, I would not have reached this moment.

All of you have provided strong shoulders that enabled me to see beyond the horizon. I am already more than I was ...this has been a journey of discovery and a labour of many emotions, but none more profound than love.

Publications arising from Thesis

The Development and contextualisation of Black consciousness, Glasgow Anti Racism Alliance November 2007

Unveiling common threats to security and community cohesion, Europe and its Established and Emerging Immigrant Communities: Assimilation, Integration or Community Cohesion? International Conference, De Montfort University, 11 – 12 November 2007

'Experience of Black Students'. Minding the gap: ethnicity and gender disparities in degree attainment in Higher Education, Conference, *Institute of Education, University of London*, 22 January 2008

'Black student experience - widening participation', Widening To What? Society for Research into Higher Education & Student Experience Network, *Conference* 24 June 2008, De Montfort University

Black Students in higher education – finding safe places to enable the genius to grow, Seminar, 10 July 2008 De Montfort University

Working with Black Students: The Development and contextualisation of Black consciousness Training Agencies Group Conference, Liverpool John Moores University 12 July 2008

Working with Black Students: The Development and contextualisation of Black consciousness, Fair for All conference, De Montfort University September 2008

Working with Black Young People: The Importance of getting it right, Keynote for Black Minority and Ethnic Youth Support Seminar Exploring issues of Race, Religion and Culture, Fielder Centre Hatfield, Hertfordshire, Friday 23 January 2009

Crabs in a barrel: race, class and widening participation, SRHE Student Experience Network Seminar, Manchester March 2009

REACH Awards Ceremony MENTER - for outstanding contribution as a Black Role Model to the community through his work with university students in the East of England 25 April 2009 Cambridge

Many Voices Diversity Quality enhancement and the students voice, Conference, De Montfort University 24 June 2009,

Working with Black Students: The Development and contextualisation of Black consciousness C-SAP Critical Race Theory SIG Conference, *Institute of Education, University of London* 26 June 2009

Creating Spaces Changing Discrimination, Developing consciousness, Enabling the Genius to Grow C-SAP Conference Race Research Group SIG, Roles, Rights and Responsibilities: Negotiating Relationships, 25 - 27 November 2009, Jury's Inn Hotel, Birmingham

Working with Black young men: how do we engage with them? How do they access social rights? Black History Season 11 November 2011, De Montfort University

Murmuring: The Experience of Black Ethnically Minoritised students in HE. Black History Season 24 October 2012, De Montfort University

Student Retention and Achievement in Higher Education: Success, Inequality and Disadvantage. Black Ethnically Minoritised Students research. A conference to consider the issues 1 November 2012 Bede Island De Montfort University

The Role of Higher Education Institutions to Nurture Often Unheard Voices: Working with BEM Students in the UK, Blackness in Britain Conference 12th September 2013 Newman University, Birmingham

Working with the hard to reach, a lecture by Carlton Howson De Montfort University
Location Hugh Aston Building 3.04 Date(s) 05/11/2013 (13:00-14:00) - See more at:
<http://www.dmu.ac.uk/about-dmu/events/events-calendar/black-history-month/events/working-with-the-hard-to-reach.aspx#sthash.IVVLuPbG.dpuf>

Publications:

Howson, C. (2007), 'Working with Black Young People: The Development of Black Consciousness in an Oppressive Climate', in Sallah, M. & Howson, C. (Eds.) (2007) **Working with Black Young People**. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing.

Sallah, M. & Howson, C. (Eds.) (2007) **Working with Black Young People**. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing.

Howson, C. (2009), 'Crabs in a barrel: race, class and widening participation', in Howson, C. Sallah, M. (2009) **Europe and its established and emerging immigrant communities**, Trentham, Stoke on Trent

Howson, C. Sallah, M. (2009) **Europe and its established and emerging immigrant communities**, Trentham, Stoke on Trent

GLOSSARY

BEMS – Black Ethnically Minoritised Students

BEMSDG - Black Ethnically Minoritised Students Discussion Group

AGR – Association of Graduate Recruiters

HEAR – Higher Education Achievement Report

WP- widening participation

HE – Higher Education

IPA - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

PAR – Participatory Action Research

CDP – critical dynamic pragmatic (method)

ACADEMY – De Montfort University

NUS – National Union of Students

PSMS – peer support and mentoring systems

DFES – Department for Education and Schools

NYA – National Youth Agency

PIN TRIANGLE – used to facilitate discussions about different positions, interests, and needs.

YCWE – youth and community work education

NTEHE – non-traditional entrants into higher education

Ranking exercises - used to facilitate discussions about the relative importance place on a specific item/issue

Johari windows - used to facilitate discussions about awareness – often we do not have the answers because insights in terms of known, unknown.

LTCAM - Learning, Teaching and Curriculum Assessment Methods

Forcefield analysis - used to facilitate discussions about different pressures

Card-sorting exercises - used to facilitate discussions about different issues

Rich pictures - used to facilitate discussions about different things to enable participants to reflect their views.

SMART objective setting - used to facilitate discussions facilitate discussion and in setting Specific, Measurable, Achievable Realistic and Time bound objectives.

SPICED objective setting - used to facilitate discussions and in setting subjective, participatory, interpreted, cross-checked, empowering, diverse objectives

SVOT ANALYSIS - used to facilitate discussions about strengths, vulnerability, opportunities and threats

DSU - De Montfort Students Union

ECU - Equality Challenge Unit

HEFCE - Higher Education Funding Council England

HEA - Higher Education Authority

YCD – youth and community development (course)

SW – social work (course)

Bold – direct quotes from participants are highlighted in **bold**, quotations from others sources are also highlighted in bold and referenced.

PART 1

Chapter 1:

Is race still a factor in influencing educational outcomes in higher education?

“I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you this day rejoice are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me...”

Frederick Douglass (1852:343)

1.1 Introduction

The last two decades have seen a shift in the state’s role in higher education (hereafter HE); having spent the previous two decades focussing on primary and secondary education, the state has turned its focus to HE. The shift was significant in that it sought to move from a belief in education for the development of the individual to vocationalism and education as a service to the state. The significant focus has been placed on breaking down barriers to social class, gender, disability and race. Despite the expansion in the access to and uptake of HE by different social groups that reside within and form that which is classified as the working classes, (for example, women and ethnically-minoritised people), the perception of HE as an ivory tower, divorced from public scrutiny, persists. On 22 January, 2003, **Secretary of State for Education and Skills Charles Clarke made a statement on the**

Higher Education White Paper in the House of Commons (guardian.co.uk, 2003). The statement was repeated in the executive summary of the Department for Education and Skills (hereafter DfES), entitled **“The Future of Higher Education” (DfES, 2003a)**. It speaks about the value of HE, indicating that the British HE system was a **‘great asset’**, for individuals and the nation:

“...universities and colleges play a vital role in expanding opportunity and promoting social justice. The benefits of higher education for individuals are far-reaching. On average, graduates get better jobs and earn more than those without higher education.”

(DfES, 2003a)

“The Future of Higher Education”, (2003a) was making a statement about a value, an expectation that people generally hold about public services or services that are in place for the public good. However, although some aspects of the statement were accurate ... **“On average, graduates get better jobs and earn more than those without higher education”** ... it was harder to sustain an argument that HE promoted social justice. As will be illustrated later, there is a discourse about whether HE institutions ought to be involved in promoting social justice. Indeed, the promotion of social justice is often totally absent or not obvious in curriculum content and less so in learning teaching and assessment practices in HE. In launching **“The Future of Higher Education”** (2003a) the previous Labour government was making a statement, a social policy that reflected its values, a government that acknowledged and sought to address some aspects of social inequality. In 2008, John Denham, the Government’s Universities Secretary, was quoted by BBC News as saying that higher education can **“help unlock the talent of their local people.”** He added that:

“Never have universities and colleges been more important to our country, both nationally in ensuring our success on the world stage, and locally, in our towns and cities through the creation of jobs and new skills, driving regeneration and enriching cultural life.”

(Denham, 2008a)

In a forward to a report called **“Staying on top: The challenge of sustaining world-class higher education in the UK”**, (2010), Professor Michael Arthur (Chair of the Russell Group) and Dr Wendy Piatt (Director General of the Russell Group) noted that:

“We can be proud of our higher education sector in the UK. At a time when leading nations around the world are waking up to the importance of investing in the skills, research and ground-breaking new ideas which are incubated within higher education institutions, the UK’s universities still achieve a gold standard in an increasingly competitive global market.

(2010:1)

The executive summary of the **“Higher Education White Paper”**, (2011) noted that: **“Education should not stop when a person leaves school. The opportunities ... it offers should be available to people throughout their lives in different forms ... whatever will help them achieve their goals at that stage of their life”**, (2011:4). The proposals relating to higher education in England were presented to Parliament by Universities Minister David Willetts on the 28 June, 2011. The Higher Education White Paper noted that: **“Higher education has a fundamental value in itself”** (2011:4). The report also noted that many UK universities are regarded as “world-class” in terms of contributing to the economy and in attracting international students. Within the climate of increased competition, UK universities will be tasked with the challenge of putting **“the undergraduate experience at the heart of the system”**, (2011:4).

Thus, we can see from the quotations above that HE is valued and forms a central plank in social policy. HE is thought to be crucial in changing the social and economic outcomes for individuals and the nation. However, just as Greg Dyke, Director General of the BBC, once commented about his own corporation, HE institutions are still **“hideously white”**, in terms of academic staff and students. Moreover, the higher that one ventures up the hierarchy within the academy, the absence of BEM people is more pronounced (Equality Challenge Unit, 2009; 2011). A HE institution is one place where one would expect to see innovative practice with regard to challenging inequalities, but the inequalities that are evident in society are often replicated both within the structure and everyday practices in HE (Essed, 1991; Back, 2004; Pilkington, 2012). Yorke & Thomas, (2003) note that HE in the UK has been significantly:

“...influenced by government policies whose basic rationale they argue is the development of national competitiveness and wealth through education of the workforce.”

(Yorke & Thomas, 2003:63)

The “**Higher Education White Paper**”, (2011) promises to put students at the heart of the system. Professor Eric Thomas, (President, Universities UK) responded to the White Paper by saying that “**universities always have been and remain unequivocally committed to delivering this,**” (Thomas, in Universities UK, 2011:3). However, the Government’s commitment to widening participation was not as encouraging as the previous Labour government’s, The Coalition government rather sought to ensure that there are “**sufficient higher education places available for those qualified**”, (2011:7). It could be argued that rather than tackling the historical and current inequalities in society, they are instead replicated at every stage of the education system. In practice, considerable focus has been on the Government policy of Widening Participation (Yorke & Thomas, 2003; Wakeling & Kyriacou 2010; Stevenson, 2012). This context is presented to illustrate the normative nature of higher education; the contexts demonstrate that traditionally some groups remain outside or on the fringe of HE. Black ethnically-minoritised (hereafter BEM) students are routinely excluded and marginalised in higher education. This study sets out to examine the experience of BEM students in HE; it seeks to explore how the policy and practice of widening participation is manifested in terms of retention, degree attainment and progression. The study will draw on a conceptual framework drawn from critical theory. Critical Race Theory encourages the use of narratives from BEM students. This approach will form a key source of evidence by presenting voices that are often absent within the ivory towers of HE.

1.2 Theoretical framework

This study is underpinned by Critical Race Theory (hereafter CRT). CRT is a theoretical framework with its roots in critical legal studies. Its application to education increased significantly following the publication of Gloria Ladson-Billings & William Tate’s (1995) influential article “**Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education**”. As an emergent paradigm for conceptualising the trajectories between race and education, CRT acknowledges the centrality of race and focuses on how elements of racism and prejudice are embedded in society and social institutions such as schools. CRT grew as a radical alternative to dominant perspectives. Cornel West, (1995) argued that an alternative perspective was required to deconstruct the “**seldom-addressed role of deep-seated racism in American life**”, (West, 1995:xi, in Scheurich, 1997). Gillborn, (2006) argues that a number of scholars including Bell (1980); Crenshaw (1988); Delgado, (1989); Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, (1993) were frustrated with “**the silence on racism**” and this prompted them “**to**

foreground race and to challenge not only the foci of existing analyses, but also the methods and forms of argumentation that were considered legitimate”, (Gillborn, 2006:20).

Gillborn, (2006) argued that CRT offers a genuinely radical and coherent set of approaches which could revitalise critical research in education across a range of inquiries, not just self-consciously “multicultural” studies. Egbo, (2011) notes that within societies that are perceived as racially-inclusive, the situation could be more complicated. The illusion of inclusion may be one of the reasons why despite increasing diversity among student populations in some HE institutions, the teaching force remains predominantly homogeneous, white and middle class. As a consequence, academics and many students view the world through lenses that sustain intractable difficulties. These can only be resolved when a serious scrutiny of the role of race in reifying social injustice through education becomes an integral part of the discourse (Housee, 2008, 2009; Gillborn, 2008; Singh, 2011; Rollock, 2012).

Advocates of CRT have been reluctant to identify a set of unchanging theoretical tenets and would rather talk of “**basic insights**” (Gillborn, 2006: 20) or “**defining elements**” (Tate, 1997:234). This reflects CRT’s recognition of the changing and complex character of race/racism and its opposition in contemporary society. CRT is premised on a number of “basic insights”. One is that racism is a normal, ingrained feature of our landscape; it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture. Consequently, legislation is created to achieve equality by insisting that treating blacks and whites alike becomes neutralised. This means that often, only the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice are highlighted. The everyday misery, alienation, and despair caused by normalised interactions between groups are ignored (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Gillborn, 2006).

CRT draws upon numerous traditions. It has crossed epistemological boundaries. Crenshaw et al, (1995) note that inspiration and a sense of direction derive from other “**courageous, brilliantly-conceived, spiritually-inspired, and ultimately transformative mass action**”, (Crenshaw et al, 1995:xiv). According to Yosso et al, (2001) CRT:

“...challenges the traditional claims of the educational system such as objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. Critical race theorists argue that these traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups”.

(2001:91)

Therefore, a critical race theory in education challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups. CRT maintains that race, as a social construct, is grossly under-theorised in analyses which purport to deconstruct the workings of society and social institutions (Omi & Winant, 1993). CRT is committed to social justice and to the elimination of all forms of inequalities, especially those that are racially-motivated.

With regards to educational knowledge, advocates of CRT argue that while race is commonly used to sustain inequality in schools and society, its **“intellectual salience... has not been systematically employed in the analysis of educational inequality” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995:50)**. One common question within the academy is whether or not race really matters. Many educational practitioners, scholars and researchers have engaged in the issue (Gillborn, 2006; Lund, 2011; Lund & Carr, 2010; McNeil, 2011; Schick, 2011). As Ghosh, (2008) notes:

“(even though)...race does not have scientific validity, we must not underestimate its power as a social construct to affect people’s lived experiences, their daily lives as well as their futures. Race is a very real concept in our social consciousness, and it has real world consequences.”

(2008:27)

Similarly, Fleras & Elliott, (2003) argue that the concept of race will continue to be significant in everyday life and public policy: **“not because it is real, but because people respond as if it were real”, (2003: 52)**. Moreover, it is of central importance that the term “racism” is used not only in relation to crude, obvious acts of racial hatred, but also in relation to the more subtle and hidden operations of power that have the effect of disadvantaging groups that have been ethnically-minoritised (Gillborn, 2006). Thus, whilst differences may be evident, the allocation of position, privilege and power may be manipulated or concealed. William Tate, (1997) argues that CRT:

“...challenges dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colour-blindness, and meritocracy as camouflages for the self-interest of powerful entities of society.”

(1997:235)

Racism in society is pervasive and omnipresent; its pervasiveness is the nexus of the claims by proponents of CRT, such as Milner, (2007), who argues that:

“Race and racism are so ingrained in the fabric...of society that they become normalised. Individuals from various racial and ethnic backgrounds may find it difficult to even recognize the salience, permanence, effects, and outcomes of racism because race and racism are so deeply rooted and embedded in our ways and systems of knowing and experiencing life.”

(2007:390)

Rollock, (2012) illustrated how being middle class was not a barrier to the racism experienced by black professionals and their children. Sivanandan, (1985) has invested a life-time exploring different strategies like race awareness and anti-racism training employed to counter racism. However, there is recognition that racism is not static; it mutates. Gillborn, (2006) argued that:

“...conventional forms of anti-racism have proven unable to keep pace with the development of increasingly racist and exclusionary education policies that operate beneath a veneer of professed tolerance and diversity.”

(2006:11)

The anti-racism stance of the 1980s and 1990s was instrumental in exposing the deeply conservative posturing that espoused desire for liberation, whilst accepting the status quo and **“frequently encoded deficit perspectives of black children, their parents, and communities” (Gillborn, 2006:13)**. The **“Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report” (Macpherson, 1999)** employed CRT principles and was instrumental in acknowledging the systematic nature of racism in Britain. Sivanandan noted that:

“...the unrelenting struggle of the Lawrences has put institutional racism back on the agenda . . . they changed the whole discourse on race relations and made the government and the media and the people of this country acknowledge that there is a deep, ingrained, systematic racism in the institutions and structures of this society.”

(2000: 7)

The 1999 Macpherson Inquiry's approach to unravelling and revealing institutional racism was pivotal in advancing an enhanced appreciation of racism, in terms of outcomes and effects, rather than intentions:

“‘Institutional Racism’ consists of the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people...Racism...in its more subtle form is as damaging as in its overt form.”

(1999:321)

This investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence exposed some longer-established definitions, presenting a fundamental challenge to liberal complacency about the realities of contemporary racial politics and inequalities. As Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton observed decades ago in what is widely credited as the first attempt to define the term:

“...institutional racism . . . is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human life. (It originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation.”

(Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, Reprinted in Cashmore & Jennings, 2001: 112)

Many of the advocates of CRT have recognised that whilst conceptually there is some merit in developing a theory to explain how relationships between groups are racialised, the name CRT has provided a basis for objection to it. Gillborn, (2006) notes that CRT is not a theory, but rather a perspective that articulates a set of inter-related beliefs about the significance of race/racism and how it operates in contemporary western society. Hayes, (2013) suggests that CRT at a basic level infers that **“if you are white, you are racist”**, and his primary concern is that this **“absurd ‘theory’”** is now incorporated into **“the mainstream of higher education”**, (Hayes, 2013). Here, Hayes reflects on an example of the on-going emotional exchanges that occur when the silence about white racism is challenged in university classrooms (Dlamini, 2002; Leonardo, 2002; Rich & Cargile, 2004; Gillborn, 2006). CRT has been rejected by critics such as Cole, (2009) and Hayes, (2013), who argues that it is not really a ‘theory’, but rather a ‘perspective’; **“it is a political position pretending to be a theory.”**

However, CRT is one conduit which seeks to move beyond the silence by engaging with issues that are structural and/or amorphous. It therefore uses narrative and emotional work as a signifier, enabling groups that are disenfranchised to find ways of sharing their stories and confronting the essence of White privilege and the emotional impact that is evident or that emerges as the stories are told. Thus when Hayes, (2013) refers to CRT as breaking the silence of racism but defines it not as theory, but storytelling, he fails to acknowledge his own privileged position – the right to name or situate meaning. Hayes would perhaps prefer that the silence of White racism is maintained. Hayes' (2013) attack on CRT is spurious and based largely on semantics.

Although it is accepted that CRT is an emergent and a developing perspective, CRT offers a coherent and challenging set of important sensitising insights and conceptual tools. CRT offers a general challenge to educational studies, and to the sociology of education in particular. **“To cease the empty citation of “race” as just another point of departure on a list of exclusions to be mentioned and then bracketed away” (Gillborn, 2006:27).** CRT insists that racism be placed at the centre of analyses and that scholarly work be engaged in the process of rejecting and deconstructing the current patterns of exclusion and oppression. A critical analysis of actions and outcomes should enable practitioners to acquire a better understanding of intersectionality and a complex amalgam of individual, social and institutional variables that affect educational outcomes for many students, especially those from racialised backgrounds.

CRT provides a lens to explore a complex and fluid ‘mashup’, a non-static that is also contradictory and incomprehensible in terms of its apparent fluidity and structural integrity, impermeability and elusiveness (Rugg, 2009). CRT's commitment to expose such phenomena makes it difficult for it to be embodied as one thing devoid of the other (Foucault, 2004). This is both a weakness - as that which people do not understand they often find ways to ignore or debase - and a strength, in that if one is unable to contain it, one is likely to find it more difficult to slay.

1.3 Personal standpoint

My interest in the experience of BEM students in higher education has existed throughout my professional life. I have often reflected on my own experience in education and higher education. Although I was inquisitive and enjoyed discovering new things, this was not

always evident in the classroom environment and I would feel frustrated and disengaged. I had left formal education without any qualifications, so getting back into education was a huge effort. It was a challenge and a cause of embarrassment. Even now, I feel inadequate, a failure, such was the impact.

In 1990, five years after I completed my course, a significant number of students failed the Diploma in Youth & Community Development (Hereafter YCD). I was contacted by some of the Black students who were extremely concerned. An internal report was compiled with contributions from staff and students. The consequences also impacted on those who took up posts soon after and became embroiled in the investigation about the course, the staff team, the department and the university. In summary, all the students who failed were women and most were BEM. This led to a claim that the university, and, in particular, the course team were racist and sexist. This experience has had long-lasting implications for learning and teaching and influencing the youth and community division's approach to working with BEM and marginalised students.

This experience has continued to shape many facets of my engagement in higher education. I commenced working for the university shortly after the failure and I was often confronted by both Black and white students many of whom regarded me as the "token" Black member of staff brought in to give the impression that concerns raised by students were being addressed. I felt insulted by some of the remarks made at the time. However, I fully appreciated the position and feelings articulated. I recall taking a session on applied social science and most of the students asking for Black perspectives. I asked the students what they meant. I felt that in some respects I could offer some of what the students sought, but I also felt that this would negate and draw attention away from the wider issues in terms of why so many Black students had failed. The request for Black perspectives was, in my view, symptomatic of some of what was absent in the curriculum. Some of the students asked to be directed to books written by Black writers. I told them that this would not necessarily address their concerns, as the sifting process may also restrict Black writers from saying some of what they really want to say. The patterns emerging contributed to major concerns being expressed in the assessment procedures and there was a perceived crisis of confidence for both staff and students (Weston, 2001).

I completed the YCD course in 1985 and for many years I would see my success as "in spite of the academy". Following graduation from the course, I did not feel prepared for the field or work that I wanted to excel in. I did not feel that I had acquired adequate preparation, but in spite of myself and the course, I secured a full-time job and applied for higher education

courses to enhance my knowledge and skills. Education can be like a drug; it has different effects. I became addicted to using education as a vehicle to find the ability to develop my vocabulary, my knowledge and effectiveness in working with others to make changes; I have been in education ever since. Nyerere, (1967) regarded education as significant in making changes:

“Let our students be educated to be members and servants of the kind of just and egalitarian future to which this country aspires.”

(1967:16)

As both student and academic, I could relate to the words of Nyerere in that I had become a servant to others as I journeyed and struggled with the challenges of inequality.

This study emerges out of the author’s experience within youth and community work education (hereafter YCWE) in HE. This chapter argues that policies and practices associated with the efficient running of HE institutions contribute to the unfair and discriminatory practice towards marginalised groups. With regards to BEM people, the unfair treatment manifests itself in differential attainment, lower levels of retention and slower progress. The assertion here is that BEM people are betrayed by the practice of institutionalism and by the actions of academics. Inequality is a consistent issue where academics struggle to explain why a system that purports to provide equal opportunities and non-discriminatory practice is persistent in its negative impact on ethnicity (Richardson, 2005; Fearfull & Kamenoub, 2006; Brennan, 2007; Izikor, 2007; Grossman & Charmaraman, 2008; Gillborn, 2008).

Academics are perceived to be people located in influential positions; they have a specific role and responsibility in disrupting the perception and perpetuations of inequalities that work to advantage particular groups (Sanchez & Fried, 1997; Robinson, 1997; Hall, 1997). The general public expects HE institutions to be **“doing the things you should do and not doing the things you should not do” (Morphew & Taylor, 2009, Online)**. They go on to assert that:

“Higher education ... tends to be evaluated by the extent to which they cohere with existing expectations of what a legitimate college ought to be.”

(2009: Online)

In order to maintain their position of trust and authority, HE institutions need to define themselves as clearly as possible in relation to not only what they do, but also what they represent in terms of goals and values. These will need to cohere with existing values in civic society, or they will be aspirational, giving people something to aim at (Skidmore & Carmichael, 2013). However, as Morphey & Taylor, (2009, Online) noted: **“goals and outputs are notoriously difficult to quantify”**. Thus, HE institutions often attempt to define themselves by identifying baselines by which they may be measured, or those which illustrate their distinctiveness. The mantras of HE institutions, their goals, values and outputs are enshrined in their mission statements or their statement of purpose. An example of how an HE institution has sought to communicate its values and intentions to its staff and a diverse society is provided below.

“Riverside University is a vibrant, dynamic and out-going institution committed to excellence, diversity and the communities it serves. A key part of its identity is the ownership and promotion of a cultural policy.”

(Riverside University, 2010: Online)

In this example, it is evident that this institution seeks to communicate to the public that it is constantly evolving, that it is reliable and values and recognises the importance of maintaining its links with a diverse community. Close scrutiny of the statement reveals that this institution is not as altruistic as the initial reading of the statement suggests. This institution recognises the competitive environment in which it operates. The five key points suggest that the apparent attempt by the HE institution to empower, engage, serve, provide and create is borne out of self-interest and the HE institution is outward-looking only in as much as it needs to create a market for it to remain viable.

HE institutions as ‘ivory towers’ are not immune to the social, economic, cultural and political pressures that impact on civic society (Carnoy, 2005; Davidson & Harris, 2006). HE institutions are not insulated; therefore they must present themselves as providing something that is useful, innovative and necessary for sustaining life for the rest of society (Pears, 2010). The marketing of the HE institutions as an important and crucial part of everyday life is sophisticated, presenting themselves as being an integral, accessible part of local communities and simultaneously as mystical, aloft and beyond reproach. HE institutions develop codes, language, and create knowledge through research (Broadmoor, 1978). They remain inaccessible to the vast majority of people, the socially-excluded, the uneducated and the ignorant (Broadmoor, 1978; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). Moreover, having created codes

that are inaccessible, HE institutions claim legitimacy by offering to decode that which they created, thus maintaining their position within the structure of dominance, a structure in which language and knowledge are crucial. Thus, the marketing of HE includes mission statements and Morpew & Taylor, (2009, Online) asserted that: **“Ostensibly, mission statements are sacred artifacts for colleges”**. Moreover:

“Virtually every higher-education institution has gone through a well-considered process to produce a mission statement describing its distinct qualities and values ... those documents will be the official and exclusive means of communicating organisational identity.”

(2009: Online)

Thus, to extend the argument by Morpew & Taylor, (2009), it can be said that the academy is not passive about the question of validation or legitimacy. Rather, it is actively involved in shaping ideas through discourse. They recognise that institutional legitimacy is conferred by others, either as a conscious active act, or as neutral, passive act. In this instance, this may even be an act of resistance, but in the structure of dominance, this works in favour of the status quo (Bourdieu, 1990). Perceptions of an organisation's behaviour may prove far more significant than the realities that occur out of public view. As one who was keenly interested in education, I was an avid reader, listener and observer of life. These tendencies led me to the conclusion that education was a hostile and violent environment in which state-sanctioned bullying regularly took place (Carmichael, 1968; Illich, 1986; Rangasamy, 2004; Bird, 2006; Richardson, 2005). What is shocking about this observation is that a significant amount of the bullying took place between staff and students, staff and staff (Cropper, 2000; Rangasamy, 2004; Bird, 2005; Gabriel, 2005, Online; Bahra, 2007, Online; Babita, 2007). As noted by Bahra, (2007, online):

“...there are thousands... who are subjected to systematic ridicule and bullying for being different and not fitting.”

(2007: Online)

But I also believe that education is a force for change, the means by which we come to develop the ability to analyse, critique and change the world (Fanon, 1967; Freire, 1985, 2005; Hilliard, 1995; Ampim, 1996).

For me, education ***is*** a political enterprise.

1.4 How the UK education system fails BEM people

Where education purports to meet the specific or 'special' needs of BEM people, it does not do so effectively, because their 'real' needs are not being met. Rather, many professionals are responsive to the 'tick box' or some other constructed or theorised notion of what is required to make BEM people align themselves to white people. In this scenario, BEM people are represented as the problem or the barrier against progress (Hayes, 2008). Rollock, a research fellow at London Metropolitan University, is reported as saying that BEM pupils were disproportionately likely to be regarded as failures, regardless of their parents' income. **“Black pupils held back by teachers' bias against hoodies”** was written by **Dominic Hayes** and published in the **London Evening Standard on January 29, 2008**. It invoked a range of comments, two of which have been identified as pertinent to this chapter. The first comment is from reader Gary, from London:

“Wherever you go in the industrialised world, black boys seem to be failing on a huge scale, yet in the Caribbean and Africa even given the relative poverty, they seem to be doing better. I put it down to not enforcing a rigid code of conduct for these kids so they know exactly where they stand.”

The second comment is from David, of Cambridge, who argued that:

“At some point, western society will have to confront the fact that educational under-performance by pupils of African or Afro-Caribbean parentage, (not Indian or Pakistani), is firmly linked to racial and genetic characteristics and not to racism, class, or prejudice. Serious academics who offer clear and unambiguous evidence in support of such arguments are routinely pilloried and accused of fostering social-Darwinism, when in fact, the evidence from everywhere in the world is overwhelming.

“In terms of intellectual, cultural and social skills there is a clear hierarchy which places Chinese/Japanese people at the top, followed by Indo-European populations, and then European/Caucasian people. People from African roots are at the bottom of all performance indices, no matter which measure is applied. What is needed is a strong dose of honesty and realism, not a continual search for excuses based upon liberal western guilt for nineteenth century imperialism.”

These contributions have been included because they are representative of views held by a wide cross-section of people. Moreover, it could be argued that media reports and responses by the public are as significant in formatting public opinion, group consciousness/solidarity and dissonance. Indeed, Ramadan, (2009) has argued that the media is now effectively used for shaping policy, yet it is outside the political framework and therefore unaccountable.

In the response to the article referred to above, the reader is encouraged to consider the stories conveyed: Gary appears to be exasperated at having to read another report or explanation about Black underachievement in the British education system. There is clearly a struggle, a conflict of interest which is articulated in public spaces as 'Black failure' or 'Black underachievement'. Thus, failure or achievement is racialised or rationalised, and in terms of Black people, the rationalisation is presented as cultural deficit. The second response from David asserts that investment in Black people and the various schemes to support them is a waste of time because as he proffers: **"People from African roots are at the bottom of all performance indices"** as a consequence of their lack of **"intellectual, cultural, and social skills"**. However, Gary offers an alternative narrative as he laments and postulates that everywhere in Africa and the Caribbean, BEM children are achieving, thus drawing attention away from a cultural deficit to an explanation that suggests a more concerted attack on Black people, education being the instrument used in their destruction. Both Gary and David appear to be presenting rational ideas that have become normative and guide research, policy, and practice. Yet the main issue that Rollock, (2008) raised was one that draws attention to the fact that even when Black families made attempts to militate against the evils of poverty, race was significant in how students were responded to by their teachers. Both Henderson, (2002) and Rubie-Davies, (2010) agree with Boyle, (2002) that teachers may often respond to a **"wide range of students' attributes"** (2002: 4). Hattie & Timperley, (2007) agreed with Sewell, (2002), concluding that the perception of teachers in their relationship and interaction with students could be transmitted to students in a manner that reinforces them in a negative or positive manner.

As Cropper, (2000) notes, it is widely acknowledged that the British education system has failed to meet the needs of BEM communities and that BEM **"young people growing up in Britain do not always meet their full potential"** (2000: 598). By failing to meet 'real' educational needs through a relevant curriculum - utilising teaching, learning and assessment strategies that are relevant to BEM learners - these learners may be significantly impeded:

“Many of these institutions fail Black students in relation to providing a relevant curriculum and support to enable these students to raise to the challenge of gaining a good degree that would facilitate them in their aspirations.”

(Gabriel, 2005:Online)

Gaining a good education remains the most significant factor in helping young BEM people to escape a life of poverty (Lightfoote, 2001; Howson, 2002; John, 2007; DfES, 2003). Nelson Mandela, (2003) noted that **“...education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”** (2003, Online). Dwivedi, (2002) commented that what BEM people would like to see is a system of education eradicated of racism so that:

“...they can enjoy their full share of equality with regard to education access, treatment and outcome.”

(2002: 214)

For BEM people, education is the single most important issue when it comes to social inclusion. It can mean the difference between life and death (John, 2007) and this notion is significant in the field of youth and community and social work education. Many young BEM people are exposed to practitioners who perpetuate the denigration of the BEM community (Cudd, 2005). Their solution is ‘domestication’, where BEM children learn to hate themselves and their communities, blaming them whilst turning to White people for solutions and for validation:

“They taught us to hate ourselves and love their wealth.”

(West & Hill: “All Falls Down”, 2003)

However, Halifa Sallah, (2007) challenges this idea of **“their wealth”**, arguing that the wealth accumulated has been expropriated from countries such as Africa, leaving them weakened and exposed to other forms of exploitation. Thus, as indicated above and so graphically illustrated by Rollock, (2012), education and economic advancement might not be a sufficient barrier to normative practices that disadvantage BEM students.

1.5 Conceptions of the ordinary: Where oppression, discrimination and racism is 'normal'

Education at any level can reinforce oppression (Asante, 1995; Hilliad, 1995; Mojab, 1997; Bishop, 1997; Avari et al, 1997; Major, 2002; Rangasamy, 2004). It can also play a vital role in transformation (Hilliad, 1995). Regarding those participating in the aforementioned YCD course, their experience in the British education system may have compounded the notion that whiteness and success are synonymous (Verma & Baggley, 1979; Mashengele, 1997; Gulam, 2004). The attitudes of tutors have resulted in disorientation and bewilderment on the part of some BEM students, which in turn has been interpreted as a sign of stupidity (Murray & Hernstein, 1995; Murray, 1996). Rollock, (2008) noted that BEM people's attempts to be self-directing and to articulate their response to second class education leads to them being pathologised and labelled as 'troublemakers', and, increasingly, they come to see education as a pointless punitive exercise (Mashengele, 1997; Figueroa & Kamala, 1999).

Mashengele, (1997) raises concern about the “**Euro-centred nature of the curriculum**”. Cropper, (2000) argues that the presence of BEM students on campus has challenged some courses, but many programmes retain a Eurocentric dominance and traditional ideologies of teaching and learning (Cropper, 2000: 600). The “**Egglestone Report**”, (1985) pointed out that BEM people have a commitment to higher education, seeing academic qualifications as a defence against the discrimination they expect to meet in the labour market. Sir Herman Ouseley, (2001) observed that Asian communities, particularly the Muslim community, are concerned that racism and Islamophobia continue to blight their lives, resulting in harassment, discrimination and exclusion. Yet there are social processes that counteract their efforts.

In this chapter, the term “institutionalism” will be used to denote the ways in which the normal practices and procedures prevalent in many educational and welfare systems often adversely impact on participants (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Essed, 1991; Gillborn, 2008). The normal working of the education system often adversely impacts on the opportunities available to women, working class people, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people (Bourdieu, 1990). The education system also discriminates against people due to their ability and their ethnicity (Woodson, 1933; Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967; Coard, 1971; Richardson, 2005; Gillborn, 2008; Picower, 2009).

The issues of unequal access and negative outcomes are not confined to BEM students (Connor et al, 1999; HEFCE, 1999; Bamber & Tett, 2001; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). The British education system is revered, especially by people who are external to it, or who have

had some association with it (Burns, 2011). For example, as the educational level of some Chinese people has increased, having a degree of an ordinary Chinese university already can't satisfy their increasingly-competitive society. Chinese parents and students have begun to place a high value on overseas education, especially at top American and European institutions such as Harvard, Oxford and Cambridge, "revered" among many middle-class parents (Wang Ying & Zhou Lulu, 2006). Since 1999, the number of Chinese applicants to top schools overseas has increased tenfold (Marshall, 2003).

These persons are using what is seen as a legitimate means of maintaining or gaining an advantage, or what Bourdieu, (1990) refers to as "**cultural capital**". This advantage comes at a cost and it is this cost that made education unobtainable to the masses (Barkham, 2010). It seems ironic that one can call education unobtainable, given that it has been available en masse for more than 150 years.

1.6 Widening participation: Widening to what?

Whilst accepting the necessity to widen participation in education and take other such initiatives to address the historical and current inequalities in society, the policy of widening participation has done very little to change the economic or social position of BEM people.

In terms of widening participation, the present Government refers to the "**Robbins Report**", (The 1963 "**Report of the Committee on Higher Education**") in relation to opportunities to pursue courses in HE. Simultaneously, it acknowledges that: "**The number of unsuccessful applicants has risen sharply in recent years**" (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011:7). It has also been acknowledged that the last few years have seen some upheavals in HE in terms of a governmental lack of clarity, direction, impacting on HE institutions and students (Universities UK, 2011). There has also been an introduction of fees, reductions of student places, penalties for 'over recruiting' and 'under-recruiting'. Some universities have responded to this by increasing their UCAS tariff points (Russell Group Papers, 2010; Universities UK, 2011).

Whilst some higher education institutions have demonstrated their ability to attract and recruit BEM students, many have not been able to make the adjustments which reflect the multi-racial and diverse student population of today (Bhattacharyya et al, 2003; Broecke & Nicholls, 2007; Richardson, 2008; Higher Education Academy/Equality Challenge Unit, 2008;

Singh, 2011; NUS, 2011; Pilkington, 2012). In terms of equality impact assessment, many HE institutions would fail in how they recognise and respond to the needs of BEM students. Many universities seem to operate on the **“one-cap-fits-all principle”** (Connor et al, 2004; Andalo, 2007a; Singh, 2011). Although BEM students make up a sizeable part of the HE population, **“their prospects are often not as bright as their white counterparts”** and they struggle to breach the **“ancient institutions”** of the elite HE institutions (Coughlan, 2013). Coughlan reported on research carried out at Durham University, which found that **“students from ethnic minorities are less likely to gain places at top universities than white pupils with the same A-level grades” (2013: Online)**. Paton, (2009) argues that these institutions should **“explicitly aim to achieve the ‘best social and ethnic mix’ to ensure their student populations are more balanced”**, (2009:Online) Yet despite the numerous obstacles, BEM people are more likely to study for higher qualifications than their white counterparts. Participation among BEM HE students is 56 per cent, compared to 38 per cent for White students (Connor et al, 2004; Gabriel, 2005; Sellgren, 2010). At RU, the proportion of BEM students or non-white students is 48 per cent (RU, 2011). Thus, whilst according to the 2011 National Census, the ethnic minority composition of the United Kingdom comprises approximately 20 per cent of the population, these figures support the argument that proportionately more BEM people are participating in HE.

1.7 Identification of the problem

In the Vice-Chancellor’s annual address to RU staff in the summer of 2000, he drew attention to the university’s poor student retention. The issues of attrition, the factors influencing students’ failure and the decision to withdraw from courses were also of concern to staff in the YCD and Social Work (hereafter SW) divisions. Although the primary concern was on factors leading students to academic failure, postponement or withdrawal, there was also an interest in the factors which led to success. Whilst there was a general interest in the experience of all students, the focus of this study is on the experience of BEM students. The particular concerns raised at the time were about the high drop-out and failure rates among BEM students on professional education and training programmes (Weston, 2000). The findings from this study are likely to be relevant to other programmes within the university and in the HE sector at large.

This study emerged out of a concern in relation to the number of BEM students failing or leaving their courses before they achieved their final award. Anecdotally, there appeared to

be a disproportionate number of BEM students who failed to gain their final awards and a significant number seemed to spend more time completing modules because of “academic failure”. These students were required to resubmit assignments that had been referred. This meant that the classification of their degree was often below average because marks were “capped” at re-submission.

The initial interest in this topic was ignited as a result of the experience of working with BEM and White students, some of whom were desperate to achieve, but who consistently indicated that the system “irrelevant” to their aspirations, leading to a lack of motivation. Many students likened the process to “like jumping through hoops” (Weston, 2001; Rangasamy, 2004).

The general concern about the experience of BEM students in higher education prevails because the Government has indicated a desire to see 50 per cent aged 18 to 30 gaining a place in higher education by the end of the decade (DfES, 2003). It has attempted to achieve this through a number of initiatives aimed at widening participation. In essence, the initiatives were aimed at increasing ‘non-traditional’ students in HE; those who are denied access, usually on the basis of discrimination. In the UK, ‘non-traditional’ students tend to come from working classes, BEM groups or older age groups, as well as students with disabilities or learning differences. Non-traditional students may also involve gender, such as women in engineering and men in nursing. However, these numbers are increasing (Harvey, 2004).

The specific concern with BEM students on the YCD programme was that the university has consistently recruited a high number of BEM students - between 40 per cent and 50 per cent, the last three intakes has stabilised at about 60 per cent, a large number in comparison to the overall picture in the wider university. The concern arose out of an observation that the recruitment of BEM students on these programmes did not lead to any significant change in the content of these programmes, in terms of recognising the diversity of issues and needs of the participants. Nor did it change assessment, teaching and learning strategies. Whilst a prayer room has been made available, it is extremely difficult to find other examples of accommodation. Humphries, (1988) noted that:

“Black students find themselves in trouble academically because they do not always meet the expectations of white academic institutions and white professional organisations, and because racist interpretations are imposed on their motives, behaviour, language, forms of expression, and styles of working. Yet seldom do such

difficulties result in an examination of educational structures and assumptions, or any commitment to make changes, making rhetoric about equal opportunities suspect.”

(1988:8)

In terms of the YCD programme’s image, the university may be complacent about their recruitment achievements, but the number of BEM students who dropped out by the end of year one was significant and disproportionate. All of the factors indicated above are significant considerations for study. The development of the study and its progress was flexible. It was an iterative process based on qualitative methods utilising dialogue groups, biography, case studies and interviews (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001; Cudd, 2005).

This study is significant for those who wish to gain insights into how education generally and HE specifically affect and shape the identity, motivation and aspirations of BEM students. Fundamentally, it asserts that the ordinary policies and processes involved are based on White supremacy and White privilege and contribute to a disorientation of BEM students.

1.8 Aims of this study

The aims of this study were to gain ontological insight into the experience of BEMS in UK higher education, and to provide a descriptive, interpretive account of their lived experience. In keeping with the aforementioned principles, the focus of the inquiry was adapted so as to reveal the meaning of being a BEM student in HE in the UK.

The research aims were:

To explore BEM students’ experiences of HE in the UK.

To gain insights into which factors BEM students felt impacted on or explained the differential attainment, retention and progression of awards

To suggest ways of enhancing the BEM students’ experiences, increase attainment, reduce attrition and enhance progression within courses and beyond.

The study asserts that historical and current policies and procedures utilised on the YCD course militate against students’ achievement, leading to difficulties in student retention, attainment and progression. Moreover, these policies and procedures that militate against

BEM students are not exceptional, but “ordinary” (Carmichael, 1966; Rangasamy, 2004). They are not practised by people seeking to confine the capacity of BEM learners. Nor are they procedures or policies devised with the intention of keeping BEM students outside of the experience. Rather, they are the outcomes of ordinary people doing ordinary things (Essed, 1991). These ordinary things can and often do have a devastating impact on BEM learners, or those outside the constructed notion of ‘normality’ (Thompson, 2006). In this sense, identity becomes a very important aspect of this work (Rangasamy, 2004). Dominelli, (1992) writes:

“It is the subtle presence of racism in our normal activities, coupled with our failure to make the connections between the personal, institutional and cultural levels of racism which make it so hard for white people to recognise its existence in their particular behaviour and combat it effectively.”

(1992:165)

Within this quotation, the problem for BEM people and White people can be discerned at a range of levels. At an academic level, reference is made to the subtle presence of racism. However, racism is never subtle. Racism can be elusive in character and manifestation, making it difficult to sustain a robust or coherent challenge when confronted by people who refuse to see or accept arguments of discrimination or racism. Indeed, there is often a notable discomfort in discussions about inequalities generally. White people often appear to feel guilty, ashamed or embarrassed when others highlight or expose their racism. Some are proud, seeing their behaviour or attitude as normal. They will often disregard the arguments of discrimination as being unfounded, placing the onus on the accuser/victim to prove that they have been racist. This tactic and the lack of confidence in the judicial system and reliance on people served by racism means that people who suffer from racism are often reluctant to take cases forward. Dominelli, (1992) suggests that racism has become ‘normal’ practice, and whilst some BEM people derive some benefit from it, White people continue to be the primary benefactors. Moreover, racism is endemic in our society and it is for these reasons that it is hard to “combat effectively”.

Schwartz, (2010, Online) argues that: **“universities can do more than almost any other institution to improve social mobility and justice”**. Under the administration of the previous Labour party Government, the DfES report, “The Future of Higher Education”, noted that:

“HE has a critical role to play in the community, both as a social and cultural centre and as a community leader.”

(2003a: 41)

Hurtado, (2009:1) invites us to envision **“a world that is equitable, interdependent, sustainable, innovative and economically secure and that supports the welfare of all”**. She argues that in order to achieve such a vision:

“...educators must equip students with values, skills, and knowledge to become complex thinkers and ethical decision-makers in a society currently plagued with conflict and inequality.”

(2009:1)

The current coalition government has indicated that their reforms for higher education are based on making higher education institutions more responsible for delivering **“a better student experience; improving teaching, assessment, feedback and preparation for the world of work”**. Also, where these higher education institutions **“take more responsibility for increasing social mobility”** (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011:4). Higher education is thus perceived as the vehicle which can achieve prosperity and social mobility. It ought to be noted that changed emphasis is a reflection of the different ideological base of the respective political parties; one is concerned with competition and the other accepts the state’s role in reducing inequalities.

Education is pervasive, controlling, coercive, seductive, enlightening and divisive. It has been used by the ruling elite as a means of maintaining their hegemony over the masses (Gramsci, 1971). It is a powerful tool in the transmission of culture, ideas, beliefs, values and social position (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 2001; Jakubowski, 1992; Bourdieu, 1990; Sanchez & Fried, 1997). As such, it is regarded as a legitimate force utilised by the state in the reproduction of society (Bourdieu, 1990). At a 2010 Summit on Education in the United States, Jill Biden, acting on behalf of President Obama, noted that **“education is the first step in realising the American dream”** (Biden, 2010). Moreover, education is valued even by those it classified as inadequate and unworthy of the rewards (Bourdieu, 1990; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009).

The rhetoric of making education accessible implied that those able to access it would enhance their quality of life, and there is some correlation between attaining a higher level of

education with enhanced job prospects (DfES, 2003; Schwartz, 2010). The massification of education was a response to the rapidly-changing situation brought about by industrialisation, accelerated in recent years by globalisation and technological revolutions, both of which required consumers and a semi-literate workforce (Carnoy, 2005). Those who enter education and secure the jobs offered on completion are able to procure some limited advantage in that they are rewarded for their servitude. They are incorporated into a system of oppression (Bourdieu, 1990). Cudd (2005:21) argued that **“oppression is a harm through which persons are systematically and unfairly or unjustly constrained, burdened, or reduced by any of several forces”**. Young, (1990) described oppression as a system that is rigged against certain classifications of people - women, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexuals, working class people, Black people, people with disabilities, youths, the elderly, and people with mental illness. Within this system, there is a tangible form of progress based on the material artefacts and symbols that some people surround themselves with as an indication of their achievement (Freire, 1972; Young, 1990; Browder, 1992; Howson, 2009). Nyerere, (1967) asserts that:

“The purpose of education is to prepare young people to live and serve the society, and to transmit the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of the society. Wherever education fails in any of these fields, there is social unrest as people find that their education has prepared them for a future which is not open to them.”

(1967:16)

The British education system is based on a principle of meritocracy, on the maintenance and reinforcement of inequalities (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu, 1990; Willis, 1977; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). It is deceptive in that the fundamental base is premised on participation in an enterprise in which the vast majority of participants are led to believe that they can attain the more coveted positions in the hierarchical and pyramidal structure of society. Thus, in a theoretical, ideological and practical sense, education is often utilised as an efficient way of sifting out those who are able to demonstrate that they are worthy of the positions for which they are destined (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 2001; Bourdieu, 1990; Jakubowski, 1992; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). In reality, the massification of education means that many of those who participate in it are destined to lose and there is a greater propensity of loss from those participating from non-traditional entrants in HE (hereafter NTEHE) and those recruited as part of widening participation initiatives (Connor et al, 1999). However, within the structure of dominance, education and its advocates are persuasive. Morphew & Taylor, 2009, online)

cites John W. Meyer, who wrote an article in the “**American Journal of Sociology**”, entitled “**The Effects of Education as an Institution**”:

“Education provides a vital credential, not because the person making the hiring decision believes that education fits people for success in modern society, but because he or she believes that everyone else believes in education.”

It is possible to liken many of the participants in education to those who play the lottery. Those who play or gamble do so in the hope that they will win the jackpot. The vast majority of people will never win, of course, but every week the ritual is performed in order to maintain the interest of the public. Johnson, (2010) refers to this ritual as “**a tax on stupidity**”.

The meritocracy idea implies that each person has an equal chance to change their social or economic position based on the effort they make or the innate talents they possess (Kellner, 2000; Keith, 2005; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). However, in reality, there are major structural and amorphous barriers that work against large sections of the population, resulting in particular patterns that enable social commentators to reliably predict the outcomes for different groups who participate (Kellner, 2000; Keith, 2005; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). The reliability or consistency of these predictions enables academics the opportunity to explore possible reasons for the persistent patterns. My interest in this area is based on the observation of some persistent patterns in public discourse, policies and practices which give the appearance of a willingness to embrace equal opportunities and social justice. This is manifested in the language of ‘inclusive’, ‘integration’ or ‘diversity’, all of which are presented in an uncritical form. Thus, when operationalised within the academy, they reinforce or replicate the conditions that lead to the marginalisation of BEM people and NTEHE students. Therefore, it is important to explore or analyse how HE institutions embark on discourse that externalise the problem. The externalising of the problem is further evidence of their unwillingness to accept responsibility for their negligence (Sanchez & Fried, 1997; Back, 2004; Picower, 2009).

1.9 The values and ethos of Youth and Community Work Education (YCWE) courses

YCWE programmes prepare qualified and competent practitioners for employment within the voluntary, independent and maintained sectors of a diverse and changing field of professional activity. YCWE programmes tend to be explicit in the values that underpin their courses; they are committed to social justice and widening participation and thus have

traditionally attracted students who are marginalised or excluded within the normal working of society.

Yet, despite the ethos, values and guidelines that underpin YCWE, not only are ethnically-minoritised people kept outside of the curriculum, but the education they receive prepares them for servitude (Anders, 2010). Academics are dichotomous, often proclaiming themselves as objective, neutral and simultaneously supporting equal opportunities and valuing social justice (Wallace, 2003). This raises the question of how one remains objective whilst presiding over a catastrophic failure. Many academics would reject the assertion that differential attainment, slower progress, and lower retention of BEM people has anything to do with their practice (Jakubowski, 1992; Sanchez & Fried, 1997; Baker et al, 2006; Richardson, 2007). Academics prefer to see themselves as neutral (Bozoki, 2004), but as Freire, (1994) suggests, adopting a neutral stance is tacit support for the current structure of dominance. Moreover, Stenhouse, (1970) has questioned whether an academic can maintain a neutral position when facilitating discussions on controversial issues. **Back, (2004:1)** has argued that “**universities are both value ridden and value seeking**” and that “**...there is a deep resistance in the academy to reckon with ... the sheer weight of whiteness**”. Picower, (2009) found that some teachers in his research relied on a set of “**tools of Whiteness**”, designed to protect and maintain dominant and stereotypical understandings of race. The experience of many BEM people would suggest that the passive acceptance of the status quo in the guise of neutrality and equal opportunities is a total contradiction of the ethos of YCWE, HEIs mission statements and the professions that graduates go on to. These programmes, HE institutions, and professional organisations often advocate anti-discriminatory practice and notions of empowerment. But the persistent patterns of differential attainment, slower progress, and lower retention of BEM students would suggest that there is a need for affirmative action, rather than neutrality.

1.10 Summary

This chapter has presented the key principles and assumptions on which this study is based. One of the central arguments is that education remains one of the most powerful forces in lifting BEM people out of multiple deprivations, and that the interest in entering higher education remains buoyant among BEM people. However, many higher education institutions have failed to make the necessary adjustments to accommodate the diverse groups with whom they are now working and this failure is having an adverse impact on BEM

students in relation to progression, degree attainment and retention. This study will focus on the YCWE programme. Such courses are regarded as being at the cutting edge in relation to the education and training of students who are expected to embark on professional careers in youth and community development. Moreover, these courses are grounded within an ethos of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice. Therefore, if there was one place that one would expect to find best practice, it would be here. Indeed, some may argue that these courses have a long and enviable experience of working with BEM students.

Chapter 2: Literature review

“And nothing's ever perfect; there's no guarantee

And if I knew the answers it would put my mind at ease ...”

MUTYA BUENA, “REAL GIRL”, 2007

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to bring into focus the main issues relating to this study. The literature review will identify the key themes that have emerged and will seek to **“put the research in context”** (Denscombe, 2007:50). At the outset of this study, the primary concerns in relation to the BEM students' experiences in HE were related to attainment, attrition, and progression. It was felt that close consideration of these three dimensions could provide helpful information to assist key stakeholders in changing some of the aspects of practice which adversely impact on BEM students. It was also envisaged that information would assist BEM students and their communities in terms of preparation for HE and provide support for the HE journey. The context in which these concerns surfaced was largely located within personal and professional experiences of the author; chapter one has provided accounts in relation to the author's personal perspective.

The aforementioned concerns can be linked to policy, in particular the government's policy of Widening Participation (WP) in HE (DfES, 2003a; May & Bridger, 2010; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011). The WP policy was an acknowledgment of the persistence of social and structural inequalities (Quinn et al, 2005; Copland et al, 2008; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). Widening Participation was regarded as one measure that would address persisting inequalities which was evident throughout society and a feature enshrined in the structure and habitus of HE. The author started from a premise that inferred or suggested that attainment, attrition and progression could provide a narrative providing wider insights about WP and the BEM students' perceptions and experiences in HE. Widening

Participation was the genesis, the catalyst in terms of policy and the instrument in terms of practice that would address inequalities in society (Copland et al, 2008; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009; May & Bridger, 2010).

During the period leading up to registration and from July 2007 – July 2013, various searches were undertaken to learn about BEM students' experiences in HE. The searches commenced with the Internet, using Google's search engine and various terms. The first search was for "**Black students in higher education and widening participation**". It returned 254,000 results. In an attempt to gain more focused 'quality' sources, **Google Scholar** was used. Using the same parameter, this returned **67,500 results**. I was unable to access some of the papers due to non-subscription by the university. I therefore began to review some of the abstracts, selecting those papers with a focus on the areas already identified as the key issues (attainment, attrition, retention, progression, and widening participation). See Figure 2.1 below:

Figure 2.1: Key terms used whilst undertaking an initial literature search on BEM students experiences in HE.

	Key terms	Google Scholar results	
1	Black students in HE and WP	67,500	
2	Black minority ethnic students in HE and WP	31,000	
3	Black students in HE and attainment	212,000	
4	Black minority ethnic students in HE and attainment	82,200	
5	Black students in HE and retention	132,000	
6	Black minority ethnic students in HE and retention	45,800	
7	Black students in HE and attrition	56,500	
8	Black minority ethnic students in HE and attrition	25,000	
9	Black students in HE and progression	105,000	
10	Black minority ethnic students in HE and progression	35,200	
11	Experience of Black minority ethnic students in HE	376,000	
12	Experience of Black students in HE	2,210,000	

Continuing this process of checking which articles were accessible, and those that dealt with the parameters entered, I randomly selected 100 articles and started to identify the main themes emerging from this initial consideration of the literature. In addition, Google alerts were set up for 'HE' and 'Black Students in HE'. I also set up BBC news alerts in relation to 'HE' and Mimas Zetock alerts (The Zetoc service is provided by Mimas at The University of

Manchester on behalf of the British Library and Joint Information Systems Committee - Jisc.) for “BME education”; “Black people and HE”; “Attainment”; “Retention” and “Widening Participation”. I organised and attended local and international conferences, organised by bodies including the British Educational Research Association (BERA); Higher Education Academy (HEA); Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE) and Training Agencies Group (TAG), listening, dialoguing and presenting papers and workshops based on themes emerging from the research I had undertaken. I spent the first eighteen months immersed in literature, searching different sources and trying to understand some of the complexities associated with the BEM student in HE. There were many contradictions and I wondered whether I had understood the text in terms of reading research and the text based on living, listening, reflecting on the encounters with academics, students, and members of BEM communities. During this phase, I identified areas in which there seemed to be some consensus and areas of difference in relation to the discourse of BEM students in HE. I felt I had reached a point of saturation when I encountered different studies referring to the same themes and similar solutions. This proved to be a useful engagement with the literature in that it alerted me to a whole range of factors associated with BEM students’ experiences in HE.

In trying to make sense of the experience of BEM students in HE, the focus has been placed within Widening Participation, student retention, and student attainment contexts. These three areas are closely aligned and often intersect. It became apparent to me that concerns about the student experience were far more extensive than I realised. After several decades of research on student experiences in HE, Tinto, (2006) says that we have now attained:

“...a more sophisticated understanding of the complex web of events that shape student leaving and persistence.”

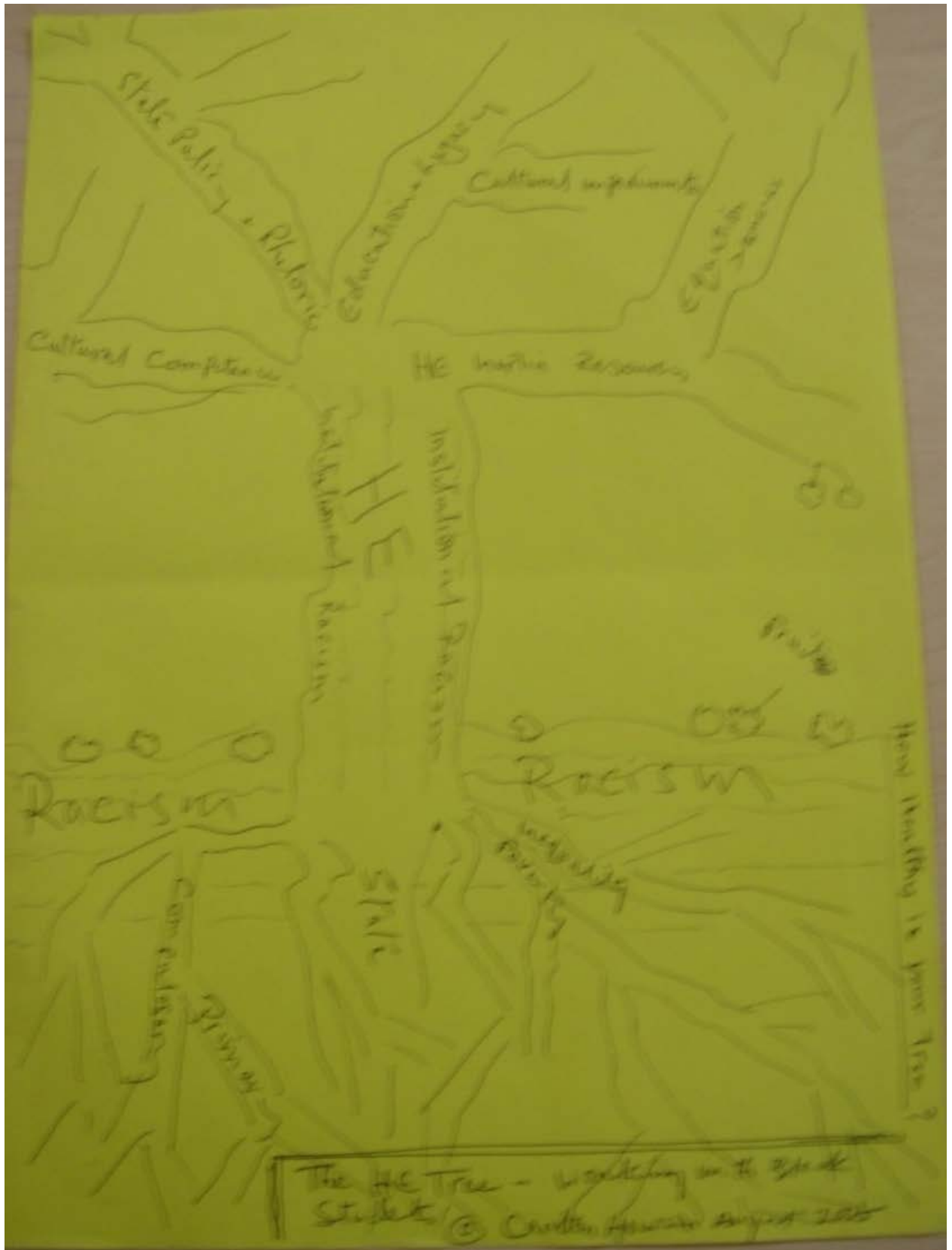
(Tinto, 2006:1)

The interest in the BEM students’ experiences is not only concerned with termination and persistence, but also attainment, happenings on campus and progression beyond graduation. However, these aspects will not form a significant part of this research. The areas of focus are those perceived or shown to be important in shaping the experience of BEM students in ways that students and those who work with them may not appreciate.

There is no doubt that there are concerns about the experiences BEM students have in HE, and a plethora of articles give testament to this. "Black Britain" on-line magazine provides examples of some of the issues. An article written by Deborah Gabriel, (2005), under the heading: **"The crisis facing black students in higher education"** (13/01/2005) notes that: **"Black people are more likely to study for higher qualifications than their white counterparts". Participation among ethnic minorities on higher education courses is 56 per cent, compared with just 38 per cent for white students.**" Gabriel, (2005) referred to a DfES Study on minority ethnic students in HE. The report showed that **"...black students accounted for only four per cent of the student population as a whole"**. However, the **"drop-out rate for black students is 15-20 per cent, compared with the 3-4 per cent average"**. In addition, it was argued that black students overall **"...do not perform as well as white students on degree courses"**. For Black graduates who have made financial and emotional sacrifices in order to enhance their career prospects, the outlook is pretty grim.

In considering the literature, I identified seven themes underpinning the discourse. The seven themes identified formed the basis of the explanations offered. However, an analysis of these explanations is important because of the ways in which they intersect, offering plausible and compelling articulation which can serve as self-fulfilling prophecy, both for the academy and BEM students. In addition to these seven themes, an eighth theme was suggested as one measure that both recognises the impact of the seven themes and suggests a practical and strategic option for effective change.

Figure 2.2: The HE Tree: The identification and conceptualisation of how HE work with BEM students



These **eight themes** became the basis of my research:

- 1 State policy and rhetoric
- 2 Education and legacy
- 3 Cultural impediments
- 4 The Equation (more BEM students equals lower standards)
- 5 HE inertia and resources
- 6 Cultural competence
- 7 Institutionalism – oppression, discrimination, racism, collusion and stereotypes
- 8 Creating spaces

The life cycle stages of the student in HE can be represented as follows:

- 1 Pre-entry
- 2 Transition
- 3 1st term/semester
- 4 1st year
- 5 Progression to year 2/3
- 6 Progression to employment

In this work, the six themes are incorporated in the discussion in terms of their impact on students' experiences.

2.2 1 State policy and rhetoric

“The people who set policies have little real idea of the needs and aspirations of black students. We need permanent representatives to be part of the system who will be advocates for the black community.”

(Pav Akhtar, Black Students’ Officer for National Union of Students, 2005)

Education is enshrined as a fundamental human right. This right is explicitly stated in the United Nations’ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (UDHR), adopted in 1948:

"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. ..."

(Article 26, UDHR, 1948: cited in Myteber, 2003)

Historically, education was the means by which one society ensured its position in the world by keeping a record, helping citizens to acquire the skills to respond to rapidly-changing circumstances and to ensure the masses attained a sufficient education to keep them obedient (Gillard, 2011).

However, education is often talked about as if it is neutral. Those who practise it as academics have also enjoyed a status and reverence setting them apart from the masses (Žižek, 2002; Gillard, 2011). The contested nature of education and the struggle for control over education have become more intense over the years (Žižek, 2002; Gillard, 2011). Thus education with the possibility of transformation has been surrendered to the state. Freire, (1972) suggests the education can be transformative when it:

“...becomes ‘the practice of freedom’, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”

(Freire, 1972:16)

Fraser (1991) argues that issues of public health and welfare could be linked to education. He noted that in the period following the (European) Industrial Revolution, the distribution of

wealth was also linked to education. He said fee payers were able to access an education enabling them to participate in education provided by the universities established at that time. However, he acknowledged that for the masses there was **“a deficiency of educational opportunity”**:

“The rich could buy themselves out of the problems of squalor and ignorance, the poor could not and the state played little role in education.”

(Fraser, 1991:78)

The only other way to gain an education was to become **“a felon, cadet or pauper” (Fraser, 1991: 78)**. Educational provision for the masses constituted occasional attendance at charity or endowed schools. Fraser, (1991) argues that underlying the debates about education was **“the pyramidal structure of British society”**, (Fraser, 1991: 78) in which a few dictated to the masses. Some arguments against education for the masses included the notion that teaching them might **“render them factious and refractory” (Fraser, 1991: 79)**.

Education moved from a voluntary, focused provision that provided basic relevant skills and knowledge to a more strictly-controlled provision, whereby the criteria for success were externally determined (Fraser, 1991; Gillard, 2011). The state eventually assumed control of the education system in 1870 in the U.K (Fraser, 1991; Gillard, 2011). The Education Act, 1870, was the first Parliamentary act associated with widening participation in education (Gillard, 2011). This act was followed by a number of reforms until the next substantive act, the Butler Act, 1944 (Fraser, 1991; Gillard, 2011). This act extended the provision of education and also raised the school leaving age (Gillard, 2011).

Furthermore, a review of debates that preceded the mass availability of education provided interesting accounts in that those who objected to the widening of education and those who advocated its widening were unified in seeking to maintain the interest of the middle classes or the ruling elite (Schram & Turbett, 1983; Greenbank, 2006). For example, one early advocate placed a high priority on the education of working class children saying that:

“...it is necessary, in order to render the great body of the working class governable by reason.”

(Leonard Homer, 1837: Cited in Fraser, 1991: 79)

Those objecting to widening education were concerned that education would increase awareness to the extent that the ruling elite kept them in ignorance as a means of exploiting them. One anonymous commentator asserted that education would be “**prejudicial to the morals and happiness of the labouring classes**”. This commentator added that education would teach the working classes to:

“...despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in ...laborious employment to which their rank in society had destined them.”

(Anon, 1848: Cited in Fraser, 1991:23)

Iteration from that period used an analogy implying that the middle classes were riding on the back of the working classes:

“If a horse new as much as a man, (sic) I should not like to be his rider.”

(Leonard Homer, 1837, Cited in Fraser, 1991:78)

These accounts can be compared with more recent assertions about education, illustrating the consistent underlying messages about the purpose of education beyond the rhetoric. It can thus be argued that the massification of education was not an attempt to assist people who were already experiencing disadvantage. Rather, the massification of education was an attempt to incorporate the working classes into a structure, where those participating in the education system had specific roles to fulfil (Gillard, 2007; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). These roles will be relative to the level of education obtained and the curriculum utilised (Chadha, 2006). It is precisely for this reason that in terms of education, its purpose and function is contested. Stenhouse, (1970) noted that the aim of education was to develop the capacity of the participants' ability to handle evidence critically. In 2007, UK university lecturer Bob Brecher was concerned about the lack of critical ability of many people graduating from HE institutions and used the “**Post-16 Educator**” to launch a “**Campaign for Critical Education**”. Whatever is concluded about the purpose of education, the academic is the main conduit and primary link to the students (hooks, 1991). It is the academic who facilitates the student in reaching his or her potential and in developing the ability to handle evidence critically (hooks, 1991).

With the expansion of education as part of a universal welfare system following World War II, people were encouraged to look ahead and take advantage of the opportunities provided to change or enhance their lives (Fraser, 1991; Quinn & Thomas, 2005; Gillard, 2011). This message may have been aimed at the working classes, but many of them may not have been in a position to take advantage (Boyle et al 2002b; Gillard, 2011). This was another way of providing the act without the resources or the targeting so that those in greatest need are able to gain equal opportunity at the point of entry and exit (Anders, 2010). If this policy was aimed at the working classes, they were not the ones who benefited most (Tomlinson, 2001; Quinn & Thomas, 2005). Rather, the middle class took advantage by making arrangements that would enable them to secure and hold on to the positions they had acquired (Tomlinson, 2001; Anders, 2010; Gillard, 2011).

The struggle for education in the post-war period is significant for other reasons. This was the period in which people apparently started to recognise social divisions other than social class and what may have been perceived as a temporary feminist movement by some disgruntled white women (Tomlinson, 2001; Gillborn, 2008; Gillard, 2011). This recognition intensified the struggle, for within the climate of limited resources, the working classes had to work harder to access and retain their position on the 'ladder'/class hierarchy, whilst fending off the recent arrival of migrants, who were perceived as the new threats to stability and cohesion (Tomlinson, 2001; Gillard, 2011). It is at this point where the issues of race and education begin to surface. Initially, the Government's response was to ignore this. Finally, it resorted to various acts such as the Race Relations Acts of 1965, 1976 and 2001; the Equal Opportunities Act, 1975; the Human Rights Act 2000, and the Equalities Act, 2010 to support education-specific policies.

In relation to this particular study, the WP policy is one of the most significant, partly because of its impact on all learners, but also for those learners who have been designated as a pseudonym (sic) of WP (Quinn & Thomas, 2005). The significance of this becomes transparent in discourse about BEM students accessing HE. In 1997, Lord Dearing undertook a review of higher education. The subsequent report gave rise to the reformation of HE. The previous Government set targets for HE, whereby WP would lead to 50 per cent of those aged between 18 and 30 years of age going on to higher education by 2010 (DfES, 2003b). The DfES' (2003b) "**Future of Higher Education**" report demonstrates the previous government's commitment to extending HE. HE was seen as essential in "**expanding opportunities and promoting social justice**". The significant increase in the proportion of university students from ethnically-minoritised communities is a reflection of the last Government's HE policies (DfES, 2003b; Tolley & Rundle, 2006; ECU/HEA, 2008). While

there has been some success in recruiting BEM students (Connor, 2004; Tolley & Rundle, 2006; Richardson, 2008; ECU/HEA, 2008), concerns have been expressed about the ability of HE institutions to support these learners adequately during their time at university (Bunting, 2004; Geoffrey, 2006; Russell Group Papers, 2010). WP established some important principles aimed at recognising and challenging discrimination and addressing the needs of marginalised students:

“...We must be certain that the opportunities that a higher education brings are available to all those who have the potential to benefit from them, regardless of their background. This is not just about preventing active discrimination; it is about working actively to make sure that potential is recognised and fostered wherever it is found.”

(DfES, 2003b: 67)

Singh, (2011) has argued that there have been dramatic changes facilitated by Government policies of expansion, fair access and WP. He notes that it was due to **“tighter statutory requirements”** brought about as a consequence of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, (2000), and **“greater scrutiny”** via bodies such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) that fostered and encouraged these changes. Singh also suggests that the academy has itself contributed to the change in people’s understanding, assisted through various empirical studies. Thus, **“we now have an increasing body of evidence uncovering the experience of BME students in HE” (Singh, 2011: 5)**. A more critical explanation is that many HE institutions were forced to comply with a changing landscape, meeting government targets and being held accountable through the associated impact of sanctions for failing to meet targets (Bunting, 2004; Geoffrey, 2006; Russell Group Papers, 2010). The work of agencies such as HEA/ECU/ HEFCE have been instrumental in creating a space for reflection on practice and the impact this has on BEM students (Stevenson, 2012). However, very little has changed in the structure of HE and the practices associated with poor retention, differentiated attainment and lack of progression for those students designated as ‘WP’ (Stevenson, 2012). In **“A Review of Black and Minority Ethnic Participation in Higher Education”**, Tolley & Rundle, (2006) noted that the Aim-Higher National BME Education Strategy Group - established in 2005 - encouraged and supported the increased participation of BME students in HE by working at local, regional and national levels. Quinn & Thomas, (2005) note that universities have been incorporated within the **“poverty industry”** and that they are:

“...among a raft of initiatives and institutions expected to respond to and compensate for those factors that help produce poverty’.”

(Quinn & Thomas, 2005:1)

Quinn & Thomas, (2005) assert that higher education does not automatically produce paths to social justice and escape from poverty. They indicate that **“the growing phenomenon of ‘voluntary’ withdrawal among young ‘working-class’ students”** (2005:1) is testament to this fact. Therefore, staying and completing the course may be the most important factor in the quest for social justice and escape from poverty. Thus, it is in this sense that retaining students **“is seen as having a role in economic growth, employment, stability and social equality”** (2005:2). In recognition of the value of education, Bird, (1996) found that BEM students had placed a high premium on education. Compared to white students, BEM students are **“over-represented”** in HE.

The importance of HE is established by making links to education as **“a prerequisite for citizenship for young people in the UK”** (Quinn & Thomas, 2005: 13). The White Paper on The Future of Higher Education, for example, asserts:

“HE also brings social benefits ... there is strong evidence that graduates are more likely to be engaged citizens.”

(DfES, 2003a: 59)

Retaining students is regarded as a moral imperative by institution policy-makers. Non-retention is seen as **“setting students up to fail”** and **“unacceptable”** (DfES, 2003b). The HEFCE has been tasked with **“bearing down on non-completion”** and on those institutions which allow it to happen (DfES, 2003b). It is somewhat debatable whether universities accept the conception or role as liberator for those in poverty. Equally, some may question their worthiness in such a role. Moreover, I would argue that universities would claim to work without bias towards or against particular groups. Therefore, their work within the ‘poverty industry’ or social justice can at best be described as passive. Singh, (2011) noted that BEM students took advantage of WP policies introduced over the past 20 years and that WP has been characterised by a move from an elite to a mass HE system on the one hand, and a greater political imperative to actively promote race equality and social justice on the other.

In a review of WP research in the UK, Gorard, (2006) asserted that:

“Inequalities in HE participation are evident throughout the life course and include differences in terms of . . . ethnicity.”

(Gorard et al, 2006:22 - 26)

The WP agenda was an attempt to address previous failures in the system (Quinn & Thomas, 2005). However, for Yorke & Thomas, (2003) WP policy and the need to retain students is related to wealth and national competitiveness. In this sense, WP can be said to be more about broadening the base of the pyramid without changing the summit. The implication is that groups continue to be reflected in the same position, but now they have diplomas or degrees. This is part fulfilment of the prophetic words of Dore, (1976), who envisaged a time when we would need a suitcase to carry our academic credentials. It is worth noting that this observation forms a significant critique by entertainers who appear to evoke more attention from young people, such as Kanye West, in **“School Drop-out”**, 2004, **“Mis Education”** by Lauren Hill, 1998, and Tupac, **“Loyal to the Game”**, 2004. These artists challenged a status quo that encouraged the participation of BEM people in educational establishments that have been persistent in their inability to work effectively with BEM students. Though the lyrics of their music, they challenge the notion of WP; seeing this as veneer concealing a system in which no attempt is made to tackle structural inequalities or the circumstances that reproduce them. However, the relative success of WP has culminated in worldwide alarm expressed in relation to the number of students dropping out of HE (Tinto, 2006). Quinn et al, (2005) suggest that ‘drop-outs’ are seen as a threat to the government’s WP policy and its social justice agenda.

A number of different theories emerge about why students leave their course before completion and who is most at risk, but Pitkethly & Prosser, (2001) noted that a third of first year students considered withdrawing from their course during the first semester. Also, research suggests that withdrawals in years two and three often related to events from the first year of study in higher education (Tinto, 1995). Within the literature, there is agreement that previous education impacts on the experience and outcome of students who enrol on HE courses. Singh, (2011) argues that in relation to policy development, there has been:

“... (an) important shift away from a defensive posture associated with fulfilling legislative and regulative requirements, to more pro-active responses aimed at developing pedagogical strategies for addressing BME student attainment.”

(Singh, 2011:7-8)

He noted that it is possible to delineate three broad historical phases in the way that WP and BEM students' attainment has been positioned.

According to Singh, (2011), the first phase - pre-1990 - was **“characterised by a state of ignorance and apathy”** with **“low levels of awareness of the issues of equity and discrimination”** (Singh, 2011:7) and a disregard or vigorous defence where it was inferred that a problem might exist, drawing on the earlier work of Heward & Taylor, 1997; Farish et al, 1995. This reflects what Singh and others describe as a period of **“self-delusion on the part of ‘white’ academics”**. They have argued that many of these academics were oblivious to their actions and that it was difficult for **“liberal-minded, rational intellectuals”** to be engaged in practices that were reviled within the academy. Singh drew on the work of Back, (2004) who suggested that some white academics saw themselves as **“immune from a racism based on lazy thinking and prejudiced behaviour and attitudes”** (Singh, 2011:7). Singh identified phase two as during the 1990s, when there was a massive expansion of HE and the WP agenda. He suggests that the massive expansion in HE was **“an unintended consequence”** (Singh, 2011: 7) due largely to an interpretation of the WP policy, in which the focus was on lower socio-economic groups. The significant impact of this policy was to increase dramatically the percentage of BEM students attending university and in this regard, the policy was very successful. Singh's third phase started in 2000 and continues to the present. Singh (2011) suggests that the catalyst for this phase emerged following the publication of the Macpherson Report in 1999. According to Singh, this report **“significantly raised the profile of race equality and prompted a series of Government initiatives to promote race equality”** (Singh, 2011: 7). Following the publication of the report, there followed a legal requirement for HE institutions to look at and publish statistics on BEM student attainment. The range of more targeted initiatives stemming from the Race Relations (Amendment) Act, 2000, initially had an impact, but Singh has noted that **“many universities ... remain in a state of denial about the BME attainment gap”** (Singh, 2011: 8). The issue of BEM students' experiences in terms of WP, attainment and retention has, on the whole, reduced the issue of **“managing diversity and student deficit models”** (Singh, 2011:8) where it is often suggested that BEM students' lack of ability is the primary cause for their relatively lower attainment (Turney et al, 2002; Jones & Thomas, 2005; Jacobs et al, 2007; Ahmed, 2007).

The Degree Attainment in Higher Education report by HEA and ECU, (2008) focused on an exploration of understandings and perceptions of degree attainment variation across institutions and among academics and students; ways in which current race equality policies

and gender equality schemes helped HE institutions address issues of attainment variation, and relevant teaching, learning and assessment activities and issues (HEA & ECU, 2008: 2). In regard to policies and practice, this report found that such schemes did not appear to inform HE institutions' engagement with attainment issues. The report authors concluded that HE institutions should provide reports identifying relevant activities, including indications of progress against actions.

2.3 2. Education and legacy

An exploration of the literature that pertains to BEM people and education represents a tale of failure. This failure exists in relation to BEM people themselves and a failure at every stage of the education system. The literature over five decades has raised concerns about how the education system has impacted on Black people (Woodson, 1933; Coard, 1971; Swann, 1985; Troyna, 1987; Gillborn, 2008).

Within the literature, educational attainment - in terms of degree classification, retention and progression - was often articulated as explanation that made links with negative factors associated with BEM people, specifically their characteristics, motivation, suitability and ability (HEA & ECU, 2008). The last two decades have seen a range of Government initiatives aimed at responding to the problems experienced in gaining entry to HE. One of those initiatives was “**Access to HE**”, enabling adults to take courses within the community and gain the necessary credentials for entry into HE. It was also possible to gain entry as a mature student. Similarly, “**Aim-Higher**” was an initiative aimed at young people aged 16 to 18. “**Widening Participation**” was aimed at people from different social groups previously excluded from HE or particular courses (Powney, 2002.)

WP initiatives have clearly contributed to a diversity of students on some university campuses (Powney, 2002; Connor et al, 2004; HEA & ECU, 2008; Singh, 2011; Stevenson, 2012); it has also been noted that some elite universities are still struggling to respond to the equality challenges (Connor et al, 2004; Gorard, 2008; Russell Group Papers, 2010; Grove, 2013). Within the context of this work, the struggle for HE has manifested itself in terms of the on-going difficulties of access, retention, attainment and progression to employment (Connor et al, 2004; HEA & ECU, 2008; Singh, 2011; Stevenson, 2012).

In relation to access, a mixed picture emerges. There remains a perception that many BEM students with the relevant qualifications do not apply for courses in HE. When they do, they are not getting on the courses they applied for (Hall, 2012). Yet others indicate that relative to the overall population, BEM students represent a higher proportion of the student population in some universities than white students. The representation of BEM students is uneven; it seems clear that there is a segregation emerging in relation to where BEM and white students go in terms of courses studied and institution selected (Grove, 2013). Some HE institutions practise excellent recruitment of BEM students, whilst others remain segregated. Connor et al, (2004: 42–43) observed that the participation rates for Asian people (60 per cent) and for black people (61 per cent) were markedly *higher* than the participation rate for white people (38 per cent). Bridge, (1996: 5) noted that selection policies were being **“significantly influenced by a firm commitment to recruit more ethnic minority students to courses”**. She infers that such a commitment can lead to decisions based on targets, rather than ability. Concurring with Bridge, (1996), Munro, (1995) found that selection interview ratings failed to show any correlation, either with subsequent performance on the course, or with previous academic achievement. Munro, (1995) referred to the findings of Coulson, (1994), who studied the outcomes from a course which admitted students with no previous social work experience and found that this group was **“significantly more likely to have problems”** during placements (Munro, 1995). The science of selection and recruitment of students remains at best a subjective exercise. However, given that selection and recruitment is said to be based on specific criteria, those students who gain entry into HE do so on the basis that they are sufficiently and appropriately competent (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011).

The WP agenda has been instrumental in increasing the numbers of BEM students in HE. However, based on the literature considered, pre-university attainment does appear to have a bearing on subsequent performance in HE (Gorard et al, 2006; Broecke & Nicholls, 2007; Richardson, 2008). Rather, the evidence points to a complex range of different factors at play, such as previous educational experiences; curriculum content and design; teaching, learning and assessment approaches; the learning environment; and direct and indirect racism (Bird, 1996; Turney et al, 2002; Back, 2004; Tolley & Rundle, 2006; NUS, 2011; Hall, 2012).

The recruitment of BEM students in HE has presented many challenges. These challenges include the legacy of previous educational experience. Cropper, (2000) noted that for Black students:

“...the education system has not been a place where there have been many positives...the British education system has largely failed to meet the needs of the black community.”

(Cropper, 2000:597-598)

This is part of the legacy whereby BEM students are blighted by the negative experience. The experience is not simply related to the outcome in relation to qualifications and skills, but also to the experience of racism, a curriculum that failed to include them in a positive manner, leaving them feeling isolated and distrustful.

Cropper is not alone in raising these concerns. Indeed, concerns about the education system and its failures have led to important critiques by people representing different interests (Bird, 1996). Today, phrases such as **“valuing diversity”** are incorporated into the values and mission statements of many institutions in the public sector. However, it can be argued that the education system as a whole has:

“failed to recognise and value the diverse cultural and racial backgrounds and experience of these individuals and communities.”

(Cropper, 2000:598)

Another aspect of the challenges brought about by the recruitment of BEM students and the legacy of previous education relates to the entry qualification thesis. It could be argued that one factor impacting on selection and recruitment of BEM students is a perception within some HE institutions that BEM students are more likely to exit courses before completion and their persistence on such courses is related to their previous educational experience. Thus, the BEM students' experiences **before** entry to HE is often highlighted as a key factor in the various aspects of the life cycle of students. Singh, (2011) has argued that BEM students' experiences are culturally and spiritually nuanced, meaning that they come to university with a unique set of experiences, which will ultimately impact on their perception of the university as an institution along with its staff and practices.

Forsyth & Furlong, (2000) found that it was school qualifications that primarily determined whether people entered post-school education and at what level. However, they also acknowledged that these qualifications were themselves linked to pre-existing advantage,

particularly social class and having working parents. They also found that the costs of higher education and the prospect of large debts were a major negative influence on these young people and their parents. One way of financing higher education was by taking part-time work, but this often clashed with the demands of full-time studentship. Equally, Fielding et al, (2008) suggest that entry qualification may be a factor indicating that lower entry qualification can influence achievement, but there is variation across academic disciplines.

Naylor (in Goddard, 2000b) and his colleagues found that in general, institutions with high entry requirements - offering subjects such as medicine and law - tend to have lower drop-out rates. They also recruited fewer black students, leading to what is referred to as segregation in HE (Gurin et al, 2002; Phillips, 2006b; Crozier & Davies, 2008; Leckie et al, 2012). Segregation and attainment persist, as reflected in a recent article by Sellgren, (2013), where it was found that the current emphasis on choice and diversity was likely to hit a ceiling because of the lack of engagement with (or negative impact on) disadvantaged families. It is often argued that structural inequalities in society reduce the achievement and aspirations of children from ethnically-minoritised groups. As a consequence, people from ethnically-minoritised groups will be under-represented in HE, and those who do manage to gain access to HE will exhibit poorer attainment (Ogbu, 1978). It has been acknowledged that WP has had the desired impact in some HE institutions but structural inequalities in particular societies reduce both the achievement and the aspirations of children from ethnic minorities (Richardson, 2008).

Shiner & Modood, (2002) noted that BEM applicants do tend to have lower entry qualifications than white applicants and suggest that some of the disparity in attainment among different ethnic groups might be explained by this. The education and legacy thesis presents BEM people as saddled with weights that will hold them back through the life cycle. Where they end up is related to starting points. Richardson (2008) noted that it was possible to conclude that:

“...the under-achievement of adults from ethnic minorities in higher education is a legacy of their under-achievement as children in secondary education.”

(Richardson, 2008: 44)

The picture emerging from the literature is that there are complex reasons why the degree attainment gap exists (Richardson, 2008; Stevenson, 2012). However, it is conclusive that even after controlling the main factors one might expect to impact attainment, such as prior

entry qualifications, type of prior institution, parental attributes and language, there remains a statistically-significant gap in attainment between BEM and white students (Richardson, 2008; Singh, 2011). In this scenario, it is difficult to imagine an HE experience as a model for social justice. Following the arguments presented, it is the education and legacy rather than anything that HE institutions do that determines the outcome for BEM students (Gabriel, 2005; John, 2007; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). This raises the question of whether the notion of “complexity” is offered in preference to a more accurate articulation of the problem, namely discrimination. Thus whilst there may be some validity in the argument that education experiences continue to have an impact on outcomes for students, it should not be used as a default explanation for attainment, retention and progression.

2.4 3. Cultural impediments

Education and legacy is closely aligned to cultural impediments, often referred to in the literature as “**social or cultural capital**” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This asserts that the key factor in sustainability and progress in HE relates not only to what students bring in terms of qualifications, but also what they bring in terms of knowledge, understanding, attitudes, aspiration and motivation. It is claimed that these students lack the discipline or knowledge of protocols based on direct insights gained from others who are familiar with the culture and conventions of HE. The role of social class in participation in HE provides a good context in which to review the value of a robust measure of cultural capital. The suggestion that ‘non-traditional’ students (in terms of ethnicity, gender, social class and disability) are under-represented in HE is aligned to their background. Chowdry et al, (2008) found a significant relationship between a measure of area deprivation and the likelihood of students with the same achievements continuing on to post-16 education. Thus, in terms of WP, many of the groups the policy was supposed to assist remain at the margins. WP has increased the participation of people from the lower-middle and upper-working classes.

Cultural capital forms a centrality in discourse of how education reproduces class inequalities. Lamont & Lareau, (1988) identify some examples of ways in which cultural capital may work to exclude individuals from particular social activities and spheres which we now consider in relation to participation in HE. They suggest the phenomenon of self-exclusion by students who feel that they will not fit in with the culture of higher education institutions (Read et al, 2003). These students may rationalise that the problems they must

overcome as a result of their low cultural capital make it too risky to participate (Archer & Hutchings, 2000). Overt bias by academics responsible for selection and recruitment may make judgements based on cultural capital considerations and this could be a factor in participation in HE (Singh, 2011; Stevenson, 2012).

The published literature contains ample evidence to suggest that when a university embarks upon a policy of wider social and cultural participation in its degree programmes, it is likely to be accompanied by higher failure and drop-out rates (Yorke, 2003; Tinto, 2006; Stevenson, 2012). The efforts made to increase the participation of some groups have encountered some resistance (Collins, 1998a; Singh, 2011; Stevenson, 2012) and many theories have emerged to explain why certain groups do not gain entry into HE, along with why some withdraw, fail, or do not attain a classification regarded as 'successful' (Yorke, 2003; Tinto, 2006; Stevenson, 2012). Indeed, consideration of student retention has led to some commentators expressing their frustration because the efforts made to entice some groups into HE is regarded as 'wastage' (Bunting, 2004; Geoffrey, 2006); it is among these groups where most concern exists in relation to retention and attainment. The concerns expressed are linked to the notion that some of the students gaining places in HE do so as a result of WP initiatives, and these students are not really deserving of these places. Therefore, when they drop out, it is considered as 'wastage' (Tinto, 2006; Cropper, 2000; Quinn et al, 2005; Yorke, 2003; Pitkethly, 2001) However, a review of the literature reveals that concerns about student attrition and retention have been a cause of concern for more than four decades. An article by Tinto, (2006) stated that:

“Student retention is one of the most widely studied areas in higher education.”

(Tinto: 2006: 1)

Forsyth & Furlong, (2000) reported that:

“...under-representation in higher education was primarily due to poorer school performance by disadvantaged young people, rather than to any systematic bias in university admissions policy”.

(Forsyth & Furlong, 2000: 1)

Cultural impediments thesis is attached to 'disadvantaged groups'; a status associated with particular characteristics used as a signifier of difference which reduces the necessity to

problematise these assumptions. This analysis fails to address not only the range of inequalities and barriers that disadvantaged groups encounter, but also the fact that the systems that sustain some aspects of the inequality through its policies, procedures and practices are absolved of any responsibility for its continuation. Leslie, (2005) argued that the higher participation rates in BEM students would lead to **“a diminution in average quality of applicant” (Leslie, 2005:631)**. Yorke, (2003) is amongst others who refers to ‘non-traditional’ students as students who do not have a parent or family member who has been through HE and are therefore unlikely to go into HE. But this discourse is located within a ‘cultural capital’ argument that defines the ‘non-traditional’ students as having a ‘lack of cultural capital’, thus suggesting they are an additional burden. Quinn & Thomas, (2005) assert that:

“UK policy on student ‘drop-out’ from post-compulsory education is dominated by a narrow conception of lifelong learning and withdrawal, with the focus on linear progression and completion. Students are generally expected to complete their studies within a fixed and pre-determined time, and the primary objective is to retain students on the courses on which they initially enrolled.”

(Quinn & Thomas, 2005:13)

This view of retention tends to pathologise new constituencies of learners, perhaps for being poorly prepared for university or even for lacking academic ability. While remaining in university is cast as a virtue, deciding to leave is popularly portrayed as a lack of moral fibre. Longden, (2003:6) identifies the following labels as having appeared in media articles relating to non-completion:

‘Failure’

‘Drop-out’

‘Non-achievement’

‘Wastage’

Veronica McGivney, (1996) brought together research findings and evidence from further and higher education in a study of the scale and nature of mature student withdrawal from courses. She found that some students who discontinued their programmes of study had experienced a clash between the expectations and the actual experience of student life. She refers to Kember’s (1995) notion of ‘normative congruence’ - the degree of fit between students’ and institutions’ expectations of each other:

“Normative congruence is achieved when a student’s intellectual beliefs and values are consistent with the expectations of the college and its faculty. In an academic context, incongruence is most often present when a student’s conceptions of knowledge and student requirements differ from academic norms and conventions ... Integration will not occur if a student is unaware of an academic convention or has a different perception of a task, or an alternative conception of knowledge to faculty.”

(Kember, 1995:49-50)

In developing the concept of normative congruence, Kember drew upon the work of Tinto, (1975). According to Tinto’s theory, decisions to drop out arise from a combination of student characteristics and the extent of their **“academic, environmental and social integration in an institution” (Tinto, 1975:92)** Although many researchers have confirmed the validity of this model, others found that factors external to the institution play a greater role than the model suggests. McGivney, (1996) commented:

“Tinto’s model is based on the traditional, full-time, campus-based, younger student and therefore has less relevance for mature students involved in different modes of study.”

(McGivney, 1996: 87-88)

The public denouncement with respect to those students who do not complete the course or those who fail may be influential in shaping the BEM student experience (Singh, 2011). The BEM student does not recognise or necessarily regard himself as a widening participant. Singh, (2011) noted that some students struggle with their course. However, some academics may rationalise this struggle as an aspect of the inadequacy of the student or even the student as a member of a particular group. This rationalisation may draw on information derived from all around them, reinforced by personal experience and public denouncement. For example, whilst there was a public denouncement of James Watson, (2007) for suggesting that Black people lack intelligence and that efforts made to educate them are a waste of time, the assumption that BEM students have low aspirations is derived from theses, presumptions, stereotypes and anecdotal evidence used to explain the persistence in relation to attainment (Milmo, 2007). However, there is no evidence to confirm this. In fact, at GCSE level, BEM students surpassed white students in aspiring to HE (Connor et.al, 2004).

The assumption of low aspiration is based on theories designed to deflect attention away from systems of oppression, in which white privilege continually renders non-whites as educational deserts incapable of growth or development. When non-white people attain reasonable grades, it is often argued they do so because they have received favourable treatment. These circumstances engender an educational environment in which discriminatory practice is the norm, used to legitimise failure of BEM students (Gurin et al, 2002; Aronson, 2004; Crozier & Davies, 2008; Leckie et al, 2012).

The emergent themes here suggest that in comparison to those classed as 'white', BEM students experience greater financial difficulty and are also less able to discuss problems with lecturers, relying instead on family and friends for support (Singh, 2011). Moreover, in explanations for the differential outcomes in terms of participation, attainment and progression, there was a tendency to locate the problem within socio-economic factors or family background. While some have identified factors related to institutional discrimination (Back, 2004; Gulam, 2004), others favoured the contrary 'deficit-type' explanations. Fielding et al, (2008) assert that deprivation has a small but significant impact, but one has to be cautious because in some areas of high deprivation, the gap between BEM students and their white peers narrows and "**possibly reverses**" (Fielding, 2008). HEA and ECU, (2008) warn that it is important to resist a tendency to view students as the core problem instead of other factors.

The significance of the culture impediments thesis is that it has grown in popularity, with many writers turning to this theory as a credible explanation for why BEM students do not apply for courses in HE, why they leave courses, why they do not attain 'good' degrees and why they do not progress to more prestigious jobs. This thesis is used manipulatively by the educated to bewilder those who seek a rational explanation for why particular patterns are so enduring.

2.5 4. The Equation (more BEM students equals lower standards)

Whilst there was some apparent commitment to the principle of WP among some HE practitioners, this was often expressed in terms of deficits, or the equation that greater numbers of BEM students equals lower standards (Leslie, 2005:631). This equation is based

on a combination of fear and a justification for why BEM students do not perform well in HE. It can also be associated with the terms 'wastage', 'deserving' and 'undeserving' (Connor, 2004). Once again, like the previous themes, this thesis fails to address issues of inequality. Rather, it attempts to deflect attention and responsibility for working with all students to attain the standards required to compete on an equal basis.

The equation thesis is enigmatic because it works in overt and covert ways, based on what is essentially a eugenics idea in which some social groups are considered to be inferior. Moreover, an extended association with them can lead to a diminution or contamination (Herrnstein & Murray, 1996). The equation thesis is based on spurious evidence and linked to the notion of ability and intelligence. The equation intersects with all of the key themes emerging from the literature. Moreover, it is present throughout the life cycle of the BEM student, underpinning perceptions and behaviour of white academics, white students and sometimes the corresponding behaviour and performance of BEM students (Allen, 1997; Back, 2004; Baker et al, 2006; Bahra, 2007). The equation is an aspect of positionality and a struggle for education linked to current status and future rewards, hence various tactics are used to exclude BEMs (Russell Group Papers, 2010). When those tactics fail, the architects produce alternative strategies. This plan underpins the 'hidden curriculum', invisible to white students and some white academics, as they offer their colour-blind approach to hide their privilege (Back, 2004; Gulam, 2004).

Thus, one of the outcomes from this is that the performance levels of BEM students suffer, they become demotivated and some struggle to stay the course. Long-term, many lose confidence in their ability and their expectation of self begins to mirror the perceived perceptions of white academics and students (Gurin et al, 2002; Aronson, 2004; Crozier & Davies, 2008; Gutman & Akerman, 2008; Leckie et al, 2012).

The equation is significant for other reasons. It has already been shown that the widening of HE was only partially achieved and many of the HE institutions perceived or ranked as 'elite' have largely continued to recruit students from elite backgrounds. Thus, by implication, those higher education institutions that have recruited higher numbers of BEM students may be regarded as less credible in terms of academic challenge and excellence. For example, post-1992 or Million+ Group of universities - mostly pre-1992 former polytechnics - are often perceived as having a much lower status in the hierarchy of HE institutions. Thus, the students, qualification, course, and institutions awarding them may be discredited. Moreover, when BEM students stay on courses and narrow the attainment gap (Fielding et al, 2008), it is perceived as not based on the efforts of BEM students or staff. Rather, it is due to a lack of

challenge. In such instances, a more plausible explanation is offered to maintain the status quo, thus BEM achievement is perceived to be as a result of grade inflation or lowered standards (Clark, 2013). The issue of what is perceived as grade inflation is reflected in an article where, rather than celebrating achievement, concern is raised over the criteria employers use to select staff. The article quotes Carl Gilleard, Chief Executive of the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), who says that most graduate recruiters use a 2:1 classification **“as an automatic cut-off point” (Gilleard, 2013, in Ratcliffe, 2013 Online).**

The equation is also linked to progression, because an educational process leaving participants lacking in confidence may be reflected in the positions applied for. Moreover, a concern over what was referred to as rampant grade inflation has left some employers threatening to demand firsts instead of 2:1s (Clark, 2013). As a consequence of such concerns, a new report card system known as HEAR (Higher Education Achievement Reports), detailing students' extra-curricular achievements as well as their degree mark, is proposed (Ratcliffe, 2013). Despite significant shifts in the demographics of students on some campuses, many universities remain in a state of denial about the BEM experience, choosing to reduce the issues of WP, attainment and progression to one of managing diversity, student deficit models and education legacy (Turney et al, 2002; Jones & Thomas, 2005; Jacobs et al, 2007; Ahmed, 2007; Singh, 2011). The literature has shown that within the academy, there is still a need to illustrate the extent to which academics are blindsided by their own delusions and misconceptions about particular BEM communities. For example, Bagguley & Hussain, (2007) noted there remained an urgent need to overcome assumptions in communities, schools, universities and among employers that South Asian women from certain communities are not serious about HE.

2.6 5. HE inertia and resources thesis

The equation thesis is closely aligned to the HE inertia and resources argument. Some conclude that logically, when a university sets about widening participation from diverse groups, they should expect higher levels of attrition and failure (Cropper, 2000; Pitkethly, 2001; Thomas, 2002; Yorke, 2003; Quinn et al, 2005; Tinto, 2006). HE inertia and resources derive from marginalisation and the alienation of academic and support staff reacting to what is often perceived as unrealistic and unreasonable demands. One impact is that BEM students or others who come under the category of WP are perceived as destined to fail or at

best attain modest qualifications. When a student from the WP categorisation does well, it is regarded as exceptional, followed by exclamations and wonderment, implying that such students are not expected to succeed. These students are often considered as problematic or deviant and will often find themselves subjected to higher levels of scrutiny because of the disbelief that they are capable of such work, or to grant them their entitlement to HE (Allen, 1997; Back, 2004; Baker et al, 2006; Bahra, 2007).

HE has not been immune to the economic challenges and academics find that they are required to do more with less. Over the last two decades, there has been an increase of undergraduate students (Booth et al, 2005). Following the introduction of student fees, there has been a reduction in applications to HE. HE institutions have found themselves trying to deliver the Government's policy on WP, raising the attainment levels of marginalised groups and ensuring that employability is seen as an outcome for students (Piatt, 2009). The Russell Group Papers, (2010) indicated that increased **“student demand”** was putting pressure on universities that **“are already facing a difficult choice between restricting levels of participation or compromising on the quality of the student experience”** (Russell Group Papers, 2010: 20). According to the Russell Group, (2010) **“further expansion in student numbers without adequate funding to research-led teaching poses an unacceptable threat to the quality of teaching” (Russell Group Papers, 2010: 20)**. Thus, a further impact on the aspirations of BEM students - in terms of studying at an institution of their choice - impacts on attainment and retention because of the relationship between good quality teaching, attainment, and retention (Piatt, 2009).

Most commonly, the argument from academics is that the Government and management are seeking to develop and implement policies, procedures and practices that are ill-conceived and unrealistic. Some academics and professional services staff convince themselves that it is not possible to achieve the target or levels expected. Some academics may become overwhelmed, alienated by demands and what is perceived as driven by unreasonable and unattainable targets, hence some resign themselves to strategies of survival. This will inevitably impact on the quality of learning, teaching, assessment and the student experience.

Lee Eliot-Major, (2000) refers to the work of Mike Milne-Picken, who suggested that the widening of access for students recruited from working-class neighbourhoods ought to attract widening access grants allocated to those institutions best able to deliver. Major argued that the statistics show that the post-1992 or Million+ universities are doing the most to attract poorer students into HE. However, the Government has focused a significant proportion of

funds for widening access to improve the number of disadvantaged students applying to the 'leading' universities.

In a letter to the Times' "**Higher Education**" supplement, HE lecturer Alistair Ross, (2000) pursued this very issue:

"The interpretation of student drop-out rates from different institutions is perverse: it is precisely those universities with a high drop-out rate that are demonstrating their ability and flair at attracting 'marginal' students and demonstrating their commitment to furthering social inclusion. They need support to be successful in keeping more of these students on course."

(Ross, 2000:15)

The editorial leader in The Times online, (27.12.00), headed "**Admissions targets are eroding university standards**", claimed that "**the mania for targets**" is intellectually inconsistent with university facilities that:

"...have been stretched beyond any sane measure of elasticity to cope with the numbers."

(Ross, 2000:15)

Ross, (2000) went on to assert that those who will ultimately suffer most are the weakest students, with few of them:

"...aware that the new two-year foundation degrees - which have the merit of being explicitly vocational - may well be more valuable than three-year programmes elsewhere."

(Ross, 2000:15)

Yorke et al, (1997) identified the five most significant reasons for student non-completion generally as:

Incompatibility between the student and institution

Lack of preparation for the HE experience

Lack of commitment to the course

Financial hardship

Poor academic progress

Alison Goddard, (2000a) noted that once a student is enrolled on a course, a raft of integrated support measures is needed to keep them on track, including consistent academic and financial support. Jeremy Weinstein, (2000) argued that the selection and retention of students could be regarded as an aspect of **“the current crisis in social work” (2000:7)** He pointed out that the rapid expansion in HE coincided with resource limitations. Weinstein recognised that greater inclusiveness has produced significant changes in the student profile. He lamented that:

“...having now succeeded in attracting mature individuals and people from ethnic minority backgrounds into social work, social work tutors struggle to heed their own teaching about institutional racism and disadvantage to provide the necessary support.”

(Weinstein, 2000:7)

Paul Weston et al, (2000) identified a widely-held belief that:

“...work pressures and other priorities have deflected tutoring/mentoring staff from roles they have effectively played in the past in supporting all students, and particularly black students in compensating for deficits in their pre-higher education academic experience.”

(Weston et al, 2000:11)

In a collection of papers edited by Susanne Haselgrove, (1994), Christine Henry asked the question: “Do we practise what we preach?” The resulting set of recommendations addressed such matters as the leadership of the university, management style, organisational culture, the university’s mission statement and the need for a code of professional practice (see also Henry et al, 1992). She commented that:

“In times of scarcity and unemployment, access to higher education may be seen as a double-edged sword. Access allows entry into higher education for those who have been disadvantaged, but may not take into account financial hardship, crowded teaching, poor accommodation and eventually graduate unemployment ...”

(Haselgrove, 1994:112)

Moreover, those students who have been most neglected by the education system, those who have been historically debarred from the range of privileges that might have prepared them for the challenge of HE are the very ones most likely to be adversely affected by the HE inertia and the lack of resources required to compensate for previous failures.

2.7 6. Cultural competence

Within the literature, it is apparent that many of the issues previously discussed relate to what might be regarded as a lack of cultural competence. Cultural competence occurs when there is a valuing of diversity, a sophisticated understanding of one's own culture, and where one uses the **"dynamics of difference"** (Cross et al, 1989:20) to offer sensitive and appropriate systems of care.

The literature has shown that a high proportion of those working with diverse groups lack the understanding and knowledge of the groups with whom they work (Cropper, 2000; Gurin et al, 2002; Aronson, 2004; Back, 2004; Gulam, 2004; Bagguley & Hussain, 2007; Crozier & Davies, 2008; Gutman & Akerman, 2008; Leckie et al, 2012). Thus, a basic response to BEM students' attainment, retention and progression tended to be based on a colour-blind approach. The assumption being that treating everyone the same equates with an adequate strategy for managing race and diversity. This strategy has been shown to be ineffective (Back, 2004; Gulam, 2004; Bagguley & Hussain, 2007; Singh, 2011), yet HE staff persist as both they and their managers find themselves impotent in responding to the challenges posed by diversity, widening participation and working with people who challenge their conceptions of 'normality'.

Each of the previous themes has provided examples of a lack of cultural competence, yet this rarely features in the discourse of those who are apparently writing from perspectives which fail to appreciate the importance or indeed the relevance of cultural competence. Asante (1995) cautioned that the continual exposure to Eurocentric education can make BEM students **"racist against themselves"** and that many ran the risk of **"becoming insane"**. Thus, an acknowledgment of how western pedagogy has contributed to what academics have referred to as **"cultural genocide"** (Harris, 2012). Examples abound in which the discomfort of being challenged on the basis of one's willingness to accept that white privilege or racism may be a factor has led to an abdication of responsibility by some white staff. They claim that their interventions will only worsen the situation as they do not

have the ability to work with diversity, or more specifically, BEM people (Ahmed, 2004; Lawson, 2007).

Bridge, (1996) suggested that insufficient distinction was being made between equal opportunities policies and anti-discriminatory practice. She asserted that anti-racist training itself could be counterproductive because it might induce:

“...positive discriminatory processes, which are both illegal and may contribute to failure rates on courses”.

(Bridge, 1996:8)

Jeremy Weinstein, (2000) insisted that **“attention must also be paid to the wider culture of the programme” (Weinstein, 2000: 7)**. He said that there was a necessity for tutors and students to identify key danger points, putting in place appropriate support mechanisms, especially at the major points of transition. In relation to student retention, he said the problem that many students faced was in the academic work (Weinstein, 2000:7). Strategies to improve retention and academic success would include writing workshops and more appropriate assignments, such as report writing and seminar presentations, rather than being unduly reliant on the traditional essay.

Research undertaken within the same institution by Paul Weston et al, (2000) drew conclusions based on the research. They noted possible explanatory factors included for student attrition and academic failure related to:

“Outside commitments, e.g. community responsibilities, the need to work; Institutional racism...which has...ill-prepared black students for the opportunities that higher education represents. Academic staff values relating to acceptable academic discourse; a fear, for some students, of committing things to paper.”

(Weston et al, 2000:10)

Equally, Yorke, (1999) also highlighted circumstances which tend to lead to withdrawal or failure. These included:

“...the quality of teaching is poor; the academic culture is perceived by students as unsupportive (or even hostile); ... detract(s) from studies.”

(Yorke, 1999:26)

Cropper, (2000), following on from Bird, (1996), acknowledges issues specific to BEM students and their interactions within and beyond the educational environment. Cropper, (2000) draws attention to what is meant by the inclusion, integration and participation agendas. She says that opening up education and expecting students to be exposed to inequality and the dynamics of those who have power and those who do not, simply will not work. She says:

“... to simply include or recruit black people into dominant institutions may have undesirable effect of integration or assimilation.”

(Cropper, 2000:599)

Cropper, (2000) named strategies such as “mentoring”, “anti-oppressive” and “anti-racist” as measures taken to counter the structural dominance. The mentoring initiative appears to be one of those initiatives that are commonly ‘bolted on’ to existing provision, where advocates for such schemes are forced to struggle vigorously for funding and acceptance. Tinto, (2006) noted that:

“Most retention activities were appended to, rather than integrated within the mainstream of institutional academic life. Retention activities were ... add-ons to existing university activity.”

(Tinto, 2006:3)

Yorke, (1999) concluded that many of the institutional activities to improve retention were not aimed at targeting specific groups. The information is not specifically targeted at “**lower socio-economic groups**” (Yorke & Thomas, 2003:63). Cropper, (2000) suggested that some institutions may employ a colour-blind approach in regard to recruitment, selection, teaching, progression and assessment. However, this approach invariably fails to challenge the existing levels of inequality. Moreover:

“...students’ experiences of education will be different due to the different historical and structural positions they may hold inside and outside the institutions.”

(Cropper, 2000:599)

Managing race and diversity has proved to be a significant challenge for the many institutions charged with fostering community cohesion and equity. However, the integrationist

approaches utilised fail to take into account the structured process of institutional racism, power and identity in relation to those who are expected to integrate (Troyna, 1993). This approach also fails to acknowledge the positives that BEM students bring to the learning environment (Cropper, 2000). Lister, (1999) raised concerns about non-traditional learners by stating that their inclusion could lead to them being further marginalised due to policies and practices common to HE institutions. Thus, a far more participatory infrastructure is required to counter the existing levels of exclusion.

It could be argued that the presence of BEM students has challenged how some courses are taught, **“the curriculum and dominant and traditional ideologies of teaching and learning which have largely been Eurocentric” (Cropper, 2000: 599)**. However, this is not enough to change the status quo. Therefore, from the perspective of the inclusion/integration model of BEM students accessing and participating in HE, both policy and practice has:

“...failed ... to recognise the experiences of those students who are often expected to adapt and fit into existing traditional structures and cultures.”

(Cropper, 2000: 599)

A number of commentators (Preece, 1999; Cropper, 2000) suggest that BEM students are further marginalised. For example, **Beresford & Wilson, (1998)**, commented that many inclusion initiatives **“serve to maintain and reinforce social divisions and inequalities, rather than challenge them” (Beresford & Wilson, 1998: 86)**.

Cropper, (2000:600) says that once BEM people gain access to HE, there are **“many internal barriers”** and these may culminate in direct and indirect discrimination and institutional racism. Cropper, (2000) drew on the work of Aymer & Bryan, (1996) who recognised that not only must the BEM student cope with the usual trials of academic and social demands of HE, but also:

“...they must also cope with the pressure and conflicts over the development of racial identity within what may sometime be a hostile environment.”

(Aymer & Bryan, 1996:600)

Several writers suggest that the alleviation of the problem is linked to recognition (Cropper, 2000; Bird, 1996) and the failure to recognise issues facing BEM students may circumvent

initiatives aimed at enhancing the BEM student experience of HE. Pitkethly, (2001) argues that if a university is to retain students, it needs to focus on the needs of the students in the cohort and identify the issues that directly impact on them, rather than attempting to replicate practice examples from elsewhere without consultation with the student cohort(s) or other personnel expected to implement changes.

Pitkethly & Prosser, (2001) note that there is some general agreement in the literature that high proportions of students withdraw or fail because of adjustment or environmental factors, rather than because of intellectual difficulties. The factors include a lack of clearly-defined goals on the part of the student, a mis-match between the student and the course or university culture, and feelings of isolation (Tinto, 1995). Hockings et al, (2009) focused on exploring how students succeed in HE and what makes this happen. They raised this question in relation to teacher response to a wide range of student characteristics such as “maturity”; “honesty”; “likeability”, or even “sense of humour”. The research by Hockings et al, (2009) raised a particular concern about the way staff describe students. For example, terms such as “natural ability”; “ability in the subject”; “interest in the subject”; “class participation”, and “confident approach”. Within an HE context, a tutor’s ambitions for their students are pertinent, as they are likely to focus on areas such as “critically assessing the argument”, and “becoming aware of theoretical knowledge”. Boyle et al, (2002a) contend that for academics **“how students approach their subject is as important as the knowledge they acquire”**, (Boyle et al, 2002a:4). It might even be possible for a student to miss out some key points, but they will be “forgiven” if the argument is good (Laurillard, 2001).

Hockings et al, (2008b) identify that the degree route for computer courses is popular as there is a good job market, good prospects and accessibility. This parallels with the perception about the social work and youth and community work courses. In addition, these courses may also be perceived as less academic, more vocational, thus the type of student applying for these courses may have reasoned that these courses are well within their capability in relation to the academic challenge. On completion of the course, there is also a good chance of securing employment. Boyle et al, (2002a) consider this kind of reasoning by students to be “instrumental” or “strategic”. They said that some students with ‘A’ grades at A-level seemed to do better, but this might be related to study skills and the **“academic discipline that makes a successful university student”**, (Boyle et al, 2002a:14-15).

Wittman & Velde, (2002:456) suggest it might not be possible to achieve cultural competence. They argue that there is little evidence in the literature **“regarding the intentional inclusion within curriculum of course work on either critical thinking or**

cultural competence". Competence, they argue, entails more than sensitivity. For them, competence requires a reflexive demonstration by practitioners who are skilled and knowledgeable about their own culture and the culture of those with whom they work. Thus, there remains a challenge both for academics and for students. One of the significant challenges posed by WP is how to facilitate the promotion of critical thinking skills successfully, in order to prepare students to practise effectively in a multi-cultural, global world (Wittman & Velde, (2002: 456).

Cultural competence is a fundamental tenet of youth, community and social work education (Abrams & Moio, 2009), yet many of those professionals entrusted with learning and teaching have worked from a position of arrogance, with little regard to the issues of diversity and a more critical or radical curriculum. These academics lack reflexivity; they perceive and evaluate themselves as possessing the knowledge and skills to educate and validate whether or not their students have acquired the skills, ability, understanding, knowledge and experience to work effectively within a multi-cultural and an increasingly-globalised context. These academics determine the criteria for the test of proficiency, yet the test of their proficiency did not include a test of cultural competence; such a test would be regarded as irrelevant and against the notion of integration.

2.8 7. Racism, discrimination, oppression and institutionalism

Racism, discrimination, oppression and institutionalism provided the canvas on which all other themes are exposed. The themes on this canvas are borderless, intersecting to form pictures that are both interpretive and interpreted on the basis of positions. As such, it is highly contested, as the label of being discriminatory, oppressive or being racist brings with it connotations that would imply that such persons ought not to be in professions in which they hold positions of authority and power, or where they can abuse such positions. There is no doubt that BEM students are exposed to "endemic racism". Indeed, following the publication of The Macpherson Report, (1999), there was some general acceptance that many of the public organisations could be practising what was referred to as 'institutional racism'. Pearl & Singh, (1999) edited a series of contributions on the theme of equal opportunities in the curriculum. In a chapter on student experience, Linda Waterworth, (1995) provided a description of black nurses' experiences, based on interviews with four student nurses in the third year of a Dip HE (Nursing) programme. Their responses were analysed under the

headings of: “making friends”; “culture shock”; “experiences of racism” and academic issues. Waterworth, (1995) concluded that:

“...the students described experiencing various degrees of being excluded and isolated. They had all experienced racism, both from colleagues and patients, although one of them described a reluctance to accept that the problems were related to racism. The students did appear to be having more academic problems than might have been expected from their entry qualifications.”

(Waterworth, 1995: 202-3)

Connor et al, (1996) identified a far greater likelihood that white students will obtain a good degree compared to non-white students. In their survey of students who had graduated from four UK HE institutions in 1993, they found that even when the two groups enter university with similar academic qualifications, they differed in the classes of degree awarded. For example, she noted that 65 per cent of white students had been awarded good degrees, while the corresponding figure for non-white students was only 39 per cent. This was the first investigation in the UK to demonstrate a clear difference in attainment between white students and students from other ethnic groups.

Following on from Connor et al, (1996), several studies have found similar patterns in relation to degree attainment (Owen et al, 2000; Naylor & Smith, 2004; Leslie, 2005; Elias et al, 2005). Researchers have confirmed that white students are still more likely to obtain good degrees than students from other ethnic groups when the effects of other demographic and institutional variables have been taken into account (Broecke & Nicholls, 2007; Naylor & Smith, 2004; Powdthavee & Vignoles, 2007; Richardson, 2008). Moreover, Richardson, (2008) indicated that:

“Relative to white students, those from every non-white ethnic group are less likely to obtain good degrees and less likely to obtain first-class honours, although there are consistent variations across the different non-White ethnic groups.”

(Richardson, 2008:10)

In particular, Richardson, (2008) noted that:

“...the odds of an Asian student being awarded a good degree were half of those of a

white student being awarded a good degree, whereas the odds of a black student being awarded a good degree were a third of those of a white student being awarded a good degree.”

(Richardson, 2008: 10)

Richardson, (2008) concluded that the underlying pattern is irrefutable and remained broadly consistent from one year to another.

Pav Akhtar, (2005) Black Students' Officer for the National Union of Students (NUS), told **“Black Britain”** on-line magazine: **“Black students can often feel isolated. Black students sometimes come up against hostile academics who are unwilling to support different learning styles, or different cultural perspectives.”** He stated that the fact that Black students leave university with lower grades than white students is due in part to unfair and discriminatory practices.

Akhtar continued: **“Research has shown that when colleges and universities don't have anonymous marking in place, black students receive up to 12 per cent lower marks.”** He believes that the problems for Black students in HE begin within the secondary education system. He stated:

“The curriculum completely ignores the contributions of black people to society by the exclusion of black history. It is unsurprising that many Black students battle with their sense of identity and suffer from low self-esteem. They end up with lower expectations of themselves.”

(Black Britain on-line magazine, 2005)

Akhtar stated: **“I believe that black students' lower attainments within higher education are not a question of aptitude. We need to look at all the root causes. There are social and economic factors that have an impact on black students' ability to deliver.”** He believes it is important to improve black representation within the HE system in order to improve the participation and performance of Black students.

Richardson, (2008) follows Osler's (1999) hypotheses about whether the disparity in degree attainment might be explained by the exposure to discrimination, suggesting that Black

students were more likely to encounter discriminatory teaching and assessment practices or more subtle exclusionary attitudes and behaviour from teachers or students. He referred to Connor et al, (2004) who had interviewed full-time students at 29 institutions and concluded that: **“there was no consistent message from our student survey that any group of minority students felt more disadvantaged than white students”**, (Connor et al, 2004:80).

However it might be significant the pilot studies for the annual NUS's National Student Survey found that white students tended to produce more favourable ratings of their programmes than Black students (Richardson, 2004). Another possibility is that variations in the attainment of students from different ethnic groups arise from variations in the quality of the learning itself. Researchers have identified three predominant approaches to studying among students in HE: A **“deep”** approach is aimed at understanding the meaning of the course materials, a **“strategic”** approach is aimed at achieving the highest possible marks or grades and a **“surface”** approach is aimed at memorising the course materials for the purposes of academic assessment.

Ridley, (2007) gave a questionnaire on studying approaches to two cohorts of first-year psychology students at a single institution. They were classified as **“white British”** (32 students), **“other white”** (13 students), **“black Caribbean”** (15 students) and **“black African”** (17 students). The four groups did not differ in their use of a deep or strategic approach, but the two groups of black students were more likely to adopt a surface approach than the two groups of white students. The four groups differed in their examination marks, with the white British students obtaining better marks than the other three groups.

Moreover, the white British students still tended to obtain significantly better marks, even when the effects of variations in the students' approaches to studying had been statistically controlled. Richardson, (2008) commented that whilst at present:

“...little is known about the attainment of students from White ethnic minorities, but the general issue of the under-attainment of ethnic minority students urgently needs further investigation.”

(Richardson, 2008:15)

An article, **“Racial divide is higher education's ‘dirty secret’”**, featured in **The Times' “Higher Education”** supplement, written by education correspondent Matthew Reisz on

16/12/12, draws attention to the discomfort that surrounds discussion about attainment. The article suggested that **“Race is higher education’s ‘dirty little secret’” and more should be done to tackle the issue**. In this article, Mark Crawley, Dean of Students at the University of the Arts, London (UAL), is interviewed and quoted as saying that: **“Higher education has a dirty little secret: white students get more firsts and 2:1s than black students – and no one even talks about it”**. The same article also took comments from other participants. Fairouz Aniq, Students’ Union Cultural and Diversity Officer at UAL, advocates blind marking. She also argued that there was a role for positive discrimination in arts education as **“the only way to break the nepotistic nature of the creative industries”**. Typical of the rejection of initiatives to remedy structural difficulties is reflected in the comments by Hew Locke who noted that **“teaching should be about encouraging people rather than making allowances for their backgrounds”**. However, he said he recognised - and often knew personally - all the black British artists listed on Wikipedia. He looked forward to the day when there were so many that a large proportion would be unfamiliar to him.

Racism permeates the whole system of education; it is endemic in our society and we are all tainted by it. Racism can manifest itself in the content of the curriculum. Equally, failing to address comments made could leave students feeling isolated and fearful. Or comments made among academics that denigrate particular social groups can have the impact of cementing false ideas or the culture of the system, especially if these comments are made by those in positions of authority. These comments are an aspect of ‘othering’.

The discourse of widening participation, student retention and degree attainment is framed in such a manner that facilitates powerful groups to deflect attention away from the systematic ways BEM students are failed. The story told by the custodians of the system is one of deficiency, unworthiness, ingratitude and wastefulness. This story manifests itself in relation to the perception students have of themselves as a social group – BEM is defined not solely on the basis of race, gender, disability, sexuality. The various aspects of a person’s identity are compounded by a distorted perspective in which people who are victimised by a system are deemed responsible for both their own personal failure and the failure of the system (Young, 1990). BEM students are incorporated into a system in which symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) is a feature of their everyday encounters. Those making the accusation failed to recognise the extent to which violence is normalised, not only in action, but also in language. Moreover, they also failed to focus on those committing the abhorrent act and those implicated by their silence.

Singh, (2011) notes that in relation to policy development, the literature suggests that there has been an important shift away from a defensive posture associated with fulfilling legislative and regulative requirements, to more pro-active responses aimed at developing pedagogical strategies for addressing BEM student attainment. However, whilst there remains both a reluctance and a resistance to name or acknowledge the extent to which HE as a process has contributed to many of the negative impacts or outcomes for BEM students, it is unlikely that progression will advance beyond the point of “**it’s complex**”, a common response to the nature of the problem. The seven themes considered thus far have provided some important insights of how the BEM students are affected by the individual themes. When the themes are considered collectively, it demonstrates that BEM students continue to thrive within a system of oppression and their ability to survive may be linked to the extent to which they have resisted assimilation into a culture that negates their being (Tolley & Rundle, 2006).

2.9 8. Creating spaces

Whilst reviewing the literature from both a personal and professional viewpoint, it became evident that there was an implicit acceptance by some authors, practitioners and policy-makers for a need to create alternative spaces that would facilitate BEM students with the opportunity to explore and address negative issues. However, there was not a corresponding or explicit steer in this direction; it was often alluded to, rather than a specific policy. Jacobs et al, (2007) indicated that in terms of strategy, the primary focus was on recruitment and WP, rather than on enhancing BEM student success and progression. However, a number of HE institutions reported mentoring and individual support for BEM students as an option, although the general ethos of institutions was to foster inclusivity and avoid differentiating between students along the lines of ethnicity. However, in practice, what has been achieved has been the undertaking and publication of more research which points to a problem or concern with the disproportionate retention, attainment and progression of BEM students in HE (Singh, 2011; Stevenson, 2012). Bird, (1996) had previously noted the importance of offering flexible provision and culturally-sensitive student services to enhance BEM and white students’ access and engagement with HE. Law et al, (2004) provided practical suggestions to assist HE institutions to evaluate and integrate anti-racist change at both organisational and pedagogical level. Tolley & Rundle, (2006) provided examples of different organisations and initiatives across the UK and how they have sought to develop and implement the WP remit of “**Aim-Higher**”. This study noted that the complexities demanded a response to the acknowledged complexities from HE providers, in essence, the consideration of different

initiatives and methodologies to support learners.

Bagguley & Hussain, (2007) emphasised the need to build links with local communities and related careers services for female South Asian students and graduates. They also highlighted the importance of widening the curriculum and encouraging young Asian women to apply for courses that might better suit their talents, developing role models and a 'critical mass' of students, enabling them to feel both comfortable and have a sense of belonging to the university. Universities also need to ensure that equality and diversity policies are put into practice by successfully challenging unacceptable behaviour from staff and students. Further, it is suggested that careers staff could be more pro-active in bringing employers and BME students together to discuss any concerns they have about cultural and religious issues, such as wearing the hijab to job interviews or in the workplace.

The NUS's "**Race for Equality**" report,(2011) indicated that it was important to raise awareness of the unique challenges BEM students may face in HE, ensuring that there is equal treatment by employing policies such as anonymous marking and the development of role models by increasing the number of Black academics. This research also found it important to provide academic support systems, such as skill-building workshops and allocating students an adviser to monitor progress and offer advice. They also argued that different teaching approaches could be used to ensure all students are engaged. It was suggested that BEM students could be offered funding support.

A number of studies from the United States have highlighted the importance of strategies for addressing BEM students' psychological well-being, sense of belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation needs (Donnell et al, 2002). Dumas-Hines, (2001) suggests that retention strategies need to provide counselling, tutoring, academic support, career planning and placement services, as well as working to improve the social and racial climate on campus and the cultural competency skills of academic support staff (Smith & Naylor, 2001; Connor et al, 2004; Chang et al, 2006).

As discussed within the literature, there are complex factors and explanations for the disparity in attainment, retention and progression of BEM students in HE (Connor et al, 2004; Broecke & Nicholls, 2007). These reasons are overlaid with instances of direct and indirect racism (Turney et al, 2002; Jacobs et al, 2007; Howson, 2009; Jessop & Williams, 2009). Thus, strategies to facilitate success require a multi-pronged response. Byfield, (2008) proposes strategies that included engaging parents in the educational experience, making positive links between universities, the wider community and, significantly, the Church.

Sewell, (2009) emphasises the importance of “**intellectual rigour**” underpinned by caring, reliable support and stimulating physical and cultural pursuits. Ainley, (2008) placed the emphasis on developing self-efficacy, critical self-reflexivity, resilience and cultural capital. These outcomes are associated with the long-established traditions of critical pedagogy, based on the work of Paulo Freire, (1970).

Singh, (2011) acknowledges that in working from such a paradigm, there is a danger in focusing attention away from wider institutional practices and social oppression towards the behaviour and attitudes of BEM students. It is important to challenge the idea of BEM as victims-only. Housee, (2004) reports in her research on South Asian female undergraduate students that such students do display a remarkable degree of agency. While the arguments for focusing on the needs of BEM students are well-made in the literature, a number of studies warn of the dangers of directly targeting BEM students for “**special treatment**”, as in so doing, one could create a negative impact by labelling and reinforcing negative racial and cultural stereotypes (Law et al, 2004; Jacobs et al, 2007).

There were some specific examples of initiatives targeted at BEM communities such as “**The Windsor Fellowship**”, a registered charity with a range of programmes to address the needs of ethnic minorities from primary school right through to HE. Bola Ogun, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, told “**Black Britain**” on-line magazine:

“...those who undertake our programmes are already bright and intelligent and would succeed anyway. Our view is that statistics show that many in similar situations still drop out of university or fail to do as well as expected. Our staff members work hard to support students throughout their university life. They are also put in touch with other black students in similar situations which increases their level of peer support. What we do is to nurture talented individuals and provide them with the necessary leadership skills to achieve their goals and ambitions in life.”

Within the tradition of youth and community education or practice, there is recognition and acceptance of the necessity to create space or environments, enabling marginalised groups to identify sources of oppression and to regroup (Hooks, 1991; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Thus, in this study, the conceptualisation and the identification of the need to create space as a response to the seven themes discussed above was not unusual. The current Coalition government has indicated that their reforms for HE are based on “**putting higher education on a sustainable footing**”; shifting public spending away from teaching grants and towards repayable tuition loans; Second, institutions must deliver a better student experience;

improving teaching, assessment, feedback and preparation for the world of work. Third, they must take more responsibility for increasing social mobility (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2011:4). Hence, it is difficult to argue that education is neutral (Freire, 1972; Stenhouse, 1978; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990); it is by its very nature biased towards the particular context, ideology and characteristics of that which it seeks to reproduce (Freire, 1972; Stenhouse, 1978; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Gillard, 2011).

Sociologists and academics from other disciplines argued from a critical perspective how various structures and actions contributed to a process which systematically marginalised certain groups of people (Lynch, 2006). Some argued that whilst it was possible to appreciate and observe the normal working of the systems that produced variable outcomes, it was far more difficult to explain how the system of dominance was colonised by a particular group who coalesced a range of resources to ensure the system would perpetuate its own interest (Bourdieu, 1990; Young, 1990; Cudd, 2005; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). Freire, (1972) noted that a great deal of education had the impact of “domesticating” its participants. Illich, (1971) talked about the “**disabling**” function of education. The literature review initially facilitated the conceptualisation of a tree with many branches, leaves and fruit, (see Fig 2.1). This review emerges from an extended period of thinking about, talking about, reading, discussing and working within the field of HE. This extended exposure contributed to the formulation of a model devised and used both to explore and understand BEM students’ experiences in HE. The model is based on a summary of what I perceive to be a language that evolved from the literature as an explanation of BEM students’ experiences in education. Moreover, the model reiterated the main themes that permeated the literature and the policy and practice of working with BEM students in HE. The themes that emerged formed the basis of this study. Whilst it is possible to identify specific themes separately, it is important to consider the integrated nature of these themes because they demonstrate omnipotent aspects of the issues being explored.

The process of analysis has assisted in the focus of this study, namely a consideration of BEM students’ narratives about their experiences in HE, using these emerging themes and CRT to analyse these experiences.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The experience of Black Ethnically-Minoritised (BEM) students in higher education in the UK

“Primary research is the most effective weapon against the destruction of African history and culture.”

(Prof. Manu Ampin, 2005, Online)

3.1.1 Introduction

This chapter charts the journey towards finding a conceptual framework within which to locate this study. The study seeks to explore the experiences of BEM students in HE in the UK. The research question asked was:

“Is there a link between the BEM student experience in HE and degree attainment, retention and progression?”

In considering the BEM student experience in HE, three areas - widening participation (WP), retention and attainment. - underpinned many of the concerns. These became recurring themes in the literature, as well as additional emergent factors which explain BEM students' experiences. All three themes provide a lens through which we get to see how HE intersects with life beyond campus in a manner that impinges on BEM students and how these experiences are often reflected in discourse. Whilst the three areas identified are not the total sum of BEM students' experiences in HE, they do provide a basis for the examination of how the Academy has been able to construct and maintain a notion of BEM students in their pathologised state, a state in which the Academy remains somewhat complacent/oblivious to

its culpability in negating BEM students' endeavours, not only to survive, but to thrive within HE. An HE experience, as a model for social justice, needs to be consistent in delivery (Cropper, 2000).

The themes and how they coalesce are an example of the intersections impacting on BEM students' experiences. The emergent themes will be relevant to many applications in terms of "internationalisation", "integration" and "diversity" agendas. Yet, whilst these are powerful and determined discourses about attainment, retention and progression, they are seldom examined in terms of their relationship with one other. These shape a cycle of practice that normalises processes and the subsequent outcomes of these policies and practices. This is partly what Macpherson, (1999) referred to as "**institutional racism**", claiming that such "**inadvertent acts**" had negative impact on particular groups. Such policies and practices fail to recognise how this affects academics working from a position in which white privilege is often absent from their theorising. This situation continues to impact adversely on BEM students (Gillborn, 2006b) and the consequent negative outcomes are often theorised as the personal or cultural maladroitness of those who are unable to navigate successfully through HE. Such discourse is normalised and becomes the conventional wisdom and the basis of policy and practice in work with BEM students.

The three areas identified for this research are:

Widening participation (WP)

Student retention

Disparity in degree attainment

The consideration of these areas will assist in exploring the complexity of factors which often adversely impact on BEM students in HE. In this study I remain concerned about the attrition of BEM students. However, I chose to focus on retention rather than attrition for reasons associated with information access. I was aware that even though I had contact with some students who had left courses, I was not confident of being able to make contact with a large enough sample. I was also aware that students often withdrew from courses without providing a reason. The focus on retention would also provide an opportunity to gain some insights from those who stayed on the courses; what has assisted them? What has hindered them, in terms of their aspirations? This study does not set out to prove or disprove disparity in degree attainment. There are already ample studies which confirm this (Bhattacharyya et al, 2003; Broecke & Nicholls, 2007; Richardson, 2008; Higher Education Academy/Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), 2008).

3.1.2 The impetus for the study

Chapters one and two have laid out the aims, rationale and impetus for this study. Both the desire and decision to research the experience of BEM students in UK HE is influenced by my personal and professional experiences. The desire emerged from my role and the perception of my responsibility as a Black academic. The decision was conscious, but on reflection, there have been many moments when I felt there was little choice; it was as if I had to do this work and I was in a position to make a positive contribution. These experiences have informed the research focus and the research strategy. I am employed as a senior lecturer in HE. I was aware of disproportionate representation of BEM academics in HE, especially at senior level (AUT, 2005; ECU, 2009; ECU, 2011). I was aware of policy initiatives aimed at widening the participation of BEM people in HE (Allen, 1997; Powney, 2002; DfES, 2003a). I was also aware that a significant number of BEM students did not complete their course, or attained a degree classification on average lower than their white peers (Connor et al, 2004; Broecke & Nicholls, 2007; Gorard, 2008). Equally, their progression during and after the course lagged behind that of their white counterparts (Essed, 1991; Abbott in Wright, 2012). The burden of living in a hostile environment (hooks, 1992; Back, 2004), where there are daily reminders of BEM people not being considered capable of attaining more prestigious positions, only makes the situation worse.

This study is more concerned with the impact that disparity in attainment or degree classification has on BEM students and staff across all aspects of the learning, teaching and assessment process. Widening participation is one of those highly contentious issues in education. WP policy may be regarded as successful in terms of changing demographics in selected HE institutions (BBC News, 2000a; Osborne, 2003), but a more critical analysis would conclude that WP is, in effect, an acknowledgement of systemic failure (BBC News, 2000b; Baker et al, 2006; Andalo, 2007a). WP is also engulfed with spurious notions which imply a strong commitment to change a prevailing situation (Bunting, 2004; Russell Group Papers, 2010; May & Bridger, 2010), whilst in practice, very little changes (Bunting, 2004; Geoffrey, 2006). Thus, WP theoretically offers hope, but BEM students are often blamed for demanding or requiring more resources or support to 'catch-up' (Geoffrey, 2006), or they are perceived as lowering standards or holding back more able white students (Geoffrey, 2006). Student retention is also considered from the perspective of what students perceive to be the key factors in staying the course.

3.2 Conceptualising BEM identities

This study accepts that the categorisation of people as 'black' or 'white' is problematic and highly contested. However, the categorisations used in this study are a conscious attempt to illustrate that race and racism remain factors that inform the experience of participants. The concept of race is a relatively modern concept. Within the ancient world, the Greeks, Romans, Jews, Christians and Muslims did not have racial categories. Gosset, (1997) argued that in previous eras, people were divided according to religion, class and language. These divisions are evident within the classroom and inform the extent to which people are included.

Race and ethnicity are both social constructs. Race is associated with the idea that there are innate biological differences. Even though this idea has largely been discredited, explanations for the success and vivacity of one group over another remain potent in discourse (Fisher & Model, 2012). Omi & Winant, (1993) argue that popular notions of race as either ideological or objective condition have epistemological limitations. Ladson-Billings & Tate, (1995) argue that thinking of race strictly as an ideological construct denies the reality of a racialised society and its impact on "raced" people in their everyday lives. Thinking of race solely as an objective condition denies the problematic aspects of race: how do we decide who fits into which racial classifications? Marsh et al, (2010) suggest that race as a political grouping has roots in slavery and colonialism. Even when the concept of race fails to "make sense," we continue to employ it. Toni Morrison, (1992) noted that:

"Race has become metaphorical – a way of referring to and disguising forces, events classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race" ever was."

(Morrison, 1992:63)

She argues that racism is as prevalent today as it was during the Enlightenment of the 18th century and that it:

"...has a utility far beyond economic, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before."

(Morrison, 1992: 63)

Chun, (2011) argues that by using race terms, the axis of race is designated as central to its logic. Thus, the term “black” and its use as a reference to specific racialised groups has through its usage acquired its own logic. However, the term “black” has been subject to many transformations. As a means to separate one social group from another, it has remained consistent. Historically, “black” was used as a term to separate white people from black people. This was particularly important during the periods in which people were being enslaved on the basis of social class or skin pigmentation.

The term “black” or “black perspective” is located within the anti-racist discourse which came into being in the 1970s and 1980s. It is positioned within an ideological and political contemporary context of society, identifying the significance of power structures and relations, and the resultant discourse around race and racism. From this perspective, racism is inherent in British society; it is the white group that controls the means of power and subjugates on the basis of colour; the power struggle is one based essentially on the concept of race (Barn & Harman, 2006). The central aim of the “black” identity conceptualisation is to enhance understanding of the power mechanisms and institutional processes which militate against ethnically-minoritised groups. A further key aim of the Black perspective is to achieve a political consciousness and a unification of non-white people as an antidote to the “divide and rule” strategy of old colonialists and contemporary imperialists.

The National Union of Students (NUS) recognises that finding an inclusive label with the capacity to support and reflect the different experiences of its constituents accurately is problematic. To this end, it has used the term “Black” as an umbrella term. On its website, the NUS Black Students’ 2009 campaign, claims that it represents **“the largest constituency of Black students in Europe and students of African, Asian, Arab and Caribbean descent, at a local and national level, on all issues affecting Black students”**. (NUS, Online, date unknown).

Likewise, this study acknowledges that the conception of “White students”, “Black students” or “BEM students” as homogeneous is problematic; such lumping of groups does not reflect the considerable variation existent within and between groups (Bird, 1996; Fenton, 1996; Richardson, 2007; Broecke & Nicholls, 2007). Within this study, there is an acknowledgment that racial classification is confounding. The contested nature of race has been the focus of different studies. The term used in this study is Black ethnically-minoritised (BEM). The preferred term that has been established among policy-makers, academic and activists is “black minority ethnic” (BME). The use of these terms presents some difficulties in that quite often the term as a point of reference is used to refer to people who are not white. But its

usage denotes a state of being – people who are not white are BME. Richardson, (2006) asserts that the term “**BME**” is merely the “**latest genteel euphemism for avoiding talking about, and seeing, racism**”. The usage of the term BME also assumes that White is therefore the majority; it is a given and remains accepted (Chun, 2011). Whilst accepting numerically that within the UK, Whites still represent the majority; there are now areas in which non-white people comprise the majority; indeed, on some university campuses, non-white students outnumber white.

The association or connotation with notions of White superiority and Black inferiority has also informed the decision to find an alternative expression. The idea of White superiority and Black inferiority creates its own discomfort, especially within the context of youth and community work education, where participants perceive themselves as liberals. But these terms are accepted and used, both at a conscious and a sub-conscious level. White superiority is deemed to mean “majority” and Black inferiority deemed as “minority” and thus a plausible explanation for what is often articulated as justification for differences favouring one group. Fanon, (1986) notes that even when the colonial is in the minority, he does not feel inferior (1986:92). He argues that Black people live in societies which fuel their inferiority complex (Fanon, 1986:100). In societies that proclaim the superiority of one race over another, Fanon (1986) argues that when Black people are confronted with the dilemma, they either turn white or disappear (Fanon, 1986:100); “**...for not only must he be black; he must be black in relation to the white man**”, (Fanon, 1986:110). Pitts, (1993) warns that:

“...the imposition of unexamined, Eurocentric evaluations of the proclivities and capacities of black people by relatively powerful white ones.”

(Pitts, (1993) in Cook & Hudson, 1993:104)

Moreover, Eurocentric evaluations of capacities of black people have been systemically developed over time:

“...to structure individual attitudes, social practices and social institutions. In consequence, black people are structurally disadvantaged.”

(Pitts, (1993) in Cook & Hudson, 1993:104)

Gilroy, (2004) advocates a post-race discourse, but is compelled to accept that people’s lived realities have contributed to their perception and position in discourses about race and

racism. Thus, although terms such as “multi-culturalism” and “diversity” have emerged, they cannot disguise the reality of persistent racial inequality. Chun, (2011) argues that no single social dimension, whether race, nation, class, gender, or sexuality, can exhaustively define a community, an identity, or even a single cultural sign. Moreover, the act of putting groups under particular categorisations may be framed as “productively strategic”.

Soydan & Williams, (1998) refer to the work of Norbert Rouland, (1991) noting that:

“...minorities as such, they are defined only structurally. Minorities are groups which in a minority position as a result of the balance of power and of law, which subjects them to other groups within a society as a whole, whose interests are the responsibility of a state which perpetuates discrimination, either by means of unequal legal status (apartheid policies), or by means of civil equality principles (by depriving communities with special social and economic status of specific rights, civil equality can create or perpetuate *de facto* inequalities).

(Rouland, 1991:224, in Soydan & Williams, 1998:4)

Soydan & Williams, (1998) argue that “power” was a crucial determinant in both the classification and relationship denoting groups in terms of subordination:domination and discrimination:oppression between groups. Soydan & Williams, (1998) suggest that the **“notion of ‘minority’ is not ...univocal or static, but mediated by power”**, (1998:4). In recognition of demographic changes, Portelli & Campbell-Stephens, (2013) used the term **‘black and global majority’**, as a reflection of the reality that **“people of colour are a majority in the world and increasingly in the urban contexts of western countries”** (Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2013:27).

My decision to develop and use the term **“BEM”** was an attempt to illustrate the extent to which a process has or is taking place which minoritises groups and individuals from specific social groups. There is also an acceptance that some groups which are identified under the umbrella of “Black” in its political sense may be reluctant to be referred to as “Black”. Black is sometimes used as a descriptive rather than a political term. Hence, there is often confusion. In this study, a distinction is made in terms of the use; wherever “Black” is used in its political sense, the ‘B’ is capitalised. When the word “black” is used in its descriptive sense, it is used with a lower case ‘b’. By using this term as a point of reference, the author seeks to problematise the conception and the taken-for-granted connotations, whilst simultaneously

creating a space as a provisional starting point for a more complex analysis (Bucholtz, 2003) and political unity (Spivak, 1988).

3.3.1 Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Chapter one has discussed CRT as the main theoretical framework for analysis. One of the objectives in this study was to illustrate the contested nature of HE, to explore its role in perpetuating inequalities and to consider the impact of policy initiatives such as WP. There is also an objective to demonstrate that student attrition and disparities in degree attainment are an outcome of the racism and oppression that permeates the British education system. This study is about the BEM students' experiences in HE and an attempt to construct and articulate BEM students' narratives, exploring the intricate web and imagery underpinning much work with BEM students. The study explored their aspirations and challenges as they sought to illustrate specific implications for practice and to define the terms by which they are recognised.

When used as a tool to examine claims of neutrality, objectivity, colour-blindness and meritocracy, CRT provides a good conceptual framework. Gillborn, (2006) noted that a key aspect of CRT is to advocate a race-conscious approach to transformation and political action, rather than liberalism's embrace of colour-blindness or a reliance on rights-based strategies. Storytelling, counter-storytelling and narrative are used to illuminate and explore experiences of racial oppression **"naming one's own reality"** (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995:58). Delgado (in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) argued that despite diversity within CRT, there is agreement that **"racism is not a series of isolated acts, but endemic ... deeply ingrained legally, culturally and psychologically"** (Delgado, in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995:57). Telling one's own story provides an opportunity to explore how people in particular situations become oppressed and subjugated. This realisation can be an important step towards freeing oneself from mental slavery or from **"inflicting mental violence"** on oneself, (Delgado, in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995:57).

In relation to HE, the opportunity to expose the academy to the BEM students' narrative could serve to increase the awareness of the multi-faceted ways in which the academy not only silence the BEM students' voices, but also how the academy discourages aspiration. Delgado, (1995) argued that the 'dominant group' justifies its power with its own explanations in order to maintain privilege. Oppression is rationalised, causing little self-examination by the oppressor. CRT theorists believe that we should seek to **"name our own reality"**, as

much of reality is socially-constructed. CRT theorists attempt to uncover or decipher the social-structural and cultural significance of race in education. Delpit, (1988) argues that this is one of the tragedies of education in silencing the voice of ethnically-minoritised people. Ladson-Billings & Tate, (1995) noted that “**without the authentic voice**” of BEM people, comments about their experience of education and their communities remain circumspect (1995:58). CRT rejects a paradigm that seeks to be everything to everyone, advocating instead a “**race first**” approach to emancipation (Martin, 1976; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Gillborn, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Gillborn, 2010). Therefore, I considered this appropriate for my research.

3.3.2 Intersectionality

The quest to understand difference and its overlapping aspects has led to the development of methodologies. Crenshaw, (1991) attempted to find explanations about the oppression faced by women of colour in the USA. In her quest, she contributed to the emergence of a methodology now accepted as a legitimate methodology for studying ‘**the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations**’, (McCall, 2005). Intersectionality seeks to examine how various socially- and culturally-constructed categories of identity, such as gender, race, class, disability, sexuality and age interact on multiple and simultaneous levels, contributing to systematic social inequality (Crenshaw, 1991). In essence, intersectionality asserts that oppression based on sexism, racism, homophobia, classism or religion does not act independently. Rather, these forms of oppression inter-relate, creating a system of oppression reflective of multiple forms of discrimination. Cultural patterns of oppression are not only inter-related, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society (Collins, 2000: 42). At an overt level, this study was concerned with the experiences of BEM students in HE, but recognised that the articulation of experiences would be communicated through the complex and diverse meanings that one attaches to oneself as a member of a social group.

3.4.1 Choosing an inquiry paradigm

Broadly speaking, convention offers two dominant approaches or paradigms from which to choose when collecting information for research purposes: quantitative methods (based on positivist principles) and qualitative methods (based upon post-positivist principles)

(Silverman, 2010; David & Sutton, 2011; Cohen et al, 2011). An exploration of research philosophy and methodology was undertaken to identify an appropriate means by which to investigate the aims and objectives of the study.

3.4.2 Positivism

Positivism is a philosophy developed by Auguste Comte in the second half of the 19th Century. The emphasis in this paradigm is on knowing the fundamental laws governing matter and that there *is* an “objective” reality that *can* be “*known*”. It contends that genuine knowledge is founded on sensory experience, such as knowledge emanating from scientific methods, and that the acquired knowledge should be confined to the natural, physical and mental worlds. Comte argued that all true knowledge comes from individual observation of objective reality, thus true knowledge must be gained from objective, discernible, and measurable data. Any other transcendental knowledge should be rejected (Crossan, 2003; Sarantakos, 2005).

While the positivist, scientific method has dominated the natural sciences, it has been challenged. A major criticism of this approach is that it cannot examine human behaviour on a profound level. Many sociologists contend that human behaviour is complex, that it changes over time and that it is difficult to predict in different circumstances, so it should not be explained by rigid social laws (May, 2001; Crossan, 2003; Sarantakos, 2005). Positivism when used in this sphere yields useful but limited data that only provides a superficial view of the phenomenon under investigation.

The aim of this study is to gain ontological insights into the experience of BEM students in HE in the UK. In seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the BEM students’ experiences, the limitations of a positivist, quantitative approach were recognised. Specifically, the experiences of BEM students are relative to the context in which the experiences occur. There will be differences, for example, in thoughts, feelings and behaviour. The positivist approach cannot deal with this variety of results because it does not provide a way to understand the diversity of BEM students’ experiences, or the unified experience of diasporic groups. Another limitation related to the ‘measurement’ of the BEM students’ experiences is that these cannot be explored and described in terms of objective data that are not quantifiable, such as feelings of anxiety and satisfaction. Nor can they be translated into statistical form. Humans are not objective and their behaviour, feelings, perceptions and

attitudes are subject to many influences that positivists would reject. They cannot capture BEM students' experiences holistically and meaningfully from a perspective that is essentially reductionist. The objectives of this study required an approach giving a richly-detailed description of BEM students' experiences, collected from BEM students through analysis of their words, rather than by numbers. This consideration led to the search for another paradigm to achieve in-depth understanding of BEM students' experiences in HE.

3.4.3 Post-positivism

Post-positivism is an alternative tradition to positivism. It also overlaps with terms such as anti-positivism, subjectivism and interpretivism. The philosophy of post-positivism is the discovery of people's feelings, opinions and experiences from their own view, rather than from that of the researcher, in order to gain understanding at individual or group level, rather than a superficial exploration (Clarke, 1998; Giddings, 2006). It seeks to describe life from the participant's viewpoint (Hoepfl, 1997; Giddings, 2006), a method that accords with the aim of this study. There is considerable agreement that the qualitative method with its focus on exploration of individual experiences from a holistic, detailed perspective provides a valuable device for generating and testing new hypotheses (Silverman, 2010; David & Sutton, 2011; Cohen et al, 2011). This study aimed to explore a range of factors influencing the experience of BEM students in HE, thus, a qualitative approach was reasoned as most appropriate. A number of writers have indicated that the attraction of qualitative methods is their capacity to explore meanings behind observable facts (Sarantakos, 2005; Silverman, 2010). Hancock, (1998) has argued that:

“Qualitative research attempts to increase our understanding of why things are the way they are in our social world, and why people act the ways they do.”

(Hancock, 1998:1)

One of positivism's key advantages relates to the observer's independence from the object of enquiry, as opposed to post-positivism's roots in the researcher's subjective perceptions (Flick et al, 2004; Sarantakos, 2005). Critics have regarded this as one of the limitations of post-positivism, arguing that such studies would be strongly influenced by researcher bias because the researcher would be too closely identified with the study, thus other researchers

would come to different conclusions (Crossan, 2003; Sarantakos, 2005; Ryan & Niemiec, 2009). The second limitation is the highly-subjective nature of the paradigm; it is unique to its setting and is therefore not replicable – replicability being a key element in validating research. However, this can be challenged by ‘reliability’.

This study is concerned with the experience of BEM students in UK HE. The researcher felt that a detailed picture of the experiences was needed. This could be obtained by inviting BEM students to describe their experiences, without inhibition or constraint. Such considerations led the researcher to adopt a qualitative approach when collecting illustrative and verbal accounts of BEM students’ experiences. The study is concerned with such accounts, rather than testing pre-conceived hypotheses. Quantitative methods often miss the emotional dimension which is essential to the experience. As observed by Prof. Irving Selikoff, (2004): **“Statistics are people with their tears wiped away.”** Measurement, categorisation and statistical analyses are inadequate tools with which to obtain a holistic understanding of BEM students’ experiences. The nature of this study necessitated the use of a qualitative research methodology, because it is also useful in understanding the experiences of BEMS in various settings. Research is like everyday life; **“...it is sometimes complex and downright chaotic”**, (Silverman, 2010:14). Thus, it was important to adopt an approach to explore issues beyond BEM students’ control, but which impacted on their experience.

3.5.1 Constructing a conceptual framework: an emancipatory methodology for the exploration of BEM students’ experiences in HE

“Research is a combination of both experience and reasoning and must be regarded as the most successful approach to the discovery of truth” (Borg, 1963, in Cohen et al, 2011:4). The choice of methodology for this research was a combination of reasoning and experience. As part of the research strategy, several approaches widely accepted as qualitative approaches in social research were considered. The approaches considered were grounded theory, ethnography, participatory action research (PAR) and phenomenology. Their superficial similarity in describing what happens in any given situation posed a challenge to the researcher in making a choice between them, as each one promised to offer a relevant means of exploring the experiences of BEM students in HE. A brief discussion follows regarding the ultimate selection of the conceptual framework adopted.

3.5.2 Grounded theory

Grounded theory was originally developed by two sociologists, Glaser & Strauss, (1967). They elaborated on the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism means that individuals expound their experiences and create meaning out of them through the symbolic significance assigned to those experiences (Goulding, 1999; Sarantakos, 2005). The goal of grounded theory is to generate theories grounded in reality from inclusive explanations of phenomena (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). By collecting and analysing data, the researcher develops an enhanced appreciation of relevant material. This is called 'theoretical sensitivity'. The grounded theory process is complete when no new ideas emerge from the data. This point is called 'theoretical saturation' (Goulding, 1999; Sarantakos, 2005). This approach focuses on unravelling the elements of an experience. By studying these elements, the links between them are identified, enabling the researcher to present an understanding of the nature and meaning of that experience for a group of people in a defined situation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Goulding, 1999; Ryan & Niemiec, 2009).

The aim of this study was essentially to gain an understanding of BEM students' experiences in HE and a description of the factors that shape their accounts. This involved endeavouring to understand experiences, rather than providing an explanatory framework. Grounded theory was therefore rejected because this study required a methodology which allowed for the experiences of BEM students to be explored and understood, rather than explained. One of the key components in this study was the need to understand the meaning in BEM students' experiences, rather than developing theory.

3.5.3 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

The PAR approach offered the possibility of not treating participants as objects to be studied, but rather as animators; people who did not just tell their story, but explored the stories they were telling and considered what actions were required to change their experiences (Sarantakos, 2005; Taylor & Pettit, 2007). PAR was appealing because it enabled the researcher to establish a different kind of relationship with participants. The approach is particularly suited to practitioner-led research, as it encourages participants to problematise existing practices and develop potential solutions. PAR starts from a premise that there are problems, and that some groups are advantaged within the structures (Taylor & Pettit, 2007).

PAR asserts that these interactions, behaviours, policies or structures may be known by some and imagined by others. One of its key objectives is to reveal that which is hidden from groups in a manner that evokes change (Taylor & Pettit, 2007). The change is derived either from the challenge presented by participants/researchers, or the genuine desire to act on the insights gained from the research. It is about developing the tools available to move to a more egalitarian society (Taylor & Pettit, 2007). One of the drivers for PAR is located in the perception that the experience of BEM students could be significantly enhanced by their participation. Thus, PAR was an approach that would be of value in my research, due to its 'methodological flexibility' (Chiu, 2009). This 'methodological flexibility' would enable the integration of research methods such as dialogue groups, mixed-methods (Chiu & West, 2007), visual methodology (Wang & Burris, 1997; Chiu, 2009), theatre, or citizens' juries (Pimbert & Wakeford, 2003) where the aim was to involve BEM students as active participants.

3.5.4 Ethnography

The goal of ethnography is to discover and describe the ethics, beliefs and practices of specific cultural groups (Hughson, 2008). Ethnography emphasises the importance of the researcher's immersion in the data through fieldwork and observation (Sarantakos, 2005; Hughson, 2008). The researcher then interprets the data resulting from the participants' own words, using local language and terminology to illustrate the phenomena (Hancock, 1998, Hughson, 2008). The data collection methods are participant observation and in-depth interviews, time-consuming because the researcher needs to spend a long time in the field (Sarantakos, 2005).

The result of ethnographic inquiry is cultural description of the kind derived from lengthy periods of intensive study and by living in the subject's social setting. Investigators must observe and participate in at least some of the activities that occur in that setting and reflect independently (Hughson, 2008). Most critically, they depend heavily on working extensively with a few participants (Hughson, 2008). This approach enables the researcher to be immersed in the field working 'normally' with different stake-holders, without compromising the rigour of the research. Ethnography specifically focuses on how individuals are influenced by the culture in which they live and how they interrelate within their cultural group (Sarantakos, 2005; Hughson, 2008).

3.6.1 Phenomenology

“Phenomenology is about making manifest what one is talking about in one’s discourse.”

(Heidegger, 1962:54)

In other words, the study of phenomenology can be described as the study of human experience and the way we come to understand our everyday world. Phenomenological thinkers describe the structure of experience and pose questions regarding existence and meaning. It is concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event, as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself (Smith, 2003; Brown-Wilson, 2008). Lavery (2003) characterises phenomenology as belonging to the life world or the experiences of humans as they live them.

Edmund Husserl, (1859-1938) sought to explain how to overcome personal biases which stand in the way of achieving the state of pure consciousness. Husserl, (2001) introduced the idea of **“bracketing”** as a means of enabling the researcher to abandon or suspend his/her own lived reality and describe the phenomenon in its pure, universal sense. The process of bracketing involves **“consciously and actively seeking to strip away prior experiential knowledge and personal bias so as not to influence the description of phenomenon at hand” (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007:173).**

In the present study, the pre-understanding of the researcher (my skin pigmentation and the BEM students’ perception of me) was considered an advantage. The factors in common with the participants in this study – my concepts, principles, beliefs and adherence to BEM students – constitute the starting point to understand their experience of HE. Crotty, (1996) argued that:

“...if we all have preconceptions and presuppositions, how can we avoid imposing such presuppositions and preconceptions on the data.”

(Crotty, 1996:19)

He suggests that bracketing involves the investigator’s reflection on their past and present experiences, together with the segregation of the meaning of those experiences from those of the participants. The purpose of bracketing for Husserl is to make it possible for the

researcher to concentrate on the participants' experiences, to permit participants to construct and give meaning to their own reality, and to give the researcher the ability to enter their world and explore it.

The concept of "being-in-the-world" has a precise application in understanding the experience of BEM students in relation to Heideggerian phenomenology. It became obvious that BEM students' existence in HE creates meaning. They are "being-in-the-UK-higher-education-system" as part of their world. Understanding these students' existences can be gained through interpretation – but not description – of meaning. It is necessary to understand the essence of being a BEM student to interpret the hidden meaning in the experience (Heidegger, 1962).

In this study, my understanding of the life context of BEM students who have undergone the same experience is enhanced. My background constituted the basis for an articulation of the hidden meaning of these experiences, with both knowledge and experience of being a BEM student. My interpretation of this experience is likely to be different to that of someone who comes to it without any pre-existent knowledge. I was aware of the need not to impose my interpretation or perspective on the BEM students' experiences, so I described and interpreted the data from their own perspective. Heidegger, (1962) contradicts this position by maintaining that pre-understanding is already with us in the world and that it cannot be put aside. Nothing can be encountered without reference to a person's background understanding, and the sub-conscious attitude is integral to knowing. Therefore, bracketing is impossible because we are always interacting with the world (Rapport & Wainwright, 2006). In Heidegger's (1962) philosophy, he appreciated the essential nature of the three elements of language, space and time to comprehend and gain understanding of what it means "**to be**". These elements provide a context in which experience takes place. Without an understanding of the participants' contexts, the stories would not be complete.

During the dialogue groups, the BEM students were encouraged to talk about specific issues from their own point of view. The main interest in this study was learning about BEM students' experiences, whatever these were. When new issues emerged from the conversation, these were explored with the students. Throughout the study, both my pre-understanding and deepening understanding was frequently challenged as I reflected on the data represented in the BEM students' discussions. Both my pre-understanding and cultural affinity offered an understanding of the BEM students' lived experiences, an insight that was deepened as the study progressed. In this research, my pre-understanding or insider knowledge was the starting point for this study. I sought to identify my assumptions, rather

than eradicate myself of them; my pre-conceptions reinforced the basis of my understanding of the BEM students' experiences.

3.6.2 Language

Language is a medium of communication. It differentiates human beings from other life forms, and it demonstrates people as **“being-in-the-world”**. Heidegger, (1962) asserted that language is not word, but **“a way of speaking”**. It mirrors the state of mind and inner mood of being, so revealing something about the individual (Heidegger, 1962). He emphasised that through language, we are concerned with speaking and listening to the unspoken. In this research, the participants permitted me to enter their world by articulating their stories and allowing me to share their experiences. The knowledge gained permitted me to arrive at a realisation of reality, a procedure supported by Heidegger's assertion that language is the articulation of reality (Heidegger, 1962). This notion would also be supported by PAR as a methodology for involving disenfranchised people as researchers in pursuit of answers to the questions of their daily struggle and survival (Freire, 1970, 1974; Brown, 1978; Fals-Borda, 1979; Hall, 1981; Tandon, 1981). Raising questions about conditions and actively searching for better ways of doing things form the essence of participatory research. Thus, the research agenda would facilitate an organised cognitive and transformative activity in finding a language to communicate their reality (Park, 1993). In this context, the concept of language was very important in this study. It was very useful that the participants and I shared the same language; a vernacular that enhanced and assisted communication. I was aware of each silence, each exclamation, the placement of each pause for breath and body language. I interpreted the hidden meaning of these signs in order to understand their experiences fully. Even the moments when I knew what they wanted to say, I had to resist finishing their sentences, encouraging them as they sought the words to define or illustrate their experiences. For some, finding the words was very difficult and they used analogies or diagrams. Therefore a method was required to capture the use of symbolic logic (Maddy, 1988); **“mind mapping”**, and **“Post-its® mapping”**, through the use of flip charts, photographs, drawings and Post-its® (Christians & Carey, 1989).

3.6.3 Space

Space refers to the context of the study. An understanding of experience can be achieved by paying attention to the subject's feelings, thoughts and pursuits. Heidegger's (1962) expression "**referential totality**" means the interpretation of everyday life activity within its context, shaped by the culture and the circumstances in which people find themselves. Space is a reflection of a person's real world (hooks, 1994). In order to understand the BEM students' experiences fully, we must first know the context of their lives (Rollock, 2012). Their feelings, thoughts, aspirations, motivations, commitment, expectations and beliefs during the process of education can be revealed by locating them in the context of their situation and their community, where cultural expectation plays numerous roles in these experiences (hooks, 1994; Rankin, 2006; Ore, 2011;). Space is a key expression in this study. It denotes a dynamism that is both situated and simultaneously fluid; Intersectionality, CRT and PAR enable the possibility of an enhanced understanding of the BEM students' experiences in motion, as they are situated and recognise the more fluid interpretations of the experience (Gillborn, 2010; Rollock, 2012).

3.6.4 Time

Heidegger, (1962) refers to time as historical. People live in a changing world and time gives meaning to a person's existence. People's lives change over time, a state of affairs which results from their existence in a temporal context. The past, present and future all influence people's perceptions and accounts of an experience. The past is known; people acknowledge that it is out of their control, but that it still influences their present state of being, and allows them to imagine possible future existences (Heidegger, 1962). In the present study, the presence of the BEM students' past experiences within the UK education system and/or experiences of education in their countries of origin informed or shaped their present ones. These present experiences may in turn modify the memory of the past. Perspectives on the future may also be coloured by past and present experiences. These observations have enabled me to understand the nature of the ontological world that is the focus of this inquiry. These observations provide my rationalisation with the adoption of a conceptual framework which draws on insights and approaches from CRT, PAR, interesectionality, ethnography and phenomenology to inform this study.

3.7.1 Critical dynamic pragmatic approach (CDP)

People conduct research for many reasons, some just for curiosity and a desire to know, but Langeveld, (1965) makes the point that in conducting educational studies:

“...we do not only want to know facts and to understand relations for the sake of knowledge, we want to know and understand in order to be able to act and act ‘better’ than we did before.”

(Langeveld, 1965:4)

CDP was adopted as an intersectionality, an amalgamation of philosophical principles. Methods were combined as these were regarded as the most efficacious approach that would enable participants to reflect upon and share their experiences in HE (Cohen et al, 2011:4). This research centred on issues of social justice and pedagogic principles and practice. This study sought to identify the ways in which participants not only made sense of their experiences, but also which strategies emerged as a response to their experiences and their interpretations of these. During this study, attempts were made, not only to acquire data, but also to involve participants in exploring the experience and contributing to action that would enhance their experience. There was no specific attempt to skew the data in a particular direction; but all research processes have impact of data. Kiernan, (1999) captures the political nature of qualitative research with people with learning difficulties:

“The goal of qualitative research is quite explicitly to ‘ground’ studies in the experience and views of respondents. Nonetheless, even in qualitative studies, it is the researcher ... who determines the overall research questions, and the researcher who gathers, analyses and interprets the data and draws conclusions.”

(Kiernan, 1999:43)

Thus, it is evident that while seeking to value the experiences of people marginalised within society, traditional qualitative research is likely to encompass substantial barriers between the powerful researcher and the less powerful researched (Nind, 2008:4). The research approach adopted was aligned to a qualitative research paradigm. Silverman, (2010:9) asserts that: **“...research methods should be chosen based on the specific tasks at hand”**. The research design was not chosen; it was emergent as relative to the issues being

explored. Silverman, (2010) quotes Becker, who commented that qualitative research for him was based on **“practical rather than ideological choice” (Becker, 1998:6)**. The methodological choice for this study was based on a range of considerations which included both pragmatic and ideological concerns (Smthye, 2005; Giddings, 2006).

The approach embarked upon in this study was motivated by a strong personal and professional desire to find a conceptual and practical tool to unveil and explore issues prevalent in the experience or the lived reality, yet unrecognised by others who are also within the experience. For example the significance attached to racism tends to be different based not simply on the experience or the lived reality but also on how these are mediated through interactions grounded in normalised power, privilege, stereotypes and behaviour. Thus, White people who participate in racist acts often do not perceive themselves as racist; indeed, some BEM people observing such racist behaviour might even conclude that ignorance is the basis of the racist behaviour rather than the act itself (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Gillborn, 2010). The approach to this study was ‘organic’ whilst adhering to the criteria, (rigour-transparent, replicatable, and systematically-controlled) (Smthye, 2005; Giddings, 2006). Ryan & Niemiec, (2009) argued that:

“The fundamental norm for science is to advance accurate predictions, have control over outcomes, and understand mediating and moderating processes by investigating how systematic variations in conditions affect change in a given phenomenon.”

(Ryan & Niemiec, 2009: 264)

The research process commenced with some basic and often unarticulated conceptions and principles. As a man of African-Caribbean heritage, a social group on which a great deal of research has been undertaken, I was reticent and uncomfortable with the challenge and unsure that I had the ability to reflect adequately on the authentic voices and experiences of BEM students. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, (1999) notes that the word “research”, **“... is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (1999:1)**. I perceived the relationship between researchers and the researched as exploitative, often based on extraction of data from respondents in support of the propositions of researchers. Thus, in undertaking this research, the principle of participation was preferred. The BEM students were to be regarded not as subjects, but as participants; there was a risk that the participants could be ‘domesticated’ (Freire, 1990) by the research process. Corrigan & Tutton, (2006) explored the appropriateness of terms used in research when referring to people and concluded that **“the term ‘participant’ should be used when the research has involved**

respondents or volunteers in the design or use of the study, not just as an in-vogue term,” (Corrigan & Tutton 2006:103). The present study utilised principles and techniques that could be associated with Action Research (AR). Baskerville & Myers, (2004:329) assert that AR seeks to **“solve current practical problems while expanding scientific knowledge”**. Baburoglu & Ravn, (1992) noted that AR is unique in the sense that whereas other research methods seek to study organisational phenomena without changing them, the Action Researcher is concerned to create organisational change while simultaneously studying the process. AR is an approach that **“is strongly oriented toward collaboration and change involving both researchers and subjects” (Baskerville & Myers, 2004:329).** Reason and Bradbury, (2001) noted that:

“Action Research is only possible with, for and by persons and communities, ideally involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sense-making that informs the research, and in the action which is its focus.”

(Reason & Bradbury, 2001: 2)

This study sought to provide descriptive and interpretive accounts of the BEM students' experiences as a means of validation; to use these accounts to inform pedagogical practice and to identify implications for BEM students, HE and BEM communities. The research methodology was located within the qualitative research paradigm and based on the application of a combination of participatory tools over a series of whole-day workshops, informal discussions and observations. These workshops took the group through a process of naming and acknowledging shared experiences, making visible the impacts of those experiences and distilling possibilities for change into a number of inter-linked approaches. The process was underpinned by a commitment to working with group processes, as well as towards a tangible outcome that could be presented to the three stake-holders: BEM students, BEM communities and the university. The research methodology worked on the principles of security, significance and solidarity based on shared norms, commitment to collective goals, and recognising that there may be internal and external conflict with other groups (Harding, 1991; Jeff & Smith, 1999; Crow, 2002; Humphries & Truman, 1998).

In PAR, it is important to be aware of the significance and desirability of solidarity among the participants. A lack of solidarity may lead to tension between members of the group and the individualism of its members, or it may be prompted by the existence of tensions between the solidarities of competing groups. Wrong (1994) describes as commonplace the observation

that “[s]olidarity based on shared norms, commitment to collective goals, and the maintenance of a system of differentiated roles, are defining criteria of all stable organized groups, including groups whose raison d’être may be conflict with other groups” (Wrong, 1994:185, cited in Crow, 2002:4). It is acknowledged that solidarity among members of a group can be heightened by emphasising the group’s distinctiveness. Wrong argues that solidarity may even be “**strengthened by antagonistic relations with other groups**” (Wrong, 1994:201, cited in Crow, 2002:4). Thus, it was important to develop an approach that would help BEM students to share their stories and suggest what their perceived opportunities for change.

The sensitivity and commitment to this approach is located within the principles of informal education (Jeff & Smith, 1999), PAR (Nind, 2008) and anti-discriminatory practice (Harding, 1991; Humphries & Truman, 1998). This approach was cognisant of the lived experiences of BEM students (hooks, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Delpit, 1988; Gillborn, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Gillborn, 2010). Thus, it was hoped that those participating would find some value for themselves within the process (Nind, 2008). The research methodology was based on a process of attempting to research *with*, rather than research *into*, or *about* (Harding, 1991; Humphries & Truman, 1998).

The objective in this research approach was to create a space to enable participants to reflect on their experiences in the hope that insights gained would contribute to changes in HE and that these changes would enhance the experiences of BEM students in HE. Following an exploration of the subjectivist paradigm, a justification for the selection of a subjectivist approach was undertaken. The research approach adopted was a post-positivist (subjectivist) methodology to capture the BEM students’ experiences. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) were adopted, as they would elucidate and assist in articulating hidden meaning, making them visible to those blind-sided by the normality of the Academy. The conceptual frameworks utilised have grown out of critical theory and concerns about the representations of society as a cohesive, stable entity. Researchers from this theoretical base have raised concerns about research that failed to provide the critical context to make sense of research findings and analysis (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Gillborn, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Gillborn, 2010). Post-positivist critical theorists have drawn attention to the many discontinuities in traditional positivist accounts of the nature of society (Sarantakos, 2005; Gillborn 2006, 2010). They have raised concerns about research which depicts society as a stable, static object to be studied using conventional methods (May, 2001). Giddens, (1997) notes that:

“Unlike objects in nature, humans are self-aware beings who confer sense and purposes on what they do. We can’t even describe social life accurately unless we first grasp the concepts that people apply in their behaviour.”

(Giddens, 1997:12–13)

Critical theorists argue that positivist methods fail to capture or connect holistically with important elements in relation to questions such as what the objects of their study understand from their experience and how they apply meaning to their contexts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Positivist methodology has traditionally occupied a position of dominance within the social sciences, but its position has been challenged in terms of the extent to which it offers a critical understanding of the complexity of humans interacting with their environment (May, 2001). Positivist studies often utilise methodology that fails to address or even consider the significance of power and its utilisation of knowledge (Hunter, 2002; Morgan, 2007). Indeed, a great deal of research is sponsored or commissioned by the wealthy to meet the objectives of groups which are situated in more dominant and powerful social positions. Such research often takes place under the guise of objectivity (Hunter, 2002). Thrupp, (1999) refers to these researchers as ‘textual apologists’. Such textual apologists make reference to inequality and wider political and economic structures, but continue their work in a largely or entirely decontextualized and uncritical way (Thrupp, 1999; Thrupp & Wilmott, 2004: 228–229; Gillborn, 2006). In this sense, social science and education researchers can inadvertently perpetuate the hegemonic control exerted by being encouraged to seek validation via the existing research conventions and the conceptual frameworks utilised in the construction of such knowledge (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Stephen Ball, (1994; 2004), argued that sociologists often battle to demonstrate their relevance. Others have warned that **“there is a real danger that we are being seduced”** (Gillborn, 2006:18).

This study used ethnography, phenomenology, CRT and PAR to generate a deep understanding of the experiences of BEM students in HE. Such findings may in the future inform sensitive and effective pedagogy. The study focuses on meanings, including those initially hidden. In this study, the researcher’s role was to understand, uncover, reflect on and interpret BEM students’ reality and the context in which this reality existed by entering their lived world during the time of their HE experience. This was achieved by listening to and understanding the meaning attributed to these experiences, which in turn reflected their needs.

In undertaking this study, I reasoned that my existence was an essential element that consciously or unconsciously informed this study. Thus, the notion of being was a starting point in developing my more nuanced and critical understanding of research. Having considered the approaches discussed above, a positive, conscious decision was made to amalgamate several approaches: ethnography, CRT, intersectionality and PAR. Together, these provide the possibility not only to explore and represent the personal accounts of participants, but equally to subject these accounts to an analysis utilising a tool that acknowledges the strength of the individual approaches in their attempt to dissect the structural (macro) and individual personal accounts (micro). The approach taken is also evidence of the struggle of the researcher and participants to work within their context – socio-economic, cultural and political – and the impact which the study and their participation has had on the conception of their experience. The approach adopted also provides the possibility of wider consideration of the dynamics of power, structure and agency.

CRT, PAR, ethnography and phenomenology were combined as an approach and henceforth referred to as the Critical Dynamic Pragmatic (CDP) methodological approach. It is well-situated as a methodology to study BEM students' experiences of HE in the UK. The challenge lies in observing and recognising what must eventually be brought to light. I brought knowledge of such experiences to the research question, having spent many years in the British HE system, both as a student and a member of academic staff. The memory of past experiences, along with my current experiences, shapes my understanding. Through extended contact with the participants in the study, I gained further insight into the lived experience. In using the CDP method, I tried to establish an engagement with the BEM students' world and to increase the richness of my experience. The methodology used for this study is informed by the researcher's commitment to understand and articulate the phenomenon through the participants' narratives. That is to say, the researcher engages in an interpretive process. Interpretation is an attempt to bring to light the hidden meaning so as to obtain a comprehensive understanding. It is proposed here that understanding is more powerful than explanation for prediction in the social sciences (Benner, 1994).

Van Manen, (1997) maintains that a perfect phenomenological text is one which leads us to see a certain something that will enrich our understanding of the experience of everyday life (van Manen, 1997). Reflective interpretation of a phenomenon is required in order to gain a comprehensive and more meaningful understanding. The reflective-interpretive process not only involves description of the experience as it appears in consciousness; it also needs an

analysis of the underlying aspects and discerning interpretation (Rapport & Wainwright, 2006). Thus, the final interpretation is regarded as only tentative, rather than absolute. Interpretation therefore depends on the researcher's perspective. Different meanings may be ascribed to the same action by two researchers. Furthermore, the same act can have different meanings at different times. Ayres & Poirier, (1996) state in this regard that:

“...since each researcher is unique and brings to analysis a unique aesthetic response, it is not surprising that multiple interpretations can emerge from different researchers' encounters with the same artistic text.”

(Ayres & Poirier, 1996:166)

This variation in interpretation between researchers relates to their theoretical and historical backgrounds. Through immersing myself in the BEM students' experiences of HE, **“the attentive practice of thoughtfulness”** (Van Manen, 1990:12), I was gradually able to express my interpretation of those experiences.

To achieve understanding of the experience, we must continuously pass between the part and the whole of the experience until we gain the depth of understanding of the text. Heidegger, (1962) talks about **“historicity of understanding”** (p. 31), arguing that we can understand our world by the experiences of our lives and through this, we develop our own world. Thus, an individual's interpretation of a phenomenon is based on their historical background or, alternatively, a set of pre-understandings, prejudices, pre-conceptions and pre-suppositions which constantly determine our standing, so that the individual cannot step outside of their pre-understanding of the world. Researchers using the interpretative process must be aware of pre-understanding because the researcher cannot be free of this historical background. Heidegger, (1962) describes the relationship between the human and the world as indissoluble. Munhall, (1994) also argues that we were constructed by the world and meaning is found through that construction, whereas we construct this world through our background and experiences.

Gadamer, (1989) stated that:

“...language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs...understanding occurs in interpretation.”

(Gadamer, 1989:389)

According to Gadamer, (1989), the individual's lack of horizon means that they cannot see far enough to perceive the meanings behind the text. Interpretation is perceived as a fusion of horizons, a circular process in which the anticipation of the interpreter reacts with the meaning of the world experience. Having a new horizon is therefore an essential aspect of the interpretive process. Gadamer, (1989) asserts that individuals must not be rigidly attached to their pre-understandings, but must remain open to recognise the uniqueness of meanings held by others. Gadamer, (1989) acknowledges that bracketing is impossible in the understanding process, and he supports the idea that prejudice plays a positive role in the search for meaning. Benner, (1994) added that:

“When we are able to understand the situation of other people, it is not because we are able to look deeply into their souls but because we are able to imagine their life world.”

(Benner, 1994:19)

My pre-knowledge was incorporated into new meanings arising during the discussions, and through subsequent contact with the BEM students. I was able to deepen my understanding of their lived experiences. Throughout this study, my being and my background was significant. My pre-knowledge was the starting point of the study. Through my involvement with BEM students, aspects of my pre-knowledge constantly came to mind and caused me to reflect on the discussions confirming my cultural affinity in terms of enhanced understanding of BEM students' experiences. Thus, the approaches in ethnography, PAR and phenomenology individually advocate for extended contact with participants in their social context. Such exposure would facilitate researchers to develop the social meaning that groups attach to their experience. In this study, I had a cultural affinity with the participants. I had the same original social context as many of the BEM students, which helped me to identify the meanings behind the discussions that might have been missed by someone from a different social context.

This study explicitly engages with Gadamer's (1989) notion of researchers bringing their own horizons or prejudices to a study. In this regard, my pre-knowledge has guided this study, enabling me to interpret data and formulate understandings. However, the research process has presented many challenges. It was difficult to become detached from my context as a BEM academic who was a part-time student in HE. It was extremely difficult to bridge the gap between these two perspectives. During discussions, I regarded some aspects of the BEM students' experiences as normal in the HE culture. However, when discussing my experience and some initial findings with colleagues, they seemed surprised, even shocked. I was

conscious during the analysis process of the necessity not to apply my interpretation only, but to enable the BEM students' own narratives of their experiences to be heard. At the most basic level, this study will encourage discernment by raising awareness among academics in HE of what it feels like to be a BEM student (Kearney, 2001; Gillborn, 2006). My role as co-facilitator was to obtain a full description of the BEM students' experiences and to ask for more clarification; it was not to impose my own interpretations or perspectives.

This approach has been chosen for this study because as a methodology, it facilitates understanding of the world in which we live. It draws upon and combines the strength of other established theoretical frameworks as a means of exploration and explication of human experience through contact with people in their natural environments. It focuses on the hegemonic contexts in which experiences emerge and the attempts that people make to live within or change the hegemonic nature of experience, knowledge and meaning. Thus, it generates rich, descriptive data of why things are the way they are, or as they appear to be. It is concerned with the social aspects of our world (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Punch (1998:244) argued that method choice should not be pre-determined. Rather, your choice of method should be appropriate to what it is that you are trying to find out. Thus, the choice of method for this research was based on practical, pragmatic, philosophical and ideological positioning in terms of what is considered to be best fit. In making the decision to use qualitative method of enquiry, I concur with Becker, (1998) who argued that his decision to use one method did not blind him to the value of the quantitative approach. The specific methodology used in this study was chosen from among several considered.

3.7.2 Research strategy

This study used a qualitative method to collect the data to illuminate the experience of BEM students in HE. PAR is largely premised on an iterative process that capitalises on learning by both researchers and participants within the context of the social system that one seeks to influence or change (Baskerville & Myers, 2004:330). A particular feature of the study was the dialogue groups. The BEM student dialogue groups (BEMSDGs) enabled all students on the youth and community development programmes to participate if they chose to do so. The dialogue groups were important, as this served as a mechanism for interaction between the researcher and BEM students. The dialogue groups provided participants with the space to debate, agree and disagree with each other and were productive of new enquiry (Querubin, 2011). Trede et al, (2008) considered “**critical transformative dialogues**” as a “**strategy**

for today” that seeks understanding, through **“shared knowledge construction and transformation through dialogue”** (Trede et al, 2008:1).

The interaction between participants in the dialogue groups reinforced the notion of cultural affinity (Oakley, 1981), experiential affinity (Boushel, 2002) and a sense of interest in the issues raised (Querubin, 2011). The cultural affinity and experiential affinity was a demonstration of a commitment and concern for the welfare and well-being of the participants. This concept posits that **“the researchers share and understand the reality of the community being researched and might therefore better understand how the world is constructed and named and therefore interacted with”** (Sallah, 2011:12). This research was a vehicle for the articulation of the BEM student experience in order to change (Pant, date unknown; Throop, 2003). The fundamental essence of the methodological approach was based on enhanced understanding in an attempt to improve the world by changing it. At its core is **“(a) self-reflective enquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they and themselves”** (Baum et al, 2006:854). The BEMSDGs offered a safe space in which BEM students could share their experiences whilst still going through their HE experience, while their memories of events and conditions were still fresh (hooks, 1991; McCourt & Pearce, 2000; Querubin, 2011). The longitudinal nature of the study enabled BEM students to participate in the dialogue groups in a more natural, informative, fluid and non-directional manner (Trede et al, 2008; Querubin, 2011). During this phase of the study, the PAR approach was most evident.

In terms of the research design and study’s aims, securing the involvement of an external facilitator was important because of my proximity to the BEM students (Gerrish & Clayton 2004; Nind, 2008). There was some considerable overlap in terms of being a tutor on the course that many of the BEM students were undertaking. I was also linked by ethnicity and the focus of the study meant that I had a subjective engagement and interest in the outcomes from the research (Parker, 1994; Fossey et al, 2002). I felt that I needed to have someone who could act as a ‘critical friend’, someone I could trust, someone who was sufficiently confident with her position to be able to challenge me where necessary (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998). I was aware of my own bias (Mehra, 2002) and wanted to ensure that the contributions from the participants were interpreted from someone outside of the experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This was one of the control measures which would enable me both to contribute and reflect on the research (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Querubin, 2011).

3.7.3 The external facilitator (EF)

Recognising that there were potential concerns for students talking to a RU member of staff, I appointed an EF to provide participants with the space to talk about their issues. Students were given the option of whether they wanted to work with the facilitator, and whether they wanted my participation in the group sessions. The students reflected on these options after some discussion. After checking the credentials of the facilitator, the students said they were happy to work both of us.

A key aspect of PAR is active participation on an equal basis, hence why I appointed the EF in whom there was confidence and trust. The person selected, Cole, was significant in terms of the principles that guided this study (Kreuger, 1988), because of having studied similar areas of discrimination research in the past. The overall concern in this study was with processes rather than content or outcome (Kreuger, 1988; Kitzinger, 1995). The boundaries for the facilitator were to structure questions and activities to enable the group to explore issues and feelings and generate their own content (Kreuger, 1988; Kitzinger, 1995; Baskerville & Myers, 2004). The facilitator was not employed by the university and had no involvement with directing, guiding or defining content (Kreuger, 1988; Kitzinger, 1995). The facilitator was neutral and did not have a vested interest in the process or outcome from this research (Kitzinger, 1995; Nind, 2008).

The EF would be a “bracket” that would allow me to participate in dialogue, whilst discouraging me from influencing dialogue direction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Querubin, 2011). Commenting on the value of her own role as an EF, Cole, (2009) noted that: “...**for evaluation/research purposes, an outside ‘eye’ can help to reveal patterns and connections which become lost when we are ‘in’ the situation all the time**”. Therefore, behaviour or comments that may be taken for granted in a daily context can be interrogated and explored by an ‘outsider’ (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998; Querubin, 2011).

Initially, Cole declined to take part, feeling uncomfortable about being a white woman working with a BEM group around issues of racism. Her reluctance was reassuring, as I was then more confident about how she was positioned politically and about her appreciation and sensitivity to the issues being explored. She agreed to participate on a voluntary basis and; “...**we approached the research work in collaboration with participants and with what participants understood and constructed as having full subjectivity**” (Cole, 2009).

The EF was outside the group and university and therefore had “...**no connection or agenda with the institution, and could therefore be understood as safe; nothing that the group said individually would be reported back to anyone with authority over a grade or with the potential to influence an individual’s reputation**” (Cole, 2009). Also, being outside the context meant that the “...**engagement was unshaped by historical issues, internal dynamics and any need to protect my own position/reputation within the institution**” (Cole, 2009). Participation in the project was based on ability and skills as a facilitator and understanding of the dynamics of oppression (hooks, 1992; Baum et al, 2006; Agyeman, 2008); “...**being an external agent meant that it was on this basis only that I was involved without the boundaries being clouded by other, internal issues**” (Cole, 2009). She goes on to suggest her position was more transparent: “...**my credibility with the group ... more honest and more transparent**” (Cole, 2009).

Given that this involvement was over a significant period, it is likely that the institutional dynamics would become more transparent and continual reflection would be important in order to maintain objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Trede et al, 2008; Querubin, 2011). The facilitator also noted that whilst having prior knowledge can be a hindrance: “**Prior knowledge or experience of some of these issues may have helped me to think about how to approach the work, and I may have made different choices**” (Cole, 2009).

Throughout this study, BEM students expressed concerns about the issue of credibility of the study within the institution. This work has been explicitly designed to support change in institutional practices (Throop, 2003), as well as being utilised as research towards an academic award, and therefore will need to have credibility within the echelons of the academy (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998). There was also the question of commitment; when a facilitator is external, there is always the possibility that they will leave, leading to a feeling in the group that the facilitator is not committed to them or the work, and this could undermine the solidity and safety of the group (Kitzinger, 1995; Nind, 2008; Cole, 2009).

Equally, it is highly conceivable that **a white facilitator** could silence the group (Schneider, 1990; Agyeman, 2008). It is not easy to talk about experiences of oppression with a representative of the dominant group present (Trede et al, 2008). There is a potential vulnerability, a sense of exposure and the risk of not being believed or understood (Fossey et al, 2002). Because of their experiences in education and in the wider world, there was a very real risk that their experiences would be repackaged and handed back to them in a way that is comforting and dis-engaging for white people (Fossey et al, 2002; Trede et al, 2008). There was also the risk of silencing the group; learned fear and powerlessness are not easily unlearned. For the participants in the group, there would also be the risk of punishment,

further humiliation and the associated risks of making a representative of a dominant group angry or defensive (Agyeman, 2008; Querubin, 2011). Moreover, subordinate groups tend to 'protect' dominant groups from circumstances that they think may result in punishment or disapproval (Querubin, 2011). The white facilitator could attempt to change the focus and could have focused on personal defence, moving away from the necessary process of BEM students talking about their experiences (Solomona et al, 2005; Dunlap et al, 2007; Agyeman, 2008).

The role of facilitator is a powerful one in determining how questions are phrased, how the work is framed and how it is understood (Fossey et al, 2002; Dunlap et al, 2007). It requires enormous self-awareness and constant reflection to ensure the process does not become an act of ventriloquism, speaking an agenda that has not, in fact, been developed by the group (Schneider, 1990). There is a risk of patronising the group through dis-attached sympathy, through using their disclosures to frame them as victims, to personalise their experiences as something inherent about them and not as a series of coping strategies and mechanisms of resistance (Solomona et al, 2005; Agyeman, 2008). There was also the risk of self-congratulation on the part of the facilitator in being the 'good' white person (Solomona et al, 2005; Cole, 2009). Deliberation of the risks did not dissuade from the design and execution of the study as envisioned. Rather, it increased sensitivities to the need of providing spaces in which no harm is experienced by participants in the research process (Trede et al, 2008; Querubin, 2011).

On the first day of the first dialogue group, Cole was introduced to the group. It was apparent that some of the group seemed uncomfortable. After an initial pause and silence, one of the participants asked the facilitator: **“As a white woman, what do you feel that you can contribute to the group?”** The facilitator responded, giving a short explanation of her credentials, the experience acquired and the specific role that she had been invited to play. She also told the group that she understood their position:

“Had a similar group been set up to explore issues and how they impact on women, I would have been very uncomfortable with a man being involved in any capacity.”

(Cole, 2007)

She told the group that she felt privileged to have been invited to the group and that she would be directed by the group. She came prepared to leave if that was the determination of the group:

“The challenges posed to me at the beginning, specifically the question about what I had done in my life to combat racism, were present throughout my engagement with the group and needed me to examine my decisions, assumptions and thinking in a way that members of dominant groups are not often required to do.”

(Cole, 2009)

She also notes that it was:

“...critical that I accept their decision as it stood; part of the process of empowerment is trusting people to make good decisions for themselves and acting on their expressed wishes. I was completely willing to withdraw from the room if I had been asked.”

(Cole, 2009)

Following the session, I asked the EF how she felt about being involved in the project and having to answer that initial question. She described the moment as:

“...a hugely significant and pivotal moment in terms of setting the foundations of our relationship for the future of the group. I was very aware that their challenges need to be taken very seriously, to be respected, to be answered honestly and with integrity, and for the conversation not to be about me defending myself, or proving something to them...they were, in effect, interviewing me, and for us to be able to work together in any meaningful way, that needed to be the dynamic’. “(It was) ...the defining moment of the relationships and was about a lot more than the questions and answers. It was also about the critical context of whether I could be trusted, whether I had any idea what they wanted to talk about and whether I was prepared to own my whiteness as an individual and as a representative.”

(Cole, 2009)

The fact that the question of relevance was put directly to the facilitator was really important for the group, to test whether they were simply there to provide answers to questions (Nind, 2008). Furthermore, this was important because it sought to make the participants central to the process (Throop, 2003), rather than them being invisibilised (Shacklock & Smyth, 1998; Agyeman, 2008).

We began to work on the project on the basis of embracing another human being who was committed to work with us to develop and sharpen the tools for liberation. The EF interacted well with the group, situated outside of the specific experience of black students, but with considerable experience of oppression and associated violence. The experience of the facilitator proved invaluable in enabling us to look within and beyond ourselves. She used encouragement, facilitation, adaptation and the creation of spaces for reflection. She also helped to extend the conversational information gathered to practical points and action. The role of facilitator is one concerned with processes, rather than content or outcome. She notes:

“My boundaries were to structure questions and activities that enabled the group to explore issues and feelings, and generate their own content. I was not facilitating learning, training or educating, and therefore had no involvement with directing, guiding or defining content.”

(Cole, 2009)

The facilitator worked at a number of levels – emotional safety and group dynamics, enabling critical reflection, and holding the edges of a process. The main emphasis in the research design and incorporation of the facilitator was based on participation, levels of participation and sensitivity to the BEM students participating, anticipating and navigating through the group process (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Berman-Rossi, 1993; Trede et al, 2008).

Realistically, nothing will change unless those with the authority to bring about change are supportive and interested. Thus, even though the approach was designed to suggest opportunities for change within the institution in its wider sense, the design and execution of the project was not formally authorised by the institution, raising doubt as to the extent to which the institution might engage with research facilitated by an unknown entity.

The BEMSDGs were a catalyst that stimulated further discussion, often on a one-to-one basis, where participants elaborated or talked about more personal issues that they were not necessarily comfortable sharing with the group. Cole, (2009) noted that:

“Some students talked about ‘feeling useless’ because of particular encounters they had had with other students or academic staff. In such circumstances, students sought the opportunity to speak on a one-to-one basis.”

(Cole, 2009)

The longitudinal nature of the study also allowed the researcher to explore new issues emerging from the data, permitting participants to explain issues they had not previously recalled or mentioned (Whitehead, 2004). BEM students were able to contribute to the research process, not as passive respondents, but from their own world views. These students welcomed the opportunity and challenge of influencing the development and adaptation of existing programmes. They wanted the curricula on these programmes to be more reflective of diverse world perspectives, by making recommendations and supporting others as informants, mentors, researchers and orators. BEM students thought they gained from participation and were optimistic that their efforts would assist others. Moreover, as students, they would discover more about the institution of HE. As part of the formal and informal education process, they would develop a range of skills including the ability to articulate their struggle and the obstacles which impacted on their experience (Berman-Rossi, 1993).

Following Carmichael's (1968) argument, the research design enabled BEM students to have a central role in researching the forces of society that impinge on their full participation in HE. They have scrutinised the structures of an institution and the effects of its racism. Therefore, this study does not aim to research a perceived 'problematic' group, but to inform and influence the practices of a service and to ensure its relevance to the needs of the groups it is serving (hooks, 1991; McCourt & Pearce, 2000; Querubin, 2011).

3.7.4 Ethical issues

This study used a qualitative paradigm and consciously drew on a number of philosophical influences to investigate the experience of BEM students in HE. CRT and PAR are located within transformative practice and require articulation and demonstration of ethical practice. Consequently, it is fundamental that youth and community and pedagogy researchers take into account the possible ethical dilemmas that may emerge during their research. Flicker et al, (2007) suggest that: **“traditional research approaches often continue to stigmatise marginalised and vulnerable communities” (2007:478)**. Therefore, ethical approval was sought from the research ethics committee before the commencement of study.

I chose to follow the guidelines from the British Sociological Association (BSA), selected from a range of ethical codes and guidelines. This was to ensure that appropriate ethical principles were followed (British Sociological Association, 2002). David & Sutton, (2011)

acknowledge that ethics are problematic and potentially contentious. However, they concur with others in concluding that irrespective of the research tradition being followed, it is important that strict ethical standards are maintained at all times (Bell, 2005; Polit & Beck, 2004; David & Sutton, 2011). Throughout the study, I was fully conscious of these requirements. I also sought and gained ethical approval from De Montfort University's Research Ethics Committee (Appendix: A)

It was important to guarantee anonymity and that all data was maintained securely. All research documents are kept in a locked drawer which only I have access to (Bell, 2005; Polit & Beck, 2004; David & Sutton, 2011). A code of conduct for the discussion groups was negotiated which all participants and researcher agreed to observe. I also explained the need to adhere to the ethical principles set out by the BSA. I assured participants of their anonymity by illustrating how I proposed to present the findings.

Prior to data collection, each student was provided with a copy of the information sheet (Appendix: B). This was supported by verbal information explaining the study and what it entailed for participants. The information sheet included a full description of the study, its requirements and potential benefits. It stressed that participation was voluntary and gave contact details for me and my first supervisor in the university. They were assured that their participation would not affect their future treatment. I asked students to sign a written consent form (Appendix C).

3.7.5 Access to participants

I gained access to BEM students via a range of scenarios, including direct contact by me when students volunteered to participate. Others heard about my research and volunteered to be involved. Some students wanted their stories to be told, whereas others just wanted to gain some support and advice about how to deal with particular issues. Student dialogue groups and facilitation were the primary method of gaining insights into the experience of the participants.

I felt that working with a specific programme over a period would facilitate the research in terms of gaining access to the 'authentic' BEM students' voices at different moments over the duration of their course. My concern was to develop an approach allowing access to the BEM students' voices in a more organic, authentic vernacular, where students talked about

their experiences, rather than simply responding to specific questions posed by a researcher (Flicker et al, 2007).

3.7.6 Dialogue groups

“Dialogue cannot exist, ... in the absence of a profound love for the world and men. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself.”

(Freire, 1970:77)

Schoder, (2010) argues that dialogue requires **“respect for the other participants and for oneself...dialogue is the exchange of ideas between equal participants”** (in which there is) **“gratitude for the insights others provide and gratitude for the new insights participants achieve through this just act of social love. To remove fairness, respect, or gratitude is to terminate dialogue”** (Schoder, 2010:8).

Dialogue groups can produce rich and in-depth information and are beneficial to research aiming to gain an insight into **“people’s experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns”** (Kitzinger & Barbour, in Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999:4). Equally, dialogue enables participants to become a central force of the research process.

The use of dialogue groups as informants in this study was beneficial to the research. There was a considerable insight gained into the feelings of the students and the impact of the institution of HE. It was also significant that the participants were a peer group and therefore familiar with each other (Curry et al, 2009). This is in line with Barbour & Kitzinger, (1999), who argue that ‘naturally forming groups’ are groups in which ideas are formed and decisions made, making the processes involved in dialogue groups easier. It became clear that the majority of participants had similar experiences and were able to reinforce each other’s accounts of how certain incidents had affected them. The process also allowed for participants to play a considerable part in the planning and implementation of the research (Querubin, 2011). During one of the dialogue group meetings, the participants decided to set up study groups and have shorter sessions to enable more people to participate.

There were several aspects of dialogue group research that, at times, made the research process difficult. Firstly, it was difficult to gather all members together. This was hindered further by the study's voluntary nature and the fact that dialogue groups met during the teaching week. The research is a small-scale study influenced primarily by time and funding constraints, thus the study was not as extensive as I would have liked. The participants were self-selecting; opting in or out in relation to their circumstances, need or interests.

Given that the students graduating from this course are expected to work with vulnerable people and demonstrate competence and a value base grounded within the principles that govern the discipline, it was felt that this course would provide a good case study. Moreover, due to the ethos of the course, it was assumed that students would experience the promotion of equality, justice and the reduction of inequalities often associated with education practice generally (Illich, 1976; Thomas, 1993; Richardson, 2005).

3.7.7 Data collection: methods and tools

At the point of data collection, I did not specify a time frame within which the data would be collected. I would suggest that, on reflection, I did not anticipate the level of resistance that would be encountered. I thought I would spend one term gathering the data, then spend another analysing this data. The data collection phase was challenging and enjoyable.

Data collection commenced after obtaining ethical approval. I sent an email invitation to BEM students on the BA Youth & Community Development course, outlining the proposed project and research (Appendix: D). The information was also posted on the Virtual Learning Environment (Blackboard), so all students would be aware of this research. The invitation was extended to BEM students who wished to participate. This invitation was also repeated in class sessions and there were regular reminders of the dates of meetings. BEM students were provided with an information sheet and asked to sign a written consent form before participation. The following points were emphasised prior to each session:

Participants have the right to choose not to participate

Participants may leave at any point without fear of repercussion

Participants can ask for explanations and clarification at any time

The data collection was shaped by the aim of this study. In order to reveal the meaning behind the students' experiences, I encouraged the students to talk freely. The unstructured

and facilitated discussion originates from the ethnographic tradition of anthropology (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Whilst these discussions were facilitated, they were flexible and more informal than the semi-structured interview (Baskerville & Myers, 2004). Participants were encouraged to speak openly and frankly and to give as much detail as possible. The facilitator asked questions of the participants and encouraged them to express their opinions and to share their knowledge and experience. The facilitation required good communication skills, good listeners and the need to be thoroughly familiar with the context of the relevant data given by the respondent (Nind, 2008). Moreover, the facilitator needed to know how to direct the discussion so as to gain access to significant aspects of the BEM students' experiences (Kreuger, 1988; Kitzinger, 1995).

The data collection tool chosen for this study was dialogue groups, which allowed the discussion of relevant issues, while at the same time allowing them to emphasise that which they perceived as important to their experience (Corbetta, 2003). This method was also chosen because it was in keeping with the CDP approach. The discussions were sufficiently flexible to allow the participants an opportunity to shape the flow of information (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). At the start of each discussion group, the objective of the study was explained; students were encouraged to describe their own perspectives of what happened to them during the period of study.

I was conscious that the dialogue groups might stimulate anxieties or feelings of distress attributed to their experience of education (Freire, 1970). On occasion, there were breaks in discussion. The breaks were important moments in time; sometimes they appeared to be points of discovery for participants and moments in which participants realised that others shared or connected with their experience (Freire, 1970; Sallah, 2011).

In this study, I have used methods to complement and extend the range of insights that might be gained from exploring the BEM students' experiences in higher education:

Discussion/dialogue groups

Additional data collected from the university Management Information Services

Hand-written notes

Flip charts

Post-its®

Digital recorders

Photographs

Drawings

The tools used within this methodology were based participatory; these approaches are based essentially on shared ownership of decision-making (VSO, 2004). This approach attempts to locate participants at the centre in terms of the articulation of their experiences within HE. It also recognised that the research process can be used as a tool by the powerful to silence them (Solomona, et al, 2005; Dunlap et al, 2007). Thus, not only were participatory methods utilised, but models were also used to facilitate discussions about the BEM student experience in HE. Neil Thompson's (2006) personal, cultural and structural (PCS) model; ranking exercises; a strength, vulnerabilities opportunities and threats (SVOT) model; a forcefield analysis (Lewin, 1946; Thomas, 1985); position, interest, needs (PIN) triangles; rich pictures; Johari windows; card-sorting exercises, and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, attributable, relevant and time-bound) indicators, which are then cross-checked with the SPICED (subjective, participatory, interpreted, cross-checked, empowering, diverse) model. The students worked occasionally as a large group, often in small groups, pairs and individually, feeding back and reflecting on each other's developments and thinking. When participants started discussing issues, I did not interrupt the flow of discussion and encouraged them to provide pertinent examples that reflected their own experiences.

These methods were used to record the dialogue group meetings since this was the preference of the group. Note-taking can lead to a distortion of findings. However, this can be true of any form of recording. For example, video or audio tape recording can produce 'unnatural' behaviour in the group. Note-taking is a less intrusive method, encouraging the group to be as open as possible.

Direct contact with participants and their flexible nature can encourage a greater depth of understanding about a person's experience that methods such as surveys cannot (Baskerville & Myers, 2004); questions can be rephrased, probing questions can be added and responses can be checked, thus increasing the validity of the study (Cohen et al, 2011). Within the dialogue groups, space and time was allocated to support and reassure the participants and to increase their willingness to explore potentially sensitive areas (Curry et al, 2009). The aim of the dialogue groups was to gather a wide range of varied data, and to allow the students to describe their worlds in their own words so that they could emphasise what they consider to be important (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The methodology aimed to provide a detailed, comprehensive picture of students' experiences, rather than yes/no answers (Baskerville & Myers 2004). Each session started with an activity to "break the ice" (Kvale, 2007). The questions that followed built on what they had said previously. The approach adopted locates the researcher alongside the

participants within the research process (Gadamer, 1989). I played a pivotal role in data collection, as I sometimes encouraged the students to explore some of the issues just referred to. I recognised that students' reflections and contribution would determine the quality of the result (Schoder, 2010).

A variety of general techniques was required to achieve successful unveiling (Trede et al, 2008), including safe spaces and a comfortable atmosphere (Nind, 2008). A rapport was built with the students and they appeared to trust me. I respected the students' cultural backgrounds, beliefs and values. The participants were viewed as discerning individuals with the ability of self-interpretation, which is an attribute embedded in the methodological approaches amalgamated for this study (Gadamer, 1989).

The students would sometimes consult me on personal issues and sought my help in resolving some problems. They would also refer other students to me to share their disappointments, joys and successes. I was humbled, especially when I reflect on the many stories about resistance and the spirit of affirmation and determination evident in the many contacts that students had initiated (Schoder, 2010). The students were pleased to have the opportunity to share their personal perspectives and feelings with me, experiences I myself had undergone beforehand.

The BEMSDGs were initiated as a space within which an informal group can transact or interact with each other in a manner that supported their health and well-being (Nind, 2008). The group interaction can serve as a catalyst to generate unique insights into understanding shared experiences and social norms (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Agyeman, 2008).

Initiating and sustaining such groups can be very challenging (Krueger & Casey, 2000), taking time to build confidence with students (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Equally, students were often hesitant and reluctant to speak openly about their experiences in the presence of academic members of staff (Flicker et al, 2007). Even with the reassurance offered, by some were resistant or worried about what they perceived the repercussions would be of attending such groups (hooks, 1991; McCourt & Pearce, 2000; Querubin, 2011). Moreover, working with students from social backgrounds that are subject to an immense level of scrutiny often leaves participants reticent about the value of the contributions they make (Curry et al, 2009). Some of these participants were very interested in what they would gain from giving up their time (Querubin, 2011).

3.7.8 Sampling

Sampling refers to the process of selecting participants from a given population for the purposes of research (Silverman, 2010). In qualitative research, the type of sampling is determined by the methodology used to investigate the topic (David & Sutton, 2011). For this study, the sample techniques adopted were theoretical and purposive sampling. I wanted to be able to explore how BEM students expressed their overall experiences of HE and the narratives that might emerge. By choosing to focus on a particular course, I sought to gain specific insights relevant to the experience of HE (Cohen et al, 2011).

Purposive sampling is well suited to CDP, as it enables the selection of participants whose qualities or experiences permit an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Polit & Beck, 2006). The purpose of sampling is to find candidates who will facilitate the researcher in exploring the research question in some depth (David & Sutton, 2011). In purposive sampling, the researcher selects participants within specific categories such as age, culture and experience; it is not purely random. Silverman, (2010) argues that in undertaking purposive sampling, the researcher needs to think critically about the population parameters they are interested in and select cases on this basis. Ploeg, (1999) argues that the decision to use purposive sampling also influences the locations in which data is collected, as well as its constituent incidents, phenomena and practice of data collection. She adds that sampling in qualitative research is flexible, evolving as the study progresses and continuing until a point of redundancy is reached, with no new themes emerging from the data. Information redundancy is comparable to data saturation and is attained when no new relevant data seems to emerge, or where the information seems to be repeating itself (Meyrick, 2006; Lasch, 2010). It may therefore be impossible to specify the number of participants required at the commencement of the study (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

As such, it was not necessary to have a large number of participants (Cohen et al, 2011). It was more important to create the space to enable participants to reflect on and share their experiences. This would generate qualitative data to gain insights into the BEM students' experiences. The objective was not to amass a lot of data or to use a large number of participants as a means of claiming credibility (Cohen et al, 2011), as this is not the nature of qualitative research enquiry (Baskerville & Myers, 2004). The small number of participants does not render the data any less credible. On the contrary:

“...a small number of cases will facilitate the researcher’s close association with the respondents, and enhance the validity of fine-grained, in-depth inquiry in naturalistic settings.”

(Crouch & Mckenzie, 2006:483)

However, it must be acknowledged that a small sample size cannot therefore be generalised (Cohen et al, 2011). The aim of this study was to create a rich description of the phenomenon and interpret the meaning hidden in the experience (Trede et al, 2008). In this study, all of the informants’ narratives contributed to the experience in the phenomenon under study.

3.7.9 Student profile

The students come from a vast variety of backgrounds, in terms of social class, gender, race, age and learning differences. Most are mature students who do not come with what is often regarded as traditional entry requirements - five GCSEs, and two or three ‘A’ levels. Most of the students will have experience of working in a particular field practice setting and are seeking to enhance, develop and widen their skills and knowledge within this area. In terms of gender, the applicants have been 65:35 per cent women to men. In terms of ethnicity, the breakdown of candidates has been respectively 40:60 per cent Black to white. The YCD programme has recruited students every year with a range of disabilities, including learning differences. At the time of writing, this is running at 50 per cent including those students who identify themselves as dyslexic. The average age was 23.5 years on entry (RU, 2008).

The YCD courses are generally reflective of a diverse and multi-racial society; they provide greater levels of access to BEM students (National Youth Agency Endorsement, 1998). The YCD programmes have traditionally provided access opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds, many of whom are from “disadvantaged backgrounds”, where it is highly likely that they would have experienced oppressive and discriminatory behaviour against them. As a result of this discrimination and the structural and institutional inequality that has a disproportionate impact on these groups, some may arrive with low self-esteem in the first place.

Although the student population has changed significantly in that there are far more women, BEM people and others from “disadvantaged” backgrounds represented in higher education, it is submitted that there has been no corresponding change in programmes and facilities in higher education. Indeed, whilst all sections of the education system in Britain have been under intense siege, most change in higher education has been cosmetic (Figueroa & Kamala, 1999; Sewell, 2002; Carter, 2002; Back, 2004; Gulam, 2004; Rangasamy, 2004).

3.8.1 Black Ethnically-Minoritised Student Dialogue Group (BEMSDG) meetings

The BEMSDGs began meeting on a regular basis from May 2007. These discussions continued on the basis of two meetings per term and, where possible, a meeting would be scheduled during the vacation period. On average, six meetings would take place per year.

3.8.2 Time period

10 BEMSDG meetings, from May 2007 – May 2010

3.8.3 Number of students

Ranging from six to 16, with a total of 102 students participating throughout.

3.8.4 Location

Students were given the option of meeting at venues off-campus or somewhere more neutral, but all meetings took place on campus.

3.8.5 Duration of the sessions

Each session was scheduled to run from 10am to 4pm. During the period 2007-2010, student support sessions were organised, from 5pm to 7pm on Mondays and Wednesdays. These gave students the opportunity to explore issues on their course and to gain mutual and specific support, enhancing their attainment level and their overall experience of HE study.

3.8.6 Courses

The target group for these sessions was Youth & Community Development (YCD) undergraduate students, within the faculty of Health and Life Sciences, at Riverside University.

3.8.7 Gender

The ratio of participants was 65 per cent women and 35 per cent men.

3.8.8 Ethnicity

There was an equal number of students who were African (40 per cent) and Asian (Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani (40 per cent), 10 per cent African Caribbean and 10 per cent from mixed ethnicity backgrounds.

3.9.1 Field notes

I kept a research diary and documented key points, the atmosphere of the discussion group, my own reflections about what had been said, and notes to assist me during analysis. As Silverman, (2000) argues:

“In making field notes, one is not simply recording data, but also analysing them.”

(Silverman, 2000:126)

My field notes supplied me with contextual data on each student. Heidegger, (1962) asserts that one's existence is influenced by one's past, present and future. Thus, to understand the students' experiences, I required an understanding of their backgrounds. My field notes played a valuable role in providing me with this information. Moreover, the notes helped me during the analysis and interpretation process. They were useful when I attempted to revisit the data several months after I had completed the discussions.

3.9.2 Coding

I discerned the meanings in the various data that was derived from the discussions, coding the data in an open way, after which I carried out progressively-selective coding. To reveal and name the categories, Strauss, (1987) suggests conducting analyses of each line and paragraph of the transcripts in order to find the meaning in the respondents' accounts. The process of open coding included clustering the generated categories into themes. In commencing the coding, I thought carefully about what the passage was saying and what it was about. After constructing this list, I started shaping them into a more efficient system.

3.10.1 The data analysis process

The goal of the analysis was to interpret the meanings shared between the participants as they recounted their lived experiences in HE. Heidegger, (1962) asserted that understanding and interpretation are requisite components of **“being-in-the-world”**. I acknowledge that, as both a researcher and a BEM student, I approached the discussions with the students, the analysis of their words and eventually the development of this thesis in the context of the world. Consequently, I did not try to eliminate the influence of my pre-understanding or commence this study with a totally open mind. My pre-understandings of the experiences of the students coalesced to enrich the subsequent analysis.

The data was analysed using the principles of Gadamer, (1975), some of the ideas of Smith & Osborn's (2003) ideas and my own data analysis method. Guidance offered by Smith was helpful during the data analysis phase, where the outcome is unique because of the fusion of horizons between the researcher's background and the data emerging from the students' discussion (Smith, 2004; Gadamer, 1989). My analysis began during the data collection process. For instance, during discussions, I started to analyse what the students said in order to plan activities and discussion points. The analysis commenced with a process of self-reflection as the preparatory phase of research analysis. This included writing down these reflections for reference during analysis. These assumptions are embedded and essential to interpretative analysis. However, when there is an abundant amount of data, thorough and systematic analysis is needed.

The data analysis method used draws on the choice of methodology and data generation process. At the same time, it should be recognised that there is no single, definitive way to conduct qualitative analysis:

“Qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process and the analysis itself is the interpretative work which the investigator does at each of the stages.”

(Smith & Osborn, 2003:220)

The focus was on preserving the uniqueness of each lived experience and on comprehending its meaning. In phenomenology, meaning is said to be inherent in the text; the researcher’s task is to reveal and understand this meaning, rather than to explain the text. The statements derived from the discussions were sorted into themes. The themes that emerged from this study reflected the students’ experiences of HE and of their world. This approach was appropriate, given the philosophical framework of this study (Gadamer, 1989).

As researchers proceed with the analysis, they find themselves adopting their own method of working. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a framework developed by Jonathan Smith, (2003) developing in-depth descriptions of human experiences. Fade, (2004) stresses that the purpose of IPA is to:

“...attempt as far as possible to gain an insider perspective of the phenomenon being studied, whilst acknowledging that the researcher is the primary analytical instrument. The researcher’s beliefs are not seen as biases to be eliminated, but rather as being necessary for making sense of the experience of other individual.”

(Fade, 2004:648)

In this study, I used some of Smith’s (2003) ideas and adapted these to my way of analysis. IPA is concerned with cognition, or with what participants think or believe about the experience under study. During the analytical process, the researcher therefore tries to define the participants’ thoughts. Smith, (2003) argues that the research exercise is a dynamic process. The researcher tries to enter the participant’s personal world, but this cannot be fully achieved: it depends on – and is complicated by – the researcher’s own pre-conceptions.

Smith, (2003) presents two approaches to IPA. The basic method is the idiographic case study approach suitable for small samples of up to 10 participants. This allows the researcher to describe a single case in great depth and to explore the themes shared between the participants' experiences. The second approach is the theory-building one. This is useful when the desired outcome is a theoretical explanation or the formulation of a model. The aim of this study was to give in-depth descriptive interpretations, so I adopted some steps of the idiographic case study to guide me in the analysis. I looked in detail at material derived from discussion before consolidating the next.

After completing the interpretative analyses of all the material generated from the discussions, a final list of themes emerged. Fade, (2004) argued that the decision of what is included:

“...should not be made on the basis of prevalence, but rather on the ability of the theme to illuminate other themes and on the richness and power of the extracts of data that the themes represent.”

(Fade, 2004:650)

3.10.2 Achieving rigour

Qualitative research is considered by some as a “soft option”, lacking in scientific rigour because of the possibility of researcher bias (Whitehead, 2004). Rigour is clearly considered to be the key for research success, whereby the researcher rather than the reader is responsible for ensuring it (Rolfe, 2006). Moreover, the readers have to decide if the results are credible. The criteria of reflexivity and validity are used in qualitative research to ensure rigor when reviewing literature.

3.10.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity implies self-criticism and self-appraisal, with an understanding of the importance of context in interpretive research. Fade, (2004) views it as an optional tool permitting researchers to acknowledge their interpretative role formally, rather than considering it as an

essential technique to avoid bias. During this study, I documented my journey of collection and interpretation through self-reflection and feedback from my supervisory team and the students who contributed to the study. This opportunity brought both confusion and clarity, expanding my awareness of the various possible interpretations of the experiences offered by the students' interpretations that may be deeper and more expansive than mine.

3.10.4 Validity

Validity is another word for truth (Silverman, 2000). The issue of validity in qualitative research is linked to trustworthiness, which covers credibility, transferability and dependability (Rolfe, 2006). Validity is also about the likelihood of someone else doing this study and making similar discoveries. This study is unique and draws on facets that would be difficult to replicate. The study design drew on the knowledge and experience acquired over many years. Thus, gaining the same or similar findings might necessitate other researchers sharing my identity and political perspective. The research design sought to use an approach that would present new understandings about BEM attainment and experiences in HE. The validity of this study has been maintained by continuing discussion with BEM students and by offering them the opportunity to discuss and comment on the interpretation and analysis of findings.

3.10.5 Credibility

Credibility refers to the truth, value or believe-ability of the findings through prolonged engagement with the data (Krefting, 1991). The fundamental concept of the critical dynamic approach is that there are many meanings of the phenomenon under study. In order to enhance credibility in qualitative research, Moules, (2002) suggests offering the text to other readers who can open the interpretations up further. To ensure credibility in my study, I was aware of the necessity to seek other possible meanings in the data. I discussed my interpretation with participants and my supervisory team, and as the themes emerged, they agreed with my interpretation and analysis of the students' experiences.

Throughout the writing process, I constantly returned to the field and asked questions relative to my interpretation and understanding to gain further comments and to confirm that it accurately reflected the essence of their experience, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness

of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In doing this, I acknowledged that their interpretation of their experiences might differ from mine. To achieve credibility, direct quotes from the discussions were also used to illustrate the themes that reflected the BEM students' experiences.

The interpretative approach has been criticised as being biased toward the researcher's pre-understanding, rather than remaining focused on the participants' lived experience. In order to circumvent researcher contamination, during the BEMSDGs, students were encouraged to talk freely about their experiences; they were encouraged to explore issues they perceived relevant. There were occasions in which the BEM students' descriptions and interpretations of their experiences differed from mine. This was not an unexpected outcome; indeed, it was encouraging as an indication of the extent to which students felt confident in articulating issues as they impacted on them.

In this study, the aim was to interpret the meaning of the experience from the perspective of BEM students. This study sought to reveal what these experiences mean for BEM students and how these experiences differ significantly from those of other people with different backgrounds. This was achieved by interpreting those experiences from the viewpoint of a researcher who was also a BEM student. In qualitative methodology, the researcher's influence is considered as a problem in interpreting the data (Whitehead, 2004).

Researchers must be aware of the potential effect of their personal and social backgrounds. On reflection of the credibility of this study, it would appear that I placed a great deal of emphasis on the views of those outside the experience, indeed far more than I appreciated. The search for transparency is an explanation, a justification of the research strategy, and this explanation is largely a consequence of anticipated rejection or unfavourable critique from within the Academy. It could be argued that many of those external to the experience are ignorant and unaware of the extent to which they base their constructions of reality on the basis of their own mis-education, an education that could locate them in a duplicitous position; a position where they find themselves diametrically-opposed to BEM students or on a collision course as they seek to serve, instruct, or coerce. In this study, some information about my background was given in order to allow readers to judge the study's credibility for themselves.

3.10.6 Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree of similarity between two contexts (Seale, 1999). Koch, (2006) suggests that readers should be provided with sufficient contextual information to make similar judgements possible by others. I did not set out to make this work transferable; it is somewhat debatable whether exactly the same conditions can be replicated. However, I have provided readers with full and clear descriptions of the social contexts of the students, so that they have a sense of their life experiences and can compare them.

3.10.7 Dependability

In qualitative research, the term “dependability” closely corresponds to the notion of reliability in quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003). In the latter, the term “reliability” means that the results of the study can be replicated in identical conditions. The discussion method used in qualitative research makes it difficult to achieve reliability because the researcher’s interpretation plays a role in the results, as do the changing views of participants.

Golafshani, (2003) argues that the issue of reliability has no effect on the value of qualitative research. Within Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, the engagement of the researcher with the data makes interpretation unique. My approach was not to generalise my findings to defined populations. Moreover, my intention was to understand the BEM students’ experiences and the variety of meanings that would enrich our understanding of the phenomena.

This study used the CDP approach, where the researcher was central to every aspect of the study. I therefore acknowledged my historical, cultural and personal background as the study progressed. I was aware of my pre-understanding that enabled me to establish a rapport with the students throughout the research process. My prior knowledge also helped me understand their attitudes, beliefs and cultural values of their experiences. I also valued the students’ ability as self-interpreters. I respected their recollections and reflections on what happened.

3.11.1 Presenting the findings

The concern in the final stage is to move from the key themes to the writing-up process, and to decide how to present the results to readers in a compelling way. Smith, (2003) stressed that there is no division between analysis and writing-up. Analysis continues throughout the process and this is precisely when new issues can emerge. After reflection on the significant words and phrases from the students' idiographic experiences, there was a need to connect these back to the whole experience and look for shared meanings and variations. In this process, I found myself moving between the different phases of activities and discussions with students and identifying themes and sub-themes. My engagement was not a linear process. Understanding the material generated was fragmented and demanded a continual appraisal of the material generated. I continuously read and re-read the texts in order to make sure that I answered these questions according to the BEM students' own experiences as honestly as possible. The answers to these questions allowed me to access deeper levels of understanding and the meanings the BEM students attributed to their experiences. My interpretation began to form and govern the construction of my rigorous CDP account of the data.

Thematic analysis is an interpretative process (Benner, 1994). In this study, themes were constructed and then examined for additional cohesiveness, relationships, and any obviously contradictory viewpoints on the part of the participants. The interpretation of the themes was circular in nature, without beginning or end, and without hierarchy. It is therefore a process of combining vistas, where the researcher is absorbed into the study (Gadamer, 1989). In writing up the findings, I considered the different aspects and the whole equally, exploring the students' experiences, then considering its relationship to the whole and writing some more. This constant reciprocity is typical of the methodology utilised in this study. The ideas have vitality, resonating with other themes which enable the researcher to maintain a dialogue with the text in order to produce new understandings (Gadamer, 1989).

3.12.1 My role as researcher in the research process

Throughout this study, I have struggled with different challenges brought about as a result of differing roles and expectations (Murray, 2010). I considered myself to be part of the BEM students' world (Trede et al, 2008); I am also an academic and acknowledge that as such, I share some responsibility for some of the experiences revealed (Agyeman, 2008). As a researcher, I am expected to adhere to different expectations as a function of my role within

the Academy (Murray, 2010). For example, there were concerns about ethics, proximity to various interest groups who, whilst aware that I was undertaking research, had confided in me (Murray, 2010). I was part of their everyday life – their normal encounters within both the academic and social world (Sallah, 2011). Thus, I would or could have been given access to areas including discussions that others would have been denied (Agyeman, 2008). I was a researcher and ensured that participants were aware of this fact (Kaiser, 2009). I was an academic, an advocate, I was engaged in learning and teaching whilst simultaneously struggling with inequalities.

Managing myself and the range of roles and expectations was not my biggest concern, but rather managing the expectations of others including those (or my perception of those) within the Academy was sometimes challenging, especially when there were overlaps with the roles (Agyeman, 2008). To illustrate this, I will firstly discuss the role I played in this study, including the experiences that led me to consider myself an insider (Hodkinson, 2005), and then reveal how this role influenced my choice of research topic, the purpose of my study, access to participants, the collection, analysis and interpretation of data, and the maintenance of the study's rigour.

During the data collection phase, I sought to provide support at interpersonal, emotional and cognitive levels (Trede et al, 2008). I also sought to understand and interpret what was said and what remained unspoken. Through my own personal experience of being a BEM student, working within the HE environment, I know what it means to be a BEM student. Moreover, my experience of the British education system as a student and as an academic influenced my choice of research topic. Due to my position and location as a BEM student and a BEM academic, undertaking this research designated me with the status of an 'insider' researcher and gave me significant benefits. Kanuha, (2000) maintains that:

“...an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding to a population that may not be accessible to a non-native scientist, questioning about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of a research project are raised.”

(Kanuha, 2000:444)

My access to BEM students willing to talk about their experiences proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. I naively thought that BEM students would want to talk. However, I had underestimated the extent to which students would regard me as part of the Academy, the site in which some of their present struggles was located (Trede et al, 2008). I

was the person who would raise some of the same concerns as my colleagues within the Academy; it might have been difficult for BEM students to dis-align me from my colleagues (Murray, 2010). I was also a paid servant to the Academy, so it was important for me to be cognisant of student apprehensions (Agyeman, 2008).

The invitation to participate had to be genuine, allowing them to choose whether or not they wished to participate (Kaiser, 2009). I had to show that there would not be repercussions for the choices that they made (Murray, 2010). I later realised that some BEM students were reluctant to participate in the dialogue groups because they did not feel safe (Schoder, 2010). They indicated that they had some concerns about the dialogue groups, based on remarks that took place when they mixed with their white peers or some BEM students. Thus, their experiences derived within the wider university context were impacting on their decision to participate in the dialogue groups (Schoder, 2010).

Getting support from colleagues was also difficult; I had to ensure that group meetings were booked on the time-table, scheduling these to enable students to attend on different days of the week. The issue of resistance was a significant theme that became evident as the study progressed (Schoder, 2010). However, I was confident that my ethnicity, sincerity, connection, my cultural and experiential affinity and genuine interest would persuade students to participate (Schoder, 2010). Hodkinson, (2005) noted that differences in ethnicity between researcher and participants can inhibit rapport between them. While specific identity criteria may affect discussions (Agyeman, 2008), he argued that the insider's perception can enhance the quality of interpretation and understanding. The collaborative approach adopted in this research design also facilitated the research (Nind, 2008). In regard to the facilitator, although she was not a member of the BEM community, her credibility and relevance had been checked by the group. If they had been uncomfortable with her role or presence, an alternative arrangement would have been made.

In this study, the BEM students expressed a sense of relief that I was able to connect with their experiences and that I understood and shared many aspects of their background and experiences (Sallah, 2011). During the discussion groups, they freely discussed many cultural issues because they knew or believed that I had a tacit understanding of the issues (Trede et al, 2008); I understood struggle, poverty, and resistance (Sallah, 2011). Breen, (2007) proposes three merits of being an insider in a study group:

the possession of a superior understanding of the group's culture
the ability to interact naturally with the group and its members

an established, and therefore greater, relational intimacy with the group

(Breen, 2007:163)

Hodkinson, (2005) adds that holding some measure of insider status can positively affect interaction with participants, a general willingness to participate in the study, and that trust and co-operation will be extended to the researcher.

Hewitt-Taylor, (2002) states that insider research serves to enable a depth of information that might not be obtainable otherwise, because an outsider would not be offered as wide a range of information. I would argue that even when this information was offered, the 'outsider' would not necessarily comprehend the significance of the data. An 'outsider' researcher may in actual fact unconsciously express disbelief in the accounts given about the experience (Kanuha, 2000), thus inhibiting participants and limiting the researcher because of their own incapacity to understand (Agyeman, 2008). Furthermore, 'outsider' researchers complying with the educational values and criteria that rendered them fit for purpose may prove wholly inadequate and inappropriate when undertaking research with groups that have been 'otherised' by the very processes being applied (Agyeman, 2008). In this study, I felt that my position as an insider gave me a comprehensive understanding of the many issues pertaining to the BEM students' experiences (Sallah, 2011). They freely discussed some intimate aspects of those experiences with me; they may have been reluctant to discuss such intimate issues with a researcher of a different ethnicity (Agyeman, 2008).

There was a necessity to traverse difficulties that demanded insights and skills to enhance the quality of the dialogue groups (Schoder, 2010). Hodkinson, (2005) advises the insider to employ a careful and reflexive approach to avoid such difficulties which may arise during the study. My position as an insider allowed me an initial degree of familiarity that actually presented me with some difficulties in collecting data. There were occasions when I was told about particular experiences that BEM students had with particular members of staff. During these discussions, I could see some hesitation as they wondered what I would do with the information, or whether they could actually trust me with the information, given that I was also a colleague of some of those under discussion. This had the impact of me holding back from probing and adding to the level of discomfort (Schoder, 2010). At such times, I felt that this was more about my own unwillingness to be confronted with something that would require me to take the issue further. At times, I was anxious that students would not disclose major issues of professional conduct that could potentially lead to disciplinary action.

Herwitt-Taylor, (2002) asserts that any kind of research is subject to bias. I was aware that I started the study with my personal pre-understanding. I was aware of and noted my own perception of my position as an academic and a BEM student. This helped me during the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data. I also acknowledged that I shared the same social context as the BEM students, and that I might consequently miss some important aspects of their experiences. Instead of focusing on what I thought was important, I therefore documented all the issues that emerged. I ensured rigour by reflecting the voice of the students in the experience, not by my personal assumptions about the BEM students' experiences (Schoder, 2010).

3.12.2 Personal reflection on my own HE experiences

At the commencement of this study, I felt reasonably confident that I had the skills and knowledge to be able to undertake the research. I was also hesitant, harbouring some self-doubt. Since I had not previously undertaken research at this level, it was difficult to know what it would look or feel like. It was a case of what does one have to do, have to know, and how is this communicated? The communication of the PhD is also a small but highly-significant part of the award process. Indeed, the award is not based solely on the dissertation, but one's ability to have lasted the course, undertaken a viva, to have demonstrated that one has gained a 'mastery' of the subject, and to illustrate that what you have offered is original (Mullins & Margaret, 2002).

Initially, I had a slightly confused understanding of what I thought I was doing. I now realise that other significant people did not and could not fully understand what I was doing, nor even recognise the absurd situation I was in; being in many different spaces, from an academic, to a student, to a researcher and a participant. I would speak about research and my research interest with anyone who would listen. I was very confident when speaking about this, but a lack of confidence was also present. I experienced discomfort and some dissonance, especially when other academics challenged me to be exact or precise about the study and the methodology that was being used to reveal the BEM students' experiences of HE. The Channel 4 **Grand Designs** programme was my salvation as it brought to life many of the anxieties that I was experiencing. It also illustrated the extent to which unconventional approaches are often only appreciated once the design is manifested in the completion of the project.

It is with the advantage of hindsight, reflection, the opportunity to undertake further reading and the many conversations that I have had that I am now able to articulate my slightly confused understanding. For example, I would sometimes use the term “method” when I ought to have been using the term “methodology”, and vice versa. I would sometimes use the term “paradigm”, when in actual fact I meant “method”. I now realise that, like many others, I have used the terms interchangeably. Hence, my inexact understanding and usage of the terms contributed to what I perceived as slow progress in the identification of my research design and my strategy for its implementation. I recall having discussions with my supervisors and whilst they did not determine my research or the direction, I would sometimes sense what was not highly regarded by them and what might have been more credible. I often felt coerced into choosing a methodology that complied with the “safe”, “established” methodologies. Having recently read a paper by Lynne Giddings, (2006), I would argue that for a significant period during the study, I was perhaps regarded as a ‘novice researcher’.

Moreover, following on from Smythe, (2005:248), I was expected to pursue “**ready-made thinking**”. The assumptions that underpinned decision-making reflects a juxtaposition, a confusion in relation to cognitive appreciation and reasoning and, by extension, the expectations and/or actions anticipated following discussion. My sense was that I experienced some discomfort, frustration and vulnerability. During one of my supervision progress reviews (December 2011) I indicated that I felt very much like a boxer who was blind-folded in a boxing ring, fighting against an opponent who could see. I was allowed to explore and develop my own ideas. I also felt that my supervisors had confidence in me and my ability to produce work at the required level.

As I reflect on this aspect of the journey, it is hard to articulate the many emotions bounded in this realisation, the realisation of that which is never said, just expected. I was losing confidence in my own ability and the commitment of those around me, I was being punished by an opponent that I could not see, by rules that were not clearly articulated. As I reflect on the multiple and multifarious emotions, I am given to wonder whether this too is an aspect of “invisibility”, one of the key proponents of CRT (Gillborn, 2006). The reflection and the emotions aroused is at a critical level reminiscent of the notion of the “hidden curriculum”, a function of education in bestowing position (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

This desire to develop another approach was based on a number of influences. These influences were located within experiences that I had, but was not always able to explicate or describe fully. They were based on a belief that there are truths or accounts other than the

renditions of those who sought to provide explanations of BEM students' experiences, based on views held by researchers who did not share the experience and who were largely informed by western ideologies and theories that often derogate and pathologise BEM people (Smith, 1999).

It could be argued that many of these researchers were ignorant and unaware of the extent to which they were basing the constructions of reality on the basis of their own mis-education. These researchers were themselves victims, but remain unaware, and did not have the ability to engage critically in the challenge to emancipate themselves. Alternatively, they elected to remain silent, choosing instead to be accommodated in a deeply restrictive system of structural oppression for what they perceived to be the rewards accrued from their role as researchers and servants within the Academy.

I was influenced by the struggles of BEM people and the Third World, by CRT and by feminist struggles. I was also becoming more aware of critical research theorists, activists and practitioners who sought to use their research endeavour to involve participants, not as objects, but as subjects. These researchers acknowledge that the researched often embody the experiences and also have the capacity to be awakened to a realisation of the collective power they hold (hooks 1994; Smith, 1999; Gillborn, 2006).

My cognisance, my heritage and my intersectionality in terms of race, class, gender (Mirza et al, 2006) and my experiences in education facilitated me. I did not want to be blind to that which was evident throughout the world, but which education has the capacity to obscure. This observation was based on the fact that in human interaction, I observed that people's behaviours are dependent on a range of variables, including the environment. I felt that if we want to capture the "authentic voice" of BEM students, other methods were necessary; the authentic voice of BEM students would not necessarily be found within the university's classroom or laboratory context. In other words, whilst it is possible to gain some useful insights from students within these locations, I held a view that in order to gain rich data that communicates the ontological experience, consideration must be given to creating environments that would facilitate the process. BEM students held views not only about the Academy and what it represents, but also of those who they perceived to be instruments used for or against them.

Thus the BEM students' perceptions of a researcher/academic and their respective position would strongly impact on the process. Gaining access to BEM students' voices required a methodological approach located within principles that underpinned the values associated

with emancipatory or social justice research. This methodological approach was not based on extracting information from participants as in the case of many focus groups, but rather on building confidence, trust and a space where participants in the process recognise their social capital and their role as partners in an enterprise of exploration and change. This was not a “quick-fix”. Rather, it required patience and a willingness to learn from the process. The process had to be one not just determined by the researchers, but a collaboration of groups affected by the outcome of research processes and findings.

During this study, I constantly wished I had chosen a different topic; I often rebuked myself for not choosing something that was more “do-able”. I am reminded of a discussion during a PhD training session in which I was asked about my research focus and why I had chosen it. I replied: **“I am not convinced that I chose it, rather, it chose me”**. I felt conflicted and struggled with many of the contradictions encountered whilst undertaking this study and writing this chapter. I was of the understanding that innovation and originality were part of the criteria for PhD. Giddings, (2006) concurs with Smthye, (2005), suggesting that **“students learn that methodologies from certain paradigms hold more value”** (Giddings, 2006: 199).

I will use an analogy of swimming to illustrate my point. I am not a strong swimmer. I love swimming, but I lack the confidence in my ability. The reflection on this experience has caused me to explore the notion of the “hidden curriculum” and “invisibility” further, and this raised a number of other related issues. Imagine a young person who appears to observers to be swimming and having fun in the water. But beneath the surface, the young person is trapped and struggling. Interpretation is based on many factors, but most pertinent is the visible and the cultural or ‘common sense’ conclusion that one is able to reconcile for themselves and the knowledge that they may be required to explain or rationalise their decision to others. Another possibility in relation to the behaviour of the young person is one of struggling; the loss of confidence is manifested in anxiety, whereby the young person attempts to draw attention to the below-the-surface situation. This possibility has already been dismissed by spectators. The young person goes through many processes and somehow extricates himself from the desperate situation. In the process, he loses confidence, not just in his own ability, but also in the ability of those around him. The young person is left feeling isolated, ashamed and unable to talk to others about the experience because he does not expect anyone to believe his account. The onus has been placed on the young person to explain the behaviour of others and also to find evidence to support the argument.

This scenario was used, not only to draw a parallel with the multifarious experiences and emotions encountered during this study, but also to illustrate aspects of the BEM students' experiences in UK HE. There are many people drowning in our classrooms whilst others look on. This was my experience and I felt that it was reinforced on many occasions. I maintained some resistance until during a particular moment of crisis, I reasoned that perhaps I should be more pragmatic.

3.12.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed the methods used in this study, including recruitment of the BEM students, discussion groups, data analysis, achieving rigour and ethical issues. I have also described how the methods I used are in accordance with the context of an approach adapted to facilitate the exploration and analysis of BEM students experiences. In the following two chapters, I will present the findings and analysis of this study. This chapter has shown the relevance of the CDP approach in exploring BEM students' experiences in higher education. It has discussed the philosophical and methodological influences in the process of finding a methodology that would facilitate the articulation of these experiences. It concluded that the CDP approach was the most appropriate one with which to reveal the meanings BEM students ascribed to their situations. As indicated above, I struggled initially to be exact or precise about the study and the methodology that was being used. On reflection, this struggle has contributed to the decision to employ CDP as an approach to analyse the BEM students' experiences. It occurs to me that the aspects of time, space and language are integral to the struggle in explication of the methodology, research design, findings and analysis. This argument is articulated as a realisation that, on reflection, the concept of being exact is problematic since, according to philosophers such as Derrida, (1968), we find ourselves giving explanations of phenomena that are often illusionary.

I have sought to reveal to the reader the feelings, responses and interpretations of BEM students' experiences. In the following chapters, I present and discuss the key findings that have emerged and the implications for the three major stake-holder constituencies of practice. The original contribution the thesis makes to that body of work is outlined. The identified themes present a contextual background to the essence of the phenomenon, revealing the meaning of the students' experiences.

Part 2

Introduction to Findings and Discussion

“The presentation of truth in new forms provokes resistance, confounding those committed to accepted measures for determining the quality and validity of statements made and conclusions reached, and making it difficult for them to respond and judge what is acceptable.”

(Bell, 1980:143)

3.13.1 Introduction

Throughout the research process, an intimate relationship between BEM students, the researcher's interpretation, the research supervisors and the data was maintained. The rigour of the study was preserved by continuously revisiting the material produced in the BEM students' dialogue groups, both during the analysis and writing of the following chapters. This study is underpinned by Critical Race Theory (hereafter CRT); Gillborn, (2006) argued that CRT offers a genuinely-radical and coherent set of approaches which could revitalise critical research in education across a range of enquiries.

A realisation that institutional legitimacy is conferred by others (Bourdieu, 1990) influenced the decision to use a radical theoretical framework such as CRT to explore or analyse HE institutions' negligence (Sanchez & Fried, 1997; Back, 2004; Picower, 2009). A CRT analysis would pose different questions aimed at drawing attention to the implicit and explicit ways that privilege works to reinforce and reproduce particular outcomes.

Gillborn, (2006:27) - a key proponent of CRT - argues that an understanding of the current patterns of exclusion and oppression in educational studies demands that racism be placed at the centre of analyses. Thus, this study used CRT to undertake a critical analysis of actions and outcomes to illustrate the intersectionality and the range of complex variables which affect educational outcomes for many students, especially those from racialised backgrounds. These chapters discuss the results of the study by comparing and contrasting these findings with the existing body of literature.

3.13.2 Overview of Findings

As they stand, the findings of this research present a mixed picture; a picture which resonates with previous findings about racism in education (Powney, 2003; Back, 2004; Crace, 2004; Gulam, 2004; Chesler et al, 2005; Dyer, 2007). The discussion in the following chapters conscientiously drew on the work of others, seeking and gaining inspiration (Crenshaw et al, 1995:xiv). By drawing extensively on the narratives of BEM students, the study used the CRT lens to challenge the traditional claims of race neutrality in the education system (Yosso et al, 2001:91). CRT has been used to challenge the dominant discourse on race and racism as it relates to education by examining how educational theory and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups. There are also benefits offered to the three major stake-holder constituencies of practice in the form of the students' suggestions in bringing about an engagement of difference; one that challenges some of the ideological pre-suppositions and conventional ways that policy and practice subvert attempts by BEM communities and students in their struggle against discrimination.

The identified themes emerged through discussion with participants during the dialogue groups and also during the writing of the thesis. The themes were identified through a process of looking for patterns and then exploring the themes in relation to the significance thus ascribed by the BEM students. The seven key themes which emerged are:

'Discrimination'
'Positionality'
'Desire for safe space'
'Consciousisation'
'Learning contracts'
'Radical curriculum'
'Peer Support & Mentoring System' (PSMS)

The emergent key themes which impinge on the experience of BEM students in HE will be discussed in turn, with the implications presented in the final chapter. The themes reflected the experience of being members of groups who experience multiple oppressions in the UK. Collins, (2000a) used the concept of intersectionality and the matrix of domination to illustrate how:

"...systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organisation, which shape black women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by black women."

(Collins, 2000a: 299)

Thus, in a similar manner, BEM students had to navigate within a system where dominant groups, or groups invested with power and authority construct, deconstruct, situate and marginalise groups to their own advantage. Most of the BEMSDG meetings began with members randomly engaged in discussions (Krueger, 2002). These discussions were not directed, but they were extended or elaborated by the input of others as they joined the group (Krueger, 2002). The EF observed that:

"Conversations arose informally over lunch, or as we were packing up at the end of the day and participants approached me to talk about some of the difficulties they were experiencing."

(Cole, BEMSDG, 2009)

The themes present a contextual background to the essence of the phenomenon. Through dialogue, the participants revealed both the essence and significance of their experience.

Many of the themes emerging from this study intersected and some were nuanced. In order to illustrate the significance of these emergent themes, they were conceptualised as a Lernaean Hydra - an ancient, mythical serpent, with many heads. For each head cut off it grew two more. It had poisonous breath and blood so virulent that even its tracks were deadly. The Hydra was guardian to the Underworld.



The key themes and the concepts on which the participants drew to give them substance are, in essence, a complex and dishevelled form of micro-aggression manifested as discrimination and abuses of power. The discussion groups became a catalyst that facilitated and supported BEM students in exploring and bringing to the surface how discrimination had acquired a momentum that penetrated all of the key themes and which had variable impact on the experiences of BEM students in HE.

Chapter 4: Discrimination

Chapters one and two explored the nature of discrimination in HE and its impact on BEM students. These chapters set out the study's context and its impetus: whilst some commentators were prepared to explore the impact of discrimination (Humphries, 1988; Bird, 1995; Back, 2004; Wright, 2007; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009; NUS, 2011; Pilkington, 2012) others were circumspect, regarding the issue as complex (Osler, 1999; Richardson, 2010).

This study focuses holistically on the experiences of BEM students in HE in an attempt to gain an enhanced understanding of their subjective strategies adopted or suggested for change. The study used CRT and Intersectionality to uniquely discourses what it means to be members of groups who experience multiple oppressions in society (Collins, 2000a). It reveals the emotional damage invoked on such groups when they realise that HE is penetrated with discrimination, residing on a canvas that permits and engages explicitly and implicitly in oppressive and discriminatory practice (Young, 1990; Cudd, 2005; Thompson, 2006; Pilkington, 2012).

The literature review had identified a number of persistent themes; there was, for example, some acknowledgement that the disparity in degree attainment is linked to ethnicity and gender, but explanations for this disparity remain complex (Osler, 1999). Richardson, (2010) notes that:

“One reason for this attainment gap is that ethnic minority students tend to enter UK higher education with lower entry qualifications than white students. ... even when the effects of variations in entry qualifications and other demographic and institutional variables have been statistically controlled, white students are still more likely to obtain good degrees than are students from other ethnic groups.”

(Richardson, 2010)

The researcher was cognisant of explanations about BEM students' experiences in HE. The themes identified from the literature as part of the explanations formed part of the context, background and design of the research. The eight themes identified from the literature review were as follows:

- 1 State policy and rhetoric [SPR]

- 2 Education and legacy [EL]
- 3 Cultural impediments [CI]
- 4 The Equation (More BEMs means lower standards) [E <BEM=>LS]
- 5 HE inertia and resources [HEIR]
- 6 Cultural competence/intelligence [CC/I]
- 7 Institutionalism – Oppression, Discrimination, Racism, Collusion and Stereotypes [IOD.]
- 8 The necessity to ‘create spaces’. [CS]

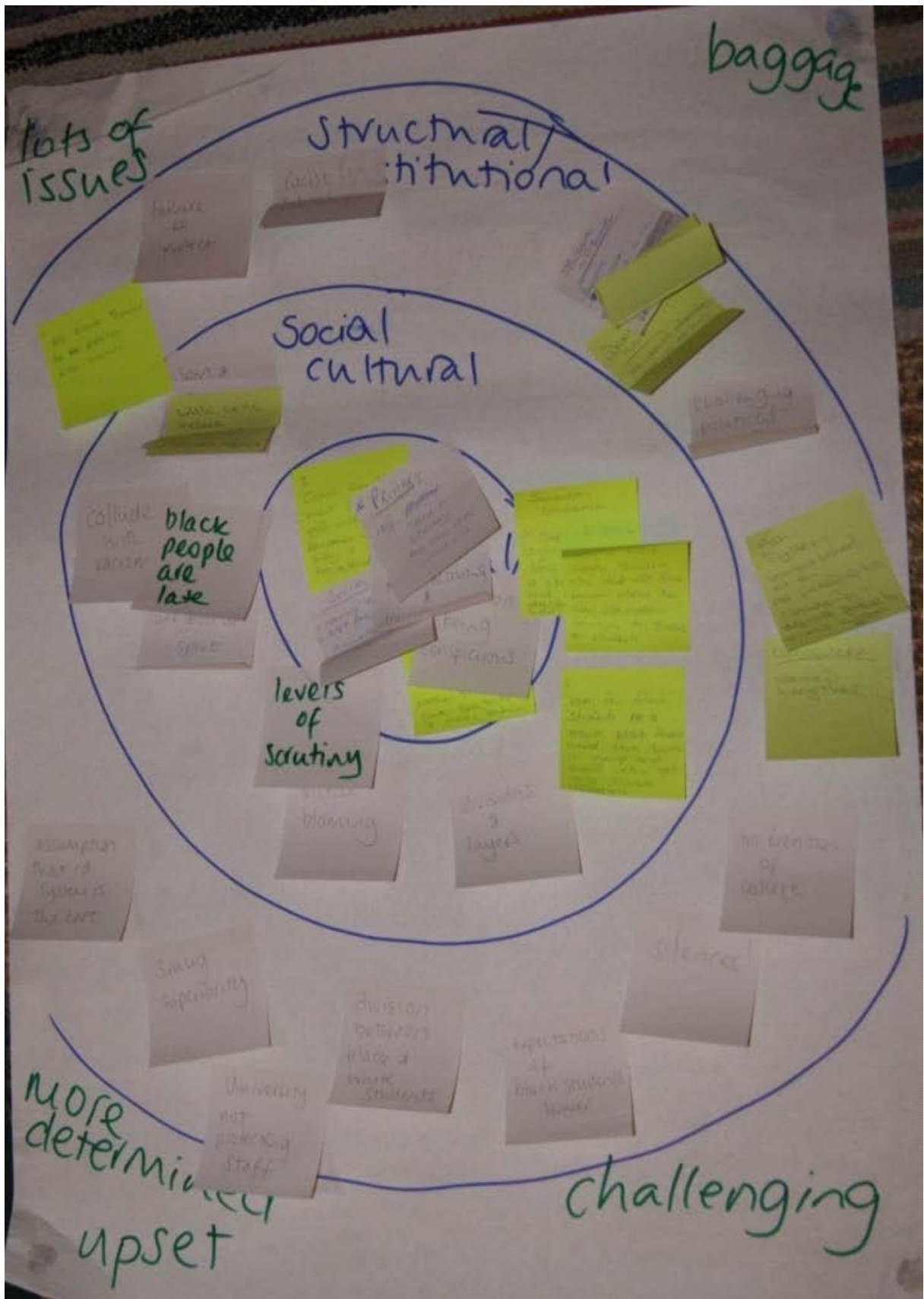
4.1 BEMs’ experience of education

The research strategy and the data collection process (Chapter three: 116 -129) discusses the data collection and rationalisation for the approach adopted. The section on dialogue groups is also included, illustrating that the group activity approach is consistent with the theoretical perspective adapted for this study.

During the first discussion group meeting, BEM students were given Post-it® notes and asked to reflect on their experiences at primary, secondary and tertiary education levels, using key words or phrases. In the discussion that followed this activity, it became apparent that there were similar themes at all levels of their educational experience. Following discussion, the Post-it® notes were put on a flip chart. Discriminatory themes were identified at all of Thompson’s (2006) PCS levels. The statements made here (**see Fig.4.1**) recurred throughout the discussion groups. One of the first themes to emerge was that of discrimination (see Appendix: E). It had pervaded a whole educational career and seemed to be no visible or experiential challenge to the expectations, responses or stereotypes embedded in educational institutions.

This study is underpinned by Critical Race Theory (Gloria Ladson-Billings & William Tate’s 1995). CRT was used in this study to analyse the trajectories between race and education. The fluidity of CRT was important because the intersections of race, and the dynamic nature of racism and prejudice that are embedded in society and social institutions such as HEIs are exposed (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw 1988; Delgado, 1989; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993; Gillborn, 2006). This study has also made use of Thompson’s (2006) PCS model to enable BEM students to critically explore their experiences.

Figure 4.1: Thompson's (2006) Personal, Cultural, Structural (PCS) Levels



Thompson, (2006) argued that to understand discrimination, it was necessary to gain a comprehension of how discrimination is developed and maintained at various social levels. These included personal interactions between individuals and groups (P); Thompson argued that these interactions are also embedded within the culture of society (C) and that they are often sanctioned at the structural level (S), in terms of policies and legislation. The operationalisation of such policies and legislation can shape practices, which can in turn adversely impact on particular social groups. Whilst it is accepted that Thompson's attempt to provide a theoretical framework for the recognition and analysis of discrimination is limited; many of the students participating were familiar with the PCS model from their courses and could therefore apply it to their own experiences.

The next phase of analysis was an attempt to transpose and overlay Thompson's (2006) respective PCS levels to acquire a better understanding of the impact that the relationships between BEM students, their white peers and academics were having on BEM students in HE (See Appendix F: Fig 4.2.2). They felt:

“Picked on by teachers and noticed for negative reasons (assumptions of regular lateness, mistakes, under-achievement)” (P)

“High levels of scrutiny of Black students in negative ways” (C)

“Understanding of Black students sticking together as troublesome, problematic and potentially threatening” (C)

(BEMSDG, 2007)

As discussed above at Thompson's (2006) 'personal' (P) level, BEM students spoke of their concerns of being **“picked on for negative reasons”**. These concerns were articulated at 'cultural' (C) level and expressed in terms of **“high levels of scrutiny for negative reasons”**. It is reasonable to conclude that the basis of being picked on and the **“high level of scrutiny”** were based on stereotypes of BEM people, or a lack of understanding, culminating in **‘understanding of Black students sticking together as troublesome, problematic and potentially threatening’**.

Following discussion and exploration of the issues raised about their experiences in education, the BEM students collectively expressed that there was a **“sense of lots of issues,”** and they were **“not clear where to start”**. They also indicated a strong sense of carrying **“a lot of baggage”**, **“sometimes a lifetime's worth”**, and they were also upset at

“how systemic it is and how hard it has been to survive within the system”. BEM students provided many examples in which they felt that their sense of isolation and belonging was compounded by the actions of their peers and academics. For example, as **Fig 4.2.2** (Appendix F), shows, they spoke about:

“Picked on by other students and treated as ‘different’” (P)

“Failure to protect Black students from playground and peer racism” (C)

“Collusion through non-intervention” (C)

“Assumption that racism is Black people’s problem and so dissociating white authority from responsibility” (S)

“Blaming of victims (holding Black students responsible for fights and for their own safety)” (C)

“Not intervening to help integrate groups or encourage white students to consider the impact of their behaviours and attitudes” (C)

“Systemic failures to protect Black students and teachers from racism (including language)” (S)

“Collusion with racist behaviour towards Black staff by white students” (S)

“Acceptance of and collusion with divisions between Black and white students” (S)

“Lack of protection in schools and university for Black teachers and lecturers experiencing racism” (S)

“Lack of support for politicised staff and students (described as ‘too passionate’, or understood as ‘difficult’)” (S)

(BEMSDG, 2007)

BEM students wanted their differences to be recognised. However, they did not want their differences to be a source for unfavourable treatment. It could be argued that at a “personal”, level, BEM students were sufficiently confident in managing the day-to-day skirmishes, the venomous hate-riven assaults and even the vociferous “micro-attacks” that formed part of their everyday experience on and off campus (Picower, 2009).

To summarise, **Figs 4.2.2 (Appendix F); 4.2.3 (Appendix G); 4.2.4 (Appendix H); 4.3 (Appendix I) and Appendix E: Figure 4.2.1** provide further examples of how BEM students believed they were discriminated against. **Fig 4.3 (Appendix I)** illustrates some of the responses from the discussion about BEM students’ experiences. These have been aligned to themes from the literature review. It is evident from these responses that BEM students were reflecting on their past educational experiences such as **“Failure to protect Black**

students from playground and peer racism” (C) to help them make sense of their present experiences in HE. As a consequence of previous experiences, BEM students did not anticipate protection from tutors.

In **Fig 4.2.1**, (Appendix: F) it can be seen that there was a clear intersection between the themes and how they impact on BEM students. Whilst some themes are mentioned specifically, others, such as **“state policy and rhetoric”**, were not explicitly referred to; thus, it could be assumed that these were not significant in terms of impact, or it could be that students may have been unaware of or might not have thought about how state policies and rhetoric had impacted on their experiences. After collating and discussing the data on the flip chart and Post-it® notes, themes were aligned to those emerging from the literature review. Each theme was ranked in terms of how many times the students made a reference to it. **Fig 4.4** is a graphic illustration of these results. **“Significant”** in this context is both positive and negative. For example, from the perspective of students, **“cultural impediments”** were not regarded as high on the significant scale, yet this is often discussed within the literature as an important aspect of why BEM students **“underachieve”** or **“drop out”** of HE (Cropper, 2000; Yorke & Thomas, 2003; Quinn et al 2005; Tinto, 2006). At an individual level (P), students spoke of:

“...being isolated and feeling conspicuous in negative ways, (a) sense of needing to ‘fit in’ to something that was not negotiable...despite my desire to succeed or potential to learn, there was always a battle for me to be recognised and I always felt like I fell short because of my inability to be like my peers.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

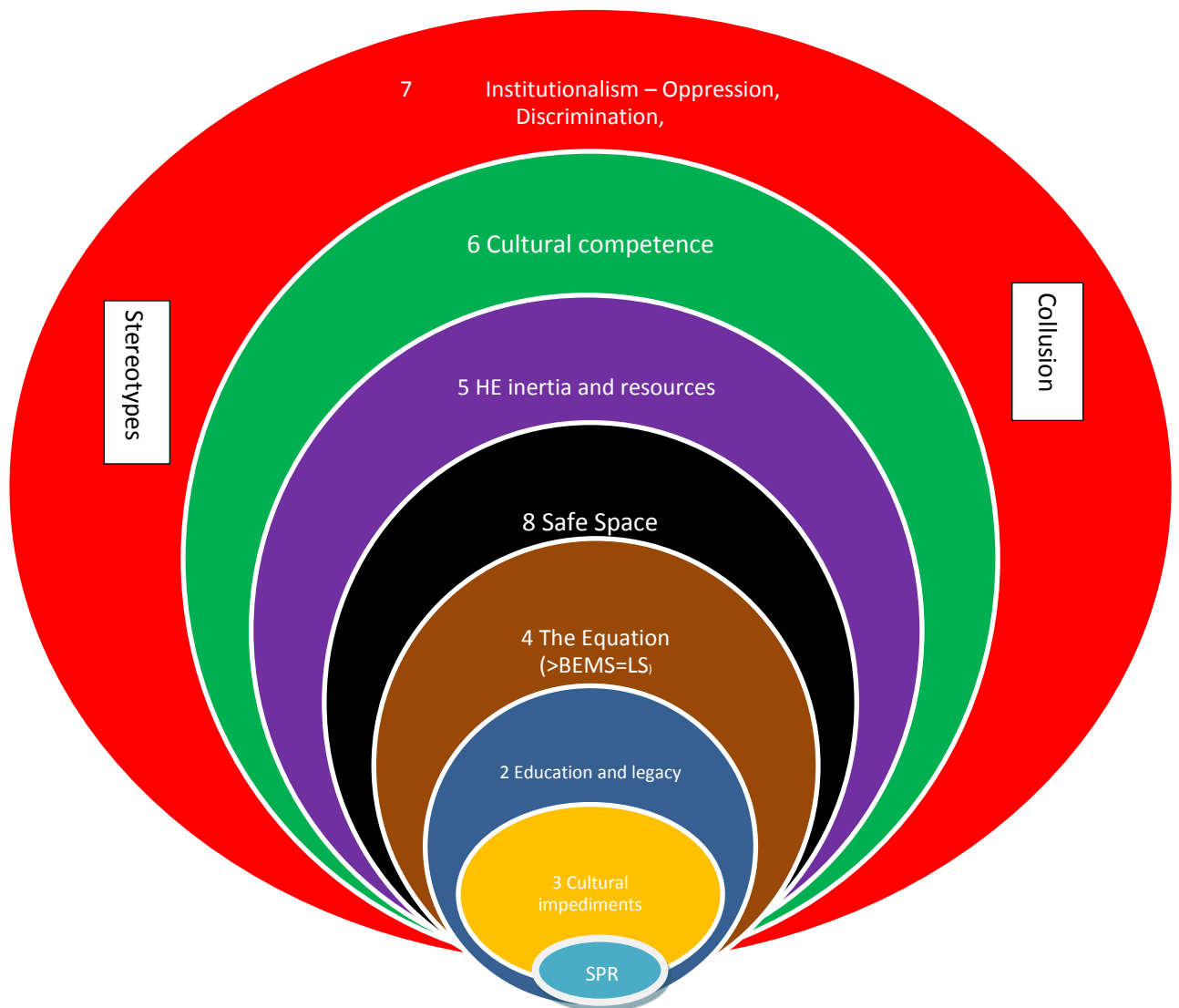
BEM students struggled and felt let down by academics and the Academy, calling it **“Collusion through non-intervention”**. BEM students talked about how the efforts they made to avoid conflict or to protect themselves were often misunderstood. Their sense of disappointment is encapsulated in a perception that at both Thompson’s (2006) “cultural” and “structural” level, BEM students perceived that their white peers and academics held an **“assumption that racism is Black people’s problem and so dissociating white authority from responsibility”**. Such an assumption would go some way towards explaining why it was plausible for **“blaming of victims (holding Black students responsible for fights and for their own safety)”**. The harsh realities of racism are potentially excused in preference to tackling or responding to the immediate manifestations.

Taking restorative or preventative action is easier to rationalise than taking action based on the perceptions of discrimination from groups that have been demonised or marginalised, especially when the propensity is to disbelieve rather than believe such groups. Thus, when in the face of the failure to protect them, BEM students' retaliation leads to them being punished for what is deemed as **“taking the law into their own hands”**.

Not only was there a failure to protect BEM students, it was also perceived that there were **“systemic failures to protect Black students and teachers from racism (including language)”**, (S); **“collusion with racist behaviour towards Black staff by white students”**, (S); **“acceptance of and collusion with divisions between Black and white students”**, (S); **“not intervening to help integrate groups or encourage white students to consider the impact of their behaviours and attitudes”**, (C); **“lack of protection in schools and university for Black teachers and lecturers experiencing racism”**, (S); **“lack of support for politicised staff and students (described as ‘too passionate’, or understood as ‘difficult’)”**, (S) (BEMSDG, 2007). The remainder of the thesis examines these issues in more detail, namely that discrimination permeated the BEM student experience in HE. This finding equates with findings from other research (Powney, 2003; Back, 2004; Crace, 2004; Gulam, 2004; Chesler et al, 2005; Dyer, 2007). Within this study, many accounts were provided, illustrating the anxiety and alienation that some BEM students experienced whilst navigating through HE. The themes of positionality and collusion were amplified at every stage of the PCS level.

4.2 How does it feel when we look at all experiences in one place?

Figure 4.4: Process of Marginalisation



In **Fig. 4.4**, the **Process of Marginalisation model** (Howson, 2011) was used to illustrate the perceived location of BEM students within the Academy. It revealed many intersecting factors and prominent established themes, such as discrimination and cultural impediments. There were also some emerging nuanced themes which provided a further degree of confusion and complexity when discussing the BEM students' experiences in HE. For example, in relation to the discussion about discrimination, it was found that participants placed different emphasis on what supported or hindered them. Whilst some themes are mentioned specifically, others, such as **“state policy and rhetoric”** were not mentioned at all, as seen previously in **Fig 2.2**. Therefore, perhaps **“state policy and rhetoric”** did not have a major impact on the BEM students experience in relation to attainment, retention and progression. However, many of the other themes acknowledged as impacting on the BEM student experience took their authority from **“state policy and rhetoric”**. This point is illustrated by consideration of two key policies that have impacted significantly on BEM students.

The first of these policies concerns the much-debated “WP” agenda, promoted under the Labour Party, but originally created in the early 1990s under the Conservative government. In essence, the policy was aimed at increasing the number of “non-traditional” students in HE. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), (2012) notes that:

“Widening participation as a broad expression that covers many aspects of participation in HE, including fair access and social mobility...It is a central part of our strategy that all those with the potential to benefit from successful participation in higher education should have the opportunity to do so”.

(HEFCE, 2012)

The HEFCE has stated that WP is one of their ‘key priorities’ and that one of their current aims is **“ensuring that social background does not inhibit access to, and success within, HE”**. They note that WP:

“...relates to the whole 'life cycle' of a student in HE. This covers pre-entry, through admission, study support and successful completion at undergraduate level, to progress on to further study or employment.”

(HEFCE, Online, 2012)

The second of these policies concerns HE, requiring students to find on average £9,000 for fees alone. It has been estimated that the typical student will leave HE with debts between £27k and £45k (Gallagher 2012; Marszal, 2012). This prospect is a deterrent, especially when students doubt that they will find the employment opportunities to pay for these. During the discussion groups, this was raised as a concern by many of the BEM students. The facilitator also expressed grave concern by saying there was a necessity to appreciate the significance of this in terms of how debt, resources and access to resource are understood. Cole, (2012) noted that:

“For middle-class students with resources and guarantees behind them, it’s understood as ‘credit’ – if they have debts at all – because they have the social and economic collateral to protect them. For working-class and ‘disadvantaged’ students, debt means fear of the knock at the door, humiliation, someone else having control over your life and decisions, being under surveillance on your spending and the constant slightly sickly feeling of being not in control and having to have your excuses/reasons ready this is not at all recognised in discussions about funding and fees and even more so now that there really aren’t jobs for graduates.”

(Cole, 2012)

The current funding structure for HE has an adverse impact and negates WP policy. Indeed, the HEFCE’s (2012) own impact assessment noted:

“We have identified possible risks to black and minority ethnic (BME) students ... and students from neighbourhoods where participation in HE has traditionally been low.”

(HEFCE, Online, 2012)

The two policies highlighted above are provided as examples of how policy and rhetoric combine and work in a manner that alienates many expected to benefit from the policy (students and wider society), or those expected to implement it (the Academy). In essence, the eight themes initially identified in the literature review become the focus as a means of illustrating how important it is to start from a canvas that facilitates the painter in creating a picture that relates to the model. In terms of HE, what has been achieved is remarkable, but at a cost to BEM and female students, especially those who have been disadvantaged by numerous factors. Thus, the result of increased participation is not WP across the board, but

the slightly-less-bright children of the middle classes entering HE. Thus, the demographics of inequality of those who enter and progress in HE are maintained (Cole, 2012).

Moreover, even potential supporters within the Academy have resisted some of the ways in which the state has approached the transformation of HE; their resistance is partly illustrated by the following themes, followed by related anecdotes from staff: “HE inertia (resistance) and resources” (“**changes could happen but it is likely to take a long time – not in my life time and it would take considerable resources and these have not been made available**”); “education and legacy” (“**we do the best we can, but previous educational outcomes are affecting the student engagement**”); “the Equation” (“**more BEMs means lower standards**”)’ (“**if the standards were lowered so that they can get in, it is reasonable to expect deferential degree classification**”). This is also based on an assumption that standards need to be ‘lowered’ – not that some of the standards are irrelevant and/or exclusive and elitist. It will require monitoring to gauge the significance of this theme in the current climate, where many HE institutions have increased their UCAS tariffs, making it harder for some WP students to gain access to HE. It also creates a tension for institutions with a historical commitment to women and BEM groups which are now being condemned for this.

Thus, even with good intentions, it has become harder for some pro-WP HE institutions to support it, especially around funding. From the perspective of students, “**cultural impediments**” was not regarded as high on the significance scale, yet this is often discussed within the literature as an important aspect of why BEM students under-achieve or drop out of higher education. When this is not discussed as “**cultural impediments**” or “**cultural deficit**”, it is often discussed as cultural capital, suggesting that students from BEM backgrounds are said to be lacking in the cultural capital of the Academy, thus rendering them at a disadvantage when it comes to competing with others who are well-endowed with cultural capital. Academic and professional staff often presented themselves as impotent in addressing many of the issues that impacted on BEM students. Thus, in this scenario, BEM students are confounded by the arguments presented that subvert their efforts of getting institutions and individuals to take responsibility for the negative experiences they endure. In other words, BEM students must manage their course while and also managing issues beyond it. The extent to which students were able to ‘shield’ themselves as they navigated or negotiated their way through HE informed how they reflected on or what they chose to articulate as the most salient aspects of their experiences in HE.

The reflection on discrimination at the structural level brought into focus the systematic nature of racism. Here, students reflected on some of the stories which suggested that the British education system was superior to other educational systems; that the content of the Euro-centric curriculum was prized above other non-UK institutions. It was perceived by some of the students that non-UK institutions had very little to contribute, which could be related to discourse, imposition and perpetuation of ideas of white supremacy. The BEM students felt that there was a general lack of respect for them, as per the removal or defacing of displays and acknowledgements of Black achievements. Equally, the curriculum content often did not reflect Black history and experience, while obscuring white domination.

The BEM students talked about what they regarded as institutionally-sanctioned bullying that was linked to an assumption that racism is Black people's problem, thus dissociating white authority from responsibility. Discrimination at the structural level is reinforced in relation to what is perceived as a lack of protection in schools and university for Black teachers and lecturers. Racism was normalised and often reflected in what appeared to be the acceptance of and collusion with divisions between BEM and white students. There were many examples in which BEM students spoke about their experiences:

“There were very few black teachers and lecturers; systemic failures to protect black students and teachers from racism (including language); lack of support for ‘race-conscious’, politicised staff and students (described as ‘too passionate’, or understood as ‘difficult’); collusion with racist behaviour towards black staff by white students.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

And:

“He clearly had his favourites and treated those like me as nuisances, despite us being the most eager to learn.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

Equally:

“I had very negative experiences from being a student, especially coming from a BME background. My form teacher was very prim and proper, very religious and white. She

did not get me or even try to get to understand some of the challenges I was faced with as a young person from a BME background.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

These views contrasted with the dismissive way some white academics and students said that they “**did not see colour**”, that ‘race’ was not significant in their interactions, or that those who saw ‘race’ as significant were causing a problem. There is an inherent discomfort within professional vocations, where any association with the charge of discrimination can be damaging in relation to the image that they seek to foster (Raban, 2011; Anyangwe, 2012; Brennan, 2012; van der Velden, 2012). Thus, one can appreciate why the Academy would seek alternative explanations for the BEM students’ experiences. Back, (2004) has argued that: “**universities are both value-ridden and value-seeking’ and that ‘there is a deep resistance in the academy to reckon with ... the sheer weight of whiteness” (2004:1).** Picower, (2009) found that some teachers in his research relied on a set of 'tools of whiteness', designed to protect and maintain dominant and stereotypical understandings of race. However, the findings from this present study provide significant suggestions of struggle and resistance. BEM students often perceived themselves as struggling with their white peers, with academics and a system of education that is based largely on reinforcing social positions in society. HE both embodies and reflects wider society:

“She also had a preference - we black students were reprimanded consistently, despite the fact that we participated more and did well.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

The differentiated experiences were brought into focus when, during the discussion groups, some students who had experienced education in other countries compared these experiences. Some participants identified a wide difference between their experiences of education in the UK and in Jamaica, Zimbabwe, and Brazil, for example:

“... one of my tutors made some comments that I don’t like. These comments are like personal, they are talking about the way I write, you know the way I express myself, it’s about my work and it is personal. It’s how we talk – we are straight people, to the point. It was crushing, especially if I was a weak person.”

(BEMSDG, 2008)

The difference was almost wholly negative within UK institutions, highlighting the degree of institutional racism embedded within UK educational systems. BEM students compared practices where, outside of the UK, they had not attached an overt racial significance to their experiences, yet with their current experiences in the UK, they were left with a conundrum of whether 'race' was indeed a factor in the negative outcomes in HE. However, further analysis suggests that some BEM students did indeed attach a racial significance as accounting for what they perceived an almost wholly-negative experience within UK education institutions. This would suggest that where the students and staff shared characteristics, values, aspirations, culture, ethnicity, gender and class, there was a greater likelihood that they would interpret the actions of the teacher as working in the interest of those in close proximity (Kahan, 2012; Freeman et al, 2011). Thus, BEM students within their own countries may not appreciate the significance of having a majority of Black teachers working with them. It is likely that in these scenarios, some would even favour the presence of some white teachers, since they are perceived as less strict.

The converse of this argument might also explain why there was a racial significance attached to the negative experiences in the UK. It is evident from this discussion that BEM students were indeed racialised and that they had attached a racial significance to their experience, whether from experiences within the UK or elsewhere. This awareness or perception is reflected in the following comment which is reflective of the views articulated in many of the discussion groups: **"I don't want to open up the 'race' card, but I feel I have been discriminated against"**(BEMSDG, 2008). As a response to this comment, Cole, (BEMSDG, 2008) noted that: **"the 'race' card expression is used by dominant groups when they don't want to listen"**. This observation is an aspect of an intersection between cultural competence and white privilege. The cultural norms and values inherent in practice work within a context that is localised and simultaneously derived from a wider perception of the relative position between Black and White people globally (Fanon, 1991).

These were recurring themes that permeated all of the other themes in both the literature review and additional material gathered. This study found that BEM students were disappointed in the systemic nature of discrimination. As a consequence of their experiences, some lost confidence in themselves, and significantly, in the academics from whom they expected support. The participating BEM students gave accounts in which they spoke of feeling marginalised, and how some tutors often regularly gave the impression that they did not believe their stories in relation to difficulties or exceptional work (NUS, 2011). The finding of discrimination permeating the whole of the education experience and its

impact is important because it also illustrates the extent to which BEM students can feel overwhelmed with the amount of issues confronting them. Some of the students referred to it as **“the burden a dominant group does not have to carry” (BEMSDG, 2008).**

The BEM students felt that many academic and professional staff employed in these institutions continue with unacceptable practices that often go unchallenged (Rangasamy, 2004; Back, 2004; Crace, 2004; Chesler et al, 2005). Moreover, rather than accept the charge of racism (Back, 2004; Crace, 2004), policy-makers, academics, researchers and even students prefer to absolve themselves of any responsibility (Rangasamy, 2004; Back, 2004; Crace, 2004; Gulam, 2004; Chesler et al, 2005). They do so by colluding and denigrating the BEM communities by suggesting that it is their pathological culture that gives rise to the early termination of their courses and differential degree attainment (Chesler et al, 2005). As National Union of Teachers (NUT) Secretary Nigel De Gruchy commented in an article on the BBC website entitled **“Schools ‘failing ethnic minorities”:**

“(it is)...unhelpful to have foolish charges levelled by individuals who are keen to catch the flavour of the month. No progress will be made unless this persistent culture of blame is abandoned.”

(Nigel De Gruchy, BBC News Online, 1999)

In the same article, The leader of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), David Hart, said:

“...such unfounded allegations make no positive contribution to solving a long-standing and highly-complex situation.”

(David Hart, BBC News Online,1999)

Both men are union representatives, expected to represent the views of their membership. The existence and form of inequality is acknowledged, especially when it relates to discussions about social class, but discourse about its persistence and the identification of those who should be held to account for historical and current atrocities often meet with opposition. Attempts to engage in a discourse about racism at a range of levels are often met with resistance. Moreover, it is within these debates where those who may not have previously acknowledged the extent of their own deep-seated racism are challenged. Gulam, (2004) argued that:

“...a pattern of institutionalised and inequitable treatment, a racialised pattern, can be discerned across the whole HE continuum...one is moved to conclude that accusations of institutional racism in the HE sector are valid.”

(Gulam, 2004:8-9)

However, the dominant view is otherwise, that the majority of white staff and key decision-makers in the sector would reject the contention of institutional racism (Pilkington, 2012). Some of the BEM students sought plausible explanations for the behaviour of white students and also of academics, suggesting that many of those who behave in ways that were considered objectionable did so out of ignorance. Ignorance is often advanced as explanation or rationalisation for discriminatory behaviour:

“We need unity, they are ignorant; they don’t mean it.”

(BEMSDG, 2007)

However, within structural oppression, the actions of the oppressor and servants of the oppressor are not entirely based on ignorance. Rather, the interaction is based on a desire to fulfil the wishes of their principal for fear of losing favour. Within the context of key stakeholders, there is a clear struggle manifesting itself in terms of position, needs and interest (Carmichael, 1967; Rangasamy, 2004). There is something quite instinctive about submission and domination; much has been written about internalised oppression, (Barn, in Humphries & Truman, 1994) and the capitulation by the oppressed (Abdilahi Bulhan, 1979; South African History, Online, 1984; Sutherland, 1989; Moore, 2000). But there is significant evidence to show that those who continue the struggle are men, women and children who seek justice and transformation, rather than assimilation and accommodation within the present oppressive systems (Carmichael, 1967; Rangasamy, 2004; Curry-Stevens, 2007). It is reasonable to argue that those who capitulate are those who do so out of fear or reward – close proximity to the oppressor is an opportunity to share aspects of status and wealth-improved conditions for themselves. This is an act of individualism and a selfish vocation (Abdilahi Bulhan, 1979; Sutherland, 1989; Moore, 2000; Seabrook, 2002; Allen, 2007).

The HEA/EUC (2008) **“Ethnicity, Gender and Degree Attainment”** project suggested that:

“...because of their self-perception as liberal, open and cosmopolitan, universities tend to differentiate themselves from other institutions that have sought to grapple with racism...the vulnerability to racism, both past and present, of British minority ethnic students does not appear directly to be addressed by universities in an academic context.”

(HEA/ECU, 2008: 21)

‘Race’ is now acknowledged as a social and political construct, not a biological or genetic fact. ‘Race’ is often specifically linked to notions of white people being superior and Black people as inferior (Pilkington, 2003). Thus, living within the construct of ‘race’ enables us to identify and create divisions between Black and white people in order to identify difference. It enables space for ignorance to form and stereotypes to develop. Even when challenged, they become the norm (Seabrook, 2002). Collins, (1994) relates this to the need to maintain stereotyped hierarchical categories:

“...the feeling of security or superiority resulting from this may help to explain why such imprecise referencing of other people or cultures spreads rapidly and is taken up uncritically on a widespread basis. This is convenient for existing relations of power, because it lends to them a sense of certainty, regularity and continuity.”

(Collins, 1994: 4)

Conditioned racialised and polarisation between individual groups is a reality within today’s society. ‘Race’ is a significant factor, governing the way in which students were interacted with and how this is understood, not only by BEM students, but also white students and others involved in teaching and learning. This would include professional services and academics. The interaction and meaning ascribed frames the experience of BEM students and the experience of university personnel. It might go some way towards explaining issues such as attainment and retention with regard to BEM students, in both these areas, BEM students are positioned negatively in degree attainment (Department for Education & Skills (DFES), 2003, 2006; Smith 2007; HEA/ECU, 2008). Moreover, they are also more likely to leave their course of study before completion (Tinto, 1975, 1988, 1993, 2006; Hayton & Paczuska, 2002; DFES, 2003, 2006; Smith, 2007), often without any explanation, hence other BEM students remain uncertain and insecure about their own position on these courses.

The BEM students gave accounts in which they spoke of feeling marginalised: **“despite all the hard work we try to put in to become successful, we are still disadvantaged within the educational system” (BEMSDG, 2010)**. The NUS’ (2011) **“Race for Equality”** report also found that in regard to the degree attainment gap between Black students and their white UK and Irish peers, **“concerns over academic support appeared more frequently than any other theme”**. The report also found that there was:

“...a perception among these respondents that the degree to which black students were supported by their lecturers and tutors was a crucial aspect of not only their academic success, but also their overall self-esteem, both inside and outside the classroom.”

(NUS Race For Equality Report, 2011:25)

The report provided a quote from one of the respondents:

“Culturally, as a minority ethnic student myself, I may be more shy about asking for help, as tutors do not appear to have the time, and I feel not to bother them. In other words, they adopt an unapproachable manner.”

(NUS Race For Equality Report, 2011:25)

The disbelief was compounded, especially when BEM students gave accounts of racism or discriminatory practice:

“As I earlier stated, I was refused help and if I received any, I was dictated to.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

BEM students often found themselves in an invidious position, caught somewhere between muddling through or seeking help. However, they were reluctant to seek help, seeing this as exposing their weakness. They viewed seeking help as another aspect of academics confirming their suspicions about whether those BEM students ought to have been allowed on the courses in the first instance. Thus, when BEM students sought help it provided a basis for staff to use this as anecdotal evidence to confirm their notion of the “Equation” (>BEM=< Standards). These students felt blamed for not knowing things that others expected them to

know. These experiences and the associated feeling confirmed to these students that they needed assistance from people who believed in them, rather those who saw them as a nuisance:

“I felt frustrated that there was no one I could ask for assistance, or that she refused me time that for others she freely gave.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

Another added:

“...most times I was ignored when I raised the issue, even more so, I was compared to other students, even though in class I was one of the most active students and always did well.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

This shared experience of being disbelieved was an important aspect of cultural affinity (Swift, 1999). I was personally familiar with many of the experiences highlighted. During the discussion groups, there were no expressions to suggest exaggeration, though some stories were shocking. They were accepted as the students' accounts and their memory of events that had impacted on them. Even though there was some attempt to probe as a means of feedback and clarification, there was no initial attempt to find alternative explanations (Swift, 1999; Winter, 2000). This was an important aspect of enabling the students to speak about their experiences. The whole process, including research strategy, was extremely demanding and invoked a great deal of reflection on the part of the researcher, the facilitator and the BEM participants. Cole, (2010) noted that:

“...the emotional processes...closely resembled the process of grieving; denial, anger, bargaining, deep sadness and acceptance.”

(Cole, BEMSDG, 2010)

Throughout the research process, space was created to enable BEM students to explore their experiences with each other and the facilitators. There were occasions where a comment was made or where the discussion took a direction that was unfamiliar to the

researchers and these required questions from the facilitators for clarification. Whilst one acknowledges that the views of the researcher were formed from living within a westernised context and shaped by some of these ideologies, this researcher did not seek to use such ideologies and theories to belittle and pathologise participants (Smith, 1999).

BEM students had multiple intersecting identities as members of social groups constructed as inferior and making them vulnerable to multiple oppressions. The rapper Tupac makes reference to this notion when he sang about being a product of the **“pimp, pusher and the reverend”**, (Tupac Shakur, The Uppercut, **“Loyal to the Game”**, Interscope (USA) Dec 14, 2004).

Therefore, how the BEM students were perceived by others, both within and outside of their social group, seemed to be significant. For example, in discussions, students would refer to the intersection of ‘race’, class, gender, age and dis/ability, but sexuality was not mentioned or explored. This may be significant in that other facets of this group identity did not prioritise sexuality. In relation to sexuality, the silence suggests that the space has not been negotiated to the extent to which members feel sufficiently safe or enabled to explore it. It is acknowledged here that in relation to discrimination and oppression, many issues are still taboo. Furthermore, this illustrates how it is possible to experience oppression and even have an understanding of what it means in practice, yet when opportunity or circumstances permit, such groups also engage in discriminatory, prejudicial and oppressive behaviour.

This study revealed that there are many struggles, both internal and external. A considerable literature has emerged, which testifies to the additional struggle that Black women are forced to deal with (Wallace, 1979; Hull, Scott & Smith, 1982; Wilson, 1988; hooks, 1981, 1991, 1992, 1994; Collins, 2000a). As Morgan, (2008) notes:

“No matter how many ways a woman breaks free from other discriminations, she remains a female human being in a world still so patriarchal that it's the ‘norm’.”

(Morgan, 2008: Online)

It is in this respect that Black women are in an invidious position in deciding to confront racism. They simultaneously deny some parts of who they are as they attempt to participate in multiple struggles. This point is made transparent when Morgan, (2008) argues that:

“Women have endured sex/race/ethnic/religious hatred, rape and battery, invasion of spirit and flesh, forced pregnancy; being the majority of the poor, the illiterate, the disabled, of refugees, care-givers, the HIV/AIDS-afflicted, the powerless. We have survived invisibility, ridicule, religious fundamentalisms, polygamy, tear gas, forced feedings, jails, asylums, prostitution, trafficking, sati, purdah, female genital mutilation, witch burnings, stonings, and attempted genocides. We have tried reason, persuasion, reassurances and being extra-qualified, only to learn it never was about qualifications after all.”

(Morgan, 2008: Online)

Moreover, cultural, social and political aspects of gender often mean that women take control of the maintenance of family life and the high expectations of fulfilling specific roles. In relation to the struggle, Wallace, (1979) laments:

“Perhaps the most important reason the Black Movement did not work was that black men did not realise they could not wage struggle without the full involvement of women.”

(Wallace, 1979:81)

These issues are reminders that in a society where social, cultural and political construction of life render one group superior to another, where well-being or even savagery are perpetuated as normal, it is crucial to raise important questions such as who determines what skills are important and validated? Wallace, (1979) argues that **“...by negating the importance of their role, the efficiency of the Black Movement was obliterated” (Wallace, 1979:81)**. The discourses of being members of groups that experience multiple oppressions engender social anxieties that are an inseparable part of the experience of being modern (Seabrook, 2002; Arnetz & Ekman, 2006). One of these concerns is the possibility of belonging. Is it possible to feel a sense of belonging to societies which change as rapidly as modern ones do, driven by the power of money as capitalist modernity has been? (Ignatieff, in Alibhai-Brown, 2001). We do not live our lives in a vacuum (Arrendondo, 1996). As one of the participants observed, there was a **“magnitude of the issue, how it can be used” (BEMSDG, 2007)**.

At the time when most of the discussion groups took place, the demographics of the student population at the university was, on average, 40 per cent BEM. Thus, it is interesting to note that BEM students still felt isolated and conspicuous. The perception of being conspicuous

and having to 'fit in' is illustrated where BEM students also talked about their relationship with white students, indicating that they were **“picked on by other students and treated as ‘different’”**. BEM students talked about being **“picked on by teachers and noticed for negative reasons (assumptions of regular lateness, mistakes)”**. In this context, the idea of contested space is evident; the Academy is perceived by stakeholders as a 'white space' (Adams, 2006).

Having to struggle with others' perceptions, being isolated and having to 'fit in' are huge distractions. Such distractions can impact on students' engagement with their studies. These distractions may manifest in the work that is produced or the interactions between students and academic staff. This can in turn lead to an **“expectation of underachievement from teachers”**. This expectation of underachievement can be linked to the self-fulfilling prophecy and other themes such as **“cultural impediments”**, **“education and legacy”**, **“inertia”**, and **“cultural competence”**. All of these themes are well established in literature, where it has been confirmed that communicated or perceived low expectation from teachers and academics often leads to impaired performance in students (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

The position of BEM students was further compounded in terms of how they perceived that they were steered. BEM students talked about their options being limited and based on stereotypes: **“Black boys and young men pushed towards sport and music rather than core subjects, Black girls and young women pushed towards domestic subjects as preparation for lives as wives and mothers or manufacturing work (not with careers or other aspirations)” (BEMSDG, 2007) .**

BEM students indicated that they were **“not understood, and their language needs not supported or addressed, no recognition of multi-lingual talents and skills”(BEMSDG, 2007).**

In terms of the life cycle of the students and also in terms of **“education and legacy”**, BEM students' experiences prior to HE may be perceived as connected. At Thompson's (2006) 'personal' level, BEM students were reflecting on experiences that had been normalised to the extent that some of them expected to be stereotyped. They perceived academics as colluding and to some extent, some BEM students also colluded with or sought to find ways to survive. The idea of **“space”** is discussed later; attention is also given to the emergent themes of **“positionality”** and **“consciousisation”**.

This research suggests that there is a relationship between the 'on-campus' and 'off-campus' experience of BEM students. The on-campus experience often mirrors the off-campus experience. Some students were shocked when they discovered the extent of the problem (Chesler et al, 2005),. even moreso given that educationalist and institutions of higher learning often pride themselves as being above the racist practices associated with the uneducated and the ignorant (Back, 2004; Bush, 2006; Ross & Quinn, 2007). Back (2004) has argued that:

“Racism has damaged reason, damaged academic and civic freedom and damaged the project of education itself.”

(Back, in Law et al, 2004:5)

When one looks at the three levels on which students reflected on their experiences, their continued engagement in HE is remarkable. Cole, (2009) noted that:

“...in order for them to be in the university at all, they had had to overcome significant obstacles and it would have been much easier not to try to be there at all.”

(Cole, 2009)

One of the significant issues here is that BEM students were not only aware of their own situation; many of them were also perceptive and sensitive to the marginalisation of Black academics. The ECU, (2009:5) considered the experiences of BME staff in HE. The researchers on this project undertook a literature review where they found that:

BME staff in senior positions report feeling that their leadership ability is questioned, and that they are often assumed to be in junior positions, even when they occupy senior (e.g. professorial) roles (Heward et al, 1997; Wright et al, 2007; Mirza, 2009). BME staff report experiences of invisibility, isolation, marginalisation and racial discrimination in HE (Carter et al, 1999; Deem et al, 2005; Jones, 2006; Mirza, 2006a, 2009; Wright et al, 2007; Maylor, 2009a). BME staff have reported negative assumptions being made about their abilities. Assumptions which they feel are influenced by their ethnicity (Wright et al, 2007). BME staff report experiencing heavy workloads, disproportionate levels of scrutiny compared with their white counterparts, a lack of mentoring and support for career development, and difficulties in gaining promotion (Deem et al, 2005; Wright et al, 2007). BME lecturers teaching in areas of race, equality and multi-culturalism report that these subjects are often designated as “low

status” when performed by BME staff, yet they appear to acquire higher status when performed by white staff (Wright et al, 2007). Overall, BME staff report having fewer opportunities to develop research capacity and enhance their promotional prospects (Jones, 2006; Wright et al, 2007).

Thus, in a scenario where it is perceived that Black academics are marginalised, it is likely to confirm to BEM students that even where there is a presence of Black staff, their authority or influence is undermined, which means that they might not be able to advocate on their behalf. This puts enormous pressure on Black academics, who often feel that they are irresponsible to the needs of BEM students due to the dereliction or the failure of the Academy in providing adequate support. In this regard, an equitable chance to compete might require an overhaul of current systems and of some of the custodians charged with the implementation of fair equitable education for social justice.

The significance of this point is etched in the comments of one of the BEM students who, whilst talking about experiencing difficulties with the course, said that they did not often go to the BEMSDGs or go to see a particular Black member of staff because they were concerned about how this was seen by their peers and other white staff. In short, they reported that:

“(they) ...were willing to take the chance in ‘muddling through’, rather than seek out a black member of staff...well you know how X [black member of staff] is seen.”

(BEMSDG, 2009)

The BEM students indicated that fear of reprisal was a significant factor in their decisions of whether or not to seek help. Equally, fear of reprisal from academic staff and other students was determinate in deciding who was best-placed to provide the assistance required:

“On reflection, I was isolated within a system where few actually cared about my learning.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

It could be argued that many of these students were in fact using the power of silence to protect themselves, or that their interpretation of the situation precipitated this silence. This was a shocking revelation, but it does equate with many of the stories shared:

“They already think that we are not educated. I just want to finish this degree and get out of there. We don't speak out in lectures for the reason that people don't understand us. Tutors do not understand either. I have been very oppressed for a while feeling voiceless. I am now trying to speak out again and finding my feet.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

It became apparent that BEM staff were often used as a last resort, when the situation was terminal for the student. These discriminatory findings exemplified the eight themes that had emerged during the literature review, thus they were dichotomised and aligned in order to gain coherence in the exploration of the key themes, the findings and the analysis of the findings.

The finding of discrimination and its impact is important because it also illustrates the extent to which students can feel overwhelmed with the number of issues which confront them. BEM students often struggle to name the issues because they are forced to reason from a perspective of those outside of the experience. Moreover, the difficulty of articulating the extent to which BEM students are silenced is compounded because of the expectations that are demanded or perceived in terms of language competence and construction of well-reasoned arguments from students engaged in the academic enterprise. The BEM students' points of reason often begin from a place where they feel sufficiently confident in expressing their experience to someone outside of their lived experience. This can significantly limit them when such persons are not available:

“I know that more support can make a great deal of difference in the way of encouragement and positive feedback. This is not always forthcoming, especially where tutors may already hold pre-conceptions about the student... in my experience, where tutors do not identify in any way with the person they are trying to help, I feel it may be an impossible task to expect any improvement.”

(Black British respondent, NUS, 2011:25)

In many instances, these students anticipated rejection and disbelief and they often regarded this as unwelcomed criticism. Some of these students in fact perform in accordance with expected behaviours, but once again, it can be argued that many of these students are fulfilling the only role that they have been permitted to occupy. This is a continuation of their

educational life, not an exception to it. There is a lifetime of learning that has been internalised and is not shared. For example, it could be argued that some students perceived or experienced some academic staff as differential in their interaction, compared to some of their peers who receive 'protection' - those who are rewarded for their compliance and acceptance of a system that benefits them. The BEM students often feel muzzled, rejected by sanctions for raising objections to what they perceive as unfair treatment. These students have learned to be afraid of the potential consequences.

4.3 Accumulated experiences: “Sense of lots of issues; not clear where to start”: Systematic baggage and surviving

The students indicated that they felt that there were a '**sense of lots of issues, not clear where to start**'. This finding was significant, as it provides some early insights about the challenges. The opportunity to reflect on their individual and collective experiences exposed the range and complexity of the issues. Any one of these issues could have been a huge stumbling block, yet these students were resilient and found different ways to cope. In terms of attainment, retention and progression, the sense of having to manage the range of issues that confronted these students was a potential stumbling block, a distraction that was often not of their own making. These students would have to find ways to avoid being derailed; they would have to maintain focus on their studies while simultaneously managing these issues, some of which remained unnamed.

The BEM students also indicated a strong sense of “**carrying a lot of baggage, sometimes a lifetime’s worth**”. These students came to HE having already experienced racism in school/ college, thus they anticipated racism in HE. This sense of carrying what the BEM students articulated as “**a lot of baggage**” may be related to the notion of internalised oppression, where students seek rational explanation for phenomena. In these circumstances, students would come to the situation with some history, drawing on it to help them make sense of things. They will, where possible, observe the extent to which their experiences are unique and why - especially when the experiences were negative - they were affected in the ways they were. Some were dismissive, saying that these were not issues, and that some people had got into the habit of moaning, that some people seemed unable to extricate themselves from difficult challenges, preferring instead to place blame by ascribing the actions of others as negative. The BEM students would be cognisant of these charges and thus tended to blame themselves for many of the problems they encountered. Thus, they were in actual fact carrying a “**lifetime of baggage**”. This relates to the previous

point in which students spoke of there being a **“sense of lots of issues; not clear where to start”**. It was important that these students learned how they were situated and found answers to the questions they sought. As a stake-holder, they had a vested interest. The answers would facilitate them in developing strategies to change some of the negative outcomes.

BEM students also indicated that further exploration of the issues identified left them feeling **“upset at how systemic it is”**. These students had engaged in a process of reflection in their attempts to find answers. What they found alerted them to the systematic nature of discrimination. Many of these students were now using a variety of different methods to communicate their disbelief that the Academy would sanction such practices. This awakening presented a paradox and juxtaposition; the Academy was deemed to be implicated in their turmoil and simultaneously instrumental in equipping them with knowledge, skills and conferment of their worthiness to practice, work and be rewarded for their efforts. The Academy was instrumental not only in educational outcomes, but also in designating where a person might be positioned. The power of the institution was apparent to many of the students, thus for many of them, their objective was to survive, hence their comment of **“how hard it has been to survive within it”**.

As part of this analysis, the statements above were aligned to the themes initially identified in the literature review. These themes embodied many of the Lernaean Hydra parallels and exemplified many virulent aspects of the BEM students' experiences in HE. By extension of the argument, it is possible to see how negative outcomes - with regard to degree attainment and attrition - might be influenced by some of the experiences referred to above.

Based on some of the narrative deployed by academics, the media and policy-makers, it is incredible that so many of these students not only survive, but given some of the starting points and their experiences whilst in HE, many of these students do very well. The comments below are typical of many discussions that took place:

“From a very young age, we are taught to memorise... we are discouraged from having our own opinions... now they constantly pick on us for plagiarism.”

(BEMSDG, 2009)

And:

“I have experienced first-hand discrimination from teachers whilst at secondary school... the hardest thing for me was when my teacher told me I was going to leave school with no qualifications at the age of 13.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

Cole, (2010) observed that:

“Some of the students were considered by the university to be ‘struggling’ or ‘failing’”. Many of those participating in the discussion groups were engaged, yet struggling to be understood within a system that appeared to find it easier to be incredulous about the efforts that these students were making.”

(Cole, 2010)

The notion of doing well was witnessed at graduation ceremonies, as the students celebrated their achievements with sheer pride, enjoyment and relief. Narratives of apathy, **“disillusioned”**, **“pathological”**, and **“uneducatable”** still resonate within the Academy. Within this space, BEM students are complex, embodying several dimensions simultaneously in order to present a narrative about their experiences or the educational outcome. BEM students are often de-contextualised from their life experience and are instead aligned to the traditional idea of the Academy and the disembodied mind. This is not at all how people live if they are middle-class white men with large numbers of people deferring to them and making their lives easier. There is also no recognition of the dislocation or, where there is some acknowledgment of this dislocation, it usually comes in the form of the cultural impediments or social capital discourse. Discussion facilitator Cole, (2012) shared her personal experiences with the group:

“I remember so clearly and still navigate the whole thing of being the first person in my whole family ever to go to university; while there was tremendous pride in my family, they also didn’t understand it and couldn’t support me, and the cultural distance between home and university was vast; (it) felt like I needed a passport between them, and there are HUGE costs to living like that in terms of an integrated self.”

(Cole, 2012)

Some institutions are vociferous in defending or articulating a position to justify why they would not allow some of these students the same opportunity. Rather, they continue to espouse their elitism such that even when some BEM students break through the barriers, they encounter further unanticipated challenges, as reflected in the preceding statements.

It remains perplexing for researchers and policy-makers alike as they seek to find a quick fix. Following the HEA/ECU report on degree attainment in 2008, questions were raised and explanations were sought. The responses given were that “**it was complex**”, (Dillon, 2010). Similarly, research by Kao & Thompson, (2003) concurs with this. The BEM students perceived their experiences to be different from their white peers. They found this difference unclear, difficult to describe, or, more disarmingly, difficult to provide the sort of evidence sought without making themselves vulnerable. Moreover, the sense of being vulnerable is more palpable when one lacks confidence in a system where there is an expectation that people will be treated fairly. The lack of confidence is derived from recognition that the system is also skewed against them.

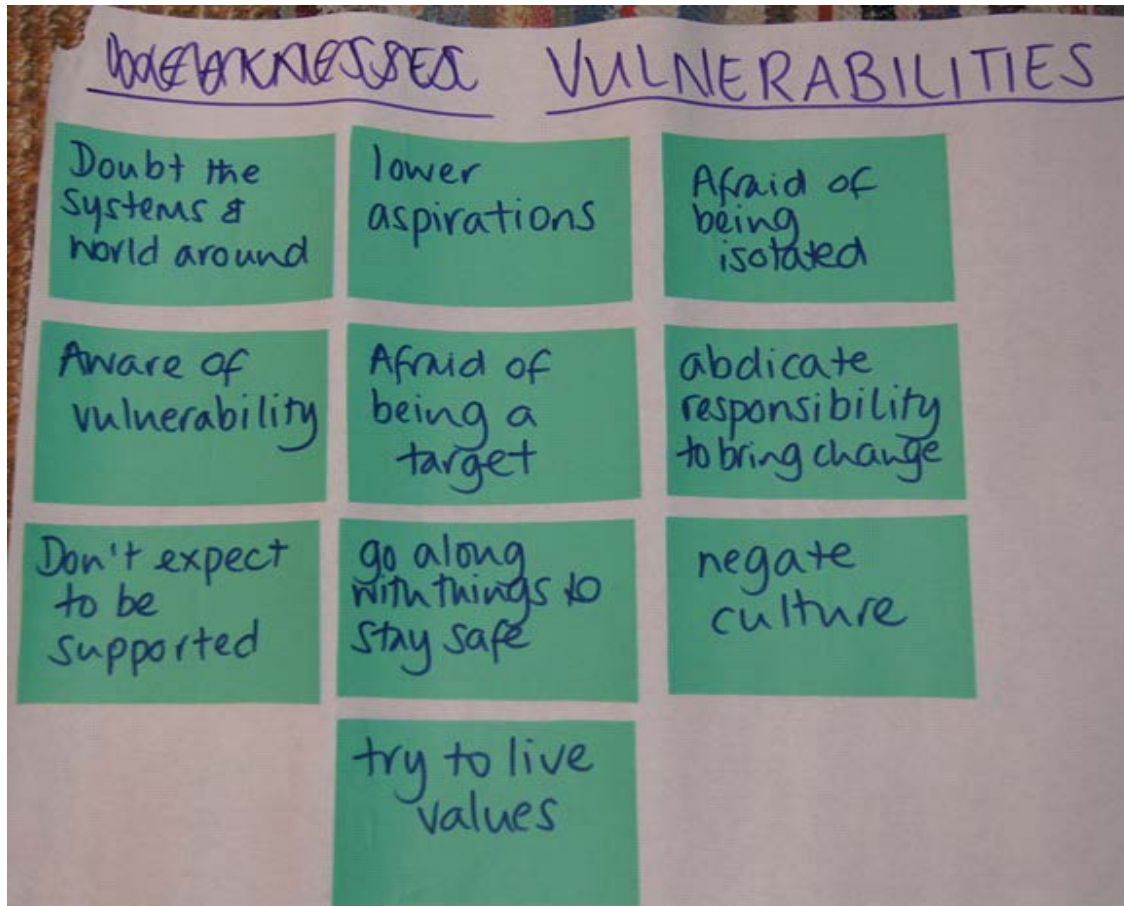
4.4 What have these experiences meant for BEMS?

A discussion was initiated to identify BEM students' perception of themselves and how they were situated within the Academy. A strengths, vulnerabilities, opportunities and threats (SVOT) analysis was used to facilitate the discussion. Following discussion with their peers, students were asked to group their responses under headings that most reflected their views and experiences. The findings from these discussions provided further insights into BEM students' perceptions of some of the difficulties. These findings also offered some practical suggestions as to what actions can be taken to influence the Academy in its purported desire to change and to be more inclusive.

Fig 4.6 shows the key findings from the discussions that were facilitated by using SVOT analysis. The findings from these discussions were interesting in that this provided further insights into students' perceptions of the difficulties and potential solutions.

4.5 The actual experience of being on campus: Vulnerability and threats: Figures 4.6 and 4.7

Figure 4.6: Summary of perceived VULNERABILITIES



The findings (Fig 4.6) showed that BEM students were acutely aware of their vulnerabilities. Their accounts were summarised as “a lack of confidence”, they “**doubt the systems and world around us**”, were “**afraid of being a target**”, “**afraid of being isolated**”, they “**don’t expect to be supported**”. These findings were also significant, as much of the literature on attainment has proffered that one of the explanations or key factors in attainment is linked to confidence. The argument is that students from ‘disadvantaged’ backgrounds often lack confidence in themselves and in their own ability. This is reflected in the efforts they make and also in the outcome. These findings challenge this notion. It accepts that confidence does play a part in explaining attainment. However, it asserts that the lack of confidence emerges from their experiences both on and off campus. These students are exhibiting what might be described as learned behaviour. Thus, they have learnt to “**doubt the systems and world around us**”. This would suggest that they have some reason to do so. The energy required to constantly live in this state is immense. This doubt derives from an

inability to trust and this lack of confidence is based on the actual experience of being let down, including indirect experience. This can be likened to the BBC's "**Crime Watch**" programme, where the numbers of BEM people shown as wanted for some alleged crime can give a distorted perception that these people are out of control. Racial profiling, and "stop and search" is regarded as proportionate to those perceived to "fit the profile". These young men are stigmatised and some live in fear, which parallels the fear of many of the BEM students who were "**afraid of being a target**". They were "**afraid of being isolated**". More disturbingly, they "**did not expect to be supported**". In essence, they were not afforded the same entitlements. These students had been failed by the system that purports to espouse values based on equality and social justice.

As a consequence, many of the BEM students spoke of having "**lower aspirations**". This finding is also important in illuminating how the same words and phrases can be used in very different ways. In this instance, when the students spoke of having lower aspirations, they also stressed that they did not lack ambition. They wanted to enjoy an enhanced quality of life, one associated with "hard work". They wanted to be directors of their own business, they wanted to manage and they all wanted to be successful. For them, it was a matter of embarrassment or shame to be on a course and not be doing well. Their "**lowered aspirations**" were born within a realisation that they were unable to change some of the perceptions of others. Thus, rather than expecting to gain a first or an upper-second degree classification, they were now resigning themselves to any award, in spite of making the perceived requisite effort to achieve their dream. This relationship can be likened to that of a hostage, a violent relationship where all of the power is perceived to be located with the captor. The respective roles are then played out as if scripted; the BEM students hoped, but they did not expect. They wanted freedom to escape the traumatic aspects of their experiences, but their freedom was located within the same being that was holding them hostage. Moreover, if their aspiration was "realistic", based on much of what they had been given as feedback, it was less likely that they would be disappointed.

This sense of marginalisation contributed to them wanting change, but being reluctant to suggest what actions ought to be taken. They were reflecting on the risks and whether it was their "**responsibility to bring change**". The students expressed that even though they wanted the situation improved, they were in "**fear of isolation and victimisation**". This is more easily appreciated when one reflects on the discourse of invisibility; the privileges or advantages that are accorded to one group may be contested by another (Young, 1990; Gillborn, 2006).

The BEM students also spoke of how difficult it was living in a manner that negated their culture. These students were trying to “fit in”. They were trying “**to live dominant values**”, even though it was not always in their interest to do so. They felt that it was rationale, logical to “**go along with things to stay safe**”. Iris Marion Young, (1990) noted that one facet of oppression is located within a process by which some groups are invisibilised and simultaneously marked out as legitimate targets for discrimination, based on their difference. The groups designated as legitimate targets for discrimination become aware of the limitations imposed on them, thus they learn to live with oppression and the associated injustices (Young, 1990).

The most profound thing to be taken from this discussion was the immense struggle that these students had as they sought to negotiate a space to live and study, trying to find a place that they were entitled to be treated with dignity and respect and where they had an equal chance of success. The issues raised within a consideration of their vulnerabilities mirrored the issues discussed above. This discussion corroborates how BEM students perceived themselves within the Academy. These students observed that their new environment within the Academy reflected aspects of civil society. It is accepted that HE often brings its own anxieties for students, but these students were challenged by the idiosyncrasy of the situation they were in. Moreover, they felt that although they had experienced racism and discrimination of different types and intensities, they were unprepared for this new idiosyncratic situation. They needed to understand the rules, which included making decisions about how much to assimilate. The finding from the discussion about vulnerabilities essentially continues to elaborate some of the earlier findings as they relate to the theme of discrimination. It has been established that from the BEM students’ perspective, their experiences within the Academy were rooted in discrimination and that the penetration of discrimination was a shock and one which they had not anticipated.

There is a close link between the vulnerabilities and the threats. **Figure 4.7** summarises some of the perceived threats. In relation to threats, BEM students were concerned about the impact that their participation in the BEMSDGs would have on their own studies. For example, they made reference to the impact of increased “**workloads**” would have on them in terms of being able to meet the deadlines for assignments, undertaking the various tasks associated with being able to produce a good quality assignment. The BEM students were also anxious about “**how much time?**” would be involved in trying to focus on issues that could have an adverse effect on them. They were uncertain of “**what is expected**”; they thought that they could be “**exploited**” by participating in initiatives that assisted the

University or white students whilst negatively affecting them. Some of the students also talked about the risk of “**family exclusion**”, by conforming or assimilating to behaviour and values that were regarded as licentious. The BEM students risked the “**reputation**” and “**credibility**” of their community and wanted to leave a good impression. They wondered about whether the institution regarded the issue as important and whether they would provide “**training and consistency**” for White staff and students to enable them to increase their understanding and ability to work with sensitivity acknowledging the ways in which the normal working of the institution privileges them. Whilst simultaneously the normative behaviour of white staff and students is often experienced as passive aggressive (Ramírez & Andreu, 2006) racism making it difficult for some BEM students to feel confident with staff and their white peers.

Figure 4.7: Summary of perceived THREATS



This study's findings have provided some significant insights, enabling us to discern the nuanced ways that some people identify issues, obstacles, challenges and opportunities or, moreover, strengths, vulnerabilities, opportunities and threats, as illustrated in many of the discussion groups. The nuances were a reaction to living within a context in which students believed they had little control. Participation or membership is assigned on the basis that participants were required to live in accordance with dominant values, a place in which they are assimilated and compelled to embrace and perpetuate dominant values (Fanon, 1986; Rangasamy, 2004). Major institutions are involved in maintaining the system of domination, privilege, power and oppression (Fanon, 1986; Thompson, 2006; Sivanandan, 2006; Chomski, in Parrish, 2006; Amnesty, 2007). Monbiot, (2013) argued that much can be learnt about a country from its silences and obsessions: **"...the issues politicians do not discuss are as telling and decisive as those they do"**. Thus, the unbearable silence is often filled by academics and commentators seeking to establish balance and stability. The balance and stability is established by marking out specific groups as legitimate targets and demonising them with references such as "skivers" and "shirkers". But as Monbiot, (2013) concludes: **"We are being parasitised from above, not below."**

Chapter 5: Positionality: Awakening, collusion and resistance

“Why, sometimes I’ve felt I ought to jump down off that stand and get physical with some of those brainwashed white man’s tools, parrots, puppets.

“One particular university’s token integrated black PhD associate professor I will never forget; he got me so mad I couldn’t see straight. As badly as our 22 million of educationally-deprived black people need the help of any brains he has, there he was looking like some fly in the buttermilk among white colleagues – and he was trying to eat me up!

(Malcolm X, in Alex Haley, 1965: 391-392)

In this study, “positionality” is used to describe aspects of ‘othering’ on the basis of characteristics such as gender, religion, class, or race. This form of conceptualisation has been critiqued (Salzman, 2002). Although Robertson, (2002) is critical of positionality as generic fixed categories, or as **“ready-to-wear”** products of identity politics (2002:788), she asserts that:

“Family history, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and religion, among other distinctions, can be usefully woven into an ethnographic narrative, but only if they are not left self-evident as essentialized qualities that are magically synonymous with self-consciousness”

(Robertson, 2002: 790)

Thus, this concept is used here to reflect and articulate sub-conscious acts biased in favour of the interests of dominant groups. Positionality is also used to reflect self-consciousness in terms of one's self-interest and or social group. Positionality is not fixed, but a relational dynamic, persistently moving within the context that demands it or where its motion is responsive to defining or constructing social reality and values. The concept of positionality has thus enabled me to locate myself within the research, whilst considering the multiple perspectives, the dynamic and mobile subjectivities evident in the phenomena under consideration (Wolf, 1996: 14-15).

The previous chapter identified discrimination as one of the study's central themes. During the discussion groups, the BEM students began to explore the significance of discrimination in terms of how they had been situated. **Figures 8.1 to 8.6** inclusive used PIN triangles to explore their position, their interests and needs in relation to their perceived position, interests and needs of white students and the university. In terms of position, the BEM students drew attention to the immense struggle they had in negotiating spaces, struggling in a different way to their white peers. They were concerned that when they tried to raise their concerns with their white peers, they engaged in a further struggle, having to manage the fears and anxieties of the white students. For example, they perceived of their white peers as not wanting issues of race to be discussed as they (white students) run the risk of being identified as racist. BEM students perceived their white peers as wanting to maintain the status quo, not acknowledging the problem, nor seeing the problem as being anything to do with them. For example:

“I noticed that when we are discussing issues that have anything to do with black people, the white students don't contribute. When I challenge this, they just reply ‘we are learning from you’. Yet in the work situation, they are the ones with the best jobs telling us what to do.”

(BEMSDG, 2009)

The notion of “learning from you” was a very common sentiment. Quite often in classroom interactions, BEM students' contributions are not validated, acknowledged or rewarded. There is no recognition of the extractive nature of these interactions and the benefits that accrue to the white students, with no real benefits to the BEM students. When the curriculum broadens the range of perspectives, the student experience is often enhanced. The learning has the potential to be more dynamic and the examples used or offered will be based on the actual life experiences of the participants. In such circumstances, there is a tendency for

white participants to remain silent; they are assured that they have enhanced their cultural capital as a result of having been taught by BEM students, enabling them the opportunity to be able to talk about equal opportunities and diversity with more confidence. However, for BEM students, there is no cultural capital in having taught them (Hussee, 2009). Whilst reflecting on this discussion, Cole, (2012) provided an example from her own experience:

“... a group of men who wanted to learn about feminism asked me to teach them – I said I would be happy to for an hourly rate. They were affronted because they thought I should do it for free because it would, in the long term, loosely be in my interests. I asked them how much they spent on a night in the pub and suggested to them that they were valuing what I had to offer them as less than that.... we parted ways. But I think this is a very common dynamic.”

(Cole, 2012)

BEM students also struggled with their white peers, who often regarded them as incapable of outstanding work:

“When I told another student what grade I got they said they did not think that I was capable of getting that grade ... Is that how they think about us?”

(BEMSDG, 2009)

The BEM students' feelings of marginalisation are also intensified because they perceive the institution as regarding them as a problem. Addressing these concerns will be resource-intensive. This discourse is thus not only about struggle, but also positionality and discrimination. A central product of discrimination is to disassemble, disembowel, and disembody the individual or social group. This process is usually followed by the (re)-allocation of position and status, almost akin to transactional analysis. This re-allocation is essential as an aspect of coercion, where individuals are persuaded to reject aspects of their identity and culture in an attempt to gain acceptance or approval from those perceived to hold power and influence.

The genocide of other human beings requires a justification and in relation to white and Black people, this justification was found in proclaiming the superiority of whites and the inferiority of non-whites. Black people were called "niggers" and "wogs"; Pakistani people were called "pakis"; Spanish-speaking people are called "spicks"; the Chinese "chinks"; the Vietnamese

"gooks". By de-humanizing non-white people, enslavement becomes just, and in the minds of many white people, differential treatment including incarceration, enslavement, exploitation and oppression are justified. However, as Carmichael, (1967) suggests:

"It becomes even easier to keep a man a slave when he himself can be convinced that he is inferior. How much easier it is to keep a man in chains by making him believe his own inferiority! As long as he does, he will keep himself in chains. As long as a slave allows himself to be defined as a slave by the master, he will be a slave, even if the master dies."

(Carmichael, 1967:5)

5.1 Positionality: Awakening

In **Figures 8.1 and 8.2 (chapter 8)**, after exploring their position relative to that of white students, the BEM students considered whether their interests were different from those of their peers. The BEM students had situated themselves in a manner that enabled them to articulate the interests of white students as primarily on two key elements: **"achievement"** in terms of passing the course, and **"aspiring to position and maintaining the status quo"**. They also perceived that white students' interests were about **"material gain"** in terms of wealth and financial gains, and **"not to be held accountable"** for negative aspects as a result of the struggle for position and status. In this sense, it is possible to conclude that the BEM students perceived the white students as a hindrance to their aspirations. The white students were perceived by the BEM students as primarily interested in pursuing or safeguarding their position. It seems significant that positions occupied were associated with ownership, thus a discourse of position equates with one of ownership and possession. In this sense, positionality is contested and to some extent explains the on-going struggle. It is interesting to note that the BEM students saw the interests of the institution as being more neutral, largely based on meeting targets and monitoring students to pass.

The BEM students' perception of the needs of white students can be summarised as a need for them to develop **"awareness and criticality"**. They noted that white students needed **"to be made accountable"**, to develop **"cultural awareness"**, and for them to **"question taken-for-grantedness"**. They also suggested that **"all students need to be taught black history"**, and needed **"to be challenged"**. It is evident from this that BEMs had an appreciation of themselves that corresponded with widely-held predictable and stereotypical

perceptions of them. A consideration of opportunities for change using the PIN triangle as a tool facilitated students to reflect on highly-complex issues. The following statement is indicative of many responses that were made during the discussion groups:

“We carry baggage; it is obvious as soon as you get into class, it’s negative ... dealing with the everyday struggle is important because it is added to.”

(BEMSDG, 2007)

The discourse on differentiated experiences is returned to here, highlighting an aspect of where a community becomes significant in providing support in moments of great anxiety. It could be argued that in terms of ethnicity, BEM students educated in their own countries were protected in a cultural context. The BEM students were within a context where their experiences were normal; they did not recognise their privilege. It was the absence of Black academics represented at every level and the inability of the Black community to influence HE that increased their anxieties and vulnerability. **"Black people are stereotyped and put into boxes, resulting in being isolated" (BEMSDG, 2010).** Many white academics and white students within the UK are also trapped in their own parallel paradigm, failing to acknowledge their privilege and how their actions impacted on BEM students.

One implication is that students might be best served by an alignment in accordance with their social group. The discourse on identity alignment highlights the invidiousness of how binary or linear discussions based on an “either/or” dichotomy fail to unravel this conundrum. As illustrated, there are significant difficulties with identity alignment arguments. This study would not support the idea of such alignments, rather it would advocate for an enhancement of the BEM students’ experience. In essence, this study advocates for accountability and quality engagement sensitive to social, political and economic factors which advantage and disadvantage certain groups.

Furthermore, BEM students’ lives are intersected, not only at the level of race, gender, class, disability, age and sexuality, but also by self (Collins, 2000a). Moreover, the self is a social construct where individuals are in constant internal and external conflict in their attempt to manage their being. Thus, when faced with constant challenge which are not always clear and which adapt, the challenges can often be perceived as an emotional, physical and psychological attack that can manifest itself in mental dissonance. Further, research by Brown & Tylka, (2011) found that racial discrimination places African Americans at risk of psychological distress.

The sense of isolation was further amplified as students spoke of the high level of scrutiny that they encountered, more so when it was realised that this level of scrutiny was associated with the negative perceptions that staff and white student peers held of them. The BEM students did not feel protected; they perceived the issues of discrimination at the cultural level as **“sanctioned by professional services and academic staff”**. In relation to this study, students had reported that discrimination had pervaded a whole educational career and that there was **“no visible or experiential challenge to the expectations, responses or stereotypes embedded in educational institutions”**. This finding suggests that BEM students not only expected to be discriminated against, but they did not expect perpetrators to be held to account for their discriminatory practices. A crucial aspect of discrimination is that it was shaping the way in which some BEM students perceived themselves in relation to others. One implication here is that it is conceivable that some BEM students in this scenario were not expecting to do well; they expected that their best efforts would not be good enough and that the education system was rigged against them. Some BEM students rationalised the situation and although they observed behaviour and practices that were discriminatory, they choose to remain silent. Moreover, this perception hindered them in seeking redress, since many had concluded that by so doing they drew attention to themselves, thus making them vulnerable. Furthermore, this experience of discrimination was an extension of their off-campus experiences, where seeking redress often exposed them, increasing their vulnerability.

The BEM students who managed to navigate through HE are those who are able to find a coping strategy. Some researchers have referred to this as resilience (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999; Hall, 2007; Brown & Tylka, 2011). What this means is that students were stereotyped into a group identity. Yet they may consciously and sub-consciously resist and indulge in behaviour that might suggest an element of inconsistency. Thus, whilst the behaviour is perceived as inconsistent, it is wholly consistent with the person's interpretation and what they perceive or what they rationalise as the best course of action. This means that a person who is perpetually referred to as “useless” might make less effort to be perceived as “useful”. A student who has been stigmatised may experience dissonance with self and others, because their attempts to distance themselves from the stigmatised group can also render them vulnerable. Students who perceive themselves as clever can increase their grade; their behaviour mirrors how they imagine clever people to behave. Some students who are not regarded as “high-calibre” (a phrase used during RU's recruitment process in August 2012), but who nonetheless regard themselves as capable resist the negative labels and the attempts to associate them with stigmatised social groups (Steele & Aronson, 1995). They often engage in social camouflage or detach themselves from such groups. They style

themselves (in dress, behaviour) in order to project an image that they consider befits acceptability to the 'in-group', the group they seek to please.

This finding challenges the discourse of the self as a constant or consistent entity. It rather suggests that the self is consistent in its inconsistency in how it presents itself. The self is a sentient being that has the capacity to transform itself, but it is unable to transform others' perception or behaviour. It can only seek to influence the way in which people interact. It presents itself in a manner that would invoke a response that may be regarded as negative, neutral or positive. In this sense, it is perhaps more accurate to take account of the multiple-self discourse (Powell, 1996a), where the physical frame that carries the person is reasonably rigid or tangible, but the knowledge, ideas, values and morals that carry the soul are manifest in what the person is able to conceive and execute. This presents some further difficulties, as the ability to execute may be limited by internal, physical and external forces. For example, this makes sense when one thinks of the descriptive words used to describe someone's personality. It would be educative if people had the capacity to morph their physical appearance - colour, gender, ability, emotional and mental being. One imagines that this would invoke less predictable responses (Freeman et al, 2011). This study essentially sought to create an environment that would afford participants the opportunity to confront different aspects of self, whilst discovering how they could formulate a narrative that connects with the position, interest, and needs of different stake-holders.

5.2 Positionality as collusion

A significant part of this study has focussed on discrimination and its impact on BEM students; a further facet of this discourse is that of '**positionality**'. In the context of this study, positionality for BEM students emerged as a reflection and realisation of their relative position within the Academy. These students discovered that contrary to their expectations, the Academy was a place that reproduced many of the social ills inequalities they had sought to escape. Positionality has different aspects to it. For example, as a consequence of reviewing their relative position within the Academy and their consideration of how discrimination had impacted on their ability to gain equal access to all spaces within it, some BEM students sought to reposition themselves in order to gain recognition and reward for their efforts. The repositioning had different forms and outcomes, depending on what the student perceived the issue to be and the outcomes sought. For example, there were students who did not acknowledge or attach any significance to race or ethnicity. For them

“everyone had an equal chance to succeed”, “people should just get on with it and stop going on about racism”. These students can be characterised as **“race neutral”**, (Coleman et al, 2008:13). The race neutral students argued that the challenges confronting them were not dissimilar to the challenges confronting their white peers. These students argued that they had the same disadvantages and opportunities. The race neutral students had adopted a position that enabled them to function or manage. For them, inequality was a fact of life. It exists, but as far as they were concerned, individuals must make the most from each situation.

The race neutral students rejected race and ethnicity as explanation for some of the apparent discrepancies in educational outcomes. **“It doesn’t matter what colour you are, we all seem to be fine on the course” (BEMSDG, 2010)**. They preferred to entertain an explanation linked to the meritocratic ideal, one that suggested that the reward and position acquired is based on the investment and effort put in. In this sense, race neutral students were **“learning to labour”**, (Willis, 1977). They did not see any point in raising concerns which inferred they had been discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity. From their perspective, this was not a good use of their time. Success for them was based on hard work and learning to live with others. These students were unable to comprehend the **“everyday racism”** (Essed, 1991) that is routinely instigated by various people, including the Academy, through its various actions, policies and procedures. Their inability to comprehend such a possibility for themselves meant they also doubted their ability to persuade others in a position to challenge such behaviour, policies and procedures. These students did not want to be diverted from their objective. Rather, they sought to be accommodated within a system of oppression (Sivanandan, 2003; Young, 1990).

5.3 Positionality as resistance

Some of the BEM students were **“race conscious”**, (Peller, 1990; Coleman et al, 2008); ‘race’ was central to the explanation for their experience. These students had similar motivation and desire to other students in that they sought to position themselves to achieve academic credit and reward. However, the race conscious students remained alert and sensitised as to how they were impacted by discrimination, and in particular, how they were impacted by racism. The race conscious students recognised that their position and the positioning of others – race neutral, white students and academics – meant that they were often at risk and vulnerable, often perceived as deviant and confrontational. The race conscious students’ perception was that they were often subjected to higher levels of

scrutiny: **"Being around people who challenge you mentally all the time; I think some people are naturally racist"** (BEMSDG, 2010). These students also felt that they had to struggle much harder in their attempt to establish their entitlements. The race conscious students were thus engaged in several struggles. They were seeking academic success in terms of reducing the attainment gap. The race conscious students also supported others through initiatives such as mentoring. The race conscious students were keen to work within the institution to enhance the overall experience for themselves and other BEM students, as illustrated in Chapter Seven's discussion on **"consciousisation"**. The race conscious students expressed a determination for change; they sought a space to reflect on their experiences and find ways to confront and reduce some of the factors that made them vulnerable.

One of the consequences of the race neutral and the race conscious groups is that they were often perceived as representing different interests. This was not the focus of the present study, but it was evident that the presence of these differing positions created conflict and manipulation. The white students and some academics used those BEM students perceived as race neutral to support many of their arguments that sought to undermine the race conscious students' experiences of racism. This created conflict between the race conscious students, the race neutral, the white students and academics. The race conscious students' perception of isolation was linked to such struggles, struggles perceived as unfair because the prevailing conventions or experiences on which they drew implied that it was unlikely that they would be supported when they raised concerns. Moreover, raising such issues is often followed by increased levels of scrutiny, which were in turn often perceived as a means of managing the behaviour of the respective groups.

5.4 Positionality as pragmatist

A third position was **"the chameleon"**, (Howson, 2012). This was discerned through the interactions between students and staff. Here, this group of students was neither overtly race neutral nor race conscious. These students did recognise that inequality was evident and that some of the negative aspects of their experiences could be explained through the race conscious or CRT lens. However, these students were also familiar with what they perceived as expected behaviour or stereotypes associated with BEM people. They thus sought to distance themselves from activities or persons who might link them with such groups. Some of these students had recognised that within the Academy, there is a penalty for association

with groups regarded as pariah or deviant. They tried to protect themselves from becoming tainted or singled out for sanctions on account of their association. These students tried to acquire capital through their association with some staff or peers who they regard as influential, such as those with social capital. Candace Allen, (2007) explored some aspects of this in an article in "The Guardian Online". Speaking about the parents of political scientist and diplomat Condoleezza Rice, she says:

"They were practical people, realists who believed in the power of a diligently-applied individual's will to change one's situation and improve one's lot, and had no desire to be seen as part of a group – at least not this group."

(Allen, Guardian Online, 2007)

This suggests that the behaviour of those involved - whether as 'victim' or 'perpetrator' - is strategic or pragmatic and was rationalised from their respective positions in terms of costs and benefits. This is fluid and dynamic as it needs to be responsive to changes as an attempt to maintain position. There were, for example, further characterisations evident and these tended to dichotomise the perceived homogeneity of the group as it fractured on the basis of gender, class, sexuality, age, faith, ethnicity, language, nationality and status, such as international versus home student; British citizen versus refugee or asylum seeker.

This discourse suggests that people are malleable and to the extent that they are able, they use the power of reason and all available resources to situate themselves in more advantageous positions. In this sense, these students are exercising agency within constrained spaces. They are doing as much as they can in limited spaces and this is a challenge to the idea of passivity and victimhood given that there was, in actual fact, a tremendous amount of navigation taking place (Cole, 2012). Those who occupied coveted positions sought to protect their positions using any means at their disposal.

The opportunity to penetrate the student spaces provided some useful insights into how the groups organised themselves, how they regarded themselves, how they thought others regarded them and how they regarded others as specific identity groups (Roesch-Marsh et al, 2011). These social groups often mirrored the communities outside of the university. Thus, for some white students, they were often exposed to ethnic diversity and an opportunity for social mixing beyond their social group. They had a choice to integrate, whereas many BEM students found fewer opportunities for social mixing beyond their social group: **"being half black myself I did struggle maybe because I didn't really have any**

faith in myself" (BEMSDG, 2010). Moreover, these experiences were a reflection of their off-campus experience, compounded by the demographics and ethnic composition of the university. It was noticeable that some programmes and faculties attracted disproportionate ratios of students in relation to ethnicity and gender. Nancy Abelmann's (2009) book, "**The Intimate University**", reveals stories of Korean-American students' experiences. In this, Ablemann was concerned about what was articulated as Korean students' "**self-segregation**". However, in her view, racism and racial stereotypes are the main sources of Korean students' social segregation at the university. Ablemann's central message was that universities needed to meet these students' needs:

"...by respecting their racialised realities; that it foster spaces in and beyond the curriculum that really make good on the promise of diversity; and that it understand particular visions they bring with them to college, one that is necessarily nurtured in the immigrant crucible."

(Abelmann, 2009: 165)

Abelmann, (2009) contends that what appears to be Korean students' self-segregation has been made more by "**racialised experiences**" than by students' choices. The extent to which universities recognise or consider it part of their role and function to stimulate wider social mixing beyond the classroom is debateable. Abelmann, (2009) pointed out that the university administration in her study was not concerned about Korean students' social segregation, nor the fact that this segregation contradicts the ideal of a multi-cultural education. Nonetheless, with or without encouragement and support, student experiences and identities were being formed, tested, reformed and consolidated. The formation of identities or sub-groups took place within formal, directed time-tabled class sessions, and informal social spaces within and beyond the university environment. For example, BEM students' reflection or accounts of their experience were not just about what occurred within classrooms, but also about what happened to them in places such as the Student Union bar and function rooms, halls of residence, sports and leisure facilities. Many of the accounts from BEM students reflected findings in Abelmann, (2009), where she notes:

"...that race works subtly, less often with the blunt band of racial incidence (although there are those too) and more often as the daily warp and woof of the fabric of college life and meaning-making."

(Abelmann, 2009: 159)

The characterisations discussed here in terms of positions highlight the extensive and complex measures that individuals and groups are willing to take in their attempt to gain more favourable positions. The more desirable the positions, the more they are coveted and the greater the intensity of the struggle to maintain or wrestle it away. Education generally and HE especially takes place within this terrain. The BEM students adopted new strategies for the purpose of co-existing within their new environment as harmoniously as possible (Zamudio et al, 2009). These strategies were relevant to the main theme of discrimination and the emergent sub-theme, “**positionality**”. Takacs, (2001) illustrates this point further in his paper on “**Positionality, Epistemology and Social Justice in the Classroom.**” He refers to Maher & Tetreault’s (2001:164) discussion of positionality, “**in which people are defined, not in terms of fixed identities, but by their location within shifting networks of relationships, which can be analysed and changed.**” The theme of positionality revealed what it meant for BEM students to be in HE, whilst simultaneously managing or ‘surviving’ in a duality in which their perceived or constructed self is being determined by others and self through interaction. Bernard Shaw’s classic 1931 play, “**Pygmalion**”, illustrates the complexity of human relationships in a social world where they are compelled to navigate through various routes, all of which present different challenges.

Chapter 6: Desire for safe space

In this study, it was essential to create space to facilitate the articulation of the BEM 'student voice'. The spaces referred to were literal in terms of physical, emotional and metaphorical; not just a question of the physical spaces, but more fundamentally the spaces that were created in people's busy and often congested and stressful lives (Chomsky, 1994; Fuentes, 2009a). When translated, these factors can often mean managing and navigating within a defined or specific space; a world that is hostile. The spaces referred to formed a temporal asylum from the everyday, destructive challenges on particular groups.

This study was based on a premise that the provision of "**safe spaces**" would facilitate BEM students in exploring, discussing and developing strategies aimed at enhancing their overall experiences in HE. The rationale for setting up the dialogue groups was based on observations of human interaction within formal, task-oriented spaces. In such spaces, the interaction between participants was often predictable, with participants behaving as one might expect – like actors on a stage performing (Kitzinger, 1995). The behaviour was often constrained by the environment, the participants and the perceived outcomes of the 'programme' (Jeffs & Smith, 1990; Wilkinson, 1998). This would often be a contrast with spaces or environments that were less formal, not prescribed in terms of having to achieve specific outcomes in a given time (Jeffs & Smith, 1990; Wilkinson 1998).

Making an initial bid for space was fraught, its need arising as part of the negotiation of undertaking this study within the Academy and with the BEM students. The discussion groups were not structured as formal information-gathering groups. Instead, they were more organic and in most instances, the discussions went far beyond the narrow physical environment of educational institutions in order to reflect on their lives, their interaction with others, the meaning or significance they attached to their experiences and the impact this has for the ways in which they understand the world. The discussion groups enabled them to reflect on and explore their sensitivities, their emotions and how they became sensitised or blunted. This was significant at a number of levels, including personal, social, cultural, political and global. Within the spaces created, BEMs were encouraged to critically reflect on their own lives with a view to identifying blockages.

The decision to invite BEM students brought risks, such as the potential that they would be accused of segregation. The BEM students and researchers could have been ostracised by those peers and staff who did not see the need for such groups. Some staff and students

saw the provision of such spaces as an example of preferential treatment and were opposed to it: **"People viewed as being different"; "The group seems to be getting smaller with some members not coming to lessons. As the course progresses some people are finding it hard"**, (BEMSDG, 2010). Some white students demanded to be allowed to attend: **"If you have your own sessions, how will we learn from you?"** (BEMSDG, 2010). Some staff did not encourage or support the BEMSDG initiative, seeing it as a threat to cohesion.

The question of space and the necessity to finding safe space that facilitates vulnerable groups is now established within the literature. Feminist groups have campaigned for this, as have disability, transgender, bisexual, gay, lesbian and Black groups. Others have included young people at risk and sex offenders. The significance of this was iterated by Notash, (2012) in **"The Pro Vice-Chancellor for faculty of Health & Life Sciences at Riverside University"**, in which she discussed with members of the School of Applied Social Sciences (SASS) the need to develop a vocabulary to talk about themselves, (Notash, December 19, 2012). She went on to say that SASS was **"complex and vibrant"** and that this **"brought with it both advantages and disadvantages"**. She concluded that there was a necessity to **"create space, time, capacity and resources that would give the school the opportunity to do the things that it needed to do and to position itself in a more favourable position"**. Thus, it was within and through this prism that the present study emerged.

6.1 Creating the space for the 'small voices'

"I am in touch with the silent ones who speak to me about how they truly feel."

(BEMSDG, 2008)

Within the context of youth work, it is acknowledged that when working with young people, the most important conversations often occurred whilst doing something quite mundane – washing up, packing up; **"when hands are busy, they don't have to look at you and it feels like a 'chat'"**, (Cole, 2012). This observation bears a striking resemblance to what is widely known in the medical world as "the doorknob question". A patient will book an official appointment to see their doctor, but it is often only when they prepare to leave with their hand on the doorknob that they will reveal the real reason they are there, particularly if the

complaint is embarrassing. Thus, in a similar manner, BEM participants were able to use the space that was created to express themselves freely and as they did so, it became evident that a range of themes emerged from the discussions. These ‘small voices’ were now loud and once some of the BEM students found their voices and confidence, they were unswerving in their quest for self-determination and a desire to work with others so that others would benefit from their experience (see Chapter Seven).

In undertaking this study, one is conscious of many of the issues that students would have encountered as part of their daily experiences of life. There is also an appreciation of some of the issues that impact on students in relation to working within a multi-cultural, multi-racial or diverse learning environment (Avari et al, 1997; Mojab, 1997; Bishop, 1997; Rangasamy, 2004). Furthermore, some students have indicated that they have experienced hostility from their peers whilst attending lectures or during informal time, such as socialising in the café. Overt and covert forms of hostility from both staff and students have been observed. Bird, (2006) asserts that such discrimination between staff and students is **“both harmful and wasteful”**, (Bird, 2006:2). BEM students often endure insults, ridicule and a denial of their heritage (Mashengele, 1997; Rangasamy 2004; Bird, 2006; Quinn et al, 2005). Youth work is premised on both voluntary and involuntary participation by young people. They perpetuate the illusion of freedom on the basis that participants are able to come and go as they wish – they are free to choose, but the parameters are strictly defined externally (Jefferies & Smith, 1990; Seabrook, 2002).

The physical and mental attacks which continued to render BEM people as **“educationally subnormal”** (Coard, 1971; Burnage Report, 1989), emphasised through the **“colonisation of the mind”**, (Ngugi wa Thiong’O, 1986; Mashengele, 1997), is part of the context that informed the conception and design of the research methodology. The attempt was to effectively connect with BEM students by exploring some of the historical and contemporary developments in relation to their experience of education at various levels, as well as a consideration of how the past can provide explanations to those who live now, and how the action we take now might transform the future (Murray & Crummett, 2010). Thus, the research was aimed at achieving more than an acquisition of theoretical knowledge that would be somewhat disconnected from the experience of the learners (Asante, 1995). This research is based in praxis and attempts to connect with the realities of the learners (Knight, 1997). Mashengele, (1997) noted that:

“...central to educational methods should be the notion of empowerment ...structuring the learning in ways which give marginalised groups a voice; through opening up

learning programmes and practices to the scrutiny and demands of the BEM communities.”

(Mashengele, 1997: 311-315)

This research attempted to give BEM students a legitimate voice through their active participation in the research process, not as objects to be investigated, but as partners in an enterprise in which they not only envision the change they wish to see, but actively participate in creating that change (Murray & Crummett, 2010).

This study found that there were similarities between the penetration of discrimination and the desire for a **“safe space”**. The presumption on which this study was based was derived mainly from observations of interactions and persistent patterns that emerged in many facets of life. In relation to HE, it was observed that BEM students were persistently lower in degree attainment, lower in retention and lower in employment and pay following graduation. These differentials were a cause for concern and this study wanted to explore whether these patterns were coincidental, or whether they could be explained by consideration of different factors associated with how different groups conceptualise, interact and articulate their experiences.

The impact of discrimination on BEM students contributed to their attempt to resist. For example, some BEM students had situated themselves in spaces that were contested as an act of defiance, or they assembled in spaces that had been vacated. These were conscious, conspicuous and sub-conscious acts by BEM students. The discussion groups gave the BEM students the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences and express or rationalise their actions. The impact of discrimination has already been discussed and the conclusion was that one of the many implications of discrimination was the need for safe places in which students and staff could re-group. Within this, there is a continued facet of positionality. The BEM students had recognised the need for safe spaces. However, in order to inhabit such spaces, there would be a continual struggle. It has been illustrated that when social groups organise against a system of oppression, they are in actual fact organising against systems that have sanctioned, encouraged or tolerated abuses of power and discriminatory practice. The civil rights movement of 1950s and 1960s America provides a pivotal moment in history, used here to illustrate that whilst Black Americans were struggling for their liberty, white America was engaged in an unequal struggle, a resistance that confirmed that **“the depths of racism heretofore unrecognised were laid bare”**, (Carmichael, 1967). Equally, Carmichael, (1967) noted that:

“It had been thought that the aims of the civil rights movement would be easily realisable because the United States constitution supported them. But thousands of African-Americans were jailed, intimidated, beaten, and some murdered for agitating for those rights guaranteed by the Constitution, but only available to whites.”

(Carmichael, 1967:3)

Moreover, for decades, the BBC presided over a number of celebrities such as Jimmy Savile, where it was thought that such behaviour was normal. Thus, whilst there is now an outrage by some, the climate encouraged and condoned such abuses of power. Deborah Orr, (2012) asserts that: **“the crimes that were committed by one man under cover of a dangerously misogynistic permissiveness”**, took place within a context that she refers to as **“rape culture”**. Following an investigation into the way in which the BBC handled its **“Newsnight”** programme on the same subject, it was noted that:

“Chaos and confusion, a lack of leadership from senior executives and an adherence to ‘rigid management chains’ meant that the BBC proved ‘completely incapable’ of dealing with the Jimmy Savile affair.”

(BBC Online, 2012)

These examples are provided to illustrate that even within institutions commanding high levels of respectability, a normative culture abounds and this culture permits actions which some would find intolerable and disgusting. However, such is the hegemonic power, the compliance in force which anaesthetises its victims, spectators and perpetrators. It is only when such practices are disrupted and exposed that we find the cheerleaders asking for justice. In such moments, some victims feel a sense of temporal relief, when their stories are validated and those culpable are momentarily humiliated. In most instances, the perpetrators are removed from public office, with a reward for services rendered. Thus, many of these institutions are culpable, implicit in a culture of denial and rape. The compounded outcome can be described as a clear example of what I have called **“institutional negligence”**.

The stories shared in the BEMSDGs were common and resonated with participants who found it easy to connect with the individualised experiences, focusing on race, gender and class. The accounts provided by the BEM students participating in this study were not new,

but they gave an insight into the enduring nature of white supremacy. Stokely Carmichael, (1967) draws attention to this by saying that:

“...(the) racist assumptions of white superiority have been so deeply engrained in the structure of society that it infuses its entire functioning and is so much a part of the national sub-conscious that it is taken for granted and is frequently not even recognised.”

(Carmichael, 1967:1)

This is the outcome of what Carmichael, (1967) refers to as **“total acts by the white community”** against the Black community. He further emphasises this point by going on to draw a distinction between individual acts of racism that we might deplore and institutional racism. He noted that:

“...(when an) unidentified white terrorist bomb (and) kill(s) five black children, that is an act of individual racism, widely deplored by most segments of society. But when in that same city not five but 500 black babies die each year because of a lack of proper food, shelter and medical facilities, and thousands more destroyed and maimed physically, emotionally and intellectually because of conditions of poverty and deprivation, that is a function of institutionalised racism.”

(Carmichael, 1967: 1)

He adds that:

“...(when) society either pretends it doesn't know of this situation or is incapable of doing anything meaningful about it. And this resistance to doing anything meaningful about the conditions...is itself is a product of (a) combination of forces and special interests in the white community, and the groups that have access to the resources and power to change that situation benefit, politically and economically, from the existence of that ghetto.”

(Carmichael, 1967: 2)

Within the modern HE environment, participation and collaborative learning is not only an aspiration; it is an expectation, one that has evolved from rationalising learning and teaching

in terms of economical and pedagogical considerations. Thus, integration is an integral facet of learning and teaching. Within youth and community education, it is a requirement. Integration entails boundary crossing. This means a disruption of the settled, unconscious expectations of place and space that white people take for granted. Disruption of place and space would at the same time demonstrate that spaces inhabited solely by white people would not be theirs in perpetuity; space is contested.

From this perspective, this study was grounded within the conceptual framework of CRT and anti-discriminatory legislation and practice. It invoked the underlying principles of the Academy and, more specifically, those of the professions that graduates would be expected to employ with their professional life. The challenge in this study is to articulate the ways in which legislation has failed to break down what have been regarded traditionally as 'white spaces'. Space is contested and this is evidenced by a physical presence of BEM students in some HE institutions. However, even though there is now a presence of BEM students in what has been traditionally regarded as a 'white space', this study suggests that much has to be done to achieve the aspiration of true integration. BEM people must continue to break down barriers whilst recognising that entering coveted places is not an antidote. Racial integration is insufficient in changing everyday practices that discriminate and exclude some groups. Kahan, (2008) draws on the work of several cultural theorists (Cohen, 2003; Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1997). They posit that individuals tended to be:

“...motivated unconsciously, to conform all manner of attitudes, including factual beliefs, to ones that are dominant within their self-defining reference groups.”

(Kahan, 2008: 21)

It had become apparent that people seem to gravitate to others with whom they share or are perceived as sharing specific characteristics. Moreover, even when concepts of multi-culturalism and diversity were being celebrated as evidence of a more tolerant post-race society, there were counter-narratives, disquiet and murmurings. David Goodhart, (2004) presented what has been considered a seminal paper, in which he entered the discourse about multi-culturalism, diversity and integration by suggesting people were uncomfortable with others. The characteristics utilised in the determination of partiality might be based on ethnicity, gender, class, caste, age and so on. The characteristics may be taken for granted; they are common, so can appear to go unnoticed, yet it is exactly because they are noticeable that some people are able to notice and differentiate on the basis of the characteristics displayed. The present study has revealed that both the penetration of

discrimination and the desire for “**safe spaces**” were profound for BEM students in shaping, understanding, negotiating and navigating through HE.

Some of the concerns expressed by BEM students were articulated within the consideration of what they perceived as “**threats**”, (see Figures 4.6 and 4.7). The key issues identified from these discussions highlighted a concern about the impact that restorative work would have on their own studies. For example, they made reference to increased “**workloads**” and “**how much time?**” it would take. The concerns of “**workload**” and “**time**” were significant because BEM students were aware that many of them had experienced difficulties with different aspects of the educational process “**to be in a lecture theatre and to feel (constantly) stupid, I really expected to be below average and that I would have to work twice as hard as everyone else to pass assignments, etc**” (BEMSDG, 2009). Some of the BEM students acknowledged heavy workloads as a reality for all students; “**I think that struggling with a heavy workload is completely irrelevant to your skin colour**” (BEMSDG, 2009). However, it is crucial to observe the manner in which these difficulties have been addressed. For example, rather than addressing the specific issues, BEM students were discouraged from participating in any initiative where they might find some respite.

Yet, within the Academy, the responses and suggestions were not unreasonable. They were logical and provided a practical way forward for students deemed to be struggling. However, by inferring that the resolution of the problem could be found in more effective management – essentially management of workload and time – there is a failure to understand the nature of the difficulties experienced or articulated by BEM students. It could be argued that within the solution-orientated advice, there was also transference of responsibility away from the Academy and its custodians back to the BEM students and their communities. The failure to understand or accept some responsibility for some of the difficulties articulated would render some of these academics as culturally-incompetent. It could also be concluded that some of these academics were incompetent in terms of their ability to undertake their professional responsibilities. Within this discourse, many of the themes identified as a focus for this study are in evidence. For example, this study has argued that a more nuanced understanding of the BEM students’ experiences in HE can be obtained by consideration of the ways in which the various themes intersect. Thus, within the admonition that BEM students should avoid involvement in taking on additional challenges or in participating in the BEMSDG, there was an explicit discouragement from participating in such groups. “**There was like a pressure from some of the White staff and students always wanting to know about what we did**” (BEMSDG, 2009). This explicit discouragement also entailed an implicit inference that

association with such groups detracted from rather than added to positive outcomes for students; **"I was asked why I felt the need to attend such a group" (BEMSDG, 2009).**

The argument articulated here is a further example of the sense of bewilderment experienced by BEM students as they seek to navigate within a system of oppression. The BEM students had made the journey into HE; they had crossed boundaries, made concessions, and consciously and sub-consciously conformed to expectations. Some had acted on the explicit advice from their peers and some academics and refused to attend the BEMDSGs. Many of these students were in juxtaposition. Their need to belong, to be included, to be accepted in the white spaces, required them to conform, leaving them with a sense of dissonance in terms of how they situate themselves with the respective groups. Many of these students were cast adrift; they felt that they were made to feel that they did not belong and this was manifest at times as they felt unable to define themselves and articulate their decision-making. The BEM students expressed uncertainty of **"what is expected"**. They thought that they could be **"exploited"** and risked **"family exclusion"**, **"reputation"** and **"credibility"**. They wondered about whether the institution regarded the **"issue as important"** and whether they would provide **"training and consistency"**. Within the Academy, there is often ambivalence, where initiatives such as the BEMSDG are neither encouraged nor overtly discouraged. Yet there were sufficient intimations given to suggest that it was preferable if such groups did not exist:

"I remember having a conversation with the group and we used to discuss some outrageous responses from our white peers. I remember people being upset with what someone said about racism and I remember getting angry, because I felt that, as a group, we seemed mute when the session was in play, but as soon as the session finished, we were loud. I remember being upset, because I felt like a "n*gger" on a plantation, with no voice to 'Massa' (master), but when 'Massa' was not present, I was the most vocal amongst the rest of the slaves

(BEMDSG, 2010).

In this sense, it is possible to observe how the themes of **"education and legacy"**; **"cultural impediments"**; **"the Equation (where more BEM students means lower standards)"**; **"HE inertia and resources"**; **"cultural competence /intelligence"**, and **"institutionalism – oppression, discrimination, racism, collusion and stereotypes"** continue to dominate or influence the extent to which conventional policies and practice have continually disrupted efforts made by BEM students to self-define. Equally, to have others

accept their definitions, not only of themselves, but also of their conceptualisation of the difficulties that hinder their progress. Such acknowledgement opens up the possibility for a more solution-based response. In an attempt to arrive at such a place, it was necessary to **“create spaces”**.

The complexity of the issues here is captured in a paper written by Michelle Adams, (2006) called **“Radical Integration”**. In essence, a consideration of the issues above entails a consideration of white and Black separateness and Black and white identity formation, where the essential question of what it means to be white or Black is scrutinised. The BEMSDG meetings have reinforced the necessity to create a safe environment, a space to enable participants to discuss issues, concerns and triumphs that impact on them as BEM people. These meetings have provided a space where participants have been able to tell their stories or just talk among themselves in a place where they are not judged, assessed or dismissed and where others listen and recognise their struggle to articulate their experiences and have them validated.

In this space, the BEM students shared their individual experiences and in so doing, they became aware of the extent of the problem. These meetings provided participants with the space to explore the impact of racism, discrimination and their associated allies in the oppression, subjugation and demonisation of Black people. In this space, participants were supported and there was a great deal of sensitivity, as participants endeavoured to come to terms with their reality. Coming to terms with the reality and extent of how much they had internalised was an enormous struggle for some of the participants. The discovery of internalised oppression and the systematic ways in which they had been discriminated against brought emotional responses such as anger. Cole, (2009) noted that:

“...for a majority of the participants, it seemed that they had not had the opportunity to disclose negative experiences and it was important to give time and proper attention to the emotional impact of doing that.”

(Cole, 2009)

Referring to psychiatrist Kübler Ross's (1969) **“Emotional Stages of Loss”**, Cole, (2009) further noted:

“...the emotional processes for many participants closely resembled the process of grieving: denial, anger, bargaining, deep sadness and acceptance.”

(Cole, 2009)

Moreover, this outpouring of emotion:

“...would make sense if we think about denied educational opportunities as losses that needed to be acknowledged and processed before it is possible to envisage a way forward that could be constructive and bring about positive change for other students in the future.”

(Cole, 2009)

The opportunity for the BEM students to share their experiences enabled them to explore issues and develop coherent, theoretical explanations based on their understanding, and to plan strategies to dismantle the current stasis which inhibited them as they sought to rise and meet their aspirations:

“Some of the students were considered by the university to be ‘struggling’ or ‘failing’. I had not understood or experienced them to be struggling; on the contrary, it was notable as a group how quickly they were making connections and thinking in complex ways about the issues facing them and the constraints of the university.”

(Cole, 2009)

Moreover, the findings from this study have highlighted the enormous efforts made by BEM students to negotiate or navigate within spaces that are often contested. The idea of space and ensuring that there are enough of these to enable participants from diverse backgrounds to thrive is a challenge to the Academy; there is very little evidence that the Academy has appreciated its significance. The provision of space is more often conceptualised as physical space, thus neglecting to give attention to many of the different locations within which the struggle takes place. There is no argument about the need for physical space as a medium in which education is transacted. The argument is often more about who controls and has access to which spaces. For example, consider all of those spaces that a university swipe-card allows or disallows entry. Who makes those decisions? Space is a resource, one that has been commodified with a value attached to it. Space is physical, but it can also be fluid and nebulous, thus making it difficult to comprehend or contain. Yet space is a further aspect of position which itself arises from circumvention, renunciation or denial of opportunities.

Most of the students participating in the dialogue groups resolved to work with each other to make changes. They felt they had learned a great deal from each other and the facilitation

which enabled them to critically explore the issues raised. Thus, the BEMSDGs were significant as a space to critically reflect, challenge and plan a programme of support and action:

“We really need this group; I feel so empowered.”

(BEMSDG, 2009)

The BEM students’ comprehension, interpretation and rationalisation of their experiences informed their approach and organisation of their lives in relation to what was perceived as the relative position of the stake-holders and the subsequent arrangements they made for survival or managing the systematic and often unyielding oppression (Carmichael, 1968; Fanon, 1985; Hayton & Paczuska, 2002; Sivanandan, 2004).

Many of the BEM students reflected not only on their experience in education, but also on issues of progression and employment (Hayton & Paczuska, 2002; BBC News, 2007a). It was apparent that staying on the course and gaining a qualification was important, but some students wondered whether the struggle was worth it (Hayton & Paczuska, 2002; BBC News, 2007a). The NUS **“Race for Equality Report”**, (2011) noted that many respondents in their study:

“...linked their experience of racism with a drop in their self-esteem, confidence, motivation and desire to continue their education, reporting that they felt marginalised and socially excluded.”

(NUS, 2011:4)

Some students indicated that the rewards offered on successful completion of the course were not always available to BEM graduates (Wright, 2012). Moreover, it has been well documented that BEM students experience discrimination both inside and outside of the Academy (Rangasamy, 2004; Schwartz, 2005; Smith, 2007; Daniel et al, 2007). This means that even when BEM students gained the equivalent qualification, they earned significantly less than their white counterparts (Wright, 2012). This can have an impact on BEM students as they struggle with the course and the associated inequalities embedded within the academy (Rangasamy, 2004; Bahra, 2007; Bhattacharyya, 2006b; Sutherland, 2006). Thus, one can appreciate how the regular encounters of racism and micro-aggressions might

contribute to some BEM students terminating or deciding to drop-out (Curtis, 2004; Bhattacharyya, 2006b).

Some of the BEM students also raised concerns about academics finding it difficult to give them a grade above average. They were convinced that when the tutors hold stereotypical views about them, their chances of gaining equivalent grades to white students were diminished. This was also a key finding of the NUS (2011) “**Race for Equality**” report, which noted that many respondents in their study:

“...regularly cited racial and cultural bias among lecturers as a deterrent to their overall satisfaction and attainment in further and higher education. ... fair assessment and transparent marking procedures were a key area of concern for respondents. Many expressed the need for anonymous marking, without which they felt potential bias and discrimination could take place.”

(NUS, 2011:4)

During one of the BEM discussion groups, the students were speaking about assessments. One student raised a concern about what they believed was a tutor’s assessment of them, rather than of their assignment. The student said that when they asked about their grade, they were told:

“... that 60 per cent is a good mark and I should be happy... I was shocked; it really put me off.”

(BEMSDG, 2009)

These concerns have been around for a considerable amount of time and the NUS has been calling for anonymous marking as a means of reducing discrimination for more than a decade. The introduction and subsequent increase in students fees has forced some HE institutions to pay attention to some of their concerns. Such resistance is illustrated by an email discussion among white members of a union representing the interests of academics (see Appendix J). The discussion is based on the announcement that the university intends to introduce anonymous marking (AM). The discussion took place with academics via emails within what was regarded as a “**safe space**”. I am unable to share this information due to the ethical issues. However, the resistance to change was encapsulated in the use of the well-known phrase: “**if it ain't broke, don't fix it**”, followed by an articulate and persuasive

argument against the proposed AM initiative (Sent: Wed 28/11/2012 16:35). The subsequent contributors took the form of basic agreement with the sentiments expressed above until one person presented an alternative view. The alternative view made reference to their experiences stating that when it came to discrimination they did not **“trust the professionalism of colleagues’ and that prejudices do affect judgements”** (Sent: 29 November 2012 10:28). There was one other comment supporting this view, objecting the notion of AM. Yet the NUS perceived AM as one way of ensuring fairness and confidence in the assessment process. The NUS have been calling for AM for over a decade, emphasising that in calling for anonymous marking, they were simply representing the views of their members and not making any specific allegation:

“We are not saying that lecturers are racist or sexist, but bias exists throughout society and sub-consciously, it could affect marking.”

(NUS, Guardian Online, 1999)

The status of being an academic is not a shield; it is conceivable that many of the professionals within the Academy retain ideas germane to those of eminent scientists such as James Watson, who believed that it is not possible for Black people to have intelligence. In an article by Charlotte Hunt-Grubbe, which appeared in “The Sunday Times”, on October 14, 2007, Watson is quoted as saying that he was:

“...inherently gloomy about the prospect of Africa... all social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours – whereas all the testing say not really.”

(James Watson, Sunday Times Online, 14.10.07)

The article quotes him as hoping that all people are equal, but saying that:

“...people who have to deal with black employees find this not true.”

(James Watson, Sunday Times Online, 14.10.07)

This form of racism may be latent (Kundnani, 2002; Bahra, 2006; 2007; Bhattacharyya, 2006a; Phillips, 2006), but it informs practice in an overt way, impacting on assessment (Bahra, 2006; 2007). This could go some way towards explaining the difference in degree

attainment between BEM and white students and the attrition rates among BEM students (DFES, 2006; Smith, 2007; BBC News, 2007a).

This chapter has demonstrated that the BEMSDG was an important arena for the BEM students to identify, unveil and unravel some of the complex issues impacting on their ability, not only to claim a space within the Academy, but also to have their rights to that place acknowledged and respected. The BEMSDG has been the catalyst enabling BEM students to acquire the insights whilst preparing for success. Furthermore, only by exposing the extent of discrimination and how racism permeates all institutions could an appeal for BEM students bring about any effective change.

The cognisance of theme one, “**discrimination**”, gave rise to themes two, “**positionality**” and three, “**space**”. Theme four, is, in essence, a realisation, a “**consciousness**” that emerges from having the opportunity to reflect on and explore issues that were pertinent to their individual and collective experiences. The BEMSDGs provided a temporal sanctuary in which to share the students’ experiences. This in turn provided the catalyst for the identification of three themes: “**learning contracts**”; the “**radical curriculum**” and “**peer support, and mentoring systems (PSMS)**”, which is, in essence, located in self-efficacy, where students sought to work with the Academy and each other to improve things. Further discussion took place in regard to the emergent three themes; students began to reflect more extensively on the discussions and sought a way to move on from disillusionment.

The BEM students saw the discussion groups as a legitimate space where they did not feel constrained or insecure. They also felt that by sharing their experiences, they would reduce the burden that many carried. Some spoke of wanting things to improve, thus they were motivated to share their stories and experiences. This was a space where they were not isolated, nor did they feel conspicuous in negative ways. They were not required to ‘fit in’ to something that was not negotiable, as the basis on which the group worked was negotiated and constantly revisited. Participants often came to the group seeking refuge – a place to regroup and reflect. In terms of geography or location, Ward, (1989) argued that the ghetto was not a place of shame, but a safe space to regroup. Further, Stokely Carmichael & Charles Hamilton, (1986) suggested that “**before a group can enter the open society, it must first close ranks**”. This notion is based on group dynamics and the development of group solidarity to facilitate them in positioning themselves where they can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralistic society. The BEMSDGs provided a space in which they discussed the areas where they were struggling or perceived

to be struggling. Some indicated that there were particular modules or members of staff that discouraged them and this in turn demotivated them.

This study has shown that BEM students and many of those responsible for the transaction of education at every level have been deluded by the fiction that if BEM people educate themselves, they would gain acceptance in white spaces, and with it an opportunity “**to leave the ranks of the oppressed and join white society**” (Carmichael, 1967:3). The BEM students discovered that their presence in HE institutions was not sufficient or indeed necessary to guarantee their liberation. Furthermore, their presence in HE may well have threatened their ultimate ability to define themselves on their own terms. Their participation in the BEMSDG was an act of self-protection and self-definition, a tacit acknowledgement of the continuing reality of de facto segregation. From this perspective, it is proposed that the most appropriate site for an individual's racial or ethnic identity formation is within the context of some appropriately constituted Black community. The following section illustrates how the aspect of self-definition was instrumental in articulating the BEM students' realisation and the strategies they suggested as relevant for implementation in an effort to change the current systematic failures in HE.

Chapter 7: Consciousisation:

Determination to succeed and to challenge for positive change: Accountability, acknowledgement and self-determination

The previous chapter discussed the theme of (1) “**desire for safe space**”. This was one of three themes identified by the PIN triangles (see **Figures 8.1 to 8.6 inclusive**) and the SVOT analysis activities (see **Figures 4.6 Vulnerabilities, 4.7 Threats, and 8.7 Opportunities, 8.8 Strengths**). The other two themes (2) “**accountability and acknowledgement**” and (3) “**self-determination**” are discussed here. The themes identified here were consistent with other findings in this study. They also reflected or replicated many of the themes that had emerged in the literature. Themes one and three are interesting, since these have embodied a more explicit focus on ideology, discourse, consciousness, consciousisation, agency and advocacy. In essence, the reflective process that the BEM students engaged in facilitated them in drawing conclusions relative to their experiences within the Academy. The reflective process was enriched due to the spaces created. The students talked about how their encounters with different aspects of discrimination corresponded with their lived reality (Freire, 1970). Moreover, in terms of discourse, the BEM students were constantly navigating within confined spaces where their reality was referred to and influenced by people outside of the experience.

The concept of 'consciousisation' used extensively in this thesis is not the same as Freire's (1970) 'conscientization'. There are different roots to the emergence of these terms. Having developed this term, a search was undertaken to ascertain whether there were any other usages of this term. I discovered that Teilhard de Chardin had written about this idea in 1961. For Teilhard, consciousisation was an active process of thought and reflection: **"the power acquired by a consciousness ... to take possession of itself as of an object endowed with its own particular consistence and value: no longer merely to know, but to know oneself; no longer merely to know, but to know that one knows"** (1961:165 in **Cunningham,1997**). I also found a book written by Fabian Patrick Mayr, (2012) called: **“Consciousising Relatedness”**. It would seem that these ideas are still developing.

In relation to this study, the concept of 'consciousisation' emerged conceptually as part of the process of working with BEM students by observing and listening to their narratives and the ways in which they negotiated difference, the ways in which they sought to make connections with each other in an attempt to construct an identity they understood. One that gave them the capacity to transform themselves, to support each other and take individual responsibility in creating the circumstances to manage the hostilities incorporated within the structure of dominance.

Consciousisation is an aspect of self-determination and naming the world, based on using a critical lens such as CRT. The aim is to understand how they have been situated by using the experience of what they had achieved collectively and individually by completing their course and achieving beyond their expectations.

Consciousisation, as used here, is an emergent and embryonic concept. The methodological approach adopted in this study facilitated such emergence in that it was open to unconscious dynamics in political theory and praxeology. The beginning of awareness starts with individual comprehension of self and the extent to which one is prepared to acknowledge responsibility for perpetuating or changing the circumstances that sustain oppression (the Hydra). Self-cleansing and a love for others are essentially elements; an act that is both conscious and unconscious where participants in this study journeyed.

The Heideggerian concept of "being-in-the-world" has a precise application in understanding the experience of BEM students. The BEM students' existence in HE creates meaning. They are "being-in-the-UK-higher-education-system" as part of their world. It is necessary to understand the essence of being a BEM student to interpret the hidden meaning in the experience (Heidegger, 1962).

The objective in this research approach was to create a space which enabled participants to reflect on their experiences in the hope that insights gained would contribute to changes in HE and that these changes would enhance the future experiences of BEM students in HE. These workshops took the group through a process of naming and acknowledging shared experiences, making visible the impacts of those experiences and distilling possibilities for change into a number of inter-linked approaches. The process was underpinned by a commitment to working with group processes, as well as towards a tangible outcome that could be presented to the three stake-holders: BEM students, BEM communities and the university.

The research methodology recognised that there may be internal and external conflict with other groups; thus it sought to create a safe space (Harding, 1991; Jeff & Smith, 1999; Crow, 2002; Humphries & Truman, 1998). Thus, it could be argued that the conditions had to be created to enable BEM students to connect with each other and to recognise their common state. The emergence of consciousness was not simply about recognition, but also about subsequent acts in sustaining and supporting each other. Wrong, (1994) acknowledged that solidarity among members of a group can be heightened by emphasising its distinctiveness. The approach adopted in this study was cognisant of the lived experiences of BEM students (hooks, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Delpit, 1988; Gillborn, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Gillborn, 2010). As Ghosh, (2008) notes:

“(even though)...race does not have scientific validity, ... Race is a very real concept in our social consciousness, and it has real world consequences.”

(2008:27)

BEM students in this study traversed many incomprehensible situations; they were often forced to find reason within and among peers, academics and others who distilled their understanding of the world largely based on the language of the ‘dominant ideology’ or from a distorted perspective. Equally, time gives meaning to a person’s existence. People’s lives change over time, a state of affairs which results from their existence in a temporal context. The past, present and future all influence people’s perceptions and accounts of an experience. Perspectives on the future may also be coloured by past and present experiences. In the present study, ‘consciousness’ was about recognition and solidarity. It was not used to identify a specific ethnic group, nor was it used to identify or locate groups on the basis of their gender, age, disability, sexuality, faith or economic status. Consciousness was more than that; it was about a group of people which was manoeuvring or which was being manoeuvred in unsafe spaces, but which still found solidarity. The inability to find an established theoretical frame of reference should not detract from boundary-crossing, in terms of positivist and phenomenological enquiries.

The BEM students felt that they were constantly perceived as victims or problems and that they had been pathologised. The Academy represented itself as inhibited by the complexity of the problem, yet refused to acknowledge the narrative from those most adversely affected.

The denial of the BEM students’ discourse enabled the Academy to situate itself in a manner that implied they would take the necessary steps to enhance the BEM students’ experiences

once evidence confirmed that such steps could make a difference. However, this would prove to be a near-impossible task as what constituted “evidence” was circumstantial and subjective, determined by the oppositional force in which there is a vested interest and one that is not always transparent. Thus, the search for “evidence” required the elucidation of notions often shrouded in a discourse that was mystified and lost in translation between interests, positions and needs perceived as different. There needed to be some agreement of what would constitute acceptable “evidence” by the different stake-holders.

The extent to which word craft is used within the Academy is illustrated by a discussion with a colleague for another HEI (see Appendix K). The academic colleague points out how a system uses many tools to subvert or confuse. The academic colleague concluded that:

“...it does not matter how absurd the arguments used to deny wrong-doing - the establishment can use them because they have the power.”

(Professor X, 20 December, 2012, 0:12)

Many of the complexities and difficulties of reaching agreement are illustrated in the study’s emergent theme, referred to as “**accountability and acknowledgement of discrimination**”. In this theme, it could be argued that both BEM students and the HE institutions want the same outcomes. However, there are crucial factors which made this difficult. BEM students were reluctant to name the problem as discrimination; they were concerned about the implications. Thus, they sought to protect themselves whilst having a sense of responsibility to protect the reputation of the institution. In the climate of position, credibility and competition, HE institutions are concerned about the implication of research findings and student satisfaction surveys that suggest dissatisfaction with the level of service. Moreover, one would anticipate significant impact and reputational damage where it was inferred that discrimination formed a significant aspect of the BEM students’ experiences.

In short, the BEM students were hesitant in this disclosure, limiting these to micro-personal discussions with each other. Some students tended to regard their efforts as not being good enough to attain a higher classification, or that attrition and lack of progress was linked to personal characteristics, such as resilience. In this respect, the discussion groups were also a safe space that enabled the participants to talk about their experiences in a constructive manner, with a view to gaining acknowledgement and resolution. The BEMSDG provided a safe space for reflection, meditation, reasoning and dreaming. This process facilitated the emergence of new insights, insights borne from another narrative, a narrative often pushed

to the margins, a narrative that the Academy struggles with, because this narrative asked institutions to take responsibility for their own role in these shocking outcomes.

During this study, BEM students constantly talked about the need to challenge what they perceived as a narrative which normalised failure or underachievement by putting the emphasis on BEM people. Getting to the end for some students was their primary objective, as reflected thus:

“No one expects me to succeed, but I am determined, It does not matter how long it takes. I will succeed.”

(BEMSDG, 2008)

Two of the themes were **“education and legacy”** and **“cultural impediments”**, in which it was asserted that BEM students do not have high aspirations of themselves. This perception acts as an impediment to their progression and achievement at each stage of their educational experience (Stone & Braidford, 2002; BBC News, 2003b; Holden, 2006; Heath & Brinbaum, 2007; Bagguley & Hussain, 2007; Fekjær, 2007; Pemberton, 2008). However, the evidence from this research is consistent with others in refuting this pernicious assertion. The BEM students’ decision to put themselves through the challenge of HE was in actual fact informed by their desire to succeed. They placed a high premium on educational success and many of the BEM students came from communities that regarded educational failure as shameful. (Holden, 2006; Heath & Brinbaum, 2007; Brinbaum & Cebolla-Boado, 2007; Fekjær, 2007; Bagguley & Hussain, 2007; Meikle, 2007; Eason on BBC News Online, 2007b). In this study, BEM students perceived that their confidence, ambitions and aspirations were thwarted by the environment of HE. They felt that the HE culture was a reflection of wider society in terms of reproducing inequality:

“It is widely recognised that under-representation and racism weaken the ability of black students to articulate their needs and aspirations through the formal structures in institutions.”

(Akhtar, Black Britain Daily News Online, 2005)

During one of the discussion groups, students were talking about why they came to the university. One student exclaimed:

“I had a big fear of failure. I chose the course and college (university) knowing that I would get in; I lowered my aspirations as a way of softening the blow.”

(BEMSDG, 2007)

Comments such as this might go some way to explain why so many students choose particular courses and institutions (Allen, 2007; Bagguley & Hussain, 2007).

The youth and community course at this particular university consistently comprises at least a third BEM students. Within the hierarchy or elitism associated with HE and some courses of study, these courses are not regarded as academically-challenging. Equally, the university is not one of the Russell Group or elite institutions. Many students had indicated that in choosing the course and the university, their decisions were influenced by the perception of their own capability. Whilst undertaking this research, it became evident that there was a lack of appreciation on the part of some BEM students in relation to the demands of the course and also a failure to comprehend the penetration of racism. This can seem both confusing and contradictory, but is consistent with other research findings (Ouseley, 1998; Hockings et al, 2010). However, a consideration of failure whilst aiming high may obscure the challenges and the insidious nature of everyday racism. Moreover, choosing an academic institution perceived as less academically-challenging can be misguided and does not take account of the presence of institutional racism within these institutions. Thus, racism may go some way to explaining degree attainment and BEM student retention, even after they have made choices in selection to reduce academic failure (Bhattacharyya et al, 2003; Broecke & Nicholls, 2007; Richardson, 2008; HEA/ECU, 2008). This then becomes part of the institutional legacy and compounds the BEM student experience both at the individual and collective group identity level (Bhattacharyya et al, 2003; Broecke & Nicholls, 2007).

This research affirms the commitment of BEM students who, on recognising the extent of the problem, began to challenge the assumptions others held of them. Unfortunately, these BEM students also gave many accounts about the personal cost of challenging (Back, 2004; Chesler et al, 2005). These accounts included finding themselves isolated and vulnerable:

“It’s difficult... an on-going feeling of isolation... being a minority.”

(BEMSDG, 2007)

Some of these students became pre-occupied with fighting against what they perceived as injustices and unfair or inconsistent treatment. This impacted on the time left for them to study, their energy and their motivation (Chesler et al, 2005). This burden was not even recognised by their peers (Chesler et al, 2005). Furthermore, when these students sought recompense, they often found there was nowhere to go, and no one to listen to their concerns. More often than not, they were discouraged from getting involved (Rangasamy, 2004; Allen, 2007). BEM and white students sought to avoid becoming a target; they did not want to risk speaking out. Thus, they distanced themselves from those who were suffering from the violation visited upon them (Rangasamy, 2004; Chesler et al, 2005; Allen, 2007). The sense of being inept compounded the negative on-campus experience, as it was an unexpected extension of the off-campus experience, the experience that they have come to expect because they *are* Black. Drawing on the work of Adams, (2006), we can explore a dynamic process in which the BEM students sought to identify and articulate their position, whilst simultaneously finding a way of managing the present, and building a platform for the transformation the educational process, based on the experiences they have been through.

It could be argued that the actions of the BEM students were instinctive or even intuitive. From their perspective and experience, the cultural norms facilitated white students in the sense that it was intended for white students; white students used it, and expected to be able to use it. From this perspective, the BEM students were simply acknowledging the cultural reality of the moment, and chose not to disrupt that reality by integrating on campus. Instead, they found ways to navigate within and around the evident exclusionary practices. Here, the notion of integration goes beyond Black entry into what is perceived as white physical space: What does it mean to be Black when faced with a white environment? From this perspective, the BEM students' refusal to collude and integrate was an act of self-description. By electing to participate in the BEMSDG, the students were powerfully articulating who they were: This is a white academy, and they are not white. Black is something different; something separate that needs to be protected, to be guarded from encroachment by outside forces. The identity-based, community-centred narrative would not necessarily place a premium on the need to 'integrate' any particular political, educational, economic, or social hierarchy. The problem in this narrative is not whether groups integrate. Rather, it is a struggle for racial equality, a struggle that is enduring and manifest in many paradoxical tensions in which education is perceived as the means to developing Black individuals within a materially-enhanced Black community.

The BEM students who participated in the discussion groups found it empowering to meet and discuss their concerns. They felt that it was important to encourage rather than

discourage others from entering HE. Indeed, they regarded themselves as trend-setters, taking the first steps on a long and lonely journey. This would appear to be consistent with earlier research about students' satisfaction with their choice of educational institution and their course (National Union Students, 2011). Throughout this project, students have reflected on their experiences. At times, they would discuss both what they perceive to be positive and negative experiences. In the early stages, a great deal of discussion has focussed on their experiences. Through this process, it became evident that they shared more than their ethnicity and culture. They also narrated their common experiences of racism and discrimination. It was instructive that in the light of the experiences, BEM students were not deterred; they regard it as desirable to have an HE qualification. This is consistent with other findings (Crace, 2004; Chesler et al, 2005) and confirms persistent and enduring attempts by BEM people to gain places in HE. Therefore, most continue to face the challenge of pursuing a course in higher education. Some felt that expectation left them with little choice.

The awareness of strengths, vulnerabilities, threats, opportunities and a desire to participate in making some changes is captured by the following comment made by one of the students:

“I am prepared to initiate some change in the university and their approaches towards students ... [BEM students] do not have enough confidence in the initiatives that are being created. I feel if we all work together, things will improve for all the students.”

(BEMSDG, 2008)

Another participant suggested that part of the problem within the Academy was linked to self-organisation and advocacy:

“We are not organised to take the issues to the authorities.”

(BEMSDG, 2007)

This view has also been echoed by Gus John (John in Eason, BBC Online, 9/4/2007) who notes that 40 years of reforms have changed very little. In some ways, both of these observations link to what Mahatma Gandhi meant when he said: **“Be the change you wish to see in the world.”**

Furthermore:

“We need unity. They are ignorant; they don’t mean it.”

(BEMSDG, 2007)

In a discussion with De Montfort Students’ Union Education and Welfare Officer, 2009, I was told that the main strategy in improving the situation for the BEM students was based on raising awareness among white students. The main focus seemed to be at a personal level, where the white participants might engage in a form of ethnic tourism. However, as discussed earlier, many of these white students are in direct competition with BEM students. The competitive aspect between participants is encouraged by the overall system of education. The reward/award is the incentive and prospect of changing one’s status and material position. Thus, white students have little interest in challenging oppressive systems that work in their interest (Carmichael, 1967:3). The system of oppression works systematically in favour of some groups and whilst it is the case that many white students are also adversely affected, they still tend to accrue more benefits. Thus, as benefactors, they voluntarily or involuntarily conspire and this becomes the basis of their relationships with Black students on campus. Thus, a strategy of ethnic tourism is ineffective and fails to challenge embedded racism at the personal, cultural and structural levels. Moreover, when senior academics are asked to respond to the concerns about disparity in student attainment, they often appear confused and slightly or temporarily dumb, uttering responses such as **“it’s complex”**, **“complicated”** or even **“it’s a big issue for us”**, and **“there are structural matters to address”** (Rangasamy, 2004; Martin, 2008).

The realisation of how discrimination has impacted or shaped their experiences in HE stimulated BEM groups to recognise themselves in terms of identity. They perceived their identity as a factor in shaping relationships, interactions and opportunities. As BEM students discussed and reflected on their experiences, it was evident that they were impacted by the opportunity to share their experiences. There appeared to be a realisation that many of the experiences were not isolated. The discussion groups afforded participants an opportunity to see that others were also struggling with similar issues:

“(it’s) ...an eye opener – ignorance is bliss.”

(BEMSDG, 2009)

Another layer in the facilitation was found in building solidarity through the process of uncovering knowledge and shifting the sense of responsibility from personal failure to

political consciousness. The deep sense of failure and embarrassment was transformed as many of the participants began to embrace a counternarrative, a narrative which suggested that some participants were becoming more vocal in expressing their disquiet. In terms of strengths, it is evident from the responses that the group was in a reflective mode, acknowledging what they had learned as a result of their discussion (**see Figure 8.8**).

It appeared that the discussion groups were safe spaces which enabled participants to discuss their concern. Through this process, some of them began to appreciate what appeared to be a racial bias in how they were treated. This realisation seemed to ignite some participants and there appeared to be an acceptance of the social reality in which they were compelled to accept the status quo, or agitate for change. Many of the BEM students became critically-conscious. Through authentic dialogue, BEM students became engaged in a process that facilitated them to analyse the culture which shaped them. This process is described by Freire, (1970) as “**conscientisation**”, a practice for freedom, through authentic dialogue, rather than for domestication. Thus, BEM students spoke about being “**ready to challenge**” and being “**more determined to succeed and to challenge for positive change**”.

The BEM students experienced a great change in their sense of self and “**being in the world**”; in other words, ‘**consciousisation**’. They constructed new self-images and found a desire to learn more about their histories in an attempt to find examples that challenged widely-held perceptions that were often based on stereotypes. The consideration of the narrative emerging from the discussion groups revealed that the BEM students were not only entering a phase of articulation, they were also realising their value and opportunities for change. Moreover, the students reported feelings of defiance, empowerment and a desire for the institution to acknowledge their value and to accept its role and responsibility in working towards social justice. A significant aspect also discussed was the BEM students’ self-determination; the desire to situate themselves in a manner that facilitated them in achieving their objectives within and beyond HE. These findings constituted one of the original contributions of this work. The BEM students in this study described how HE offered opportunities otherwise associated with employment. The impact of HE was variable and often reflected wider social status associated with particular demographics, such as race, gender, class and disability. For example, women with children found that they had to demonstrate a higher level of managerial skills.

The findings highlighted that the experience of HE contributed to the “**consciousisation**” of some students. This was not an end point, but rather a stage in a process in the practice of

freedom. In this sense, students were learning to be, learning to give, learning to take and learning to use their skills and resources to advocate on behalf of others. In this process, the goal was self-determination as an attempt to escape the hegemonic control which nullifies their attempts to resist the structure of domination. Education has the potential to change lives; it is regarded as an investment. These findings are paradoxical and in part correspond to a number of other studies carried out with BEM students in HE (Bhattacharyya et al, 2003; Broecke & Nicholls, 2007; Richardson, 2008; HEA/ECU, 2008; Singh, 2011).

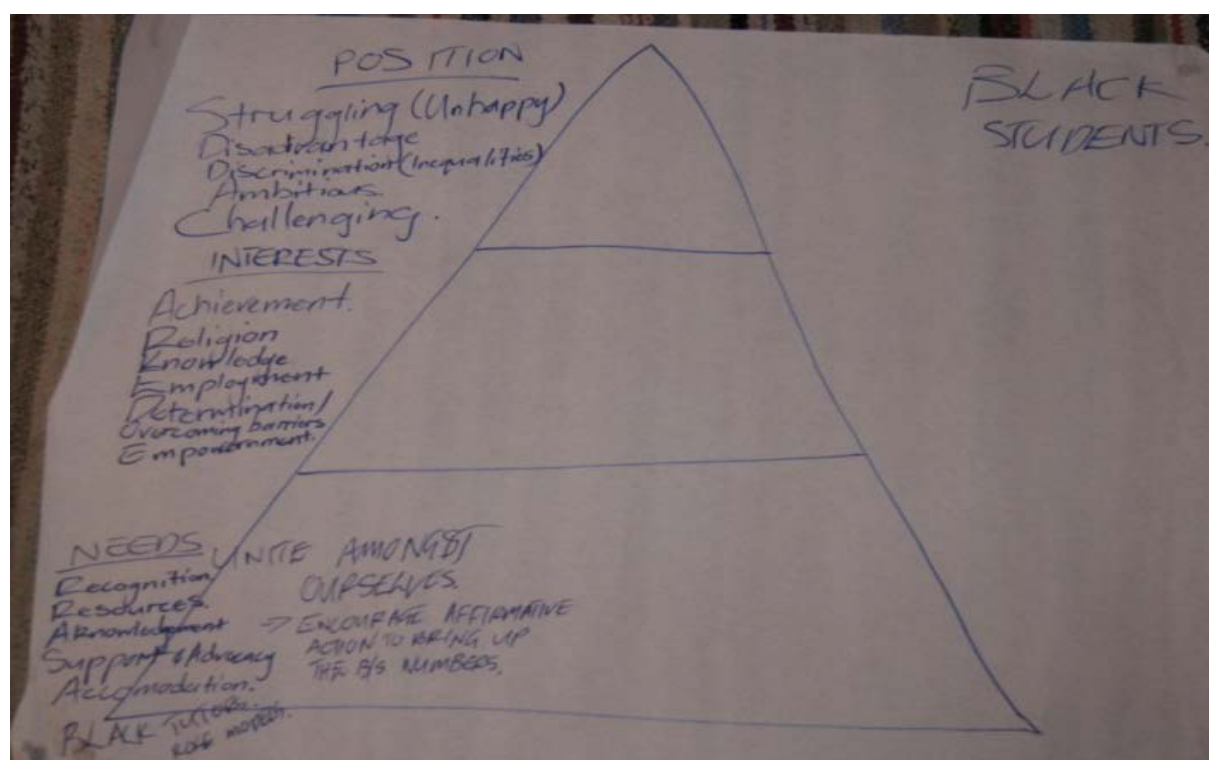
Chapter 8: What are the opportunities that bring about change?

Position, Interests and Needs (PIN) Triangles were used to explore the students' voices. This required BEM students to consider their own perspective needs in relation to what they perceived were those of the white students and the university.

Figure 8.1: Perceived Position of Black and white students and the university

Position	As perceived by BEMDSG
Black students	Struggling (with racism) and unhappy; disadvantaged; discriminated against; ambitious for success; challenging the inequalities
White Students	"I'm not racist"; "status quo"; "them and us"; "not my problem"
Institution	"Black students need lots of resources and have lots of issues"

Figure 8.2: Perceived Position of Black students

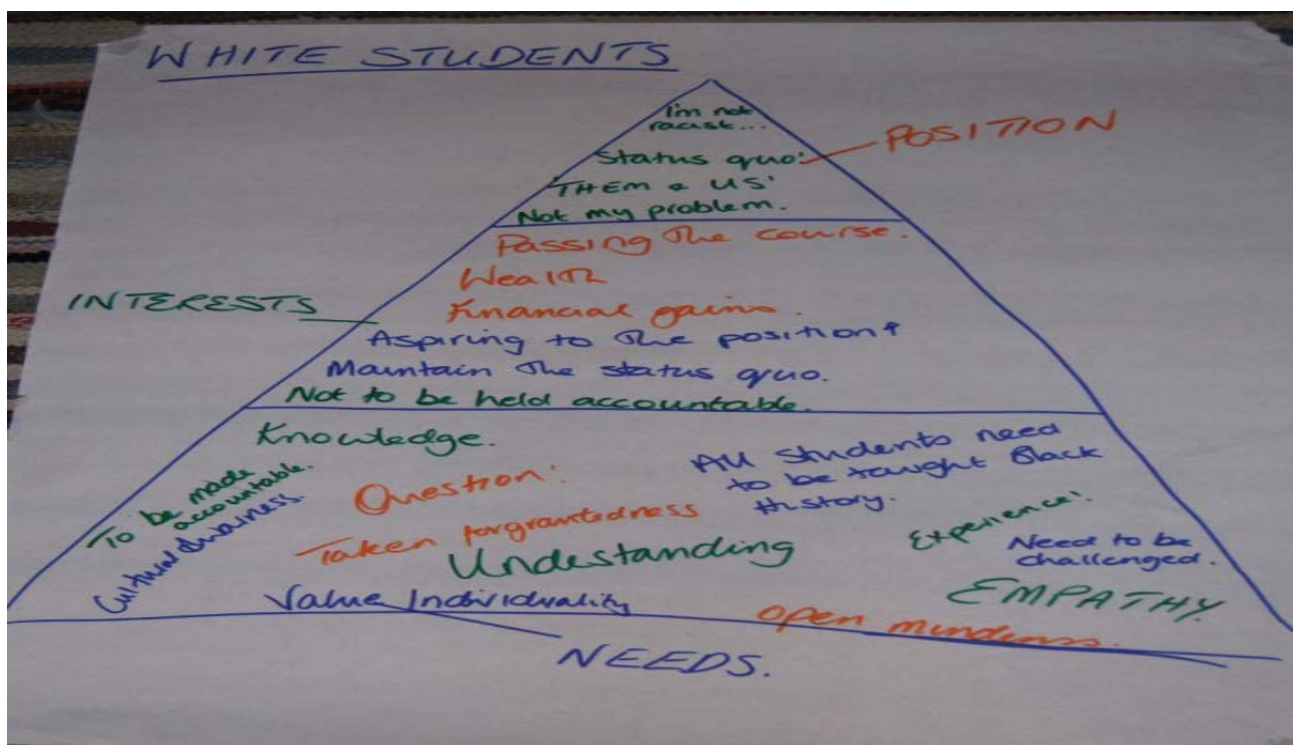


As Fig 8.2 shows, BEM students perceived themselves as struggling. They found themselves struggling for recognition and fighting against exclusionary practices. They are unhappy because they feel discriminated against and that they have to struggle to get others to appreciate the efforts that they are making to succeed. They consider themselves ambitious, but are in a constant struggle for equality.

Figure 8.3: Perceived Interests of Black and white students and the university

Interests	As perceived by BEMDSG
Black students	Achievement; recognition of religious and spiritual interests; knowledge; employment; determination; overcoming barriers; empowerment
White Students	Passing the course; wealth and financial gains; aspiring to position and maintain the status quo; not to be held accountable
Institution	Monitoring students to pass meeting targets

Figure 8.4: Perceived PIN of white students

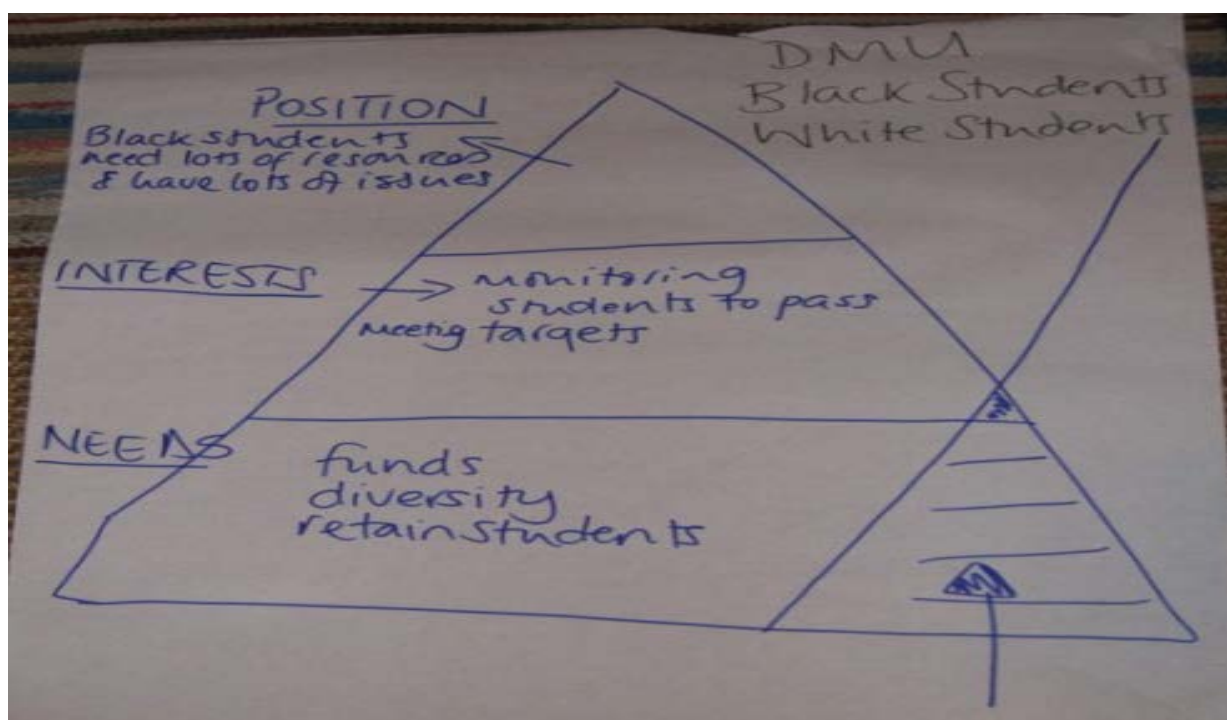


The BEM students identified their interests as wanting to be acknowledged. They wanted others to recognise the importance of their faith and spirituality, and wanted space to grow, gain knowledge, and overcome barriers. They also wanted to become empowered and were determined to achieve employment.

Figure 8.5: Perceived nneeds of Black and white students and the university

Needs	As perceived by BEMDSG
Black students	Recognition; resources; acknowledgement; support and advocacy; accommodation; “more black tutors as role models”; “to unite amongst ourselves”; “affirmative action to raise numbers of black students”
White students	Knowledge, to be made accountable, cultural awareness, question taken-for-grantedness, understanding, value individuality, “all students need to be taught Black history”, experience, need to be challenged, empathy, open mindedness
Institution	Funds diversity; retains students

Figure 8.6: Perceived PIN of university



The BEM students identified a need for recognition; they felt that the continual neglect, under-resourcing and failure to acknowledge and accommodate them led to amplification and mis-diagnosis of the problem, (Fig 8.6). They felt a strong and urgent need for “**affirmative action to raise numbers of Black students**”; they indicated that there needed to be more unity among themselves and they needed support and advocacy and “**more black tutors as role models**”. The BEM students’ perception of the institution’s needs was less comprehensive. Nonetheless, their proposals were interesting because they offered insights into how the institution was perceived by one of its key stake-holders. The BEM students perceived the institution as needing funds and diversity to maintain or enhance its position on some of the “league tables”; it not only needed to retain students, but also to enhance the qualifications obtained, reduce the disparity in degree attainment and ensure that students were employable as part of progression. This perception of the various needs was important because it demonstrated that even though the BEM students did not have access to the intricate mechanism of the institution, their responses were guided by how they believed they had been treated and, as a consequence, how they situated themselves, and how they perceived their situation within the Academy.

What opportunities and threats come out of overlapping needs?

Fig 8.7 shows the results of students grouping their responses under headings that they felt most reflected their views and experiences. The three themes below helped to meet the overarching need of improving ratings in the National Student Survey

Figure 8.7: Summary of perceived OPPORTUNITIES

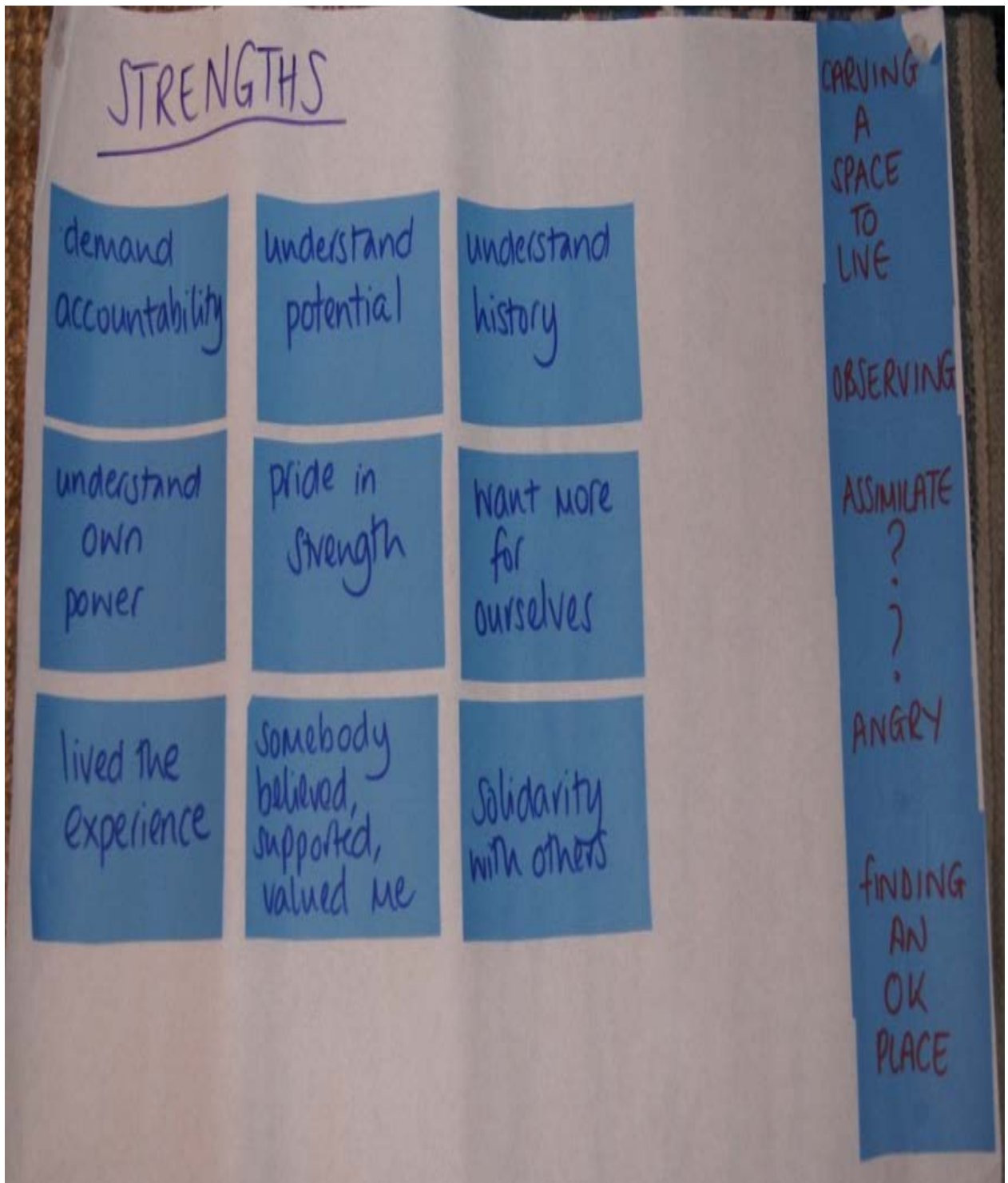


Figure 8.7 summarises some of the perceived opportunities and key issues emerging from this discussion. Having reflected on some of the issues, the BEM students sought to identify specific areas in which they could work with the university to achieve mutually-beneficial

outcomes. The BEM students were aware of concerns such as the desire to see enhanced **“progression and retain students”**, to **“generate higher academic achievement and meet specific outcomes, e.g. employability”** and to increase **“diversity and widening participation”**. These outcomes were significant and were articulated in some HE institutions’ learning and teaching strategies. The catalyst for these outcomes was directly linked to state policy and the extent to which these were delivered determined the distance between the policies and rhetoric. In the context of the sanctions or rewards attached to the realisation of these policies, HE institutions were compelled, since they are motivated by the impact of reduced budgets and reputational damage, moreso than a commitment to social justice or a reduction in inequalities (DFES, 2003). BEM students’ appreciation of these issues and their direct experience contributed to them identifying how these could be regarded as mutually-beneficial, strategic opportunities. BEM students would meet most of the objectives for these policies and the Academy could use any successful work in this area to enhance its own position in relation to marketing, performativity outcome, student satisfaction and income generation.

The students also indicated a need for the institution to recognise the potential that was available to it via its students and some of its staff. For example, the presence of students and staff from diverse backgrounds brought **“knowledge’, love, unity, empathy”**. They wanted the institution **“to be held accountable”** and they saw themselves as a resource able **“to question social structures”**. They had some understanding of what worked for them, and they wanted the institution to acknowledge and give them recognition, and where necessary take **“affirmative action, advocacy, accommodation, (with) black tutors as role models, radical curriculum, discourse of white privilege and supremacy, everyone to be taught Black history, especially white students”**. They also wanted the institution to **“value individuality”**.

Figure 8.8: Summary of perceived STRENGTHS



In terms of strengths, it is difficult to conceptualise the resourcefulness of the students participating in the study and in HE. Having explored some of their key concerns and vulnerabilities, BEM students were encouraged to reflect on their strengths. A discussion about strengths often embodies significant difficulties, since BEM students often originate from cultures that discourage conceit and discussions about strengths can be perceived as

such. However, in the knowledge that this was a reflective group discussion, the BEM students spoke about strengths from the perspective of their knowledge and experiences. Thus, for them, the key issue articulated was a need to **“understand our own power”**. It is evident that in this statement there is an acknowledgement that there is some latent power or influence located within the BEM students, collectively and individually. However, their power is not entirely understood, nor has not been tested, thus they are confused or unaware of what power they actually have. Moreover, it is acknowledged here that power is not static; it is fluid and is utilised in accordance with necessity and capacity. Each person or group is as powerful as they are allowed to be. BEM students perceived their power as linked to their understanding. Thus, they talked about the need to **“understand our history”** and **“understanding our potential”**, equating to the notion that knowledge is power.

The understanding of history was deemed to be really important in this context, since as Woodson, (1933), states: **“people without knowledge of their history are like a tree without roots”**. Moreover, it seems important that others are also aware and understand this history, since distorted history has contributed to an arrogant conceptualisation of the power of the European, whilst enabling a demise and expurgation of the contribution that BEM people have made to world civilisation. These contributions continue to be marginalised within the Euro-centric curriculum, only making an appearance during what is often referred to as Black History Month. The BEM students also talked about the need for **“understanding our potential”**. This could be related to the notion where writers such as Henrik Clark, (2001) and CLR James, (2001) iterated the importance of knowing where one has been in order to discover where one could be. Moreover, Hilliard, (1995) takes this further by suggesting that **“history must inform theory”**, (Hilliard, 1995:56). BEM people are often depicted as infantile, inept or dangerous and undependable. Such depictions can have a devastating impact on BEM students and facilitate others to perpetuate hostility on the basis of mis-education or ignorance. Among African-American scholars, the phrase **“on the shoulder of giants”** resonates as acknowledgment of a sense of history, purpose and potential. In a similar manner, BEM students were working together to enhance their understanding with renewed emphasis and vision.

The BEM students went on to draw other themes together, having identified their understanding. They then put some emphasis on the notion of being, by talking about having **“lived and survived the experience”**, (having) **“been believed in, supported and valued in other places”**, **“know(ing) our own worth”**. They also spoke of the **“pride in our strength”** and how this is amplified when they **“have solidarity with others”**. As a consequence of the process, the BEM group articulated different aspects of self-recognition

and worth. This was evident when they talked about **“want(ing) more for ourselves”** and was illustrated where they spoke about **“demand(ing) accountability”**. This finding was also significant, as a key factor in attainment is linked to confidence. Students spoke about the struggle they had in carving out a space to live and study, trying to find an OK place to be, observing the environment around in detail and trying to understand the rules, making decisions about how much to assimilate. During this research, BEM students consistently gave examples of where their white peers would remain silent when discussing issues of race, whilst having much to say in other subjects.

The following comment is typical of those made during a module designed to explore issues of discrimination and its impact on society: **“At the start of this module, I feel I held back from contributing during lectures’ (BEMSDG, 2010)**. The research process gave the students an opportunity to explore uncomfortable issues in a safe space. Cole, (2009) noted that:

“For a majority of the participants, it seemed that they had not had the opportunity to disclose negative experiences and it was important to give time and proper attention to the emotional impact of doing that.”

(Cole, 2009)

The awareness of strengths, vulnerabilities, threats, opportunities and a desire to participate in making changes is captured by the following comment made by one of the students:

“I am prepared to initiate some change in the university and its approach towards students, because I am in touch with the "silent ones", who speak to me about how they truly feel, but do not have enough confidence in the initiatives that are being created. I feel if we all work together, things will improve for all the students.”

(BEMSDG, 2008)

Part 3

Introduction to three major themes/actions: Learning contracts, radical curriculum and peer support & mentoring system (PSMS)

Following consideration of the key issues emerging from the PIN Triangles and SVOT analysis, the students were asked to identify what they felt were the most important issues to be addressed. Three themes emerged from further discussion: “**Learning contracts**”, “**radical curriculum**” and “**peer support & mentoring system (PSMS)**”. BEM students said that attention to these areas would make a significant difference to their overall experience in HE. The diagram below represents the discussion summary. Here, the central plank is identified as learning contracts, radical curriculum and PSMS. These themes then became the focus for subsequent discussions.

The BEMSDGs provided a temporal sanctuary for students to share their experiences. Students began to reflect more extensively on the discussions, seeking some way to move from disillusionment, (Fig 8.9).

Figure 8.9: Learning contracts, radical curriculum and PSMS



The three themes of “**learning contracts**”, “**radical curriculum**” and “**PSMS**” became the focus of enquiry because BEM students felt this would assist them and the institution to become aware, not only of problems, but solutions. BEM students said that attention to these areas would make a significant difference to their overall experience in HE. In figure 8.9, inside the box were the words “**learning contracts**” – “**radical education**” – “**peer support and mentoring**”. These formed the central plank in terms of focus on specific areas that BEM students thought would make a difference and enhance their overall attainment,

retention, progression within and beyond the course. These students also indicated that it would give them a sense of belonging within the university. Outside the box were additional areas seen as integral to the effective development and actualisation of this initiative (see **Figure 12.7**). The BEM students identified that content was an important consideration of **“learning contracts” – “radical education” – “peer support and mentoring”**. This would be appreciated in terms of the **“radical curriculum”**, where BEM students have consistently raised concerns about the content of some modules. The enhancement of the BEM students’ experiences was perceived as a dynamic process in which issues of practicability; feasibility; relevance; ensuring quality of learning; quality standards; ensuring quality standards; challenge; advocacy & availability; vulnerability and defined boundaries would serve as underlying principles and a benchmark for maintaining quality and accountability.

Chapter 9: Learning contracts

BEM students in this study consistently spoke about not being included in any of the decisions made about their learning journey; they said that learning contracts between staff and students would create accountability and confidence. **Figure 9.1** is based on a facilitated discussion with BEM students, the external facilitator and me. This discussion builds on previous ones relating to SVOT and PIN and summarises key aspects or a rationalisation of **how** these learning contracts could be developed, **what** they should contain and **why** they should be included.

Figure 9.1: Learning contracts: Why? How? What?

Learning contracts		
Why?	How?	What?
Clear roles and responsibilities	Clear boundaries	Labelled negatively (activist)
Accountability and transparency	Understanding educational expectations	Confidence recognising weaknesses
Achieve your end goal	Active encouragement; intervention	Resourcing
Negotiated	Personal and emotional growth	Follow-ups of vulnerable students (every 3-4 weeks)
Develop our understanding	Clear mentor roles	Consideration of language
Acknowledgement and acceptance	Expectations	Relevant and appropriate support
Get relevant support from the system	Skills input and development	Consistency of supervision
Recognition of diversity and difference	Building peers' confidence	Confidentiality (practices)
Relevant to students' needs	Support and guidance	Safety mechanisms
Sense of belonging	Staff code of conduct with students	Risk of confrontation [vulnerability]
Student-led		

As Fig 9.1 illustrates, the BEM students discussed and concluded that it was important to have “**clear roles and responsibilities**”, where there was “**accountability and transparency**”, in order to “**achieve your end goal**”. Students concluded that the goals needed to be “**negotiated**” and that they would need to “**develop our understanding**”. They had a requirement for “**acknowledgement and acceptance**”, so that neither side had all the answers. Equally, they might need to “**get relevant support from the system**”. The BEM students also said that there needed to be “**recognition of diversity and difference**”, and that much more needed to be done to make the initiatives “**relevant to students’ needs**”. BEM students said that in order to address issues of marginalisation, more effort was needed to give them a “**sense of belonging**”, and that such initiatives ought to be “**student-led**”.

9.1 How does this connect to the other pillars? How might this happen?

The BEM students highlighted the importance of “**clear boundaries**”. Linked to clear boundaries was the necessity to have an agreed “**staff code of conduct with students**” and a good “**understanding of educational expectations**”. They also felt that there needed to be “**active encouragement**” by academic staff to enable them to believe in themselves and to feel they belonged. Reflecting on their experiences in HE, the students also felt it was important for staff to make “**intervention**” and to facilitate “**personal and emotional growth**”. This could be provided by having “**clear mentor roles**”. Students also said that there needed to be more understanding in terms of “**expectations**” and that they needed to be some initial “**skills input and development**” so that mentors would gain “**support and guidance**” to build peers’ confidence.

9.2 *What needs to be included? What needs to be considered? What might the risks be?*

The BEM students discussed and concluded that when they tried to raise concerns, they were often “**labelled negatively (activist)**”, which in turn affected their “**confidence recognising weaknesses**”. It was important to have “**resourcing**”, so that there was the ability to “**follow up on vulnerable students (every 3-4 weeks)**”. Students also felt a need for “**consideration of language**” and that support needed to be “**relevant and appropriate**”. During the discussions, students drew attention to the “**consistency of supervision**” and raised concerns about “**confidentiality (practices)**”, indicating that there needed to be more “**safety mechanisms**” as they were at greater “**risk of confrontation**”. The concern and solutions proposed are comprehensible when considered in terms of the BEM students’ experiences and where they felt they were located in terms of involvement and influence in the structure of decision-making.

9.3 **Involvement and influence in the structure of decision-making**

Students were asked to use a chart to plot where they thought they were currently and where they would like to be. **Figure 9.3 “Learning contracts: Perceived level of involvement in decision-making”** illustrated that BEM students perceived themselves and family to be at the lowest point in terms of influence and involvement. In contrast, they see programme leaders at the highest point of involvement and influence.

Figure 9.3: Learning contracts: Perceived level of involvement in decision-making



It is interesting to note that other high-ranking people such as the vice-chancellor (VC), were seen as having a high level of influence, but their involvement was not perceived as great. Also, the dean of faculty was not recognised as having such a high level of influence or involvement as their role would suggest. When the students put their Post-it® notes where they would like to position different people on the chart, the BEM students positioned themselves at the heart of decision-making by putting themselves high on the involvement and influence chart. They also promoted other academic staff to have a greater level of influence and involvement. It can be argued that in this activity, students were responding to what they experienced in terms of the relevant contact with different personnel. For example, the vast majority of students have never met the VC or dean of faculty. At best, they would have had some minimal contact, whereas they know the programme leader and see them as having a significant impact on course outcome. It is also evident that their contact with tutors leads them to conclude that suggested that they would like to see this strengthened in terms of influence and involvement. This could be an aspect of the mentoring role.

9.4 Learning contracts: Creative depiction to reflect current experience and desire

Figure 9.4: Learning contracts, perceived experience and desired outcomes

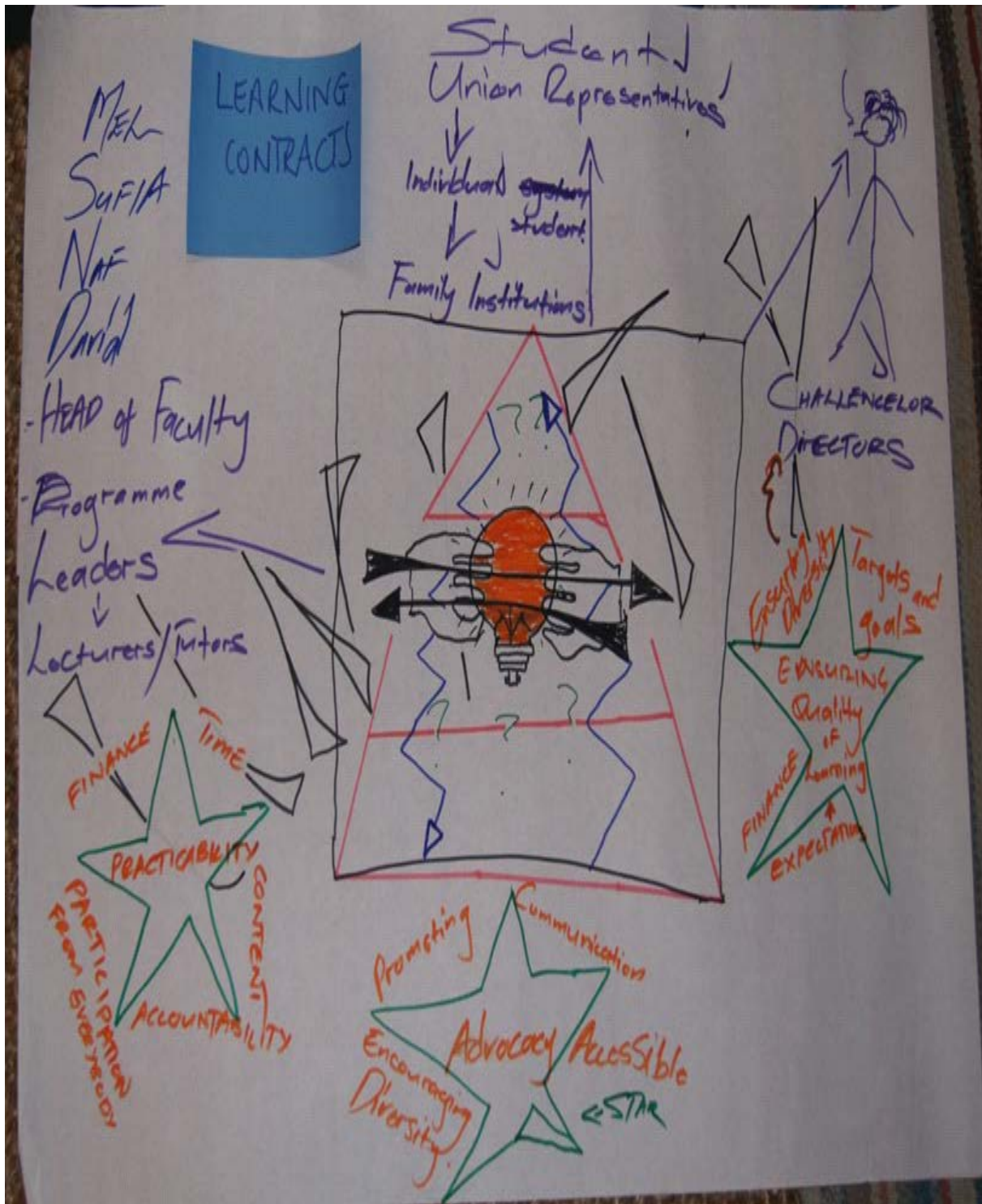


Figure 9.4, designed by some of the students, illustrated the multiple and complex ways that students see themselves and the outcomes they seek. The students linked this activity to the previous one (**Fig 9.3**), in which they explored the role and responsibility of different personnel. Here, it can be seen that they identified a collaborative approach that sought to recognise the necessity to have representation from every sector of the institution, for example, head of faculty, programme leaders, and lecturers/tutors. The ensuing discussion invoked different emotive responses, with many students saying that this graphically illustrated how they felt. In **Fig 9.4**, we see a box with a light bulb inside and three stars outside with one person - Chancellor Director. Each of the stars represents what students have identified as their primary concerns; the first star is **“practicability”**. This star is surrounded by words that indicate some of its essential elements, such as **“content”** of the learning contracts. They also indicated that there should be **“accountability”** and **“participation from everybody”** and that this should be **“financed”** and that **“time”** needed to be made available. The second star, **‘advocacy’**, puts the emphasis on **“accessibility”**, **“promoting communication”** and **“encouraging diversity”**. The third star emphasises **“ensuring quality of learning”**. Students indicated the necessity to have clear **“expectations”** linked to **“targets of goals”** and **“financed”** to develop and **“ensuring diversity”**. The students linked this activity to that shown in **Fig 9.3**.

They also felt that Student Union representatives, individual students and family institutions ought to be involved. This is recognition of being affected by both “in-college” and “off-campus” issues. As a drawing, this is a powerful symbol because it shows that there is the potential for unity and that a partnership could enable the light to shine bright. It also suggests that when this group works together, it can shatter the structural system that suppresses those who seek change.

Chapter 10: Radical curriculum

The second of the three themes was what students referred to as ‘**radical curriculum**’ (see **Figures 10.1 and 10.2**), also mentioning the necessity for academic staff to review the curriculum. They indicated that much of the content, teaching and assessment strategies were delivered such that it left them detached and marginal to the process (Asante, 1995). The approaches were likened to traditional knowledge acquisition, rather than as theoretically-coherent, contextually- relevant, organically-generated and potentially transformational (Freire, 1970; Desforges, 1995; van Weert, 2006).

BEM students did not have confidence in the assessment process and also found it hard to relate to, struggling to comprehend, struggling to comprehend some of what was discussed in the sessions. They were unsure about whether this was because of language difficulties or because of the maladroit ways in which the curriculum was delivered. Some said they wondered whether it was a deliberate attempt to deny them access to learning:

“My tutor told me that I was just unlucky; it’s just bad luck.”

(BEMSDG, 2009)

Figure 10.1: Radical curriculum: Why? How? What?

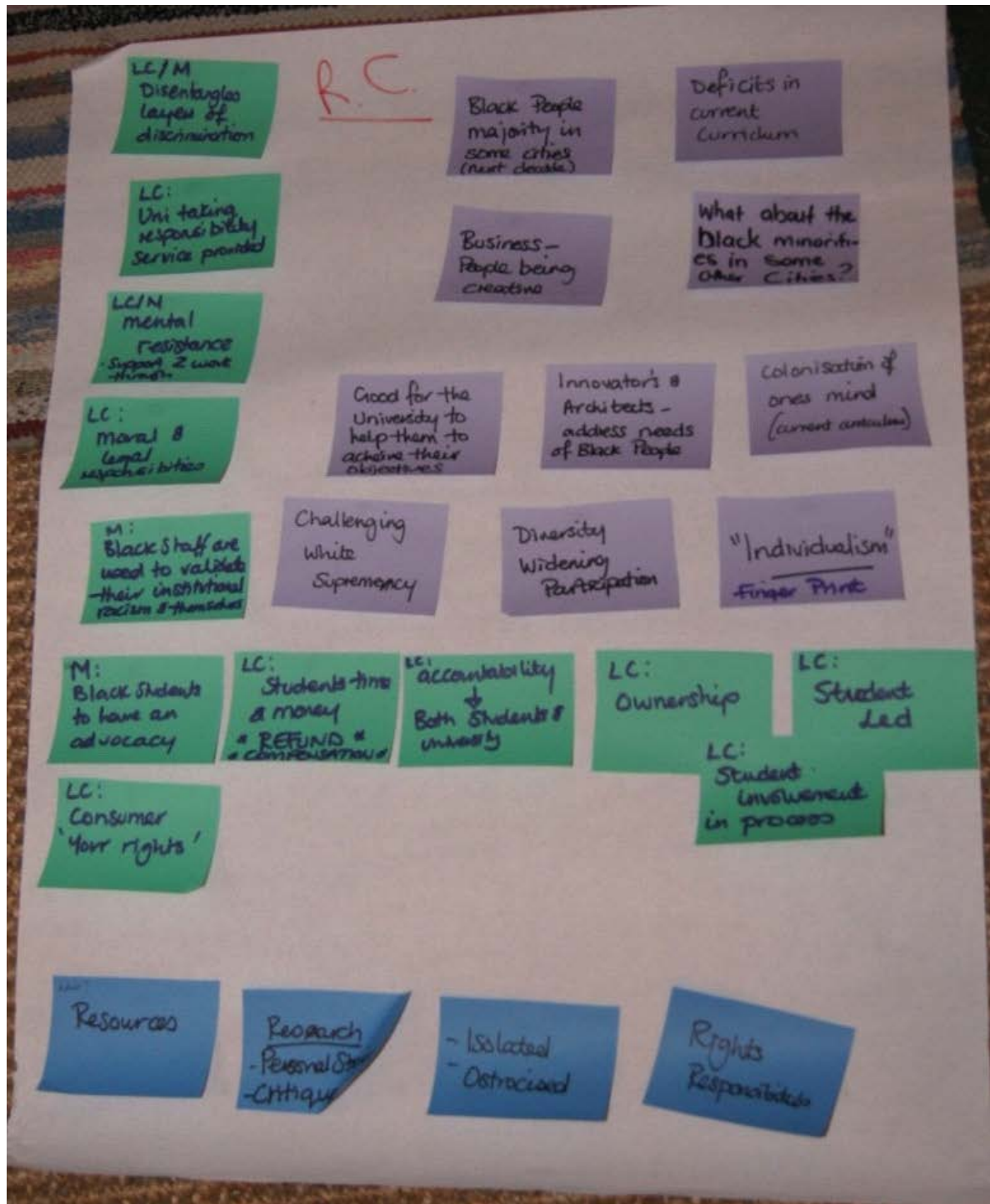
Radical curriculum		
Why?	How?	What?
Black people majority in some cities (next decade)	LC/PSMS - Disentangles layers of discrimination	Resources
Challenging white supremacy	PSMS - Black students to have an advocacy	Isolated
Deficits in current curriculum	LC - University taking responsibility; service provided	Ostracised
Diversity – WP	LC – Students’ time and money	Research
Business – people being creative	REFUND	Personal stories
Individualism – fingerprint	COMPENSATION	Critique

What about Black minorities in other cities?	LC/PSMS - Mental resistance; support to work through	Rights
Colonisation of one's mind (current curriculum)	LC - Accountability both students and university	Responsibilities
It's good for the university to help them achieve their objectives	LC - Moral and legal responsibilities	
Innovators and architects – address needs of Black people	LC - Ownership	
	PSMS - Black staff are used to validate their institutional racism and themselves	
	LC - Student involvement in process	
	LC - Student need	
	LC – Consumer: “your rights”	

The radical curriculum was proposed for a number of reasons. BEM students said it was important because **“Black people (were or likely to be) the majority in some cities (next decade)”**. Also, a radical curriculum would **“challenge(ing) white supremacy”** and would **“address needs of black people (and) some deficits in the current curriculum”**. It was felt that a radical curriculum would encourage **“diversity – widening participation”** and that it would be highly regarded by **“business – people being creative”**. It would create the potential for **“individualism – fingerprint”**. Some students asked **“what about black minorities in some other cities?”** One focal issue for BEM students was how they were affected by the curriculum. Some students saw this as a form of **“colonisation of one's mind (current curriculum)”** with the radical curriculum needed to counter this. It was also felt that it was **“good for the university to help them to achieve their objectives”**. The radical curriculum would offer students the opportunity to become aware of the contribution by BEM people in the ancient world and also their work as **“innovators and architects”**. The radical curriculum would challenge the history of the “winners”. For all oppressed groups, the history of struggle has disappeared in written and

conventional history. It is critical to come back to this and challenge the versions of history, not just to see the achievements, but also to see how a group has been marginalised.

Figure 10.2: Radical curriculum: Perceived experience and desired outcomes



10.1 *How does this connect to the other pillars? How might this happen?*

In relation to how the radical curriculum could be developed and disseminated, students suggested its incorporation into the notion of rights and linking to the **“learning contracts”**, (see Fig 10.2). This would then be facilitated by the **“mentoring system”** as an attempt to **“disentangle(s) layers of discrimination”**. The BEM students said that **“mentors”** could assist. **“Black students to have an advocacy”** and the **“learning contracts”** would locate some **“ownership”** with the **“university taking responsibility – (for) service”** provided, with costs incurred by **“students’ time and money”**. The students expected the learning contracts to be binding and, given that they were paying for a service, they expected a **“refund (and) compensation”** when the learning contracts were not fulfilled. It was anticipated that there would be resistance to the radical curriculum. Thus, BEM students linked the radical curriculum to both **“learning contracts”** and **“mentoring”**. BEM students perceived that such a dynamic process would serve as a means of providing **“mental resistance and support to work through”** by using the **“learning contracts”** to invoke **“accountability both (for) students and university”**. BEM students also envisioned **“moral and legal responsibility(ies)”**, with students exercising their rights as **“consumer(s)”**. Students felt it was important to use **“learning contracts”** to ensure that **“student need”** is the focus and that there is **“student-led involvement in process”**. The BEM students felt that establishing a **“PSMS”** would create a space where **“black staff are used to validate their accounts/experiences (of) institutional racism”** giving themselves a sense of belonging and pride.

10.2 *What needs to be included? What needs to be considered? What might the risks be?*

The most pertinent issues identified by students were their feelings about whether there would be adequate **“resources”**; this was deemed as a potential threat because students thought that the institution and other peers would be unwilling to find the necessary resources. The students felt that the radical curriculum was important, as it would encourage them and their peers to undertake **“research”** in these areas. They felt that their **“personal stories”** were relevant in helping to illuminate the extent to which they are **“isolated”** or **“ostracised”** within HE, both on- and off-campus. The

radical curriculum would enable students to engage in a “critique” of “rights and responsibilities”, in terms of their rights and mutual responsibilities to bring about change. As one student commented:

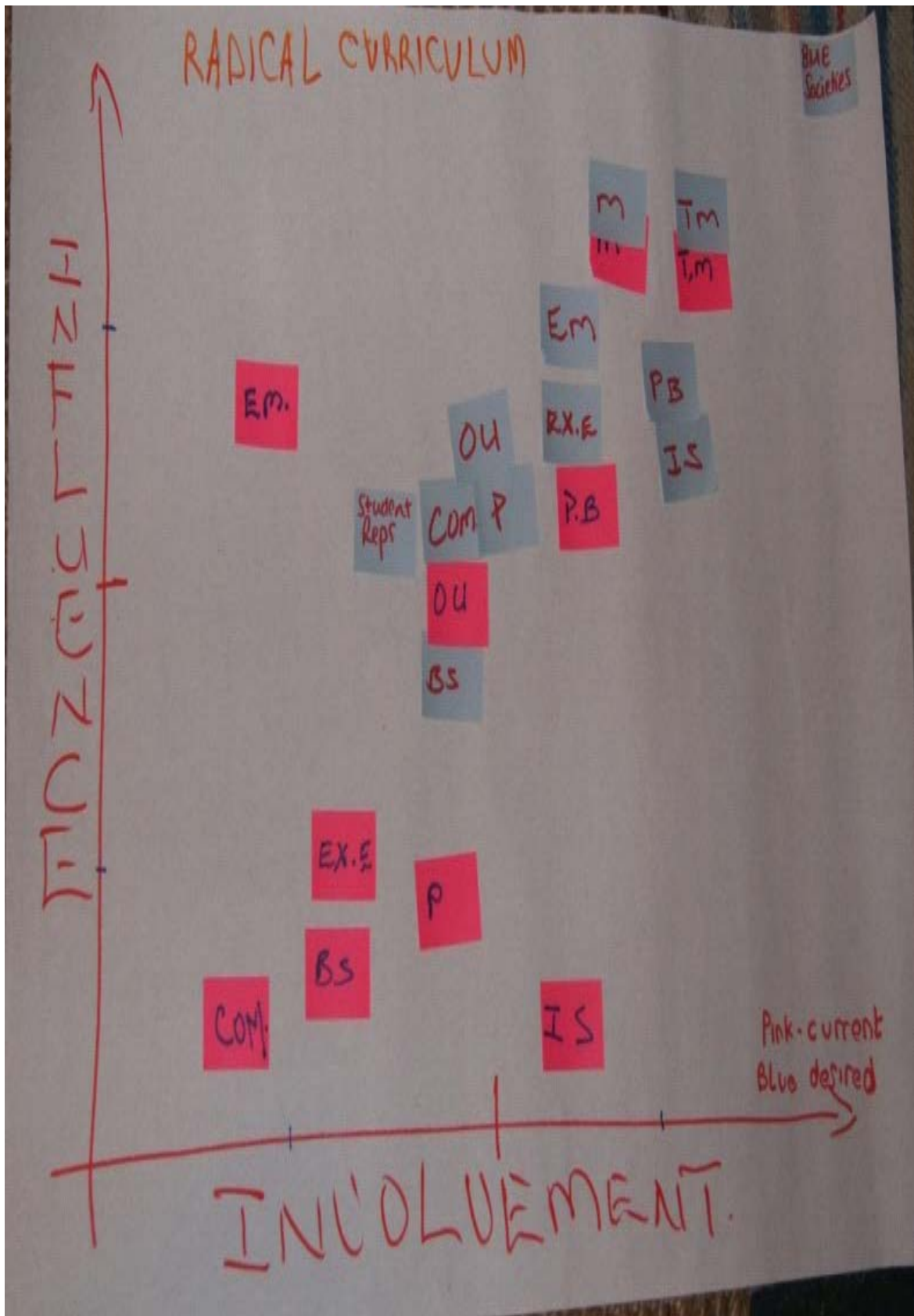
“I’m glad I came to university, because it’s given me the space to learn ... and I’ve learnt so much, especially in black perspectives.”

(BEMSDG, 2008)

10.3 Radical curriculum: Involvement and influence in the structure of decision-making

Fig 10.3 is a photograph of a flip chart showing where students see themselves in relation to involvement and influence. In this, it can be seen that BEM students perceive their communities at the lowest point in terms of both influence and involvement; they would like to see their communities acquiring an enhanced level of influence. They perceived the board of study, external examiners and parents as having marginally more involvement, but not a high level of influence. They perceived individual students as having more involvement, but very low in terms of influence. **Fig 10.3** illustrates that in terms of the radical curriculum, the BEMs’ overall HE experience would be enhanced if module tutors, BEM students and communities collaborated more in the design and delivery of the programme. The development and absorption of the radical curriculum in learning and teaching also offers a possibility of changing a future. Those graduating are likely to be the parents and families who start a different conversation with future generations about education as they move through their own life cycles.

Figure 10.3: Radical curriculum: Influence measured against involvement



Pink = current; Blue = desired

Figure 10.4: Radical curriculum: Making changes

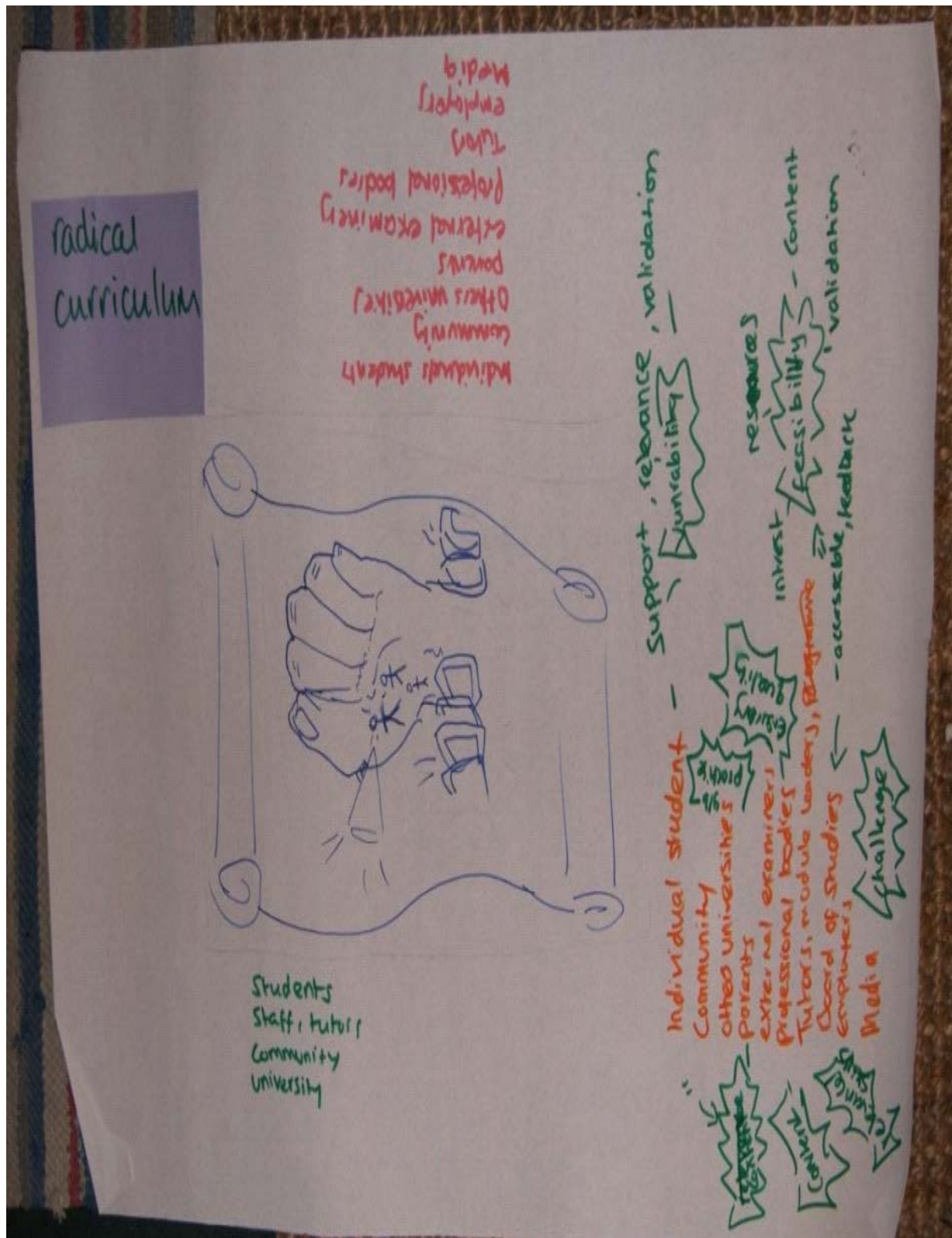


Figure 10.4 shows a photograph of the flip-chart produced by some of the students. In this photograph, the students graphically-illustrated the most pertinent issues and how they think

a radical curriculum would assist them. The scroll which represents the current curriculum and the efforts that BEM students are making to be validated. On the scroll is a clenched fist, which symbolises the (suppressed) embodied in the BEM students. There are people of various sizes in the palm of the hand, one with a megaphone, symbolising the efforts this group is making to get their voices heard. The chain around the wrist is broken; this is where the radical curriculum is used in conjunction with learning contracts and the PSMSs to encourage the participants to break free from the colonisation and suppression they have experienced throughout their educational career. The BEM students frequently spoke about breaking free; they were determined to do so, even if the provision hoped for was not forthcoming. The participants also consistently talked about finding allies with whom they could collaborate. At one side of the drawing, they have indicated that **“students, staff, tutors and the community”** and the **“university”** are all potential allies. On one side are the following words: **“individual student”**; **“community”**; **“other universities”**; **“parents”**; **“external examiners”**; **“professional bodies”**; **“tutors”**; **“module leaders”**; **“board of studies”**; **“employers”** and **“media”**. These are all identified as stake-holders, individuals and groups representing diverse and similar interests and who are or can be in a position to exert some influence in changing the current situation.

On the other side, there is a repeat of the aforementioned words above. These have all been identified as stake-holders, individuals and groups representing diverse and similar interests. The words are in close proximity to each other, but are also placed so they intersect some words or show some close relationship. There are two more words highlighted by ‘call-outs’. Both these words are surrounded by words that elaborate some of the associated issues or concerns. For example, the word **“vulnerability”** is surrounded by the words **“support”**, **“relevance”** and **“validation”**. Throughout the discussions, students spoke about the extent to which they felt vulnerable and reluctant to raise issues in the absence of support or reassurance. The radical curriculum would be based on a relevant curriculum that assists in validating them, but they questioned whether it would be feasible. **“Feasibility”** was the next word highlighted by a ‘call-out’ and then surrounded by the words: **“interest”**; **“resources”**; **“content”**; **“validation”** and **“accessible feedback”**. Students raised questions about whether there would be the interest or resources to enable the development of the radical curriculum. They felt that the content would need to be considered and that they could provide feedback to assist in the validation of such a curriculum.

Figure 10.4 symbolises the (suppressed) power embodied in the BEM students. The participants consistently talked about finding allies with whom they could collaborate. At one

side of the drawing, they have indicated that “**students, staff, tutors, community**”, and the “**university**” are potential allies. The BEM students questioned the curriculum in terms of “**content**”; “**relevant skills**”; “**challenge**”; “**good/bad practice**” and “**ensuring quality**”. They were in juxtaposition, recognising that in many respects, the curriculum lacked the potency to disturb the ‘comfort zones’ associated with ‘white privilege’; they were marginalised by the curriculum and their “**vulnerability**” was exposed when they challenged things.

10.4 The arrival of the emperor: Much ado about nothing

Tinkering with the curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment methods has been a feature of formal education over the last 80 years. This tinkering can be linked to a challenge by working-class groups who had begun to recognise that education was important in helping them to recognise their position and their relationship to the means of production (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). They also recognised the link between education and the social positions afforded to them. More significantly, the working classes and other marginalised groups began to comprehend the deceptive nature of education in relation to its potential and reality for many marginal groups (Mirza, 2006). Education is a process of sifting; at each stage it becomes more difficult for members from certain cultural backgrounds to sustain (Bourdieu, 1990; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Thus, as we have seen, HE is the ultimate expression of a process that is elitist, a system in which many who participate are destined to fail (Brecher, 2007).

Some of the developments or approaches to the curriculum in recent years reflect the changes that were taking place in wider society (Brecher, 2007; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). For example, in relation to BEM groups, the initial focus was that of assimilation (Troyna, 1987). The emphasis was getting those people regarded as different to learn basic skills like English language, and to follow basic instruction (Troyna, 1987). This was the early phase of assimilation, in which it was emphasised that the extent to which people were fully able to participate and therefore benefit was largely based on the adaptability of the ‘outsiders’, or the extent to which these ‘outsiders’ were prepared to conform (Bourdieu, 1990).

All students were subjected to Learning, Teaching and Curriculum Assessment Methods (LTCAM), based on the ‘teacher’ being the font of all knowledge (Bourdieu, 1990). Their authority was sacrosanct and the main emphasis on LTCAM was enabling students to learn

that which the 'teacher' deemed as important (Bourdieu, 1990). This mono-culture, often portrayed as less problematic, had begun to fracture as a consequence of internal and external pressures (Troyna & Williams, 1986). These fractures gave way to recognition that there were now more vociferous and visible communities extracted from different parts of the globe. They were unified by their historical relationship through colonialism and their current treatment in terms of racism and policies which continue to exploit in the form of neo-colonialism, masquerading as opportunities brought about by globalisation (Davidson & Harris, 2006).

The 'multi-cultural curriculum' was introduced, but this was subjected to a great deal of critique from all sides of the political spectrum. It was, at best, an example of going on safari, or what Chauhan, (1989) refers to as the 3 S's (saris, samosas and steel bands). The BEM communities felt that the curriculum needed to be radicalised. Attempts were made to develop a more anti-racist curriculum, one that had the capacity to recognise and challenge some of the forms of discrimination widespread in society (Howson, 2009). The proposal of an anti-racist curriculum was met with opposition (Troyna & Williams, 1986). The opposition is still evident in discussions about tackling social inequalities, where the custodians gather to protect their own interests (Sanchez & Fried, 1997; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). This is a situation in which a great deal of time is expended on persuasion of how impracticable it would be for a curriculum that would be perceived as favouring one social group at the expense of another.

Thus, HE institutions are still able to determine their LTCAM, subject to the validation of agencies, but they are expected to reflect changes in society (Wilson & Kelly, 2010). The apparent increase in social problems - young people, crime and problems with social work intervention - led to great scrutiny of programmes in HE (BBC News Online, 2009a; BBC News Online, 2009b; Wilson & Kelly, 2010). The last 30 years have seen much discussion about education generally and there has been much debate about developing courses that prepare students for the diversity and range of social problems likely to be encountered (Evans, 2008a; Hurtado, 2009; Wilson & Kelly, 2010). However, in terms of impact and making a difference for ethnically-minoritised students or their communities, the efforts can be described as the announcements preceding the arrival of the emperor in Hans Christian Andersen's moral tale, "**The Emperor's New Clothes**". Hence, the crowds come out to see the emperor splendidly adorned, only to discover that he is naked. In this sense, HE, like education generally, has had many announcements, but it consistently recedes to its starting point, providing one education for those who will lead and one for those who will be exploited.

The difficulties evident in working with a context of diversity or cross-cultural working seemed to be located in amnesia, where the principles of andragogy suggest the importance of working with people from where they are (Knowles, 1989; Merriam, 2001). Being prepared to explore the experience of all students may enable a more radical overhaul of LTCAM (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). WP and internationalising the curriculum led to a greater diversity of people from many different social and cultural backgrounds, differential learning needs and styles (Ippolito, 2007). As we learn from the experience of students, one would expect that LTCAM, along with the structures in which this takes place, can facilitate academics to appreciate that internationalising the curriculum is less about language acquisition and more about discovering the intersections within the local/global (Carnoy, 2005; Ippolito, 2007). The concern in this chapter relates to what students take from the whole pedagogical experience. Classrooms are often a reflection of what happens in wider society. Thomas, (1993) has argued that:

“Classrooms are...a microcosm of discrete and overlapping manipulative struggles for status, respect, and...ethnic hostility, degradation rituals... contests, and power-dominating games.”

(Thomas, 1993:44)

Within the classroom, there are styles of discourse, systems of power-knowledge, institutional structures and practices, all of which combine to marginalise and harm certain groups of people (Freire, 1972; Robinson, 1997; Hall, 1997; Sanchez & Fried, 1997; Bourdieu, 1990). Rapper Tupac, (2003) likened the behaviour of these institutions to that of gangs, invoking preposterous violence on others, whilst masquerading as legitimate and concealing the extent to which they are working in their own interest.

During the period in which this research was undertaken, I was module leader for several modules Applied Social Science, Contemporary Issues, Black Perspectives and Managing Race and Diversity. I also contributed to other modules and maintained a pastoral role as a personal tutor. In the latter stages of this work, I was the Year Leader for Year 2 (Level 5 students). Many of these students would have undertaken a module called “Black Perspectives” and this enabled them to develop their criticality and ability to compare the learning, teaching and assessment strategy utilised in this module with others they had experienced. The students felt that the “Black Perspectives” module was relevant to them, as it dealt with issues that concerned them and, even though at the time they did not know about some of the topics they were learning about, they were motivated because it was

delivered with enthusiasm and made a direct connection to their experiences. They said there was a need for a radical curriculum that would be more stimulating and engage the passion, desire and interests of BEM students. The radical curriculum was not just about content; it was about the whole learning, teaching and assessment process.

In advocating for what was referred to as a 'radical curriculum' BEM students were referring to a more holistic, pedagogical experience that takes account of a range of factors impinging on effective teaching and learning (Hockings et al, 2008a; 2010; Hussee, 2009). A curriculum that provided them with skills and knowledge and challenged inequalities, a radical curriculum that was focussed on social justice and led to transformation rather than 'domestication'. The BEM students also said that a radical curriculum was important for white students: **"All students need to be taught Black history, experience, need to be challenged also"** (BEMSDG, 2009). The engagement of BEM and white students in the radical curriculum would reduce the tendency of white students to dismiss it as a marginal interest and something that has nothing to do with them. When these issues are only considered polemically, or where some groups are denied access to the opportunity to learn with others, it increases the potential to marginalise the issues and the people still further, while those who are privileged remain unchallenged. The BEM students said that it would help them to learn how to address some of the needs identified through the PIN triangles, (see Figs 8.1 to 8.6 pp. 198- 200). The radical curriculum would enable white students to increase their cultural awareness, to question some of their taken-for-grantedness and to value individuality, empathy and open-mindedness.

Effective learning and teaching is impacted by many factors; teaching within the context of diverse groups is, or can be, more challenging. There are factors operational at various levels: micro, mesa, and macro (see appendix L: Hocking and Cook, 2008c). At the micro level, there are what might be described as interpersonal factors, demographic factors, personality, ethnicity, age gender and class; emotional intelligence and conceptions of the other in relation background and profession. From the students' perspective, they may hold particular conceptions of academics, learning and teaching, knowledge and knowing. The academic may also hold similar or different views in relation to themselves, students' learning and teaching, knowledge and knowing. At the point where these views intersect, there is an opportunity to explore the similarities and difference shared between students and academic/teacher; it is a point at which one might also review and consider the nature of interactions and intervention. These interactions and interventions ought to be based on the outcomes sought and how enhanced academic engagement might be encouraged.

At the meso level, factors such as economic position, educational background, social and cultural background and institutional context intersect for both learners and academic; they are likely to impact on the experience for BEM students and academics.

At the Macro level, factors such as political, economic, social and cultural are likely to impact on the learning, teaching and assessment processes. Delpit, (2006) emphasises this point, noting that with education policy and practice:

“...we in education have allowed politicians to push us to act as if the most important goal of our work is to raise test scores. Never mind the development of the human beings in our charge—the integrity, the artistic expressiveness, the ingenuity, the persistence, or the kindness of those who will inherit the earth—the conversation in education has been reduced to a conversation about one number.”

(Delpit, 2006, p. xiv)

Geneva Gay, (2010) advocates for **“Culturally Responsive Teaching”** a process of teaching and learning that recognises the differences between previously-traditional homogenous groupings. This process is implemented with the goal of what students should know and be able to do and how they will learn it, based on the cultural differences, not deficits they bring to university. The BEMSDGs could easily be adapted and used within the context of working with all students. This was a method that proved to be effective in generating content, rather than imposing it, which is often when students disengage or disconnect because they are not reflected in the curriculum and cannot see how it relates to their aspirations.

Chapter 11: Peer Support & Mentoring System: PSMS

The third of the three themes considered was PSMS. The diagram below also illustrates **how** these PSMSs could be developed, **what** they should contain, and **why** they should be included. In **Figure 11.1, (“PSMS: Why? How? What?”)** the BEM students spoke about feeling vulnerable and confused, uncertain about expectations, with no clear direction. They said the lack of role models or Black academics compounded the situation and that they often suffered in silence, unable to confide in people who they perceived as lacking understanding, due to a lack of experience with the issues impacting on them. They thought that it would be helpful to set up a peer support and mentoring system (PSMS), providing a forum from which to learn from each others’ experiences.

Figure 11.1: PSMS: Why? How? What?

PSMS		
Why?	How?	What?
Help understand ourselves more	Meeting government targets	Active participation of Blacks in politics
Understand identity	Different ideology	How we are similar and how we are different
Someone to look up to	Back up	Representation; advocacy
Build confidence	Process over outcomes	Cultural expulsion
Be challenged constructively and express self	Fairness and justice in process	Recognise cultural differences
For encouragement	Safety	Exclusify
Gives a sense of belonging	Clear values	Risk
Reduce isolation	Collaborative	Training; recognition of self
Route for progression	Strength in numbers	
Guidance	Regression	
	Awareness of issues; Black positive role models	

Figures 11.1 and 11.1a are based on a facilitated discussion with BEM students, the external facilitator and me. This discussion builds on previous discussions as indicated above (SVOT and PIN) and summarises key aspects from those discussions.

Figure 11.1a: PSMS: Why? How? What?



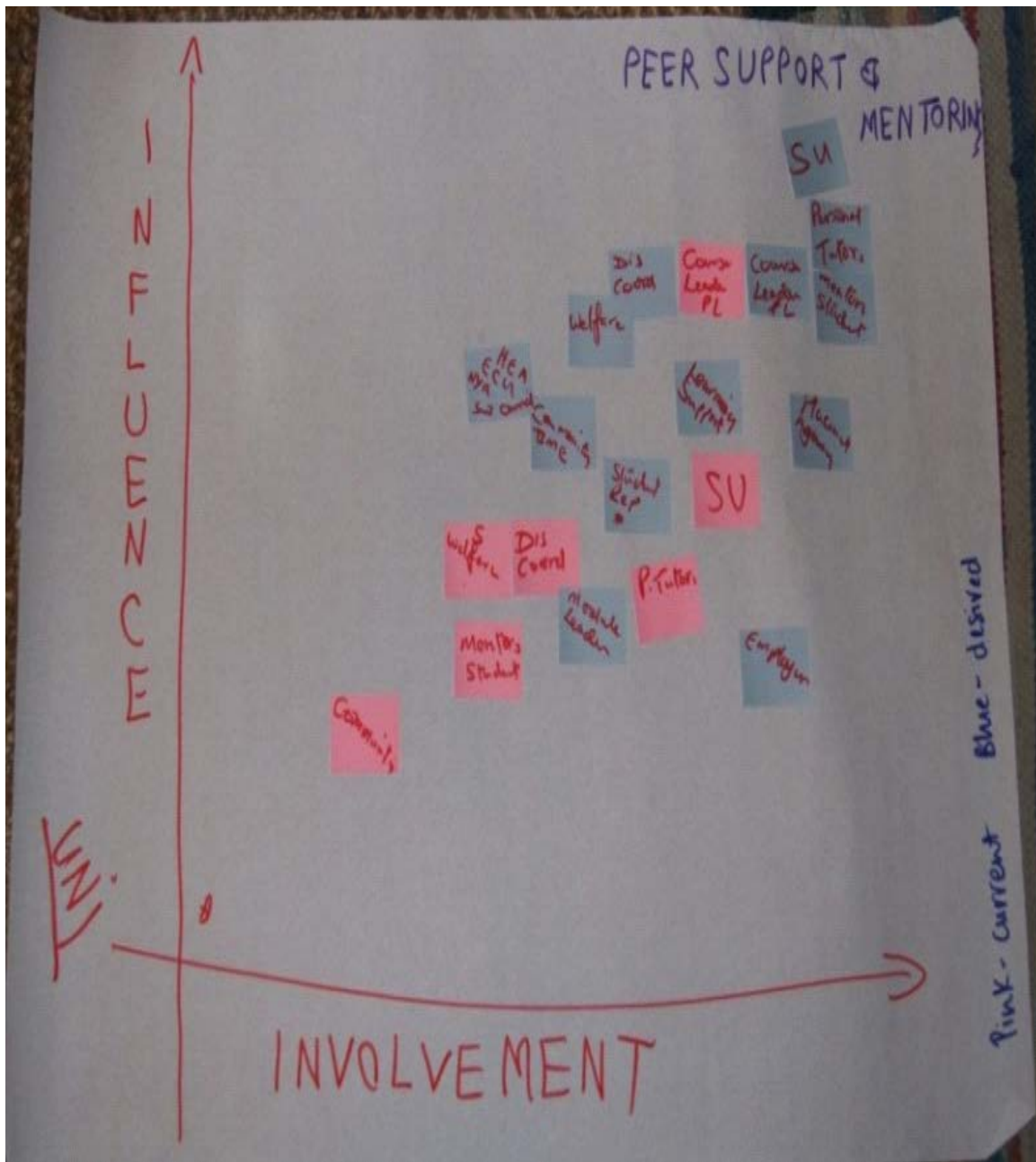
In this discussion, it is apparent that students were reflecting on previous discussions in relation to opportunities and interests. One such example is where they have indicated the “meeting of government targets” as one of the outcomes from the utilisation of PSMS. The meeting of government targets in this instance may be subject to various interpretations. As indicated in the PIN Triangles, BEM students perceived a need to show improvements in

relation to WP, degree attainment, retention and employability. It could be argued that these fell within the overall objectives of the Academy, but there was a growing awareness that both the government and NUS were having greater influence; the annual National Student Survey (NSS) could be an opportunity to draw attention to their experience.

11.1. PSMS: Involvement and influence in the structure of decision-making

Figure 11.2 is a photograph of the flip chart that BEM students made to show where they see themselves in relation to involvement and influence. They perceived their communities as being at the lowest point in terms of both influence and involvement, yet wanted to see their communities acquiring an enhanced level of influence. The BEM students also sought mentoring and guidance more than direction from their course leaders – a very different kind of relationship and dynamic. This could be related to the opportunities that students have to discuss issues with their personal tutors, where accessibility to module leaders might be limited. This finding could assist in initiating further discussion between staff and students about expectations which can in turn inform the proposed learning contracts.

Figure 11.2: PSMS: Perceived involvement and influence (present versus desired)



From Fig 11.2, it is clear that students recognised how they were impacted; they see PSMS as increasing their influence as well as involvement. BEM students want to see the De Montfort Students' Union (DSU) having much more involvement and influence in supporting the PSMS. BEM students also perceive the role of programme leader as important in supporting their journey, by suggesting a higher level of influence and involvement in the role.

It is interesting to note that in this photograph, other stake-holders such as the ECU, the HEFCE and the HEA are also identified as having a significant role in advocating on behalf of students. As in the learning contracts discussion and subsequent positioning of Post-it® notes, the BEM students positioned themselves at the heart of decision-making by putting themselves high on the involvement and influence chart. The location of academic staff (personal tutors) suggests that they appreciated this role and would like to see it strengthened, in terms of influence and involvement. It is worth noting that students appear to value this pastoral role over that of the module leadership role.

Figure 11.3: PSMS: Perceived experience and desired outcomes

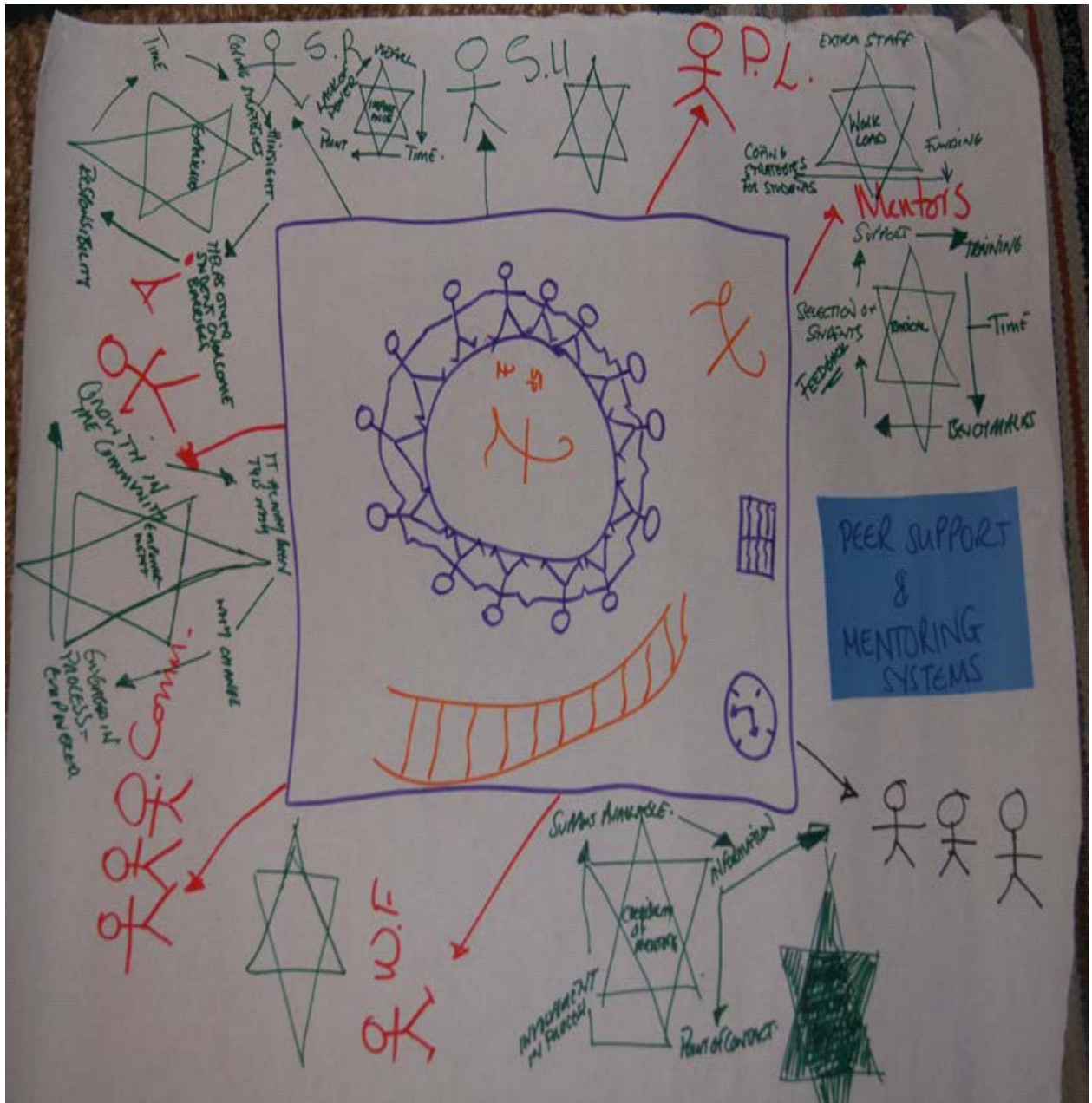


Fig 11.3 is a photograph of a flip chart produced by some of the students, graphically illustrating the multiple and complex ways that students see themselves and why they think that PSMSs would assist them. There are people in a circle holding hands, a ladder, a clock, and pound sign in the centre box. Outside the box is a drawing of nine stars and 11 people. Each of the stars represent what students have identified as their primary concerns.

Going clockwise, the first star is **“experiences”**. This star is surrounded by the following words: **“time”** → **“coping strategies”** → **“hindsight”** → **“helps other students overcome barriers”**, and → **“responsibility”**.

The second star is **“importance”**, surrounded by the following words: **“lack of power”** → **“useful”** → **“time”** → **“point”**.

The third star is blank, with the letters **“SU (students’ union)”** nearby. This is an indication that there is a role for the students’ union in supporting the development of peer support and mentoring.

The further star is **“workload”**, surrounded by the following words: **“extra staff”** → **“funding”** → **“coping strategies”**.

The fifth star is **“radical”**, surrounded by the following words: **“support”** → **“training”** → **“time”** → **“benchmarks”** → **“feedback”** → **“selection of students”**.

The sixth star is blank (coloured green), an indication of unseen areas. This means that BEM students are aware that there are many areas concealed; these areas are also spaces that could be exploited, utilised with discretion to make a difference, or to intensify the sense of vulnerability or threat BEM students perceived.

During this study, I have often felt this sense of not knowing. The more I listened to the BEM students as they discussed their experiences, the more I could identify with them.

The seventh star is **“credibility of mentors”**, surrounded by the following words: **“support available”** → **“information”** → **“point of contact”** → **“involvement in process”**.

The eighth star is blank, with the letters **“WF (white facilitators)”** in close proximity, giving an indication that the role of white facilitators was significant. Students felt that such a person can assist them in reflecting on issues more objectively, or by challenging them. The BEM students valued this and saw it as a form of mentoring during the discussion group process.

The ninth star is **“empowerment”**, surrounded by the following words: **“growth in the community”** → **“it’s always been this way”** → **“may change”** → **“engaged in process”**. There are three people in close proximity, symbolising the BEM community. This in turn reflects the significance and importance of the BEM community as instrumental in the process of efficacy for BEM students.

Figure 11.3 illustrates the multiple and complex ways that students see themselves and why they think that PSMSs could assist them. As a consequence of the isolation and vulnerabilities that BEM students experienced, they wanted the university (**“responsibility”**) to institute a number of processes associated with PSMS. These processes would include an acknowledgement of their experiences (**“lack of power”**) and the availability of people able to work with them (**“helps other students overcome barriers”**), facilitating them in articulating their experiences. The process envisaged would be integral to all programmes embedded in the culture of the university and reflected in the learning contracts, making **“time”** available and involving the Students’ Union in support. The BEM students valued the opportunity to dialogue and having access to an external facilitator; they felt (**“empowerment”**) by the mentoring and support received. From their perspectives, they wanted their communities to be **“engaged in process”**, reflecting the significance and importance of the BEM community in the process of efficacy for BEM students.

This finding is consistent with some of the issues identified in the PIN triangles, where BEM students identified some of their needs as requiring **“more support and advocacy”**; **“more Black tutors as role models”**; **“to unite amongst ourselves”** and **“affirmative action to raise numbers of Black students”**. It could be argued that the articulation of some of these needs may have been stimulated by the BEMSDG, as the students were now able to share their individual experiences in a forum where they discovered many similarities. Dyer, (1970), in a review of John Berger’s **“Ways of seeing”**, captures aspects of the journey that some students were making to find their voice. He noted that: **“Seeing comes before words.”** (1970) The BEM students were now regularly commenting on how much they benefitted from the group. They talked about the learning, support and association. They also found it to be a **“safe space”**, where some Black tutors might be invited from time to time. Moreover, it is not surprising that such needs would be identified, given that at the time of this study, the proportion of BEM students within the university was about 40 per cent. This percentage was higher on the particular courses from which most of the students came from. There was a stark contrast when it came to Black academic staff, who made up only around 20 per cent of

total teaching staff. There were no Black female academic members of staff on the Youth & Community Development team during the period of this study. This means that BEM students were less likely to be assigned to someone they felt they could relate to, or who would advocate on their behalf.

The significance of this point is appreciated when considered from the perspective of a commitment to social justice. In this regard, many BEM teachers may have made active and political decisions to work in the new universities as a location perceived as a safe space, one that is conducive to promoting social justice. However, the experiences of discrimination, isolation, positionality and the need for safe spaces for BEM students are paralleled for the BEM academics. The replicated process increased the anxiety and sensitivity of some BEM academics as they sought to manage and situate themselves in a manner that is supportive of BEM students, without hindering non-BEM students, but while simultaneously fighting battles of their own.

From the BEM students' perspective, this is a further example of discriminatory practice in that the structure and practices inherent in the Academy were deemed more advantageous for white students. This was an example of institutionalism working in the interest of what it perceives as its primary service users. Through its policies and procedures, the institution worked in a manner that did not differentiate and that all participants were subject to the same policies and procedures. The regulations and the curriculum, along with the personnel bestowed in the delivery of the education function are uniformed; they replicate the structure of dominance and inequality at the point of educational outcome, where participants are rewarded by their subsequent deployment. The uniformity of personnel within the Academy reflects the structure in other sectors. Thus, the absences of BEM academics in positions of authority often leave BEM students feeling vulnerable.

Using a critical framework such as CRT helps to expose that which is often invisible, namely white privilege. Privileges are often unearned assets which are cashed in daily: **“(It) is like an invisible, weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks” (McIntosh, 1988: 165)**. It is the matrix of dominance that creates the myopia of how they obtain their position, in which racism and sexism are just examples of how social groups become excluded and impoverished. Privilege is not invisible to those who critically-engage in a discourse of social justice. The BEM students who participated in the BEMSDGs were contributing and co-creating different possibilities through PSMS.

The key issue that emerging from this discussion was the need to enable the BEM students to have a more secure foundation to navigate through the HE system. They wanted a PSMS to **“help understand ourselves more”**. The BEM students wanted to make links with people, including academic staff and students, who **“understand (their) identity”** and also **“someone to look up to”**. They felt that such persons would **“build confidence”** and would be likely to **“be challenged constructively and express self”**. The BEM students sought **“encouragement”** and felt that a PSMS would **“give(s) you a sense of belonging and reduce isolation”**. The PSMS would assist with identifying a realistic **“route for progression”** and provide **“guidance”**, based on having some affinity with their experiences.

The narrative regarding the need for a PSMS is a tacit acknowledgment that the Academy does not provide adequate support to facilitate BEM students in relation to their aspirations or challenges encountered prior to, during and beyond the course. The identification of PSMS might be a temporary remedy, but it is not one that would necessarily make the kind of changes that the students envisaged. One reason for this is that it puts the onus on BEM students or PSMS to deliver a programme to facilitate adjustments. The narrative from BEM students suggests that much more needs to be done for them, not only to feel, but to actually be included. The significance of this point cannot be underestimated, as confidence in the initiatives requires more than a token effort or gestures. This study has already demonstrated that people who are marginalised will rarely demand a lot for themselves. Green, (2010) suggests that:

“The process of marginalisation has a funneling effect, resulting in decreased resources and (a) truncated collaborative and networking capacity, hence making options more diluted and limited.”

(Green, 2010: Online)

Thus, reduced resources and diluted, limited options can in turn induce unwarranted gratitude and a feeling that the dominant group is “trying”, so people may feel included a little bit, but the reality has not changed much. Sometimes, the feelings are manipulated in order to maintain the status quo. Cole, (2012) insists that the denial of resources followed by their truncated release is an example of how not to change whilst **“giving minority groups just enough to stop them disengaging, complaining and potentially resisting without actually changing any of the structures”** (Cole, 2012: BEMSDG).

Through the opportunity to dialogue with BEM students, my subjective experiences and critical insights were often challenged, particularly in relation to the suggestion of PSMS. I was not convinced that PSMS would asphyxiate that which I had likened to the mythical being known as the **Lernaean Hydra**. What became evident in the discussions was the selflessness of many of the BEM participants. They clearly wanted change, but many appreciated that change was a process; it was not something that could simply be demanded. The BEM students were confronted with something similar to the Hydra; they needed to find a way to stop it spreading its poison. The BEM students participating in the research did express desire, anger and frustration at the pace of change, but also maintained a focus on wanting to work with the HE institution. They reasoned that PSMS would assist the institution in “**meeting government targets**” and that the meeting of targets was not entirely negative. For example, the enhanced attainment, retention and progression within and beyond courses were regarded as positive. WP was also regarded as a policy that enabled some marginalised groups to gain entry to an HE course. However, the frustration for many students was a disconnection between policies and practice.

This disconnection fermented the BEM students and through their discussions they were able to distil the rhetoric of state policy and everyday habitual practices that limited their capacities (Bourdieu, 1990). In relation to the perceived need of a PSMS, it is also apparent that it is derived from a perception that the BEM students' experiences are located within a conflict relationship, in which power is unequal in both distribution and application. The following examples reflect the degree of discomfort in talking about racism and discrimination, reflective of a generational shift when the struggle against apartheid, racism, sexism and discrimination in the 1970s and 1980s saw direct engagement with these issues. Activists at that time were more prepared to talk about oppression and discrimination. However, following the Thatcher-Reagan axis, there has been a shift to ideas about individual freedom and lifestyles, thus reducing the capacity of scholars and activists to articulate the nature of the problem with conviction.

The focus on individualised struggles makes the focus one of discussions about individual identities and resilience. By making the discourse about attainment, retention and progression, the focus becomes one in which it is inferred that those who do not attain a higher degree classification, leave courses early or do not progress must look to their individual fragility or the fragility of their social group. The resilience discourse is offered not as a critique of social inequality, but rather to suggest that people are not or should not be incapacitated by it. Instead, they should be resilient accept despicable treatment and be validated for doing so. Reay et al, (2009) noted that:

“Resilience and coping with adversity are all qualities that are far more associated with working rather than middle class-ness but in working-class contexts are taken for granted and often read as stoicism, ‘making the best of a bad situation’”.

(Reay et al, 2009:1107)

Individuals often distance themselves from a social group that has been demonised. When a group is characterised in a negative manner, individuals from such group will often assert their difference. It would be irrational to think the social inequalities have been eradicated, yet one often hears people speaking about racism no longer being a factor, particularly since the election of Obama as the President of the USA.

The structural analysis has been denied, thus it could be argued that the colonisation of language and the ability to determine and demonise certain groups and their efforts to raise awareness is a form of systematic, symbolic violence. This is reflected in that the words used to describe activists have become insults and representative of something that people don't want to be associated with. In essence, colonisation of language and discourse has been extremely effective in depoliticising a generation. This was reflected in a number of places throughout the discussion groups, in terms of the use of words such as **“different ideology”**; **“back-up”**; **“fairness and justice”**; **“safety, with clear values”**; **“strength in numbers”** and **“regression”**. This means that BEM students were cognisant of the duplicity incorporated in transactions between groups in which power is unequally distributed and where there are consequences for veering from the script of prescribed behaviour. This is another example of how the students on the whole avoided using terms like racism or discrimination to talk about their experience, yet they are able to communicate differential treatment or perception of differential treatment. It is this perception that has informed the need for PSMS.

It could also be argued that there is a question of the cultural competence of the practitioners involved. For example, the students have used expressions such as needing more **“awareness of issues of Black”**. This would suggest that they are asking for greater awareness for themselves, their peers and professionals delivering a service. Many of the students have indicated that this deficit on the part of some the professionals' working with them has had a detrimental impact on their experience in terms of outcomes. It was during this process that recognition of a **“different ideology underpinning stake-holders”** disposition emerged or influenced their responses to the BEM students.

Further analysis of this narrative illustrates the systematic and dynamic ways that language and discourse become inextricably linked with action; a process where delineating them becomes an immense philosophical introversion. In terms of the Academy, BEM students were confronted with an indivisible entity, one that refused to acknowledge the role it played in asphyxiating their potential. The realisation of the extent to which they were exposed and vulnerable served as a corresponding commitment to support each other by providing “**back-up**” via PSMS. It was perceived that PSMS would militate against some of the negative experiences, as BEM students would be able to work with people they perceived as “**positive role models**”; people who they could emulate.

This would suggest that far from acceptance of the cultural deficit discourse, BEM students are wanting support and guidance so they can change the perception that they and others hold of them. This changed perception is crucial to the opportunities available to BEM students. Also, the PSMS would put emphasis on “**process over outcomes**”, and ensure that “**fairness and justice (are included) in (the) process**”. The BEM students had re-situated themselves and wanted more for themselves. Through the process of consciousness, they had articulated a specific desire for self-determination and to be instrumental in self-efficacy. The metamorphosis of the BEM students can be likened to what Serna & Lau-Smith, (1995) refer to as an individual’s awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses. Such awareness facilitates them:

“...to set goals and make choices, to be assertive at appropriate times, and to interact with others in a socially-competent manner. A self-determined person is able to make independent decisions based on his or her ability to use resources, which includes collaborating and networking with others. The outcome of a self-determined person is the ability to realise his or her own potential, to become a productive member of a community, and to obtain his or her goals without infringing on the rights, responsibilities, and goals of others.”

(Serna & Lau-Smith, 1995: 144)

Even people who have a high intellectual understanding of discrimination are not infallible when it comes to habitual acts, or influence by significant others and stereotypes. Accepting our fallibility can be a strength; it is an acceptance of who and what we are as human beings, engendering great strengths and capacities, but also being susceptible to those aspects of

who we are which are not always visible to us in terms of our actions, assumptions, entitlements and projections.

11.2 What needs to be included? What needs to be considered? What might the risks be?

The BEM students felt that the essential elements underpinning the desire for a PSMS is to encourage “**active participation of Blacks in politics**”, to enable students to recognise and celebrate “**how we are similar and how we are different**”. The group consistently made reference to a lack of “**representation (and) advocacy**”. They discussed some of the “**risks of potential cultural expulsion and exclusivity**”. There was also a need to “**recognise cultural differences**” and to provide “**training**” as a means of “**recognition of self**”. The idea of struggle is also reflected in the discussion about wanting to see more “**active participation of Blacks in politics**”. This would make sense when one thinks of political representation as symbolising power and the capacity to influence institutions. BEM students felt that there are insufficient examples of positive role models in politics. Furthermore, BEM people were often misunderstood, their politics seen as deviant, hostile and segregationist. This is a further example of power embodying the right to define reality; dominant groups assume this right and establish systems that facilitate them in determining how this particular reality will be interpreted and defined. Thus, grievances from marginalised groups are often de-legitimised.

However, many of the discussions that took place in the BEMDSG were rooted in a desire for adequate “**representation (and) advocacy**”. It was a desire for space or an opportunity to share the same space at the same times as their peers, a space where they could be recognised fully, not as a sub-text or an appendage, hence a desire for programmes to “**recognise cultural differences**”. The recognition of cultural differences required depth rather than paltriness based on a multi-culturalist approach. A radical curriculum would draw on CRT and aspects of critical multi-culturalism to provide an approach that engages participants in a systematic analysis of historical and contemporary consideration of identities, positions and locations. Such an approach is based on the Black perspective module offering a wider scope, not only in concepts of diversity and cultural differences, but also in motivating participants to challenge such systematic, noisome violence that anaesthetises participants. Thus, the necessity to provide “**training**” and education that illustrates “**how we are similar and how we are different**” is born. This does not mean that one is greater or that one is less worthy, it is rather about an understanding of the journey

travelled from the perspective of different storytellers. This approach would counter some of the negative representation of BEM people. It would foster an environment and context offering participants the opportunity to acquire an appreciation that different groups have made to civilisation. The emergence of tribes, fear, greed and survival created enmity and this enmity is played out in stories, traditions, politics and education. The emergent counter-narrative supports the capacity to envision and to hope. The utilisation of the best aspects of respective qualities can facilitate change, either symbolically or conceptually. The idea of the British bulldog and the Bengal tiger communicates the idea of strength and determination, drawing on symbols derived from different cultural contexts as the same content and process incorporated in Learning, Teaching and Curriculum Assessment Methods (LTCAM), as discussed in Chapter 10. Through this process, the **“risks of potential cultural expulsion and exclusivity”** can be significantly reduced.

Chapter 12 will discuss some of the ways that the learning contracts, radical curriculum and PSMSs can be applied. BEM students are experts of their lives. Involving them in the creation of solutions has added significantly to my own learning and understanding of what works for students in changing some of the negative outcomes. The following chapters discuss some possible interventions from their perspectives.

Chapter 12: Solution-focussed: Setting objectives and resistance

This study has used a qualitative paradigm by employing participatory methods to explore the BEM students' experiences in HE. CRT underpinned the study and was both explicit and implicit in the analysis. A further aspect of drawing on CRT was to use it as a conduit to move beyond the silence by using the narratives and emotional content of the BEM students' contributions to confront the essence of White privilege (Dlamini, 2002; Leonardo, 2002; Rich & Cargile, 2004; Gillborn, 2006).

The students wanted a dialogue between themselves and the university, based on an assessment of factors pertinent to their specific needs and experiences. BEM students felt it was crucial to create a space in which interests and needs could be discussed. They wanted a dialogue about expectations and what needs to happen to ensure the respective expectations are met. The students did not assume that the creation of such a space would necessarily resolve all of the issues raised. Rather, they envisaged a dynamic process acknowledging stages with a need for regular review. Most significantly, students spoke about having to follow lots of rules, regulations and norms which they were not involved in making. Students felt this implied that their experience did not matter because the university behaved as if it had a template that it enforced on all participants. So, even if there were undesirable outcomes, these were rationalised as a problem of the individual student, rather than the institution. The BEM students proposed the learning contracts in an attempt to reduce some of the difficulties that both academic staff and students faced in the transaction of education, attainment, retention and progression.

This study sought not only to gain an appreciation of the BEM students' experiences; its aim was also to gain insight into what they perceived as factors that militated against their efforts, resulting in a The deeper understanding about both worked and hindered them. If WP was to be effective, then a cognoscente of this was required in order to develop policies and practices enabling BEM students and the Academy to reach parity. Undertaking this work invoked many emotions and the investment by all participants was huge. A number of strategies and tools were used to enable students to explore the issues and propose practicable solutions. The tools were chosen for their familiarity with students in order to derive SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, attributable, relevant and time-bound) indicators, which are then cross-checked with a number of SPICED (subjective, participatory,

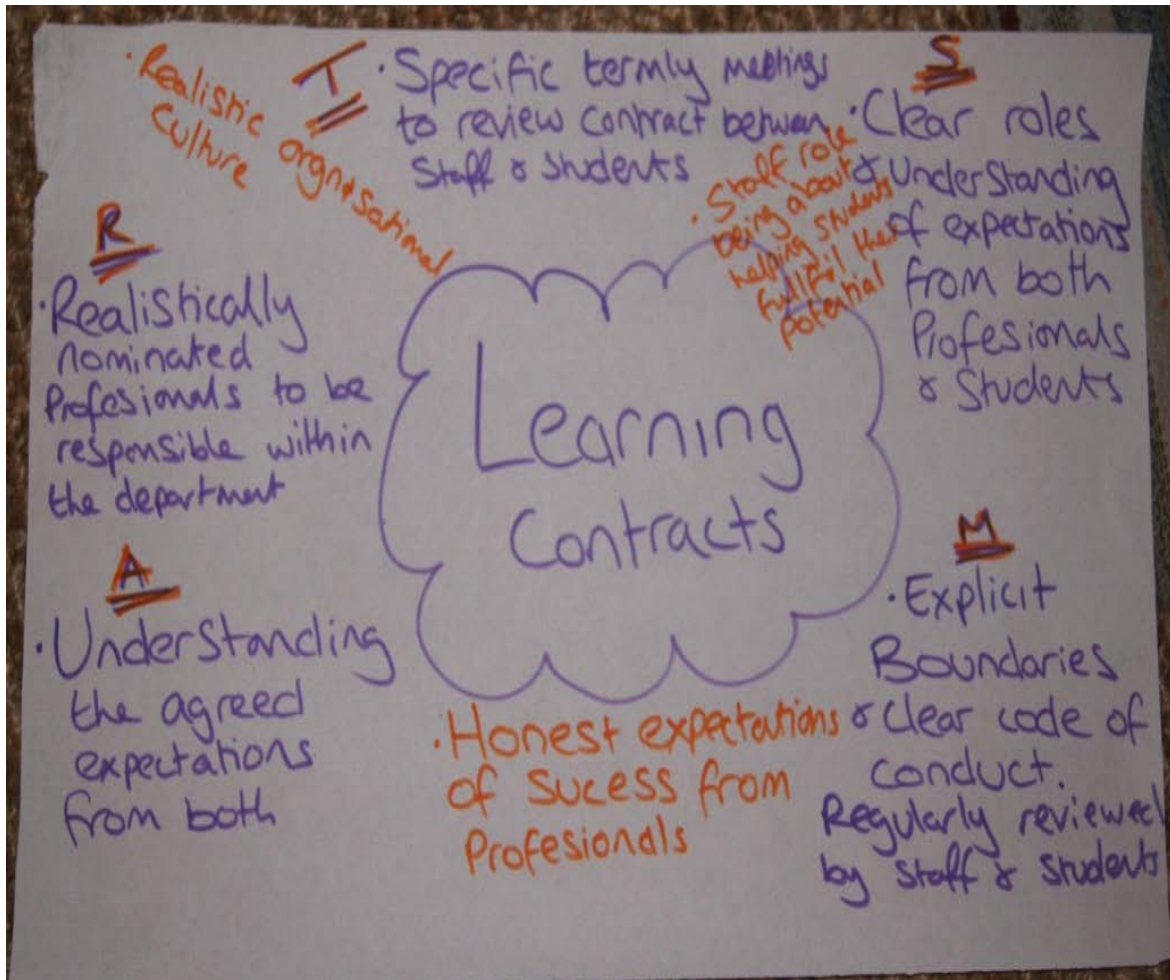
interpreted, cross-checked, empowering, diverse) indicators. These strategies focus more on the relevance of the objectives to different stake-holders and their accurate representation of complex realities (Mayoux, 2002).

The SMART models were a relevant choice, having been used in the wider course of study to assist in planning programmes when undertaking assignments. Thus, the students could monitor quickly and easily whether the project was meeting the objectives at specific points in the project's cycle.

The BEM students had invested seriously in terms of time and risks associated with attending the BEMSDGs. Therefore, the research design and activities were constructed to give BEM students the opportunity to explore and set specific objectives grounded in their subjective experiences. The BEM students discussed the feasibility of each objective proposed; the SMART and SPICED approach offered the opportunity to explore the LC, PSMS and RC in terms of their impact, while allowing them to draw on their experiences to set objectives. The following objectives were proposed and agreed upon by the students who participated:

12.1 SMART objectives for learning contracts (LC)

Figure 12.1: SMART objectives for learning contracts (LC)



The SMART objectives for LCs are discussed presently. In terms of the **Specific**, BEM students said that it was important that there were “**clear roles and understanding of expectations from both professionals and students**”. Some students said that some staff behaved as if they wanted them to fail and that they were not encouraged. Thus, within the *specific*, BEM students wanted more explicit roles to eradicate confusion in expectations. BEM students wanted support and expressed this as “**staff role being about helping the students fulfil their potential**”. This objective is clearly linked to the perception of receiving mixed messages from staff. The students required pro-active engagement and clear, unambiguous guidance that encouraged, rather than discouraged. The clarification of role and expectations is clearly linked to underlying assumptions or expectations that could be associated with an emotional contract.

The emotional contract would embody mutual beliefs, perceptions, and informal obligations between an organisation and individual within the public domain, such as HEIs and students. The bases of these emotional contracts are vaguely established as part of dynamic relationships relative to the positions of actual/perceived authority and actual/perceived subordination. They are part of an unarticulated range of expectations (Mayer & Beltz, 1998). Thus, within the context of this work and the respective consensual relationships between staff and students, it is reasonable to conclude that there is potential for a great deal of incongruence, confusion and unarticulated expectations. Moreover, the respective unarticulated assumptions or expectations create the space for mixed messages, which in turn increase misalignment, anxieties and vulnerability, thus reducing the confidence in academics as they are perceived as avatars of the Academy. BEM students come to university with a unique set of experiences which will inevitably impact on their perception of the university as an institution. In this regard, BEM students will often internalise the negative aspects of the differentiated behaviour or attitudes experienced. Singh, (2011) has argued that BEM students' experiences are “**culturally- and spiritually-nuanced**” (2011:4), thus the emotional contract comprises aspects of past and present unarticulated expectation. BEM students blame themselves or are blamed regarding the “**normative congruence**” (Kember, 1995:49), whereby the incongruence is seen as an aspect of a cultural deficit, an inability to communicate effectively with academic staff within the university.

The BEM students wanted the objectives to be ***Measurable***. The issue of clarity and accountability is maintained in this objective. Here, the students said that staff needed to have clear “**boundaries and clear code of conduct**”. They also felt that these needed to be “**regularly reviewed by staff and students**”. The lack of clarity and/or confidence in the university and in themselves is also reflected in the objective which asks for “**honest expectations of success from professionals**”. This further links to the emotional contract or seeking clarification in an attempt to reduce mixed messages and vulnerability. The BEM students recognised their fluid situation, often struggling to articulate their position; they did not have access to the whole picture and therefore felt that if the objectives were to be ***Achievable and Attributable***, then academic staff needed to work with BEM students and with each other to develop enhanced “**understanding (of) the agreed expectations**”.

To reduce the confusion and the bureaucracy in communication and to have issues responded to, students felt there needed to be ***Relevant***, “**realistically-nominated professionals to be responsible within the department**”, thus facilitating staff and

students to make necessary changes. They felt that the university would need to be more accommodating of the diverse groups, with “**realistic organisational culture**” and change needed at both cultural and organisational levels. The BEM students felt that it was important to be ***Time-bound***, scheduling “**specific termly meetings to review [the] contract between staff and students**”. The scheduling of meetings to review and monitor progress would also provide an opportunity to develop a dialogue and consider what further actions are required.

The SMART objectives devised for the “LC” theme are consistent with many of the issues raised during the discussion groups. They related to what BEM students perceived as important in enhancing their overall experience and closely aligned to how their experiences with university staff and processes impacted on their overall performance. For example, a different experience could improve BEM students’ attainment, retention and progression. A different experience could improve their confidence, which could in turn increase their motivation and desire to a point where they were able to seek clarification and an understanding of what is required of them and what they could expect in return; a partnership that would facilitate teaching, learning and assessment when working within the context of diversity. The BEM students are likely to have more confidence in their tutors as they appreciate that there is much more of a partnership established through the learning contracts. The main issue for the students related to their confidence, thus raising the question of whether the institution would be prepared to provide the resources and engage in a dialogue with the students about how this could be developed. At the same time, wider objectives would also be fulfilled, contributing to the health and well-being of the institution and all the students.

12.2 SPICED objectives for learning contracts (LC)

Figure 12.2: SPICED objectives: Learning contracts (LC)



The SPICED objectives were devised as one way of facilitating the university to work more effectively with BEM students. From their **Subjective** position, the BEM students felt it was important that the university acknowledged its role in “**providing resources to help students develop in the learning experience**” and did so by working with students to

develop and apply a learning contract. Throughout this study, students suggested that there was a lack of appreciation of their experience. Sometimes, this lack of appreciation was expressed as disbelief, and from this, they felt that it was important for the university to develop an **“understanding [of] internal feelings of what it feels like for Black students”**. The previous discussions relating to discrimination, positionality, safe space and consciousness have illustrated the situated-ness of BEM students, rather than as disembodied minds. Thus, attempts to address issues such as disparity in degree attainment, retention and progression entails a cognisance of **why, how** and **what** it is to be a BEM student in a racist world. They were not asking for special considerations and inflated grades. Rather, they were asking for a recognition that there are multiple consequences to this and that many ‘languages’ were being spoken by the students in question. They are dancing through discourses all the time and many of those discourses are in conflict with each other, making it extremely hard for the students to know how and where to situate themselves at any given moment. It also produces a fractured sense of self, rather than an integrated one, since the location at any given point may be very different to where they were that morning and where they will be later in the day. There is a constant “who am I?” question, and the risks of blurring the boundaries are high. Coy, (2009) talks about how those different identities conflict and shape the spaces she inhabits: **“This morning, I’m a researcher; this afternoon, I’m an outreach worker.”** Moreover, it was import to demonstrate that even though there was some incongruence, these were often a reflection of difficulties related to cross-cultural communication and the students’ attempts to find the language that authentically communicated their situation. The significance of this from the BEM student perspective is that they needed to feel confident that there was genuine belief on the part of academics that discrimination was a factor which accounted for some of the negative outcomes. **“Believing in that inequality towards students exists in order to participate in change”**. They also felt that it was important that safe spaces were provided, **“ensuring student voices are protected”**:

On reflection I was isolated within a system where few actually cared about my learning.

(BEMSDG, 2010)

BEM students felt that there needed to be an **“active engagement”** and that the objective of ***Participatory*** was important for the **“institution to understand the importance of participation in learning contract in order to assist students”**. The BEM students made reference to feeling marginalised by many of the processes and interactions embodied in the

normal operation of the university. The objective of *Participatory* is perceived as facilitating change, a process whereby the BEM “**student voices are heard**”. The students have highlighted the confusing messages they feel they receive; they felt that a SPICED objective, *Interpreted*, was important to reduce mixed messages and confusion by getting “**professionals to interpret the learning contract to develop personal, emotional and academic growth of students**”. They also restated the need to “**provide(ing) safety for students to say what they feel or voice their opinions**”. It was also important for the university to “**take [ing] students’ experiences into account in order to provide a good service**”. The students wanted to see this as an innovative and dynamic process that would lead to “**strategic analysis of issues brought forward in order for interpreted change to take place**”. The BEM students recognised the potential for misinterpretation and thus in the objective of *Cross-checked*, they talked about the importance of “**students and professionals with the ability to cross-check the learning contract**”. They also wanted the focus to be wider, indicating ‘**different students’ experiences, asking a wider variety of students’** and “**cross-checking with staff**”. The whole process was about facilitating students to tell their stories, thus in the objective *Empowering*, BEM students felt that the university ought to “**provide students with confidence and recognise weakness in the institution**”. They wanted the university to be more overt in its attempts to “**empower students actively**”, to “**engage and voice their needs and wants**”. The BEM students wanted reassurance to “**having a voice and having an expectation that professionals will listen to the BEM student voice**”. Cole, (2009) observes:

“Inconsistency from those with authority or influence is the most powerful way to undermine confidence and self-worth and this was very visible in this group, particularly in the women. The double whammy of racist discrimination and misogynistic stereotypes meant they were very unsure of themselves, with a tendency to blame themselves for not being good enough.”

(Cole, 2009)

BEM students also suggested that it was important to have a more *Diverse* outlook and response with “**professionals recognising diversity and differences of the learning of students**”. They also suggested that there may be some requirement for staff development, facilitating “**professionals learning of the diverse ways of learning**”. BEM students indicated that that there was a “**complexity of students’ needs**” and this ought to be acknowledged, rather than thinking about a one-cap-fits-all solution.

The SPICED objectives devised for the 'LC' theme are consistent with many of the issues raised during the discussion groups. The key issues in this appear to be those associated with students wanting to be heard and students wanting the opportunity to work with others in a collaborative way. The BEM students wanted to learn from the experiences of others. They wanted to be able to see and emulate people from similar backgrounds, people who believed in them and inspired them to participate in making changes. They did not want to be perceived as a problem because of their racial/cultural backgrounds, nor judged on the basis of a stereotype. They wanted the university to believe their stories and take action. There was also some concern in relation to cultural competence and the ability of the institution, its academics and professional staff, to develop organise and sustain learning and teaching environments that would enhance the BEM experience in HE. They were not advocating for separate provision, but rather the right to share the same space where would be respected, valued and taken seriously. They wanted to achieve their potential, not a prophecy constructed to diminish their aspirations:

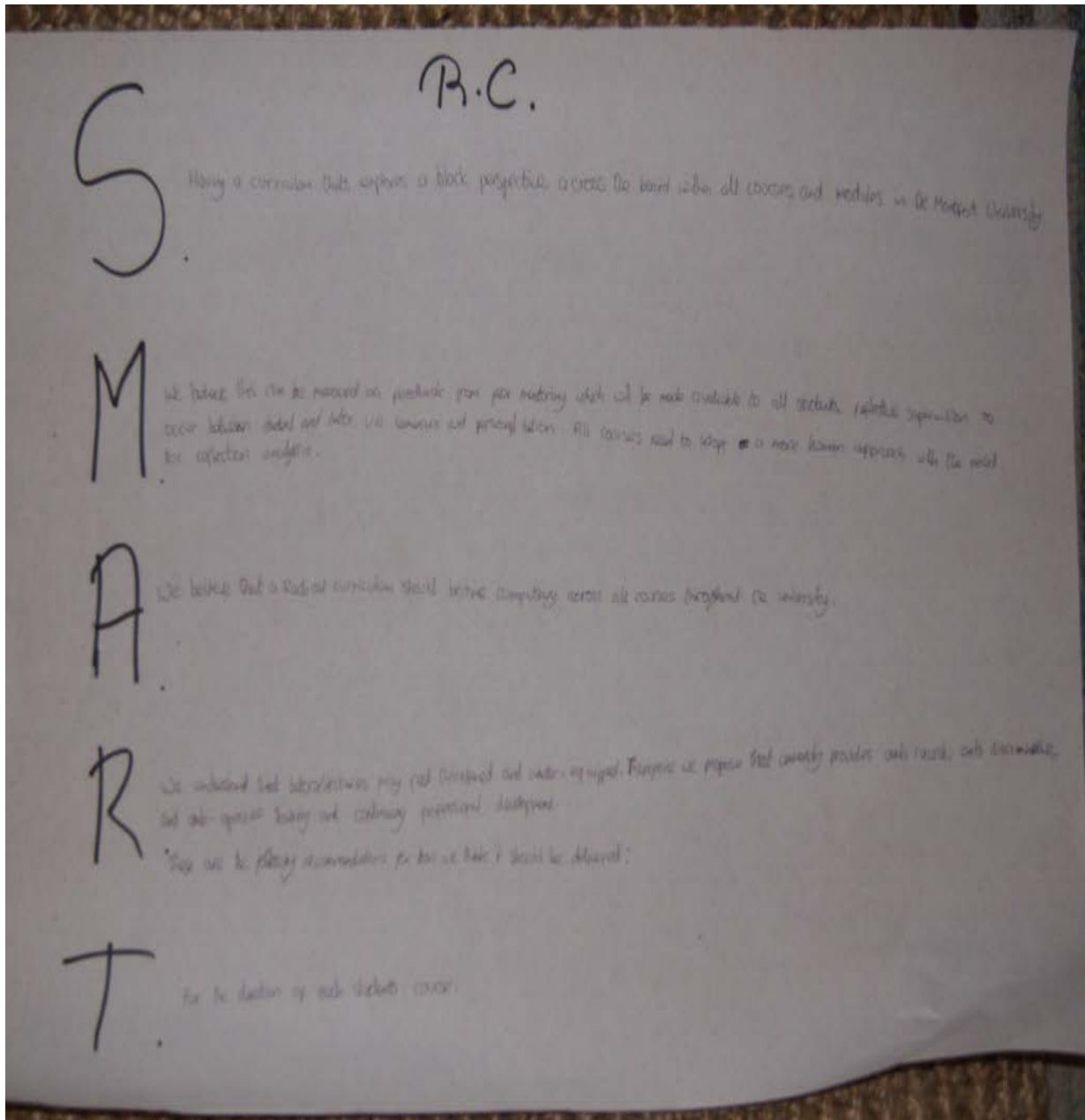
“We have to be strong. We need unity.”

(BEMSDG, 2009)

The SPICED objectives devised for the 'LC' theme also provide a template in which to locate principles and where potential advocates could be identified in terms of collaboration with PSMS, community participants, BEM students, DSU and the university. This would provide a systematic and dynamic approach to identify issues and suggest innovative alternatives.

12.3 SMART objectives for radical curriculum (RC)

Figure 12.3: SMART objectives: Radical curriculum (RC)



The evaluation of the 'RC' would be based on the SMART objectives set. In this discussion, the group seemed excited as they reflected on their own learning from being involved in the discussion group process. Most students appreciated that they were involved in an example of what could be achieved by adopting a different approach, a radical approach that allowed BEM students to reflect upon and analyse their experiences in safe spaces.

As in the case of the learning contracts and PSMS, BEM students were given the opportunity to explore their experiences and set specific objectives grounded in their subjective experiences. After discussion, the following objectives were proposed and agreed upon by the students. The BEM students said that in terms of ***Specific***, the RC meant **“Having a curriculum that explores a Black perspective across the board within all courses and modules in Riverside University”**. Some of these students would have had the opportunity to take the “Black Perspectives” module, which was available to youth and community students. Thus, when they proposed this as a module to be made available to all students by making it compulsory rather than optional, white students would not have the choice of ignoring it and white staff would not be able to marginalise it and would therefore have to engage. This objective was based on their experiences on the module and therefore they were able to be very specific in proposing it. The Black perspective module could be used as a template on which other programmes could develop their pedagogy. BEM students said that in terms of the objective ***Measurable***, **“We believe this can be measured via feedback from peer mentoring which will be made available to all students. Reflective supervision to occur between student and tutor, via seminars and personal tuition”; ‘all courses need to adapt a more human approach with the need for reflection analysis”**. The success of the migration of this module would be measured largely on feedback from stake-holders, including students, tutors and mentors. It is apparent that BEM students were recommending a variety of teaching/learning methods based on a humanistic approach, incorporating critical engagement, reflection and analysis as a lived experience, rather than as something separated out into an approach to the learning on the course.

The BEM students considered this objective to be ***Achievable and Attributable***: **“We believe that a radical curriculum should become compulsory across all courses throughout the university”**. Here, they have assigned this to the university to ensure its incorporation into learning, teaching and assessment. It would be part of the function of the executive board to determine best delivery of this. The BEM students’ experience of the positive outcomes from being engaged with the Black perspectives module and the BEMSDGs provides specific examples that suggest this objective is achievable. This objective is consistent with other issues raised, borne out of a need to develop a capacity to have a more informed, articulate and critical thinker, one who is able to work with other students as peers, but also one who is able to work within and learn from communities and the actions they take to survive.

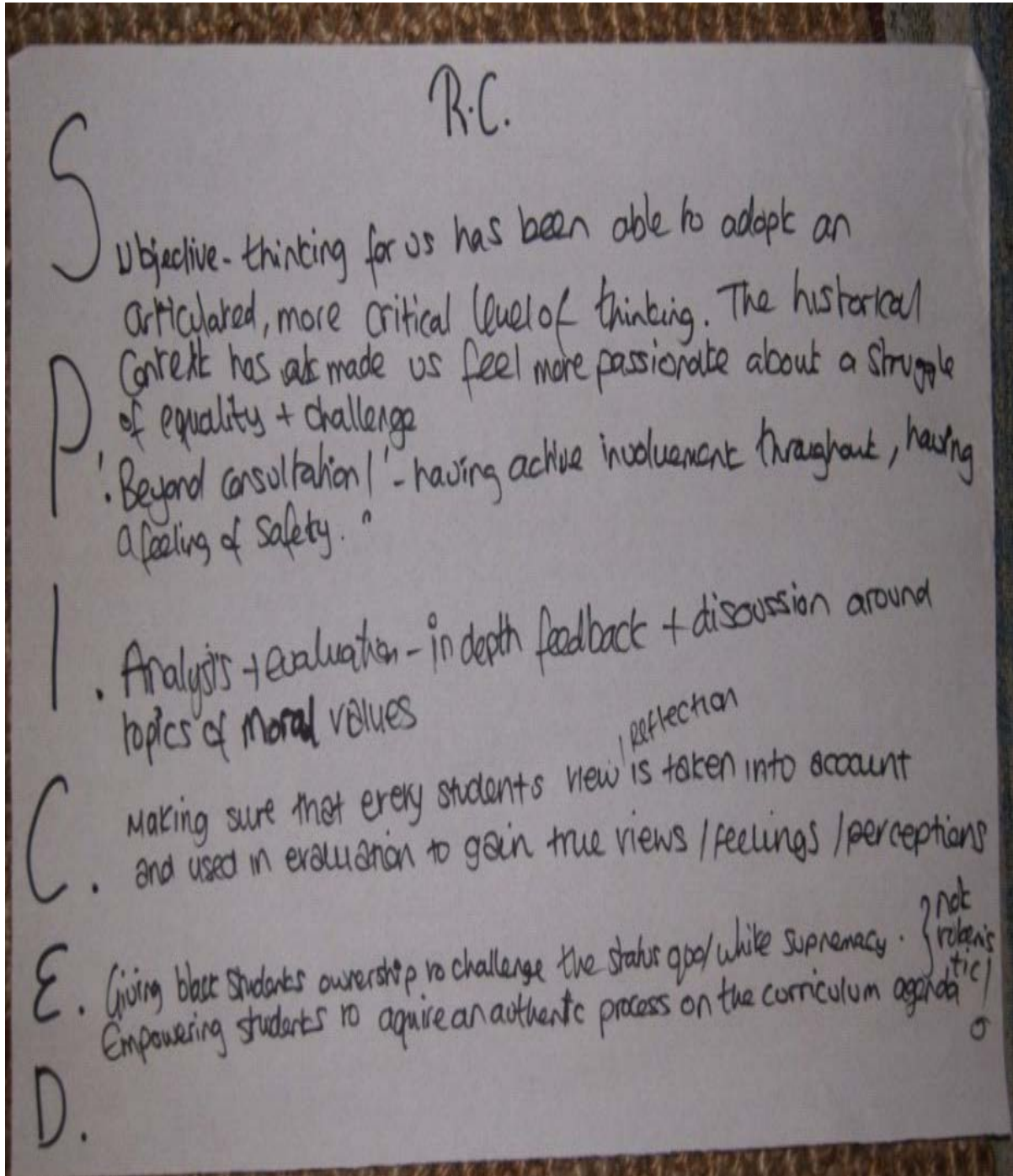
The BEM students also reflected on the dichotomy between themselves and academic staff; they did not want to alienate staff or White students, but they wanted provision to be

Relevant. “We understand that tutors/lecturers may feel threatened and under-equipped. Therefore, we propose that the university provides anti-racist, anti-discriminative and anti-oppressive training and continuing professional development”. This objective is interesting because the students have consistently argued for a radical curriculum. They have in other places talked about its relevance, but in this objective they raised an important issue, that of some staff feeling threatened or under-equipped. This suggests that students were reflecting on their own experiences. Their sensitivities have enabled them to accept that there might be resistant or anxious reactions from staff. The BEM students were also aware of consequences for oppressed groups, when the dominant groups feel anxious, resistant and hostile. Thus, their experiences within the Academy mirror the external off-campus experience of many BEM students.

In terms of the objective ***Time-bound,*** students felt it ought to be “**For the duration of each student’s course**”. The BEM students wanted the RC to be embedded on courses and available to all students as a right, not just as one-off or optional modules, but as core modules. The BEM students made suggestions of how the challenge for staff in developing confidence and skills might be addressed. Their suggestions are consistent with those one would expect from most academic development units or human resources training programmes for continuing development.

12.4 SPICED: Radical curriculum (RC)

Figure 12.4: SPICED objectives: Radical curriculum (RC)



The BEM students confirmed for themselves the value of a radical curriculum, yet this discussion group was effective; because it was not institutionalised, it enabled the BEM students to discuss and suggest a way forward based on their **Subjective** experience:

“Subjective thinking for us has been the ability to adapt an articulated, more critical level of thinking” and **“The historical context has made us feel more passionate about a struggle of equality and challenge”**. The BEM group was facilitated by an external facilitator (EF) with the freedom to work with the group at their pace and with the issues they raised. The students were not working within an assessment criteria or content-determined curriculum and although there were ground rules, there was flexibility and sensitivity to participants’ circumstances. There was no defined end product; all of the facilitation was about structuring a process, with the group writing the content as they went along. There is an acknowledgement that some of the content was informed by how the researcher/facilitator asked the questions, and the taken-for-granted capacity or willingness to travel with the BEM students on their journey. This was a process that incorporated encouragement and challenge in organising ideas and exploring further. The process, the relationships and the manner in which this study developed reflects the need for a depth of understanding in order to help them generate their own ideas. Moreover, the discussions were relevant because there was a genuine attempt for this study to be participatory.

In terms of being participatory, students did not want to be consulted; rather they wanted genuine active involvement in the process. ***Participatory*: “Beyond consultation, having active involvement throughout, having a feeling of safety”**. The BEM students also felt their ability to fully engage might be compromised if they were insecure. Thus, there was a need to ensure that the form taken is one where the students are also able to advise on the format in terms of what makes them feel safe:

“Participants need to have confidence in the group and the group boundaries in order to be able to express themselves honestly, and to have experienced some of the tools in order to trust that it is not ‘just drawing’ or ‘just Post-its®’, but that what emerges is real, representative and powerful.”

(Cole, 2009)

Throughout the various discussions, it was apparent that students felt unable to talk about issues that really affected them. Thus they wanted assistance and access to ***Interpreted*: “Analysis and evaluation, in-depth feed-back and discussion around the topics of moral values”**. This was due in part to the reaction of white peers and tutors. BEM students did not feel safe and therefore many discussions were not encouraged or developed. BEM students felt that analysis and evaluation of teaching and learning was important, not just to assess the performance of the tutor or module, but also other pedagogical issues in terms of

the complex dynamics inherent in human interaction and group processes. The students also felt that given some of the misunderstandings related to language, it was important to have specific and detailed feedback on work submitted for assessment. BEM students often indicated that they were unable to improve their marks due to not understanding feedback from tutors. For example:

“My essays continued to suffer as well as my self-esteem. And I only did well if I literally memorised her practice essays ... I felt I was cheated as I couldn’t memorise that huge amount of writing.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

Also:

“The two things that plagued me especially for the first term, was that I was afraid of failing and extremely anxious of essay writing.

(BEMSDG, 2009)

External facilitator Cole (2009) made the following observations:

“I was also aware of their confusion. They had studied hard, met the entry requirements and been allocated a place at the university, and then were hearing comments from their tutors that they should not expect to do well, that their aspirations were unrealistic.”

(Cole, 2009)

Cole, (2009) goes on to explain the potentially devastating impact of such conditioning:

“These mixed messages, coming on top of other mixed messages throughout their educational lives, seemed to result in them finding it hard to trust their own assessments of themselves, or others’ assessment of their abilities.”

(Cole, 2009)

Some of the BEM students also raised concerns that some of their white peers would engage in discussions about morality and values in a manner that suggested that BEM

culture, morals and values were not as developed. The BEM students indicated that they were often held accountable for the ignorance of some of their white peers who would make general comments often unsubstantiated or based on a news headline. The BEM students were put in a position where they were forced to defend themselves, their community and culture. The exchanges between BEM students and their white peers took the form of drawing attention to an issue like female genital mutilation, witchcraft or 'honour killings'. This would be discussed in a manner that suggested that it was normal practice within BEM cultures and that such practices were condoned by all those people from those backgrounds. A vigorous defence from BEM students would be deemed as acceptance of those practices. BEM students spoke about such matters and of how they felt perceived as generally homophobic, violent and dishonest. BEM students made comparisons and gave examples about their ability to talk openly in the discussion groups, as compared to the classroom, where they felt muzzled. One BEM student expressed this feeling by saying:

“I have learnt not to allow the African in me to speak.”

(BEMSDG, 2009)

This indicates a sense of dancing through discourses and a much-fractured sense of identity and self, far from an integrated wholeness. BEM students make choices all the time about who to be in any situation or context, and how to situate themselves. A further example is encapsulated by one of the students recounting some of her experiences with both staff and peers:

“I am concerned about some issues. One of my tutors made some comments that I don't like. These comments are like personal; they are talking about the way I write, you know, the way I express myself. It's about my work and it is personal. It's how we talk – we are straight people, to the point. It was crushing, especially if I was a weak person.”

(BEMSDG, 2008)

This student saw this as normal practice, explaining that it had extended to her placement: **“I am having some issues in placement, but there is nowhere to go.”** She then says that the experiences she had encountered and the opportunity to explore these within the BEMSDG was important because:

“...it helps me to realise why I am doing the course. We need some more people around. I am all the time wondering how they can represent me when they don’t know who I am.”

(BEMSDG, 2008)

This student concludes by saying that she does not have confidence in some of the existing groups:

“I don’t join some of these groups because when you have an issue, you want something done about it. We need action.”

(BEMSDG, 2008)

A lack of a sense of entitlement was also apparent; the entitlement to be treated respectfully, to have talents recognised, to be supported, and to have a basic faith in their abilities and potential reflected back to them:

“It is impossible to sustain a sense of entitlement and potential when, from a very young age, it is undermined and what should be given generously and freely is given grudgingly or not at all.”

(Cole, 2009)

Furthermore, inconsistency does not imbue confidence, but distrust, which means that later on, when there is praise and recognition, it is hard for people to hear it and believe in it. The interaction and comments from academics cannot be taken for granted or at face value. Thus, there is always a question about the agenda behind comments or actions.

BEM students spoke about what they perceived or experienced as favourable treatment towards some individuals or groups. This had the effect of tutors taking account of views that reflected their own (tutor) perception. This was why BEM students asked for the objective **Cross-checked: “Making sure that every student’s view/reflection is taken into account and used in evaluation to gain true views/feelings/perceptions”**. BEM students wanted feedback and evaluation to be constructed in a manner which allowed for wide engagement in the process. They felt it was important that all voices were heard. The external facilitator Cole (2009) comments that:

“It struck me as particularly offensive towards them to suggest that their aspirations were unrealistically high or that they were not adequately motivated. In order for them to be in the university at all they had had to overcome significant obstacles and it would have been much easier not to try to be there at all.”

(Cole, 2009)

These kinds of comments from white students and some staff contributed significantly to their lack of self-confidence. The BEM students wanted to feel a greater sense of ***Empowering***: **“Giving Black students ownership to challenge the status quo/white supremacy”**. BEM students often felt marginalised and unable to challenge the status quo. They were hesitant about challenging because of some of the reactions/consequences from tutors and their white peers. They talked about the failure by tutors to acknowledge their own privilege and the reluctance or discomfort of white tutors and students when some BEM students talked about their experiences and the impact of white supremacy. In this objective, BEM students want to encourage their peers to embrace the discomfort and accept responsibility associated with white privilege. BEM students talked about being constantly scrutinised or made to defend themselves, their culture, their loyalty to the British way of life, and yet they were continually ‘othered’. In her book, **“Justice & Politics of Difference”**, Iris Marion Young, (1990) argued that colonisation of identity and marginalisation of experience leads people to a point where they are required to prove something on terms that make it impossible for them to do it, in ways that others are never required to. For example, in relation to mental illness, when someone has been ill, they are never quite trusted as sane again. However, those who have never been diagnosed are never required to prove their sanity. In fact, those who have been discharged from services are the only ones with any kind of certification of their mental health – the rest of us take it for granted.

In this objective, BEM students accepted that there is often discomfort in challenging discrimination. However, they were committed to work with others to make a difference:

“I was awed by how honest they were about some of the experiences they had had throughout the educational process and horrified by some of the incidents they disclosed. I was also in admiration of how they were continuing in education in spite of these experiences in the hope that their degrees would help them claim more security in the world.”

(Cole, 2009)

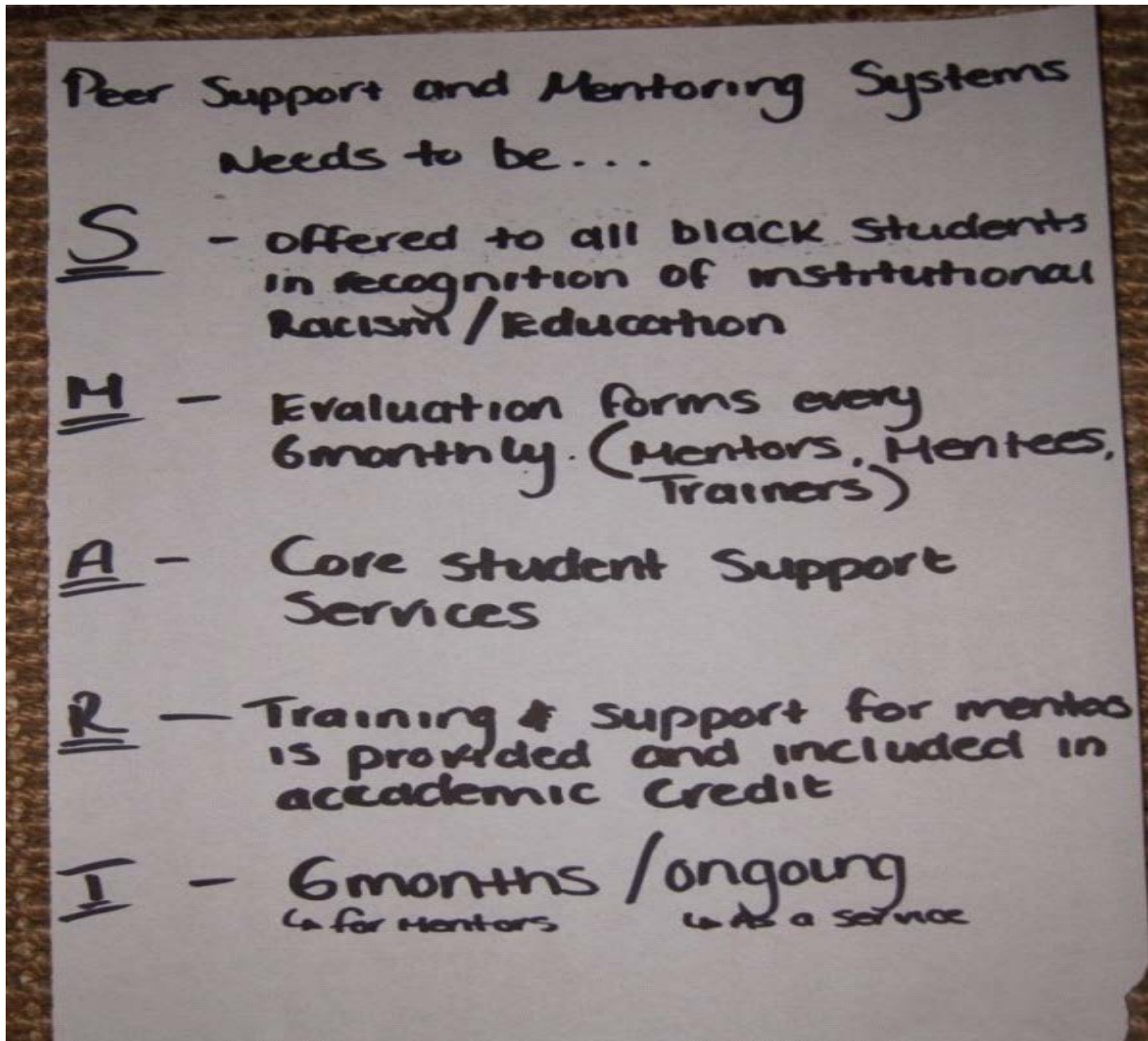
Throughout these discussions, BEM students talked about having full involvement in responding to issues that adversely impact on their experiences. The objective, ***Diverse: “Empowering students to acquire an authentic process on the curriculum agenda, not tokenistic”*** sets up a challenge of deciphering what genuine authentic involvement looks like and whether the BEM students and the institution have the time, confidence, resources and patience to make it happen:

“This absence seemed to be the outcome of an entire educational career that seemed to have them there on sufferance. Some participants mentioned individual teachers who have believed in them, but for the most part they had not been protected from racism. Some teachers and schools had colluded and perpetuated, unchallenged, the racism. The students were not understood as achievers...their conclusions and suggestions for ways forward were not unrealistic or ill-considered and the group together demonstrated expressive talents in a variety of ways.”

(Cole, 2009)

12.5 SMART objectives for Peer Support & Mentoring System (PSMS)

Figure 12.5: SMART PSMS

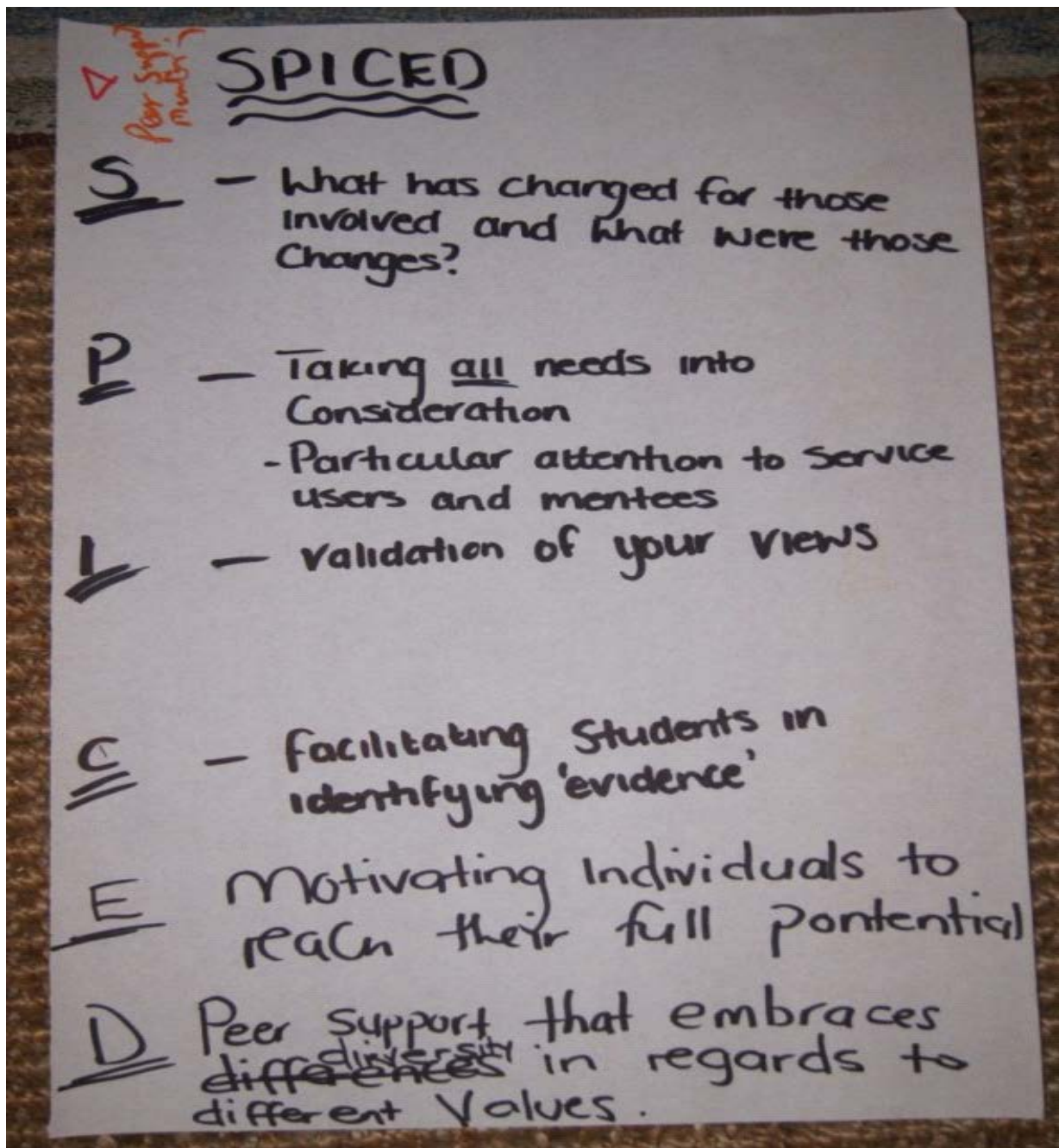


As in the case of the learning contracts, BEM students were given the opportunity to explore their experiences and set specific objectives. After the discussion, the following objectives were proposed and agreed upon by the students. The evaluation of the PSMS would be based on the **SMART** objectives set. Peer support and mentoring systems need to be **Specific**. It was felt that PSMS ought to be “**offered to all Black students in recognition of institutional racism in education**”. PSMS was in actual fact one means of bridging institutional and personal failures that had a differential impact on BEM students in terms of both experience and outcome. In the initiation of a PSMS, the students did not want a tokenistic response. They wanted this work to be valued and taken seriously. Thus, it was important that it was **Measurable**. Once established, it was important to allocate time to

develop. It was therefore necessary to set time aside for “**evaluation forms every six months (mentors, mentees, trainers)**”. This would imply the necessity to agree the content in advance of the specific outcomes and how the evaluation would proceed. The PSMS was **Attributable** as a “**core student support services**” function. This may have been influenced by the fact that some students were aware that Student Services ran a mentoring service and that a few members of the BEM students in the discussion groups had been recruited as mentors to support other students. This objective **Achievable and Attributable** potentially provided more challenges; there are a number of mentoring initiatives within the university, and none of these are specifically targeted at BEM students. In terms of **Achievable and Attributable**, there needs to be more discussion with BEM students and the Academy about the content and criteria for success. This objective ought to be attributed as a central function within the university, located within or reporting directly to the executive board, with regard to progress. In order to facilitate BEM students in undertaking this function, there needs to be **Relevant** “**training and support for mentors is provided and included in the academic credit**”. This was commented on as an important consideration, as there were many accounts given in which students were perceived to be struggling with the demands of the course, yet they were regularly called upon to undertake other duties that could divert them from their studies. Some students felt obliged to participate, whereas others saw this as important in terms of employability; they equally did not want to antagonise someone who might be assessing their work at some future date. Thus, they suggested that giving academic credit is one way of supporting students who took on additional responsibilities. The students indicated that mentors ought to be given an opportunity to work with other students for a **Time-bound**: period of “**six months – for mentors**” and that PSMS are adopted as an “**on-going service**”.

12.6 SPICED: PSMS

Figure 12.6: SPICED objectives: PSMS



In this discussion of the SPICED objectives, the BEM students felt that the evaluation of the PSMS would be based on their Subjective experience of “what has changed for those involved and what were those changes?” Thus, the students saw this as a dynamic process, one from which they could learn and as they learned, others would benefit. This is located in the subjective, but it can also lead to a research proposal which looks specifically

at setting up and exploring this in terms of changes envisaged, both desired and undesired. The BEM students sought to make this project *Participatory*, inclusive by “**taking all needs into consideration**”, with “**particular attention to service users and mentees**”. It would be necessary to initiate a feedback loop to show clear starting points in terms of needs and mechanisms set in place to achieve these. The participatory objective here was to ensure that consideration was given to how BEM students and other key stake-holders would be included. The methodology utilised would need to ensure that views of BEM students and those of the university and white students could be *Interpreted*, so there would be “**validation of your views**”. BEM students were familiar with phrases such as ‘student voice’ and ‘student-led’, but they resented the ways in which these terms were used, or the ways in which some BEM students had been co-opted as their representatives. They saw this as tokenistic, a way of bolstering up a view that equated with the dominant discourse. The BEM students were recognising that their needs could be best represented by people who shared their experiences, people for whom it was inherent, people confident enough to present evidence that challenged some of the conventional views about them. This representation was not only about the discourse, but also about the political position of the people doing the representing – did they share the same understanding of the politics? The multi-faceted issues associated with representation are reflected in earlier discussions, where it was argued that there was a balance between looking similar and having the same politics. Thus, it is not enough to assume that BEM academics will represent the experience of BEM students. Many of the BEM academics will be managing in their own ways and may also be struggling with internalised stereotypes. Cole, (2012) asserts that:

“There’s a risk of biological essentialism in the assumption that any one of a minority group will have a radical agenda and speak in the interests of that group as a whole, never mind the intersections. It is so rare, for example, to hear Black or working-class men putting forward an agenda that recognises women in any meaningful way.”

(Cole, 2012)

In order to reduce the negative or tokenistic incorporation of views that are not reflective of the BEM students’ experiences, BEM students wanted the PSMS to be *Cross-checked*; a function of “**facilitating students in identifying evidence**”. This was in recognition that some students and academics had the knowledge and skills that could be used to assist others as they sought to build their case. This is another example of the conflicted relationship the students perceived themselves to be in. The focus within this study was to work with students in a manner that would enable them to work with others, thus developing

their skills to change the most negative aspects of their experience. Educational outcome is an important indicator and is often used as a benchmark that enables objective consideration of the relationship between educational outcomes and the BEM experience in HE. Indeed, BEM students have consistently drawn attention to this by suggesting that there is a need for ***Empowering***, “**monitoring individuals to reach their full potential**”. Thus, outcomes or performativity might be measured in terms of the extent to which students leave the course before completion, degree classification and progression beyond graduation. In the SPICED objective ***Diverse***, BEM students wanted to see “**peer support that embraces diversity in regards to different values**”. This was a consistent feature in the discussions and reflected the experience of exclusion and a desire to initiate opportunities for learning that valued and embraced students from different racial and social backgrounds.

If we accept the notion that we are shaped by our experiences, then it would seem reasonable to conclude that the proliferation and consistency in the accounts of BEM students was far too great for this to be regarded as incidental, coincidence, or a figment of their imagination (Gillborn, 2008). Arrendondo (1996) argued that:

“All people are impacted by surroundings events and relationships, but each of us has a historic, economic, socio-cultural, and socio-political context that provides a framework that further impacts our personal culture.”

(Arrendondo, 1996:7)

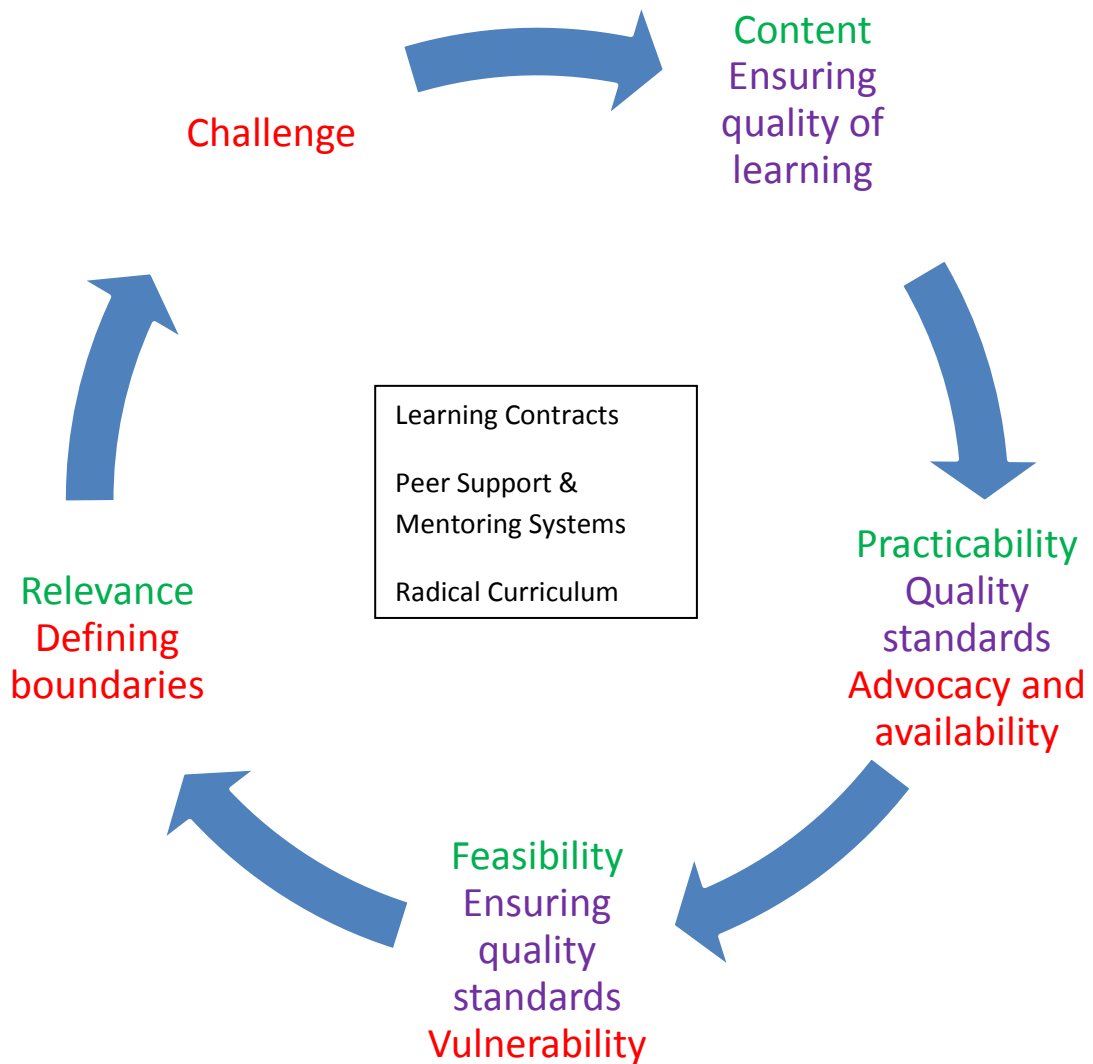
12.7 Summary

Overall, the BEM students regarded their experience in HE as a struggle, a challenge that exposed vulnerabilities and presented opportunities for change. This study draws attention to the necessity of using a methodological approach to facilitate students in telling their stories. It has also demonstrated the necessity to create the space that would facilitate the articulation of the BEM ‘student voice’. In such spaces, BEM students were encouraged to reflect on their own lives and on their experiences in HE. Their experience in HE was mirrored by their experiences in wider society and underscored by ‘discrimination’. Moreover, it could also be argued that their experience of being members of groups which experience multiple oppressions heightened their appreciation of “**positionality**”. This is reflected in terms of how they are situated, or how they situate themselves, based on perception and experiences (Collins, 2000a). The encounter with ‘**discrimination**’ and ‘**positionality**’ in HE and the opportunity to dialogue and reflect led to an emerging “**consciousisation**”, where

BEM students were “**more determined to succeed and to challenge for positive change**”, and where participants wanted HE institutions to be “**accountable**” and to “**acknowledge their role and responsibility in addressing the negative impact of policy and practice**”. BEM students “**desired safe spaces**” and they indicated that they were prepared to use various methods (“**self-determination**”) to achieve their objectives. The BEM students have identified strategies they believe will contribute to making a significant difference to their experiences in HE. These are “**learning contracts (LC)**”, “**peer support & mentoring system (PSMS)**” and “**radical curriculum (RC)**”.

BEM students felt that the three themes would help the university to meet the overarching need of improving ratings in the National Student Survey. They identified this as a selling point or opportunity for the university to embrace doing something mutually-beneficial. They also felt that adoption of the three themes would enhance their experience within the Academy, since the content of modules could be made more relevant, ensuring quality of learning via the radical curriculum. The learning contracts would identify quality standards and ensure that these were practical, feasible and within defined boundaries. The PSMS would increase the confidence and reduce vulnerability, with BEM students being more likely to accept challenges from people whom they trust and believe are advocating on their behalf. In this sense, they also felt that it was important to increase the number of BEM staff so that there would be more available. This was in recognition of the fact that the present system sees too few BEM staff supporting too many BEM students because of perceived deficits among BEM students or the HE institution. Moreover, on the whole, BEM members of staff tend to connect with the issues raised by BEM students; they trusted and perceived BEM staff as more empathetic, and therefore more prepared to go that extra mile. In contrast, white academics were perceived as ‘jobsworths’ who did not comprehend the nature of the problem. It was recognised that in this scenario, the demands on BEM staff were unsustainable and would lead to disappointments and potential burnout. **Figure 12.7** below illustrates the three themes in motion. It is a dynamic process developed as a response to a dereliction of responsibilities. This dereliction impacts adversely on BEM students, thus this tool is not meant to be static but intuitive, adapting to the changed circumstances as both university and students evolve in relation to respective positions.

Figure 12.7 Three themes: LC, PSMS and RC in motion



The participants described their experiences of being BEM students in HE in the UK. The significant finding is that discrimination is the canvas on which BEM students manoeuvre or are manoeuvred. “**Discrimination**” was initially identified in terms of the “**differentiated, experienced, educational institutions elsewhere**”. Some of the students reflected on their experiences in education at different levels and in different countries. They were able to differentiate these experiences, concluding that discrimination was more evident within the British HE system. The BEM students were reflective of social groups that experience multiple oppressions. However, race or ethnicity was an important prism that both amplified and concealed their experiences and their accounts of their experiences. The BEM students’ consideration of their experiences caused them to comment that there was a degree of confusion articulated as “**Sense of lots of issues, not clear where to start**”; “**sense of carrying a lot of**

baggage, sometimes a lifetime's worth and **"upset at how systemic it is and how hard it has been to survive within it"**. The opportunity to dialogue or reason contributed to a realisation of how power has been used and the impact this has in terms of social closure or **"positionality"**.

During the discussion groups, the BEM students explored the significance of discrimination in terms of how they had been situated. This realisation was reflected by one of the participants when they commented that what they had learnt was:

"...an eye opener. Ignorance is bliss, I don't want to open up the 'race' card, but I feel I have been discriminated against."

(BEMSDG, 2008)

The research design and the theoretical framework proved essential in that BEM students were facilitated in their **"desire for safe space"**. The BEMSDG was the catalyst for BEM students' **"consciousisation"** – a recognition of power, abuses of power, resilience and self-worth leading to being **"more determined to succeed and to challenge for positive change"**; **"self-determination"** and **"accountability and acknowledgement"**. As one student participant said:

"I am learning to make the change and value myself. Other issues impacting on me leaving me passive; it's really scary to be assertive."

(BEMSDG, 2008)

Another commented:

"(there needs to be)...more opportunities in building the programme of change; individuals can begin to take responsibility for change."

(BEMSDG, 2008)

The BEM students considered options. Their appreciation that their position was based on a process persuaded them to conceptualise alternative constructive and dynamic processes to enhance their experience in HE. They suggested a systematic, combined

approach, making effective use of '**LC**', '**PSMS**' and '**RC**'. These themes reflected the experience of being members of groups experiencing multiple oppressions in the UK. The themes present a contextual background to the essence of the phenomenon. The BEM students wanted white students and the Academy to acknowledge discrimination and how their actions (or lack of) adversely impact on BEM students; they seek restitution from the institution in terms of explicit efforts to enhance the BEM student experience.

Chapter 13: Implications for BEM students, UK higher education institutions and BEM communities

13.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the implications of the study's findings for BEM students, HE institutions and BEM communities. Suggestions for further research are also outlined, as are the limitations of the study and the original contribution this thesis makes. Students participating in this study identified **discrimination** and **institutional negligence**.

Consideration of the BEM students' experiences also explored the concept of "positionality" and how this is used within the university in terms of collusion, stereotyping and the main themes emerging from the literature. Several studies in this area have concluded that there are very complex issues (Cassen, 2007; Richardson, 2008; Singh, 2011) and that there is considerable discomfort within the Academy over explanations suggesting that disparity in degree attainment is linked to **discrimination** (Singh, 2011) and **institutional negligence**. This study concurs that it is extremely difficult to be conclusive in terms of any one aspect as an explanation of differentials in the outcome of students from different backgrounds in terms of race, class and gender (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). However, there are intersections within how BEM students manage their difference when attempting to limit the negative impacts of racism, sexism and stereotyping. This attempt to manage self in relation to others is significant in terms of BEM students and has been discussed in terms of positionality (see Chapter Five). BEM students remained excluded from important spaces. For example, some expressed difficulties in language and communication, poor cultural awareness among staff, aloofness, discrimination and racism.

Intersectionality was integral to this study; the literature review (Chapter 2) explored key explanations for the retention, attainment and progression of BEM students in HE. This review identified **eight themes** which became the basis of my research (State policy and rhetoric; Education and legacy; Cultural impediments, The Equation (more BEM students equals lower standards); HE inertia and resources; Cultural competence; Institutionalism – oppression, discrimination, racism, collusion and stereotypes; Creating spaces).

The emergent themes individually provided partial understanding. The eight themes identified in the literature - when taken collectively - provided a far deeper understanding of a dynamic context and the fluidity of factors as physical, constructed and interpretive. These factors can be random and singular, but their impact was consistent, often aligned with interpretation and reaction, rather like a circuit board, wired to form many of the connections and interconnections used by powerful groups to maintain discord. Power is maintained through the presence of both the real and the imagined which, in this study, was formulated as the Hydra (see page 133). Social discord and social order both exist within the same body and these are aspects of the many layers articulated as intersectionality.

Discussion on conceptualising BEM identities may be read as further expression of intersectionality and its many layers. Within this discussion, race was deemed as a social construct that had consequences for individuals and groups (see pages 80 - 84). **Chapter 3 considered the difference and layers reflected in the demographic data provided in 3.8.1 Black Ethnically-Minoritised Student Dialogue Group (BEMSDG) meetings (page 115-116)** some of the intersections in terms of ethnicity and gender are emphasised.

Advocating for the use of the term “BEM” presents its own challenges; it embodies many struggles as, in its simplistic or convenient presentation, it fails to articulate the complexity of the symbiotic links of a dynamic phenomenon, where logic is inadequate in its attempts to describe the nuances of social beings as they interact with the social and physical world. However, the use of this term emerged from dialogue with students. This study found that students’ experiences were differentiated prior to HE and that the differentiated experiences are often maintained during the period of study and beyond. For example, Chapter 2 explored key explanations for the retention, attainment and progression of BEM students in HE and found that educational background, cultural background, socio-economic status, age, generation and gender were all factors in determining outcomes.

With regard to the theme of education and legacy, it was shown that previous educational experiences formed part of the dynamic context which BEM students, White students and academics draw upon. Thus, the perception of African males as lazy, disaffected, unreliable or deviant as a consequence of ignorance or discriminatory practice could lead to what Broman et al, (2000) referred to as **“lower levels of mastery and higher levels of psychological distress”**.

Such stereotypes are embodied in the self-fulfilling prophecy, thus the application of demeaning stereotypes often leads to outcomes of lower attainment, early termination of course and slower progression. Conversely, the stereotype hard-working and clever,

associated with some Asian students, is often reflected in the outcomes, especially those involving students of Chinese or Indian heritage (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Tomlin, 2006). Moreover, this study found that retention, attainment and progression vary in different groups. Within the context of early educational experiences, Cassen & Kingdon, (2007) show that among low achievers, boys out-number girls by three to two. Hirsch, (2007:4), noted that students from African-Caribbean origin are:

“...the least successful and those of Indian and Chinese origin most successful in avoiding low achievement ... children are more likely to have low achievement if they receive free school meals and if they live in poor urban areas.”

(Hirsch, 2007:4)

Thus, the risk of leaving school with low achievement varies greatly in different groups. BEM students are impacted by many different factors in which there will be both alignment and points of divergence. The BEMSDG comprised participants who were differentiated on the basis of ethnicity, some of whom regarded themselves as ‘Black’, and/or ‘black’ and others who referred to themselves as ‘BME’, Asian, Indian, Bangladeshi, African, African-Caribbean, West Indian, Black British, Brazilian, Asian, Pakistani, Latino. There were students who self-identified as ‘mixed race’ and were uncertain whether the dialogues groups were for them; there were white students from Eastern Europe who enquired whether they could join the group. Some students identified themselves on the basis of their faith; this was most pronounced among the Muslim students. Sallah et al, (2010) noted that **“religious orientation was inextricably linked to constructed notion of self and identity is interwoven”**. The same study discussed accounts of the perceived discrimination between Muslims from south Asian, African and Caribbean communities. These included not being regarded as ‘proper’ Muslims, or as being impeded by other barriers such as language. This raised further questions in terms of identity and a sense of belonging.

Thus, in terms of ethnicity, there was an attempt in this study to develop an approach conceived in struggle but which sought an outcome inclusive in practice and outcome. Students were also differentiated in terms of learning differences, language, faith, age, caring responsibilities and cultural expectations in relation to religion, children, parents or other family members. The BEM students were also affected in terms of the process of racialisation, their nationality status, (citizenship), refugee, secularised, socio-economic, tribal, religious and gendered alignment female, male, first generation and second generation. The significant area of commonality was their experience of discrimination. Thus,

despite the situated-ness and their difference, BEM students were united on the basis of their common experience of discrimination and the intersections of race, gender, class, disability, age and sexuality. These same aspects made it both possible and difficult to create safe spaces for the articulation of a comprehensive totality of the BEM students' experiences in HE. Thus, within the context of the university's desire to be a global university in which there is the co-existence of 'home' students and 'international' students, the distances between full-time, under-graduate and post-graduate are further layers of intersectionality. Because of this, a more nuanced and strategic approach is necessary to enhance the outcomes for all students. This study has contributed to a greater understanding through an analysis that sought to integrate the micro, meso and macro aspects of such intersections.

With regard to this study, identity and circumstance were pertinent to the decisions students, academics and professional services staff made. These were not always clearly articulated, but were manifest in interaction and reflection. Thus, the status of a 'home student' was afforded a different status, depending on whether they were an 'international' student or a 'home' student who spoke with an accent which suggested they were from a different country, or an 'international' student who was articulate, with a very good command of English. The latter persona was often characterised as one which demanded respect; one which had or was deemed to have authority and influence. Their status was perceived as fixed – members of the ruling class. In contrast, others who spoke with strong regional dialects or accents that denoted them as foreign and/or from a 'lesser' nation were often treated as if they are lacking in ability. Further aspects of the layers most evident within the dialogue groups were gender, class, disability and age. One of the interesting aspect of identity and its intersections was that sexuality was not raised in any of the discussions, thus raising further questions about safe spaces.

The focus of this study was based on the experience of BEM students in HE. Intersectionality was integral to this study, but the scope of the study was limited as it sought to maintain a focus on disparities between BEM students and White students in terms of the differentiated outcomes of retention, attainment and progression. This study acknowledged both the significant differences between and within social groups but chose to focus on the areas of alignment and to draw attention to difference where it was pertinent to do so. It is accepted that the conflation of ethnic groups into one term serves different purposes. This section also shows the potential weakness of providing demographic data without articulating the complex intersectional dynamics that abound. It highlights the significance of intersectionality in the sense that identity is a process in which metamorphosis is natural.

These natural occurrences (people are born; they will change with age; they will often become less able with time) are often ascribed status which in turn contributes to groups choosing an aspect of a person's/group's identity as a point of focus to demean, ridicule or attack. Thus, the presence of both the physical reality and the phenomenological reality are utilised in giving substance to the epistemological or constructed self. In essence, this asserts that interactions are negotiated and navigated, based on interpretation and experience of the cultural mores within a given society. This creates the possibility for reinforcing sites of struggle by drawing on various discriminatory tools that social theorists have given different names. Thus, Parkin, (1979, 2013) refers to social closure; Alcroft, (1995) discusses patriarchy; Rosenfeld, (2009) explores sexuality, drawing attention to heteronormativity and its impact on people who are not heterosexual. Griffin et al, (2011) suggest that race aversion contributes to maintaining inequality between racial groups. The focus on the aforementioned aspects as a source for inequality fails to encapsulate the multiple dimension and therefore the multiple sources by which individuals and groups are frequently targeted when one groups seek to assert their will upon another.

Whilst these are often concerted and systematic attacks, they are normalised and therefore invisible to the extent that their destructive force is only evident at the outcome and within the narrative of groups whose voices and experiences have marginalised or neutralised.

In this study, I have argued that discrimination and positionality are aspects of the same process of oppression (Hearn, 2012) (also see Chapters 4, 5, 7, 13). Various authors (Young 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1994; Thompson, 2006 and Carmichael, 2012) have all written extensively on this subject and there is overall agreement that oppression occur when one group systematically utilises one or more points of focus to secure or advance a favourable position. Conversely, less powerful groups often subscribe to both discourse and hegemonic conditions that are a consequence of surrendering or acting against the interest of social justice, rather accepting the often deceptive notions of meritocracy. Intersectionality provides another lens which enables us to analyse critically some of the impacts. In this study, I have used CRT and intersectionality as a theoretical framework to facilitate the analysis, thus enabling the BEM students' experiences and their voices to be realised.

The study revealed how some students experienced racism from some staff, which affected them deeply. Some told of problems caused by being pre-judged by white students, academic and professional staff. They were perceived as being demanding and complaining. They recounted their suffering as normal, and complained of emotional coldness by some staff. Some BEM students complained of language isolation. They asserted that a good level

of communication allowed them a greater feeling of security when studying in HE. They felt that no allowances were made for them, even though the language used in HE is often complex and mystifying for native speakers. Other challenges revealed by the study were the cultural differences between staff and students:

“I do lots of integration work – I make efforts to invite people into my house, I do the work- but I still feel outside, not valued. They (white people) make no effort to integrate. This is the burden a dominant group does not have to carry.”

(BEMSDG, 2008)

The findings of this study broadly confirm evidence from others (NUS, 2011) and also showed how BEM students felt disempowered when their requests for support were ignored and they were forced to accept what was offered. These findings show similarities with previous research which has identified a range of barriers to the delivery of high-quality education (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; NUS, 2011).

BEM students felt isolated and unable to know where they could take their concerns; they felt there was a lack of acknowledgment and accountability within HE. They were concerned that in articulating their concerns they would become a target, thus making them more vulnerable. Moreover, a major issue was a lack of acknowledgement of their concerns. This suggests that some students were in actual fact taking a risk in raising concerns, yet their concerns were not explored with the level of professional competence that the Academy publically espouses. In this sense, the Academy is in breach of its contract, since it is **institutionally-negligent** in terms of its capacity to acknowledge and be accountable to its various constituents. In order to change, the Academy needs to demonstrate its readiness to adapt practice to enhance the BEM student experience, not by producing glossy publications and media, but through everyday actions. The BEM students identified specific actions and initiatives that they perceived would make a difference, the outcomes of which are discussed in the previous chapter.

13.2 Implications for BEM students

This study revealed that primarily, BEM students **do** have high expectations of themselves. However, what is often articulated as a lack of self-confidence in terms of attainment,

retention and progression is, in essence, a lack of confidence in the university's ability to create an environment that fosters respect for difference. A proposed comprehensive and radical curriculum taking account of their specific needs (Harris, 2012) is just one aspect of this. The BEM students in this study highlighted the need for identification of specific spaces in which they would be able to assert themselves and acquire a sense of belonging and where they would not be regarded as objects of curiosity when they sought to fulfil religious duties and traditional cultural beliefs. They wanted spaces that were affirming, and encouragement rather than scrutiny. At the same time, they wanted academics to show interest in them and their work – not only when they made mistakes, but also when they did well. Particular narratives permeated all the experiences and decisively influenced the meaning they ascribed to them.

The BEM students in this study recognised that their experiences were not isolated, individual cases, but rather that the level and form of discrimination was systematic. These students did not have confidence in some of the initiatives proposed or undertaken by the university. They wanted to be involved in a process of change and they wanted the university to acknowledge and be accountable for the discrimination they regularly experienced. They felt they had learned much from the opportunity to dialogue and expressed a commitment to work with key stake-holders in tackling discrimination and enhancing the BEM student experience.

“We carry baggage; it is obvious as soon as you get into class; it’s negative. For example, the affirmative action and dealing with the everyday struggle is important because it is added to.”

(BEMSDG, 2007)

Another student (BEMSDG, 2010) said that some of her challenges came from having to undertake work with White peers who consistently devalued her. This left her feeling confused and disappointed, she stated: **“I should have stood up for myself” (BEMSDG, 2010)**. Furthermore, their lack of confidence in HEIs is compounded as they encounter the daily acts of injustice, where individual acts of discrimination are condoned (Rangasamy, 2004; Gulam, 2004; Back, 2004) and the devastation caused to the BEM community is simply dismissed as an aspect of their own pathology and cultural impediment (Flew, 1992; Rangasamy, 2004). These institutions are complicit; they fail to recognise the violence visited on some of the most marginalised groups (Rangasamy, 2004; Schwartz, 2005; Bahra, 2006).

The fact that BEM students lack confidence in the education system at every level suggests that it may well be time for BEM people to find allies (John, 2006; 2007).

Those students who gained entry into HE have done so whilst maintaining a memory of racism where resilience was demanded to manage the impact of accumulative, normalised discrimination. The effort required to constantly challenge, disrupt or circumvent these discriminatory acts is emotionally- and psychologically-exhausting. Thus, it is within this context that BEM students undertake their studies. Their attempts to disrupt or circumvent discrimination can increase the level of scrutiny, and they may be perceived as confrontational. This presents another set of challenges for BEM students, the university and BEM communities.

Another important consideration is the fact that there is very little choice. BEM groups do not own or control any of the major HE institutions and their representation at any meaningful level of influence is negligible (Gulam, 2004). The vast majority of BEM staff employed within the Academy are on short-term contracts, or they can be found during twilight hours cleaning buildings (Back, 2004; Gulam, 2004; Rangasamy, 2004). This can be contrasted with the USA, where Black-led HEIs, such as Morehouse, Georgia, and a mainstream university such as Stanford, California, demonstrate what can be achieved with the collaboration of people who are able to recognise where their position, needs and interests intersect. But these centres of higher learning are themselves under attack from those who argue against affirmative action (Budd, 2002; Shiels, 2003).

Given the picture emerging from the BEM students' collective experience, one of the BEM students reaffirmed the need to speak out and **“not fulfil(ling) their expectations or fantasies about Black people” (BEMSDG, 2007)**. The contention and significance of how this oppression is compounded has been illustrated throughout this study. BEM students do not control the discourse; rather, they are manipulated by it. For example, it has often been argued that poverty or cultural deficit is one of the primary factors contributing to the disparity in attainment and disproportionate retention of BEM students. Whilst this may be a factor, it is not the most significant. However, this discourse contributes to the cultural deficit argument or explanation (Rollock, 2007).

BEM people are primarily located within the lower echelons of society. However, as demonstrated in this study and several others, the low economic position of many BEM people has not deterred them from seeking entry into HE. Many have made sacrifices; they perceive education as the surest way of alleviating themselves from desperate futures.

Further, because of the miniscule rewards, BEM people will often undertake far more hours of paid work than their white counterparts in an attempt to survive. More time spent in work means less time spent at home. This can have a negative impact on children, as well as productive study time.

The BEM community is often characterised as schizophrenic; they are often depicted as docile or out-of-control (Fernando, 1988; Fanon, 1991; Delphin-Rittmon, 2010; Metz, 2010). Diane Abbott (in Wright, 2012) said that Black students were “**prisoners of a culture of low expectation**” (Abbott, 2012, online). On-campus and off-campus experiences are blurred and there was very little respite for these students. We live in a society where headlines constantly focus on the BEM community as a problem, requiring strong measure to control their deviant tendencies. Such narratives become the norm. For example, the media depiction of BEM communities might lead one to conclude that violence is accepted as normal (Welch, 2007), but violence is abhorrent within BEM communities. Gillborn, (2006) noted that such situations are derived from an exercise of power that goes beyond notions of ‘white privilege’ and can only be adequately understood through a language of power and domination; “**the issue goes beyond privilege; it is about supremacy**”, (Gillborn, 2006:319). During such discussions with BEM students, several uttered: “**it makes you paranoid**” (BEMSDG, 2007). Cole explained that these feelings were common:

“Paranoia is when something does not exist; it is when someone behaves irrationally. Hyper-vigilance on the other side of the equation can be described as detecting and responding to a threat that is real.”

(Cole, BEMSDG, 2007)

The person who is self-aware may take specific steps to reduce the efforts of the oppressor to control them (Carmichael, 1968; Freire, 1972; Fanon, 1986). When BEM students begin to oppose the denial of their rights, public servants are shocked: “**Some of the shock comes from the realisation that you are not as controllable as they thought**”, (Cole, BEMSDG, 2007). BEM students talked about the need to have politicians working with specific constituencies for emancipation. The fact that so many of those graduating from educational institutions are unable to practically or critically engage in the struggle for liberation (Brecher, 2007) is further testimony to how embedded, penetrating and effective those with power have been in maintaining the current situation by rewarding those who comply (Sivanandan, 1990, 2006; Zephaniah, 2004). Moreover, from the ethos of these courses, it was

rationalised that the academics on the youth and community and social work courses would be exemplars of good practice:

“Part of our task as informal educators is ...to ask why certain voices are not heard.”

(Jefferies & Smith, 1990: 40)

BEM students continue to exist in contested spaces. Their marginalisation is ever present on and off campus, and their enrolment in the Academy is reacted to with a combination of delight and anxiety. Many of these students will have experience of the struggle they or others have made. They are not fully able to embrace their entitlement to enjoy all of the benefits of HE. They cannot fully engage in the ‘mainstream’, as the mainstream is the preserve of others; **“I did not anticipate that it would be such a struggle”, (BEMSDG, 2007).**

Social networks of BEM people are invaluable for preserving the well-being of BEM students. Such networks may provide cultural support as well as facilitating access to community resources. However, these networks should not be seen as an end, but part of a wider strategy within which to work with the issues that have a limiting impact on BEM students, White students and academics. bell hooks, (1992) noted that:

“It is only as we collectively change the way we look at ourselves and the world that we can change how we are seen.”

(hooks, 1992:4)

Any initiatives need to be based on the SMART and SPICED objectives explored with BEM students and the key stake-holders. Change is a process that transcends and crosses borders. Spirituality and love were also important aspects articulated by the BEM students in their PIN diagrams.

Improving the outcome for BEM students and realisation of enhanced participation in HE will be achieved only when there is a genuine attempt to interact with the dynamic of power. The structure of oppression and the power incorporated in it are often reflected as a form of learnt helplessness, where participants have internalised the oppression to the extent whereby they act within the precepts of the institution, but against their own interest. In so doing, the institutions of oppression are able to maintain their hegemony. In order to change this

dynamic, BEM students must be more pro-active, not only in making demands, but also by taking more responsibility and seeking opportunities to enhance their experience and addressing issues of disparity in degree attainment, retention and progression. BEM students must take advantage of any existing support and participate in evaluations, indicating concerns in terms of the appropriateness of the support provided or offered. BEM students need to be instrumental in both the agency and efficacy, thus demonstrating that they are not helpless victims. BEM students will need to connect with each other, forming local and national associations to represent issues for BEM staff and students, embracing ‘**consciousisation**’ and engaging to externally review RC, LC, PSMS in relation to BEM students’ experiences.

13.3 Implications at institutional level

The participants in this study described their experiences of being BEM students in HE in the UK as a constant challenge, in which their daily encounters featured aspects of discrimination and institutional negligence. The present study is in agreement with other research in which it has been established that within the classroom there are styles of discourse, systems of power - knowledge, institutional structures and practices - all of which combine to marginalise and harm certain groups of people (NUS, 2011; Gelb, 2012).

The central argument is that BEM students have multiple disadvantages to overcome, thus, **building on**, rather than challenging the negative assertions which emerge from people who set out to mislead and confound. In this regard, through a process of marginalisation a “**whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life**”, (Seabrook, 2002:10). The minoritising of some groups is part of the process of marginalisation. The BEM students who participated in this study were from communities significantly affected by marginalisation. Recognising and taking steps to dismantle systems and beliefs that perpetuate oppression ought to be central to effective educational practice, even more so when the Academy promotes this as a central ethos of its business.

Most classrooms are structured hierarchically, with the lecturer having ultimate authority. BEM parents may lack the knowledge of how to use the education system to their own benefit, thus amplifying the feeling of powerlessness. HE has an important role in creating ‘classrooms’, based on principles of democracy, community and social justice, in which

students are empowered to have influence over their own lives and to work in the political realm to change oppressive governmental structures that establish classroom practices and standards without participation by the affected students.

The exercise of power demands the existence of an ideology and the ability to enforce one's will on others and cultural imperialism is particularly instrumental in this process. Cultural imperialism refers to the dominant meanings and ideas of a society that render the particular perspective of one group invisible at the same time as they stereotype another group and mark it as 'other'. For example, BEM students are only noticed when they are late, yet quite often, most BEM students have been on time and prepared to study, despite having to deal with additional challenges. Cultural imperialism and stereotyping can be countered by reviewing the curriculum and including perspectives of different groups - particularly in their own voices - to avoid perpetuating stereotyping and marginalisation. Moreover, it is important to work with all students to sharpen their skills of cultural critique so they can learn to recognise these dynamics of representation in mass media and in their lives. It is important for HE to accept its responsibility and duty of care to ensure all students feel safe from violence and to engage teaching and learning strategies which deconstruct institutionalised systems of violence (Bridgeland et al, 2006).

The various aspects of oppression formed the basis on which many of the discussions took place. In other words, it would appear that most of the students participating in the dialogue groups were acutely aware of the impact of compounded oppression. In some instances, the BEMSDGs acted like a catalyst, giving participants the space to develop a vocabulary to articulate their experiences.

This appreciation should invoke a far more radical approach to our work as educators; the outcomes in terms of degree attainment, retention and progression are products of practices within the internal framework and organisation of HE, where oppression is normal. If the Academy wishes to see changes, it cannot simply ignore the devastation caused by its practices. As educators, we need to work to dismantle systems and to make sure that all students benefit from high-quality education. A radical approach would entail discussions and action to address situations which currently favour White students and staff. Some white people are 'groomed' for promotion or other favourable positions. Thus, the idea of competing in fairness often meets with resistance from those who benefit most from the status quo.

Figure 12.7 (See Chapter 12) represents a cyclical process illustrating some of the issues that must be incorporated into a holistic engagement with various stake-holders in an attempt to enhance the BEM student experience. Academics should understand that education occurs in a political and cultural context and it is important to appreciate the intensity of the influence this background wields. Educators should be culturally-competent and emphasise the importance of recognising differences as well as creating trusting relationships. At the same time, academics should be aware of the dangers of labelling BEM students because of their cultural and religious beliefs. Academics should also be aware of the importance of seeing beyond the contexts of religion, cultural and ethnic background to focus on the individual person. Making effective use of the “**radical curriculum**” or modules such as “**Black Perspectives**” often provides an opportunity to facilitate students in exploring complex, sensitive and contentious issues.

It is therefore important for academics to make effective use of “**PSMS**” and “**learning contracts**” to discuss with each student individually the significance of their perceptions of education and to assess what is important for the student to observe during the period of his or her study. Equally, it is essential to discuss ways in which these needs might be met. It is also important for academics to explain what is not possible within institutional provision and why, to avoid feelings of disappointment or dissatisfaction. One of the most incriminatory findings is that given the on-going inability of academic staff to recognise and respond to the needs of BEM students, it is reasonable to conclude with the question of whether white academic staff can work effectively with BEM students. The findings here suggest that at a personal and institutional level, negligence is evident.

The university must acknowledge its role and responsibility in the way it has failed to manage its resources, thus leading to the disproportionate outcomes negatively impacting on BEM students. In terms of the institution’s desire to be a global university by extending its reach within the international student market, it needs to recognise the considerable reputational damage that can be done if BEM students who will be drawn from both UK (‘home’) and other countries (international) continue to lag behind and are exempted from the joy of a rewarding HE experience. HEIs will need to carefully manage the BEM student experience in relation to students’ expectations and the Academy’s ability to deliver. WP, traditionally conceived of as an antidote to social injustice, may not be as prominent in the years ahead as it has in the past.

HEIs must take more effective action to enhance BEM student experience in addressing issues of disparity in degree attainment, retention and progression. This study has offered

insight that could contribute to the development of enhanced understanding in all aspects of working with diversity. It has drawn attention to the danger of neutrality in a hostile and oppressive environment. There is a necessity to address institutional negligence by providing appropriate support for BEM students and BEM staff. It is also necessary to provide support to white students and all staff and to use management systems which hold all programmes to account through detailed evaluation and developmental plans. The Academy should work with other interested parties to externally review RC, LC, PSMS in relation to BEM students' experiences. Various studies and initiatives have been supported by the ECU and the HEA. In light of the findings from this study, the university should review the deployment of all staff and initiate a recruitment, promotion and staff enhancement initiative. The enhancement initiative would encourage and support the acceleration of BEM academics at all levels (using Positive Action where necessary); this would be one example of supporting BEM staff and students and address some of the issues raised in terms of role models.

13.4 Implications for BEM communities

HE is elitist, highly-prized and a site of struggle. It is often conceptualised as a white space, the finishing school for social groups seeking to gain access to what is perceived as the advantage bestowed on those who successfully navigate it. The persistent patterns in terms of retention, attainment and progression add weight to the notion that HE exists to serve the white community. Within the context of this study, the lack of BEM community involvement was significant in terms of a sense of isolation and belonging. The perception is that university staff are like surrogate parents providing guardianship to white students only. Whilst there have been some recent demographic changes in some HEIs, there remains a disproportionate number of BEM students who are first-generation in terms of HE experience who therefore cannot therefore rely on parents or siblings to assist them. Because HE is constituted as a white space, BEM communities lack the knowledge and understanding of how to break down the walls of these ivory towers. Within the BEM communities, there remains a curious fascination about HE and thus the desire for a degree is not diminished by the barriers (Wright, 2013). It was perceived by BEM students that a greater level of community involvement would enhance their experience in terms of outcomes, such as degree classification. This finding is supported by recent research by Rollock et al, (2011) and Cecile Wright, (2013), who found that BEM community solidarity was a significant factor in providing some limited resistance to some of the negative aspects of the education system. Black community-based organisations facilitated BEM young people in developing **“a work ethos, attitudes of self-worth and black identity”**, (Wright, 2013: 96) which

supported their transition in HE. In this study, discussions revealed the purpose of physical and emotional support located within the BEM community.

Although it was perceived that access to the Academy was limited, BEM students felt that increased participation in HE and increased understanding would enable them to gain the support they perceived to be available only to white students. In terms of the radical curriculum (RC), learning contracts (LC), and peer support & mentoring systems (PSMS), an opportunity could be developed that provides a forum to influence the university, whilst providing support to BEM students. In relation to BEM students' experience, the current configuration is impotent, as it draws primarily from people already in the system, those who have successfully navigated the system, those whom the university is comfortable sitting next to, those who do not create too much discord or discomfort. Thus, the potential for changing themselves and facilitating an enhanced BEM student experience is lost. Carmichael, (1966) noted that systems of oppression rarely accept responsibility for their actions, especially when such actions bring results they do not want to be associated with. Given that such institutions refuse to acknowledge their responsibility, it is futile to appeal to or wait for the university to change itself. BEM communities and students must use their influence and their resources to hold HEIs to account and to establish a university committed to enhancing the BEM students' experiences.

The BEM communities should contribute to the cross-party Governmental inquiry entitled "**Race and Higher Education**", also providing spaces and a forum to externally review RC, LC and PSMS. The university could be more pro-active in working with local community centres, which could provide courses ("**radical curriculum**") to support BEM students, White students and academics. Partnerships could be established as part of the "**learning contracts**", negotiated with the respective stake-holders. Home students, newly-arrived migrants and international students would also benefit greatly from being able to access local groups and by attending orientation events. This would help to decrease isolation, depression and anxiety ("**peer support and mentoring systems/PSMS**"). The present study highlights the need for a further exploration and utilisation of resources in a manner that assists the university in fulfilling its objectives. To this end, the university needs to do more in terms of establishing partnerships with BEM communities. BEM students have indicated that they would feel more secure by seeing more people from their communities as role models within the university. Its executive board could be instrumental in sponsoring initiatives that visibly and symbolically demonstrate a commitment to working towards all staff, BEM students and their communities having a greater presence on campus, but also with more outreach work in areas where the demographics reflect a high or significant

number of BEM people. For example, a collaborative, university-wide initiative promoted and driven by the vice-chancellor would command a status within the university and the anticipated outcomes would be more likely to be realised.

13.5 Conclusion

From the findings and discussion, it is clear that BEM students are engaged, they have aspirations, and want to feel a greater sense of belonging. They want the university to acknowledge that it has a role in realising the opportunities to thrive. They have identified what they consider to be some initial steps toward change. The BEM students did not think of themselves as complex or difficult and do not regard their culture as a hindrance to their achievement. Rather, they regard the system of education as a paradox, both the obstacle and the vehicle to the realisation of their ambitions.

This chapter has argued the importance of acknowledging the social and political context in which education is transacted. It has asserted that academics have an important role and that adopting an ostrich approach or a neutral position when facilitating discussions on controversial issues is an abdication of responsibility. The arguments presented in this chapter recognise the challenges and the special qualities required for HE institutions when embarking on education for social justice within a hostile environment. The aspiration of 'balanced learning' can take place by ensuring that the quality of evidence from all viewpoints is as objective as possible, and that its presentation reflects the aspiration of social justice. However, the creativity and willingness of academics to work with students in more innovative ways can facilitate students in finding their voice (Hall, 1997).

Gus John has talked about the education as a system doing the same thing to get the same result (John, 2006). Cecile Wright has argued that the present system of education continually fails Black students, but rather than addressing the concerns articulated by those calling for a change in the way education is administered, the BEM community is left with the rhetoric of WP (Wright, 2013). This study concurs with the sentiments and the call for change. There is now an urgent need for a significant paradigm shift in all aspects of education, one which promotes and acknowledges the liquidity, relevance and impact emerging through discourse (Freire, 1972; Sanchez & Fried, 1997). In such environments, students have the space to develop their ability to critique and enhance their capacity to conceptualise and authentically articulate their experience to different audiences in their own

vernacular (Sanchez & Fried, 1997; Housee, 2009). The challenges are many, but they can be overcome with consistency, patience and devotion.

Understanding the teaching self involves a process of autobiographical analysis that should enable teachers to understand how their personal histories may intersect with their teaching practices. Such scrutiny is warranted by the very fact that we all grow up in cultural environments that promote the rationality and superiority of our own world views over those of others. It is therefore not unreasonable to expect that in order to empower others, educators must first understand who they are, as well as the values and beliefs which inform their practices. Educators will enhance their practice with diverse groups when they inquire about their impact (Palmer, 1998; Irving, 2006). Seeing things through different lenses is a powerful pre-cursor for a better way of doing things in the classroom. Furthermore, an analysis of the teaching self helps teachers to understand that by virtue of their privileged position, they have considerable power over their students.

Throughout this thesis, it has been argued that education is a virulent mix, being toxic and yet having the capacity to liberate. However, in terms of its often-stated commitment to social justice, HEIs have failed BEM students and many others classified as “non-traditional” or “widening participation”. The education system at its various levels brings many unpleasant outcomes. However, academics and the Academy have the capacity to make a difference.

13.6 The unique contribution of this study

This study opens a number of new dimensions that expand the range of knowledge and understanding of the subject, and bring new meaning to the BEM student experience of HE. The aspect of displacement and “**consciousisation**”, in which BEM students demonstrated self-reformation and an “**enhanced determination to succeed and to challenge for positive change**” (BEMSDG, 2010) have not previously been discussed. The study explored how BEM students’ sense of being was developed and consolidated via the BEMSDGs. The literature explores factors on the disparity in degree attainment and retention, but not the meaning of the new self-image attributed by BEM students to their experiences of HE. Some of the concerns highlighted by BEM students in this study are shared by international students and the indigenous White student population. Improving and enhancing the HE experience is important for the BEM students in this study, but would clearly benefit all students. However, this study’s most substantial and unique contribution is

the ontological description of the BEM students' experiences of HE in the UK, demonstrating the specificity of experience in great detail, as well as some commonalities of experience with White students. It has brought to light a rich ontological understanding and interpretation of the research question by developing a critical dynamic pragmatic methodology to understand the BEM students' experiences of HE in the UK. For example, the methodological approach provided a space that enabled an explicit focus on the intersection of ideology, discourse, consciousness, conscientisation, agency and advocacy.

The themes explored in the literature (see Chapter two) have individually provided some important insights, but they have failed to address the BEM students' experiences, holistically drawing on their subjective understanding of their experiences. Rather, they are often presented as problematic, whereby BEM students are projected as victims of their culture. This study goes far beyond the difficulties facing BEM students in HE to give a fuller picture of their lives, the subsequent changes in their identities and their determination to contribute to change.

The findings from this study indicated that some staff created a trusting relationship with some BEM students, thus relieving apprehension. This reassurance enabled some of the BEM students to feel secure. Some students also acknowledged the emotional support they received, as well as the reassurance given by some individuals. The most satisfactory aspect of the BEM students' experiences, was the acknowledgement of their stories, enabling them to stay the course and attain a good degree classification. BEM students learned many lessons from these experiences regarding how they could act and support others. The need for culturally-competent staff has been demonstrated throughout.

Discriminatory themes and experiences were identified within education at all of Thompson's (2006) PCS levels. This finding offers a unique contribution to knowledge in that no other study has used this model to analyse BEM students' experiences in HE. It is the first which explores YCD BEM students vividly, not only in theory, but from the BEM students' own viewpoints. It is valid, as it presents the authentic views of BEM students, using feedback loops to enable BEM students to attest that their representation was accurate. The BEM students had positive recollections, identifying staff who had facilitated them in their HE journey, thus encouraging other professional and academic staff to follow suit and be remembered as the inspirational people in a tough phase of their lives. The narrative and emotional description given by BEM students is considered to be an original contribution of this study.

This study has used the key themes emerging from the literature and the study. It has conceptualised several models to explain their impact on the experiences of BEM students. One example of this is the conception of the Hydra as a way of visioning the Academy's need to maintain its position, using various virulent and conviviality tools to pursue its objectives. In this regard, CRT was used to facilitate the unveiling of Whiteness as a potent force to maintain hegemony over BEM students and others within the Academy. This study has demonstrated that BEM students were aware of complex challenges, many of which they struggled to articulate. This study draws attention to the impact of discrimination and its many varied manifestations in terms of stereotyping, collusion and institutional negligence. This study has drawn attention to issues of positionality in terms of (macro institutional - meso cultural – micro personal) how this impacts on BEM students as they seek to navigate through HE, managing complex relationships within a “multiple selves” context. They also demonstrated considerable commitment to changing the situation for themselves and those arriving in HE after them. They saw it as their duty. They wanted to be central to the change and suggested specific actions to stimulate and demonstrate a desire to make HE accessible beyond the point of entry for all students. When space was created, the efficacy of BEM students was marked in terms of how they worked with each other, enhanced relationships with academic staff and advised significant improvements in academic work with the development of professional skills.

This study will be a validation of the efforts made by BEM students. It will encourage them to know that someone believed in them and that their contributions will be used by others. Some of these students have offered to work with peers and opportunities will be sought to transform. Following the defence of this study, it is intended to produce a number of articles for journals and to make a contribution to conferences by presenting papers and workshops. This study has already contributed to insights about BEM students' experiences in HE, further presentations will be made within the Academy, based on the key themes and findings from this study. In this way, the study will achieve some of the outcomes that were envisaged and articulated therein.

To summarise, the data revealed by this study supports many of the findings of previous research, while building on them to offer a more in-depth, rich description of the experience of BEM students. The study also highlights the need for academic and professional staff to recognise that contrary to the stereotype, BEM students are engaged and desperate to achieve. However, HE is experienced as a confusing disorientating and hostile environment. This requires staff to provide a sensitive explanation of the different approaches used. There needs to be more transparency and the embedding of “**learning contracts**”, “**PSMS**” and

“radical curriculum” as a means of demonstrating actualisation, if BEM students are not to feel discriminated against or dissatisfied with what they may perceive as institutional negligence.

13.7 Limitations of the study

It is acknowledged that this study has some limitations. This research study applied a CRT framework and a critical dynamic pragmatic methodology to reach an understanding of the BEM students' experiences. CRT provided the theoretical base from which to critically examine the narratives from BEM students and the discourses about their experiences. CDP provided a more flexible approach that recognised and utilised a basic principle of intersectionality, travelling beyond the convention in order to make visible that which eludes a conception of reality based on a distorted perspective. It is hoped that exploring these experiences will help future BEM students and the Academy. The knowledge obtained from this study has revealed some essential issues that HE institutions should be aware of when working with BEM students. The students had different opinions on issues to do with their experiences. Their positive feedback will assure HE institutions that their efforts are greatly valued, and will inform policy-makers that some aspects of HE are delivered to a high standard and are appreciated by BEM students. The negative feedback regarding weaknesses is also useful, as it can be used to assist the Academy in addressing some of the specific issues.

When this study was initially conceived, it was envisaged that there would be considerable interest in it. Resistance was also anticipated and this formed the basis of an early conversation with the supervisors of this study. During this conversation, it was noted that unveiling the "elephant in the room" may bring a great deal of discomfort to staff and students within the University. The limitations relate to the field of enquiry. It would have been more informative to have drawn participants from a wider range of programmes, faculties and ethnicities across the university and to have had the views and experiences of participants representing the Academy – from university governors, the vice-chancellor, the pro-vice-chancellor and academic and professional services staff. The university collects considerable amounts of quantitative data which could have significantly added to this study if the opportunity in terms of time, skills, and resources had been available. At an early stage of research design, it was envisaged that following the discussion groups, an opportunity would

be sought to undertake interviews with various stake-holders. It was also envisaged that an on-line survey would be used to collect data at various points in the student life-cycle. The purpose of this study was to gain insights into the ways in which students recognised and distilled their experiences in discourse. There was not one moment during the study when the researcher was not a researcher. The researcher had many other duties, thus limiting the ability to engage totally as a researcher and there was considerable frustration that many discussions taking place between groups and individuals were "off-the-record". It would have been more enlightening if the level of resistance was not so great. But the resistance is significant in that it tells its own story, a narrative with which BEM academics and students are all too familiar. However, this present study sought to be more nuanced in articulating and analysing the BEM students' narratives within a specific context.

It is worth considering the implications of the resistance encountered in gathering the data for a project such as this, although any reasons given are bound to be anecdotal, since evidence of absence is, by definition, difficult to gather. There has been some resistance based on the lack of immediacy for some colleagues. If there is little which is seen as directly relevant or producing immediate gains within the Academy, then there is a huge resistance or inertia emanating from academics who perceive they are blamed for the problems. Academics in this scenario appear to be confused and overwhelmed and there is an overall perception that the institution lacks commitment, focus and the ability to manage complex changes. As a consequence, staff engaged in a risk-averse strategy to protect themselves and used the only viable avenue they perceived was open to them – passive resistance. This is probably due to the pressure felt over the volume of work members of staff have to deal with. This is not an unusual response to change. Thus, in this sense, the findings from the study can be applied to a wider context in terms of resistance and struggle.

However, a second reason for resistance seems to be concerned with both system inertia and the substance of the project itself. Since the agenda or perceived agenda of studies of this nature has the possibility of drawing potentially-unsettling findings, there seems to be an unwillingness to confront these possibilities on the part of some colleagues who are perhaps fearful of the consequences. For instance, such colleagues have used passive resistance methods to stop or slow down the organisation of discussion. They used the hierarchical structure within their own faculties as reasons for a lack of movement, waiting for permission from others before agreeing to organise the events requested. This point has been reinforced to the Retention Attainment Ethnic Minorities (RAEMs) group by converse actions; when a member of staff with perceived authority is prepared to back the project, focus groups have

been organised swiftly and efficiently. This may not be a unique response to a seemingly-threatening situation, but it is worth considering when similar projects are initiated.

BEM students are not a homogenous group, and likewise, their experiences of HE are equally different. Some viewed their experiences positively and others more negatively. Similarly, there was considerable variation in the way BEM students perceived academics. Some academic staff exhibited sexism, racism and stereotyping, while others were the opposite, making every effort to respect the students and deliver culturally-competent care. The variable experience of academics had a considerable impact on how BEM students viewed their experience. Some were described as wonderful and caring:

“I came to university and connected with two teachers who have inspired me and encouraged me. They believed in me and made me see that I was never 'not academic enough' and instead that I was and am fully able to achieve whatever it is I want to.

“These two teachers have inspired me to continue with my studies and to go on to apply for a masters - something I would not dare to dream about.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

And:

“Last year, I was hitting 50 per cent within my assignments. This year, I am reaching 60 per cent plus. I know that this is down to the encouragement and continuing support and guidance I receive from these two teachers. They get me and my struggle.”

(BEMSDG, 2010)

While other members of staff were seen as unsupportive, all of them were working within the same institutional context. Individual experiences are seen differently at different times, in different environments and by people with different backgrounds. The range of issues and outcomes of these findings only enrich our understanding of the BEM students' experiences. The findings from this study illuminate other research (DfES, 2006; Bahra, 2007; Bhattacharyya, 2006b; John, 2007; Mohood, 2004).

13.8 Implications for future research

In terms of an approach to the construction of knowledge, academics, and academic researchers have an important role to play. Moreover, certain rights of academic staff are enshrined in the UK University's "**Articles of Government**" (RU, 2001:9.2). This would suggest that there is an acceptance that academics are expected to challenge conventional or received wisdom. Within a climate of oppression, researchers may need to prepare themselves to make surgical interventions, doing so on the basis of understanding, application and sensitivity. These academic researchers should not give themselves the option to remain silent; to do so is often to side with the powerful (Freire, 2005). Academic researchers may remain silent on certain matters where they anticipate bringing discomfort to custodians of the Academy, which is, in itself, an extremely hierarchal and oppressive structure. The procedures or policies that confine BEM students are 'normal', and whilst some BEM people derive some benefit from it, White people continue to be the primary benefactors. In relation to HE, the narrative of BEM students provide insights of the multi-faceted ways in which the academy uses its own explanations and explanations that emerge within cultural-structural level of society to justify its position and to maintain its privilege (Delgado, 1995).

There is a considerable amount of data on BME experience in HE that has been collected locally and nationally. There has also been an attempt to create a synthesis of research in HE and BME (Singh, 2011). The problem or concerns are not necessarily about the research in itself, but rather about encouraging the Academy to implement recommendations arising from some of the research already undertaken. There has been and continues to be resistance to accept and acknowledge findings where a focus is placed on institutions. In terms of this university, much has already been achieved in terms of data collection. However, there is a lack of co-ordination and a clear plan of action. Data can be drawn from various sources - UCAS, HEFCE, RU management information systems, and programme and module evaluations - but the lack of a focal point or an accountability structure means that much of the research undertaken thus far has not been utilised to any effect in shaping a direct response to the issues of attainment, retention and progression. Moreover, a focus on generating more research becomes an aspect of the delusion of doing something to tackle the situation; the generation of data does not serve a great purpose. It only delays, frustrates and demoralises BEM students and staff, whilst giving an impression that the institution is concerned about the problem.

Suggestions for further research include undertaking further longitudinal research, following BEM students through their HE journey. This should be based on BEM voices and

narratives. Much could be done by undertaking pedagogical research or research informed teaching, developing collaborative research with students to explore their perceptions of the problems and ideas for tackling them. Very little work has been undertaken with academic and professional services staff to gain a more insightful or nuanced appreciation of the problems. Very little work has been undertaken with BEM community groups to explore the potential challenges these students face in going back to their cultures and the impact of their UK experience on their future lives. Further research could explore to what extent BEM students are able to continue to resist or challenge dominant norms. There is a potential for setting up a research project based on the findings and recommendations of this study - a longitudinal study based on the mixed-method approach/critical dynamic pragmatic method. Research could be undertaken with or by the BEM staff group, BME-HE network or another group with the capacity and credibility to be able to work with the intersections of diversity.

As a result of the on-going failure to address concerns raised by BEM communities, a cross-party group of MPs has launched an inquiry that will look at the BEM community's interaction with higher education, entitled "**Race and Higher Education**". It is organised by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Race and Community and chaired by former HE minister David Lammy. It is anticipated that many of the issues referred to in previous chapters will feature in the inquiry.

13.9 Recommendations

The findings from this study are accepted by the University

The university commissions a working group that reports to its executive board; this group would co-ordinate, monitor and review the findings and set an agenda to prioritise what needs to be done to enhance the BEM students' experience in terms of enhanced attainment, progression and retention.

To work on specific projects in BEM communities/schools/colleges

To disseminate the findings of this research locally - within the university - and internationally in the HE sector by making presentations on key findings

To identify a director for Student Experience and Enhancement at executive level

To review the curriculum (TL&A) in terms of impact on BEM and white students

To identify 'safe/protected spaces' to facilitate BEM students and staff meetings

To acknowledge equality principles, undertaking further research in relation to how these are being enabled within the university

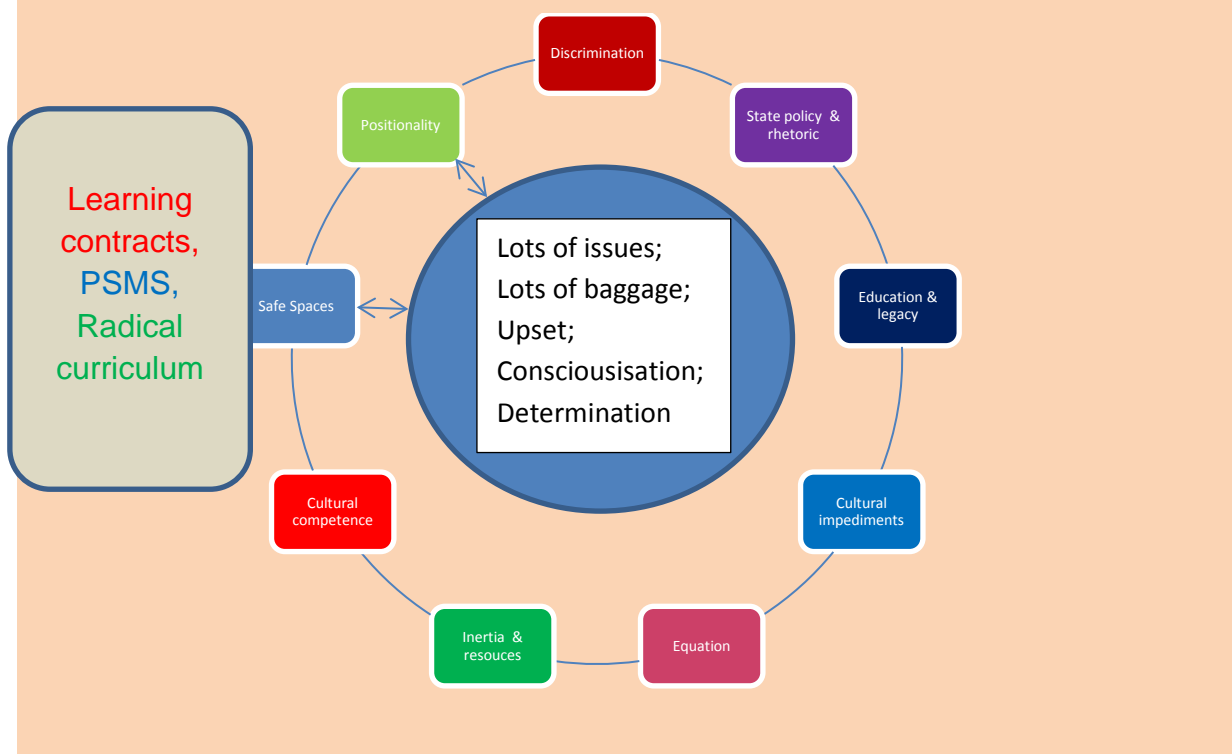
To address each of the specific areas/themes identified as having an adverse impact on BEM students

To adopt a clear vision with transparent processes for mediating on issues of discrimination and negligent practice

To provide staff development/appraisals which facilitate and encourage the sharing of good practice; valuing and acknowledging contributions from BEM students and staff; classroom observations; sharing good practice through curriculum development for academic staff, training and workshops.

To establish a Centre of Excellence – Centre for Culturally Responsive Learning and Teaching – this would be the hub for working with others to ensure that the issues identified in this research are addressed.

Figure 13.1: The impact of discrimination on BEM students in HE: Resistance and change



13.10 Personal reflection

Throughout this study, my identity as a tutor and a postgraduate student in the same school was acknowledged by BEM students. These roles or positions offered me an opportunity to gain access to different spaces and to explore how different aspects of the university systems and procedures impacted on students. It is important to acknowledge that whilst there are universal systems instigated within the Academy, the impact on different cohorts and different student groups is pertinent because this study was interested in how the ordinary working of the university impacted on BEM students. I wanted the opportunity to share my experiences as both student and tutor. In this sense, I sought to foster and develop a reciprocal relationship with participants; this work was not extractive; rather, we worked together with the emerging issues. From the start, I was acutely aware that the primary resource available to me was me. I had already spent a great deal of time negotiating support in terms of resources and time. All avenues proved unsuccessful and increased my overall frustration, knowing that there were various sources of support that others were accessing. I remained determined and wondered why I was not supported.

During the research process, I was hesitant to publicise what I was doing and was even a little apprehensive about whether I would be granted ethical approval. I accept that there were very good reasons for seeking formal ethical approval, such as protecting the rights of others, especially the vulnerable. I entertained a view that insisting on ethical approval was one way in which the powerful avoided research being undertaken on them. My journey throughout this work was influenced by the struggles of BEM people, diasporas and anti-racist struggles, by CRT and feminist struggles, and I was able to draw on the work of critical research theorists, activists and practitioners who sought to use their research to involve participants, not as objects, but as subjects. These researchers acknowledged that “the researched” often embody the experiences and also have the capacity to realise the collective power they hold (Charlier & Caubergs, 2007). The knowledge they hold was precious and it was for them to determine how it should be used. This knowledge had the potential to maintain the hegemonic grip exercised over them, or the potential to emancipate them (Charlier & Caubergs, 2007). My cognisance, heritage and intersectionality in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and nationality (Walby et al, 2012; Mirza, 2006) and my experiences in education were the inspirations for this study. I wanted to make visible what, by some educators, had been made invisible in a bid to dismiss or obscure that which they did not understand or were not prepared to deal with (Levitin, 1982; Skinner, 2005).

My experiences as a BEM student and academic certainly correlated and reverberated with these sentiments – **“Some things have to be believed in order to be seen” (BEMSDG, 2007)**. There have been many moments where I felt totally inadequate, incapable of doing this work because I lacked confidence, not only in my ability, but also in others. The challenge of persuasion, to develop a coherent argument in a manner that others outside of my being might comprehend continually hindered me. I felt unable to gain any traction; on reflection, this was an impossible task, since I was evolving and as I evolved, so did my understanding and ability to articulate my understanding of the issues being explored. In relation to undertaking research of this nature, I was constantly troubled. I knew from the start that the findings may be difficult to stomach and the detractors would perhaps focus on research methods rather than the stories articulated by the participants. I am not pre-empting the outcome. Rather, I am reflecting on experience, and in some ways, I suspect that in relation to research about inequality, oppression, power and denial, I would fall in the category of **“tell me something I don’t know”**. This statement is reflective of responses I have heard many times before; it is also an acknowledgment that research exploring injustice and inequalities as a result of relationships between powerful and disenfranchised people often lags behind.

This observation exposes a level of intolerance in having to listen to the never-ending reasons why those in power dismiss certain realities in their attempts to hold on to their power and influence. I would fervently argue that the question of the existence and form of inequality is acknowledged, especially when it relates to discussions about social class. However, discourse about its persistence and the identification of those responsible for historical and current racial atrocities often meets with opposition. Thus, it is in this sense that an attempt to engage in a discourse about racism or about who should be held to account is met with resistance. Moreover, it is within these debates that those who may not have previously acknowledged the extent of their own deep-seated racism often confront us. Whilst teaching on the courses on modules such as **“Black Perspectives”**, I was often confronted by students both black and white who objected to having a module of this title, or being taught about issues that some students considered as irrelevant to their careers. Attempts at raising awareness and holding individuals and systems to account for the perpetuation of racism created a tension; a tension that many of the White students would argue was generated by BEM tutors. What is of interest here is that when those tutors taught on different modules, they were perceived and responded to differently, and there was less tension.

Theoretical frameworks such as CRT, intersectionality and the methodological approach (CDP) adopted for this study have enabled me to engage with a more critical engagement and more fundamental questions. I am far more conscious of the necessity to find alternative theories and methods informed by those who engage with the struggle. However, consciousness, positionality, CRT and intersectionality were all aspects of the dialectics that manifested in experiences and encounters but which remain concealed by the lack of an adequate communication vehicle; language is inadequate, and people are limited by their own experiences and by the experiences of others perceived as authorities. This study reinforced the importance of owning one's own space, and not allowing others to dictate or shape the tools for one's liberation (Nyerere, 1967; Lorde, 1983). It is a reminder of the importance of understanding one's identity and learning about time and space using the 'radical curriculum' and pedagogical approaches that destabilises the taken-for-granted ideas legitimated by White privilege.

The British education system has failed to deliver in relation to the needs of both White and BEM people. Those who hold power and influence have failed; the pervasiveness of racism, inequality and discrimination require multiple approaches to change the current stasis. CRT, CDP and intersectionality were used extensively in this study, combined to explore a complex dynamic that was often illogical and logical, persuasive and also contradictory and incomprehensible (William Tate, 1997; Gillborn, 2006; Milner, 2007). This study has drawn attention to what Sivanandan, (1985) refers to as **“the mutative nature of racism which was one facet of the matrix of dominance and its fluidity and elusiveness”** (Rugg, 2009). The perceived weaknesses of CRT remain; it is perceived to be polemic, embodied as one thing, yet devoid of the other (Cole, 2009; Hayes, 2013). Thus, the logical conclusion is that the interpretive nature and its reliance on narratives is confounded by the limitations of language, time, space and critical consciousness (Ayres & Poirier, 1996). We are limited not only by what we know, but also by what others know or are prepared to be persuaded by (Gadamer, 1989; Benner, 1994; Foucault, 2004).

This study has been about many struggles that pervade and invade all that we do and all that we are. Thus, I see the struggle or the problem of power and the relationships between BEM and white people as our problem. Therefore, I have sought to connect both BEM and white people by illustrating the consequence of working from an ideology of White supremacy that does not take sufficient regard of the needs and aspirations of Black young people in their quest for self-determination. Or if not self-determination, then at least a transformed situation in which a person's value is not determined by the colour of their skin or their 'ethnicity' (Carmichael, 1968). The students in this study embodied the complexities of what we are as

human beings; they were ordinary, they were distraught, they doubted themselves because others lacked confidence in them and they were exceptional, constantly reaching for that which was said to be beyond them. In this study, I struggled with the need to be objective. I sought to interpret, translate and articulate the BEM students' experiences with a passion and conviction they shared with me. In this respect, I take comfort from Fanon, (1986) who notes that it would be “**dishonest, for it is not possible to be objective**” (Fanon, 1986: 86).

This study has been about the experiences of BEM students in higher education, so it seems appropriate for the final words to come from them. This poem was written during the BEMSDGs by one of the participating students:

13.10.1 How can I rise?

Anger over race.
Race over anger.
Questions I ask,
But no one to answer.
Your judgments of me,
Limit my outcomes.
Your assumptions of me,
Broaden my experience.

If I told you my race
Am I validated into your racist institution?
Or am I a disgrace,
In this attempt to better **our** situation?
When you preach equality,
I still feel the presence of this oppression.
I know I anger you,
But I **will** continue to ask this question.

You claim you want to understand
My problem
But you have a problem when I open the gates
To my experience.

My friend, I cannot offer you an understanding,
But I can offer you knowledge of my experience to effectively challenge.
My experiences can arm you with the awareness of the abandoning of my very existence.
Because if you have not experienced like I...
...if you have not struggled as I,
You saying you understand is a true, full-on lie.

I share with you
now how I feel,
This is not for pity, but to illustrate how the struggle is **still** very real.
Like you, I be born and then crawl,
But when I try to rise in this political world, I fall.
These laws are put forth, heavily brushed in this word 'equality'.
This is an insult to my existence because this allows these fools to ignore our pain and our
humility.
This humility that **they** forced upon us,
This humility that is **still** very much amongst us.
Because we fight a battle on pre-established false grounds.
We fight a war with 'invalid' arms.
I say 'invalid' not in vain.
I say it because we are unaware of this institutionally-racist game.
My question is how I can fight for **our** future,
When we know not of when and how **we** came,
To this racist land
When we are in school being 'educated'?
Now can you say you understand?
How we are alienated?

Anger over race.
Race over anger.
Questions I ask.
But no one will answer.

The struggle goes on.....

Appendices

Appendix A - Ethical approval from De Montfort University's Research Ethics Committee



health&life sciences

Dean: Prof Gillian Grant BA PhD CertEd (FE)

Mr Carlton Howson
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
Hawthorn Building.

Dear Mr. Howson

Re: Ethical Approval-' *Telling it like it is-a study of Black student's experiences in HEis'*

I am writing regarding your application for ethical approval for a research project titled to the above project. This project has been reviewed in accordance with the Operational Procedures for De Montfort University Faculty of Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee. These procedures are available from the Faculty Research and Commercial Office upon your request.

I am pleased to inform you that ethical approval has been granted by Chair's Action for your application. This will be reported at the next Faculty Research Committee, which is being held on 8th December 2005.

Should there be any amendments to the research methods or persons involved with this project you must notify the Chair of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee immediately in writing. Serious or adverse events related to the conduct of the study need to be reported immediately to your Supervisor and the Chair of this Committee. Also, The Faculty Research Ethics Committee should be notified by e-mail to HLSFRO@dmu.ac.uk when your research project has been completed.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Paul Whiting
Chair
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
Research Ethics Committee
cc: *Dr Julie Fish*
file

Appendix B - Example Copy of the information sheet

**Carlton Howson
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
Riverside University
Student Retention in Higher Education
Research Project**

Information Sheet

Thank you for thinking about being involved with this project. This information sheet tells you a bit about the aims of the project, and also about your rights as a participant. **Please read this carefully and if you have any questions or would like things explained in a clearer way please do ask or get in touch later.** At the end of this sheet, you will find the contact details of the people involved in this research.

What is this research about?

This research aims to look at the experiences of students in higher education; in particular it is concerned with what factors contribute to students withdrawing from their course of study and what assist in students completing. And what strategies can be developed to provide adequate support to students and enable the university to work in accordance with its mission in widening participation and producing excellence in research, and in teaching and learning.

We want to find out more about the factors that contribute to early termination of studies, we recognize that there are complex issues, and that the student experience in higher education is affected by a range of factors such as the organization of teaching learning and assessment, location, internal and external factors responsibilities outside of the course and the demands of the course. The research is interested to discover what can be done to reduce the attrition rates especially among Black people and others who often find it difficult to adjust to or gain places or acceptance in higher education. By taking part in this study, your views and experiences will help us to be more strategic in responding to the high levels of attrition among students especially in the first year of study in higher education.

Why is it being done?

I am undertaking this research as part of a commitment to widening participation and enhancing the experiences of students in higher education. This research will inform developments and assist the university as it seeks to reduce attrition among students in their first year of study. Nationally there is a concern about retention and its impact on students especially on those non traditional entrants to higher education. I am doing this research to work towards a PhD qualification at De Montfort University in Leicester.

What will happen to the research?

In order to gain the PhD qualification, I must submit a thesis at the end of the project. This is a large report which details the research and will be assessed by the University. There is also the possibility that some of the project will be used for publications or other reports. In all cases, the privacy of participants will be respected.

What about my rights as a participant?

This research is committed to respecting the rights of participants and we have developed an ethical code of conduct to follow. It is important that you understand:

- We will always keep your personal details private and these will not be mentioned in the final report. Any interview details we take down will be kept confidential and will only be accessed by the immediate research team. This is the same for any audio recordings we make.
- You can decide to leave the research project - you don't even have to give us a reason.
- At some points, you may not want to answer certain questions or take part in certain aspects of the research. **This is OK** - just let us know if you feel this way about anything we ask you.
- If you decide not to take part anymore - this will not affect your work or attendance at the university (etc). You are fine to ask for members of staff to not be around when you take part in the research.

Why do you need me to sign a consent form?

We ask everyone who gets involved to sign a form to say that they understand the research project. We will talk everyone through the project and provide this information sheet for you to read before you sign the form. We would expect people to sign this form as a signal that they understand what their involvement in the research project means.

Who do I contact with questions?

These are my contact details. Feel free to get in touch if you want to chat about any aspect of the research:

Carlton Howson
De Montfort University
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
De Montfort University
Hawthorn Building
Leicester
LE1 9BH
Tel: (0116) 2577746

Email: chowson@dmu.ac.uk

If there is any aspect of the research that you would like to make a complaint about, please do get in touch with me (details above) or my PhD supervisor:

Dr. Julie Fish (same address as above)

Tel: (0116) 257 7750
Email: jfish@dmu.ac.uk

Thanks again for taking part

Appendix C – Example Copy consent form

**Carlton Howson
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences
De Montfort University
Student Retention in Higher Education
Research Project**

CONSENT FORM

Please read and complete this *form*:

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | YES/NO |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my university work/ attendance or legal rights being affected. | YES/NO |
| 3. I agree to take part in the above study | YES/NO |
| 4. I agree to the audio-taping/videoing of the interview and I understand that I will not be identified and that the tapes will be destroyed at the end of the project. | YES/NO |

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Please print your name here: _____

**Carlton Howson
April 2006**

Appendix D – invitation to BEM students on the BA Youth & Community Development course, outlining the proposed project and research

Telling it like it is – (Focus on BME Voice)

An invitation to share the experience

Hi Folks

I would like to invite you to a very important discussion; this will form the basis of a number of initiatives designed to gain far greater insights of the experience of Black and Minority students in higher education. The meetings will take place at **Riverside University, on the following dates:**

19/11/08 (BSF) 10.00 – 5.00 – BME Students experience in education – legacy [9. 00 – 12 Gateway House GH3.78 and 12.00 – 5.00 Elfred Thomas Building 1.4]

18/12/08 BSF) 10.00 – 5.00 State policy and Rhetoric [Gateway House GH3.59]

8/01/09 BSF 10.00 – 5.00 Cultural Impediments – the impact on BME students in HE [Hawthorn 1.13]

16/02/09 (BSF) 10.00 – 5.00 Cultural Competence the impact on BME students in HE [Gateway House GH3.76]

19/03/09 (BSF) 10.00 – 1.00 HE Inertia and Resources the impact on BME students in HE [Gateway House GH3.75] and

19/03/09 (BSF) 1.00 – 5.00 The Equation [Hawthorn 1.13 in the afternoon]

15/04/09 BSF 10.00 – 5.00 Institutionalism the impact on BME students in HE [Portland 1.09]

1/05/09 (BSF) 10.00 – 5.00 Enabling the Genius to Grow [Portland 1.09]

15/05/09 (BSF) 10.00 – 5.00 Developing Framework for the articulation of BME Voices [Portland 1.09]

2/06 BSF/09 10.00 – 5.00 Reviewing progress and setting objectives [Portland 1.09]

The meeting will usually run from 10.00 – 4.00 (tea, coffee, biscuits and juice, lunch available during the day, *please let me know if you are attending to help us organize the refreshments*).

Draft agenda

Introductions
The story so far
Being a Black student in HE

Strategies for survival
Developing a module
Peer Education Project
Black History initiative
Reflection on the day and Way forward –

The Equality Challenge Unit is very keen to explore how they can support this initiative; The Higher Education Academy has also shown interest and support for this initiative is now available within the university as part of the 'Student Voice' and RAEMS projects.

I am acutely aware that some people may feel uncomfortable about meeting within the university or with people who are perceived to be working for the university; therefore I am prepared to facilitate smaller groups or one to one discussions on or off campus. If you prefer to meet on this basis please contact me and we can arrange to meet.

It is really important that we do not lose the momentum. This is perhaps a crucial time if we really want our voices to be heard, we now have the capacity to shape the experience.

I am looking forward to meeting/ seeing you again; **Word of mouth is the best publicity so please pass this on and encourage as many people as possible to attend. Work on the basis of *each one bring one***

Best wishes,

Carlton

Carlton Howson, Quality Improvement Coordinator, Department of Academic Quality, Eric Wood Building, Riverside University, The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH, email chowson@dmu.ac.uk,

Also:

Youth and Community Division, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, Riverside University, The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH, email chowson@dmu.ac.uk, Telephone: 00 44 (0116) 2577746 mob. 07778587952

Black: we concede that the term 'Black' is contested and can appear 'meaningless' in locating specific groups within the Black community; however we use it deliberately because of their shared experiences of oppression, immigration history and discrimination. The National Union of Students also use this term for similar reasons.

NB these meetings are intended for Black students (BME), however if there was sufficient interest for similar discussions with non- Black students these can be facilitated.

Telling it like it is - An invitation to share the experience

Background

Why have I decided to call a meeting of Black Minority Ethnic students?

Having worked in the University for many years I am concerned by the higher number of Black students who start programmes but do not complete. I am also concerned about the level of support that is available to Black students and whether it meets their learning needs. By now most of you will realize that unless we support what we say with research 'evidence' it will be dismissed as anecdote or just a personal experience that cannot be generalized. Therefore I am also interested in building the evidence in support of the claims we make.

Some themes for this meeting may include:

To create a space that enable Black students to meet in a safe environment where they can discuss issues that concern them and how these issues impact (positively or negatively) on their learning. (Some possible case studies)

To share strategies for thriving within an oppressive and hostile environment/climate

To explore the possibility of developing a module that recognizes, and encourage the enhancement of skills to facilitate Black students in supporting each other. These skills will be transferable and relevant to practice.

Develop a Black Student Peer Education Project (BSPEP) or the Association of Black Students (ABS) in which Black students work on behalf of each other in advancing a case for a curriculum that locates the experience of Black people as central to developing practice that challenges discrimination and oppression. Also consider more specific and targeted support that enables Black students to aspire beyond the apparent limited expectations that the education system have.

To consider the extent to which some students may wish to be involved in launching a Black History Initiative (HLSBHi) within the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences with a view of encouraging more Black Students into higher education.

There are a number of aspects to this discussion

What is this research about?

This research aims to look at the experiences of students in higher education. In particular it is concerned with what factors contribute to students withdrawing from their course of study and what assist in students completing. And what strategies can be developed to provide adequate support to students and enable the university to work in accordance with its mission in widening participation and producing excellence in research, and in teaching and learning.

The research is interested to discover what can be done to reduce the attrition rates especially among Black people and others who often find it difficult to adjust to or gain places or acceptance in higher education. By taking part in this study, your views and experiences will help us to be more strategic in responding to the high levels of attrition among students especially in the first year of study in higher education.

Why is it being done?

I am undertaking this research as part of a commitment to widening participation and enhancing the experiences of students in higher education. This research will inform developments and assist the university as it seeks to reduce attrition among students in their first year of study. Nationally there is a concern about retention and its impact on students especially on those 'non traditional' entrants to higher education. I am doing this research in an attempt to make closer links between research influencing learning, teaching and assessment, supporting Black students and towards a PhD qualification at De Montfort University in Leicester.

Thanks for taking the time to read this; I am hoping that you will see the benefits of this research and that you feel able to support this initiative. If you would like to discuss this further please do not hesitate in contacting me

My best to you

Carlton

If you wish to be involved or kept informed about the progress and findings from this research, please supply the following information:

Name:

Address

E-Mail & Fax and/or Phone

Return to:

Carlton Howson, Quality Improvement Coordinator, Department of Academic Quality, Eric Wood Building, De Montfort University, The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH, email chowson@dmu.ac.uk,

Also Youth and Community Division, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, De Montfort University, The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH, email chowson@dmu.ac.uk, Telephone: 00 44 (0116) 2577746

Black: we concede that the term 'Black' is contested and can appear 'meaningless' in locating specific groups within the Black community; however we use it deliberately because of their shared experiences of oppression, immigration history and discrimination. The National Union of Students also use this term for similar reasons.

Appendix E: Figure 4.2.1: Discrimination themes identified at Thompson's (2006) PCS levels

<i>Discrimination (PCS) Students spoke of...</i>	
Being isolated and feeling conspicuous in negative ways (P)	
Sense of needing to 'fit in' to something that was not negotiable (P)	
Picked on by teachers and noticed for negative reasons (assumptions of regular lateness, mistakes, underachievement) (P)	
High levels of scrutiny of Black students in negative ways (C)	
Understanding of Black students sticking together as troublesome, problematic and potentially threatening (C)	
Picked on by other students and treated as 'different' (P)	
Failure to protect Black students from playground and peer racism (C)	
Collusion through non-intervention (C)	
Assumption that racism is Black people's problem and so dissociating white authority from responsibility (S)	
Blaming of victims (holding Black students responsible for fights and for their own safety) (C)	
Not intervening to help integrate groups or encourage white students to consider the impact of their behaviours and attitudes (C)	
Systemic failures to protect Black students and teachers from racism (including language) (S)	
Collusion with racist behaviour towards Black staff by white students (S)	
Acceptance of and collusion with divisions between Black and white students (S)	
Lack of protection in schools and university for Black teachers and lecturers experiencing racism (S)	
Lack of support for politicised staff and students (described as 'too passionate', or understood as 'difficult') (S)	
Expectation of underachievement from teachers (including discouragement of aspirations from careers service) (P)	
Not discussing higher education as an option with Black students or supporting access to higher education (C)	
Not understood, language needs not supported or addressed	
No recognition of multi-lingual talents and skills (P)	
Understanding of learning needs unhelpful (e.g. dyslexia not picked up or addressed until university level, understood as lack of academic competence or behavioural issues) (C)	
Black boys and young men pushed towards sport and music rather than core subjects (P)	
Black girls and young women pushed towards domestic subjects as preparation for lives as wives and mothers or manufacturing work (not with careers or other aspirations) (P)	
Assumptions that the UK educational system is superior to other educational systems and a consequent lack of interest in other experiences or expectations (S)	

Few Black teachers and lecturers (S)	
Bullying by authority in relation to challenges (S)	
Removal of displays and acknowledgements of Black achievements (S)	
Curriculum content not reflecting Black history and experience and obscuring white domination (S)	

Appendix F: Figure 4.2.2: Discriminatory themes and experiences identified within education at Thompson's (2006) Individual (P) level

<i>Individual level (P) students spoke of...</i>	<i>Themes identified from discussions</i>
Being isolated and feeling conspicuous in negative ways	<i>discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; space; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Sense of needing to 'fit in' to something that was not negotiable	<i>discrimination; stereotyped; space; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Picked on by teachers and noticed for negative reasons (assumptions of regular lateness, mistakes, under-achievement)	<i>discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; cultural impediments; education legacy; equation; inertia; space; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Picked on by other students and treated as 'different'	<i>discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; cultural impediments; education legacy; space; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Expectation of under-achievement from teachers (including discouragement of aspirations from careers service)	<i>discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; cultural impediments; education legacy; equation; inertia; space; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Not understood, language needs not supported or addressed No recognition of multi-lingual talents and skills	<i>cultural competence; discrimination; stereotyped; positionality; cultural impediments; education legacy; space; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Black boys and young men pushed towards sport and music rather than core subjects	<i>discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; cultural impediments; education legacy; space; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Black girls and young women pushed towards domestic subjects as preparation for lives as wives and mothers or manufacturing work (not with careers or other aspirations)	<i>discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; cultural impediments; education legacy; space; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>

Appendix G: Figure 4.2.3: Discriminatory themes and experiences identified within education at Thompson's (2006) Socio-cultural (C) level

Socio-Cultural level (C)	Themes identified
Failure to protect Black students from playground and peer racism	<i>collusion; discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; space; education legacy; conscientisation; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Collusion through non-intervention	<i>collusion; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; space; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Blaming of victims (holding Black students responsible for fights and for their own safety)	<i>collusion; discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; cultural impediments; space; conscientisation; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
High levels of scrutiny of Black students in negative ways	<i>discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; cultural impediments; education legacy; space; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Understanding of Black students sticking together as troublesome, problematic and potentially threatening	<i>discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; cultural impediments; education legacy; space; conscientisation; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Not intervening to help integrate groups or encourage white students to consider the impact of their behaviours and attitudes	<i>collusion; discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; cultural impediments; education legacy; space; conscientisation; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Assumptions and stereotypes of Black students acted out and colluded with by teachers (always late, not academically able, etc.)	<i>collusion; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; equation; inertia; cultural impediments; education legacy; space, conscientisation; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Understanding of learning needs unhelpful (e.g. dyslexia not picked up or addressed until university level, understood as lack of academic competence or behavioural issues)	<i>stereotyped; cultural competence; cultural impediments; education legacy; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Not discussing higher education as an option with Black students or supporting access to higher education	<i>stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; cultural impediments; education legacy; LC; PSMS; RC</i>

Appendix H: Figure 4.2.4: Discriminatory themes and experiences identified within education at Thompson's (2006) Structural (S) level

Structural level (S)	Themes
Assumptions that the UK educational system is superior to other educational systems and a consequent lack of interest in other experiences or expectations	<i>discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; cultural impediments; education legacy; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Lack of protection in schools and university for Black teachers and lecturers experiencing racism	<i>collusion; discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; space; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Systemic failures to protect Black students and teachers from racism (including language)	<i>collusion; discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Lack of support for politicised staff and students (described as 'too passionate', or understood as 'difficult')	<i>collusion; discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Acceptance of and collusion with divisions between Black and white students	<i>collusion; discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; consciousness; LC; PSMS</i>
Few Black teachers and lecturers	<i>discrimination; positionality; LC; PSMS; space</i>
Collusion with racist behaviour towards Black staff by white students	<i>collusion; discrimination; positionality; LC; PSMS</i>
Bullying by authority in relation to challenges	<i>collusion; discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; LC; PSMS</i>
Assumption that racism is Black people's problem and so dissociating white authority from responsibility	<i>collusion; discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; consciousness; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Removal of displays and acknowledgements of Black achievements	<i>collusion; discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; LC; PSMS; RC</i>
Curriculum content not reflecting Black history and experience and obscuring white domination	<i>collusion; discrimination; stereotyped; cultural competence; positionality; LC; PSMS; RC</i>

Appendix I: Figure 4.3: Intersection of themes identified from the literature review and study

Themes identified		Frequency		
1	State policy and rhetoric	0	0	
2	Education and legacy	2 (14)	1, 7, 6	
3	Cultural impediments	1 (14)	1, 7, 6	
4	The Equation (more BEMs mean lower standards)	3	1, 2	
5	HE inertia and resources	3	1, 2	
6	Cultural competence	6 (24)	9, 9, 6	
7	Institutionalism – oppression, discrimination, racism, collusion and stereotypes	6 (24)	11, 5, 8	
		26	9, 9, 8	
8	The necessity to ‘create spaces’.	3 (17)	17	
	Positionality	23	6, 6, 11	
	Collusion	16	11, 5,	
	Consciousisation	18	5, 5, 8	
	Learning Contracts			
	Radical Curriculum			
	Peer Support & Mentoring Systems			

Appendix J: An extended discussion Anonymous coursework marking is an example of differing views.

Recently in University of Somewhere

From:on behalf of

Sent: Wed 28/11/2012 16:35

To: ucu-cttee

Subject: Anonymous courseworkmarking

A new initiative from the Academic Board in case you're not aware of it already ... thoughts please

So much with "if ain't broken, don't fix it" ... I'm sure this was done with the best intentions in mind, but perhaps the Academic Board should have also thought about the financial, bureaucratic and technical costs/implications of such policy. Personally I fail to see the need for this. I'm sure colleagues are professional enough to mark assignments impartially.

From: ... On Behalf Of

Sent: 29 November 2012 10:28

To:

Subject: RE: Anonymouscourseworkmarking

Sorry, but having been on the receiving end of discrimination by many 'professional' academics in the past, **I don't trust the professionalism of colleagues when it comes to discrimination.** I am certain that among our colleagues are some who are sexist, some who are homophobic, some who are racist and very many who don't accept that reasonable adjustments for disability are to be taken seriously. Among these are some who are in other respects highly moral people, who don't realise their prejudices or think they don't affect them, when they do. And even if they claim that they won't let such attitudes affect their marking, there is ample evidence that prejudices **do** affect such judgments, subconsciously at least. So I do think that more-or-less **anonymous marking is a good thing when it can be practically achieved.**

Appendix K: "Confusion and chaos but no cover-up" (subject line of original email)

TO: More recipients

CC: 6 recipients You + 5 More

BCC: recipients You

FROM:

Professor

Thursday, 20 December 2012, 0:12

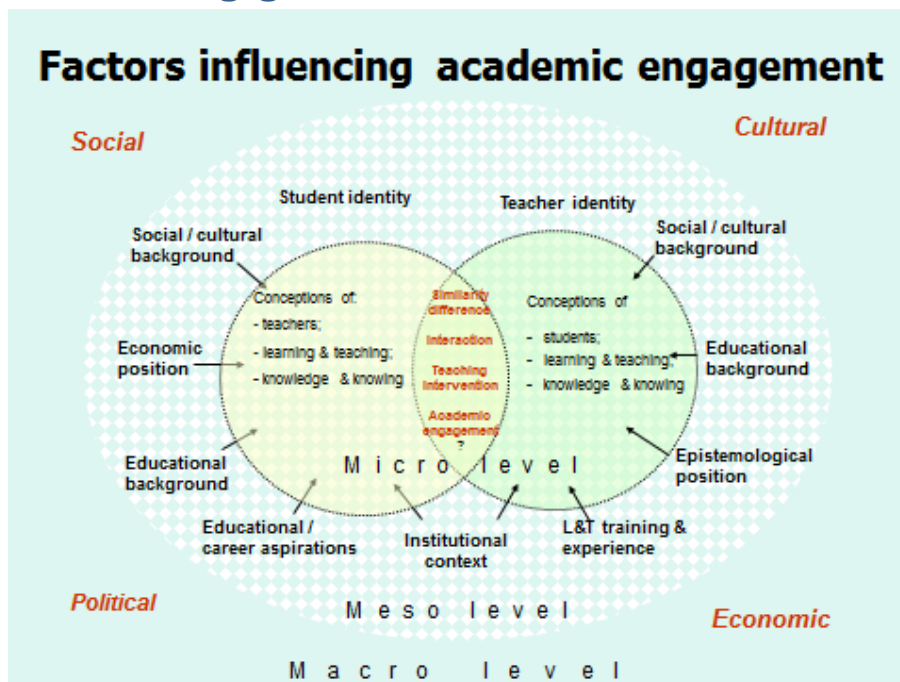
Dear All

Anyone doubting why BMEs can be discriminated against with impunity by the "great and the good" - and the not so great and good - should look to today's Report from which the subject line is abstracted. That phrase is the establishment's get out of jail card when evidence cannot be denied, whatever the context. Today's was not race, but I've encountered the phrase repeatedly with race.

Even better, perversely, was the Judge (the John Terry Judge, actually) who said he did not think a PC knew that he was being offensive when he told a black woman that she was "going home to cook bananas". Why did the Judge think the policeman said "bananas" instead of "potatoes"? Presumably, he thinks "fans" hurl bananas on the pitch benignly when black footballers appear because they look underfed. Moral: it does not matter how absurd the arguments used to deny wrong-doing - the establishment can use them because they have the power.

Rgds

Appendix L: Hocking and Cook's (2008c) "Factors influencing academic engagement"



Appendix M: Project Mandate –Centre for Culturally Responsive Learning and Teaching

Project Mandate			
Project	Centre for Culturally Responsive Learning and Teaching		
Senior Responsible Owner (SRO)/ Project Executive	Notash Andy		
Project Manager	C Daley		
Approval	By:	Date:	
Version	Version 3 (Jane Carthy & C Daley)		

1. Background

The CCRLT project is a second-stage defined project that has emanated from the RAEMS project. The RAEMS project and RAEMS group was developed following research and data that clearly identified a difference in the attainment and progression of Black Ethnically Minoritised (BEM) students. This is a national issue and experiences at RU reflect the national picture very closely. Data suggests that RU is statistically in a better position than many UK HEIs, however a clear attainment and progression gap still exists.

Extensive research was undertaken by Carlton Howson with BEM students to consider both the extent of the issue at RU and to consider interventions which would ensure improved equity for BEM students during their studies at RU.

Consultation with students will continue however this project is specifically designed to implement key interventions which are proven to provide better equity, ensuring students are not disadvantaged and are able to proceed through their studies with improved progression and attainment, greater clarity of expectations and an increased sense of holistic support.

It is important these changes are implemented as soon as possible for the following reasons:

- This is a cultural change project and there is a need to raise the profile of race equality across the institution
- RU has a high percentage (39%) of BEM students (25% more than the average UK HEI sector) and this figure is increasing
- RU is competing in a global market for students, many of whom are BEM students whose experience could be enhanced by these project interventions. Equally, without these interventions reputational damage could occur in global markets.
- RU has BEM students already on programmes who will continue to be disadvantaged without these changes being implemented
- Reputational damage from not acting on known areas of difficulties
- Attainment and progression levels have both short and longer-term adverse impacts on the sustainability of the university. This includes university income (fees) and League Table position (attainment levels and results from the National

- Student Survey) and could eventually impact on student recruitment and university programme delivery
- Addressing the attainment gap between white and BEM students is an ethical, social and economical imperative.

Defining 'BEM' identities:

An explanation of the term BEM used in this project is required to ensure there is sufficient clarity regarding the target group beneficiaries of the project. This is necessary as it is this group of students who experience consistent disadvantage (poorer outcomes) from current organisational and social structures. It is highly probable that other groups of student could benefit from the project interventions; nevertheless this should not be by design, as this could generate scope-creep and shift the focus of the project to a more generalised student improvement programme. [Note: consistent research and evaluation will enable us to illustrate how the wider student experience is enhanced]

Terminology is problematic and complex as there are significant variations and definitions. It is difficult to capture an appropriate balance between the uniqueness and the commonality between people when producing labels and definitions. The National Union of Students (NUS) recognises that finding an inclusive label with the capacity to support and reflect the different experiences of its constituents accurately is problematic. To this end, it has used the term "Black" as an umbrella term.

The term 'minoritised' is used as it illustrates the extent to which a process has or is taking place which minoritises groups and individuals from specific social groups.

Therefore this project uses and understands the term Black Ethnically Minoritised (BEM) students as an umbrella term to describe a wider group of non-white students who share common experiences navigating through social and organisational structures and processes which can (even without intention) create separateness, disassociation, isolation and disadvantage. This will include Black students from overseas, who may share common experiences during the student journey.

This approach may encounter some practical difficulties particularly with the use of external data. Where possible data used in this project will ensure it has a shared understanding of BEM students, or identify where no clear definition exists. Thus in reporting, we will be able to provide more insightful data regarding minoritised group experiences, whilst retaining the capacity to make comparison with other data sources.

2. Project Objectives and Approach

The CCRLT project is looking to achieve a solid foundation of culturally responsive learning and teaching interventions which will support progression and attainment levels for BEM students.

This foundation will support future ongoing research and consultation, ensuring RU continues to provide an equitable service delivery to meet the diverse needs of students who have accepted the offer of a degree placement.

The Key objectives and outcomes to be achieved by the project are as follows:

Objective 1: A peer support and mentoring system:

Outcome: Designed to promote levels of inclusiveness, support and engagement with the HE process. This would cover a wider remit than academic achievement and be concerned with the holistic well-being of BEM students throughout the student experience.

Approach: Agenda led by BEM students. Support services required for set-up and coordination and where applicable to provide technical expertise and authority to provide information, support and development and to create change where required.

Objective 2: Provision of a safe space:

Outcome: To enable Objective 1 to occur. Designed to provide a safe and supportive environment for BEM students. This will be both a physical and virtual space. This should promote levels of confidence, resilience and coping strategies for BEM students to thrive in a HE environment.

Approach: IT support required for a virtual space. An appropriate physical space should be identified for open use on an 'as-and-when' required basis rather than an allocated and audited provision, measuring use and outcomes. The status of the space would be on a level with a prayer room or quiet study space.

Objective 3: Learning Contracts:

Outcome: Designed to establish a joint understanding of respective responsibilities and accountabilities between staff and student. This will support student understanding of expectations and promote student planning processes.

Approach: Templates developed and approved. Monitoring of effectiveness required.

Objective 4: Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework:

Outcome: A framework which requires teaching staff to examine and modify curriculum, learning activities and assessment methodology to ensure it meets the learning needs of a diverse student population. This will promote equitable access to education and promote BEM student motivation and inclusion with studies.

Approach: Effective inclusive teaching strategies embedded in PGCHE
All faculties / programmes need to engage in the process and should be embedded in general practice.

Objective 5: Academic Preparation Programme:

Outcome: Research indicates that certain sectors of the community, including BEM students have limited access to academic environments and requirements. This can have an adverse impact on student progression and attainment. This programme will provide learning on academic writing, locating research and learning materials and reading complex text.

Approach: Could be centrally managed and all faculties and programmes should identify areas of current / potential concern regarding gaps in academic knowledge, skills and experience.

Objective 6: Personal Tutor System:

Outcome: This resource would support the monitoring of and prevention of poor progression and exclusion by providing access to guidance and additional support mechanisms at an earlier point of individual difficulties.

Approach: Development of a role descriptor and templates to support staff understanding
Training where applicable for development of staff skills and knowledge, including early identification of risk areas (for example poor student progression)
Processes established for referred student support systems and monitoring of data

Objective 7: Achievement of the Race Equality Charter Mark

Outcome: This will support the ongoing understanding of what initiatives should be undertaken or maintained to provide an equitable service provision for

BEM students. It will support our ability to ensure this project is an institutional responsibility rather than a discreet undertaking in a section of services. The achievement of the award will demonstrate RU's commitment to supporting excellent outcomes for all student cohorts.

Approach: Application submitted. If approved we need to adopt all milestones / requirements into the project plan.

3. Scope

The potential scope of the project is as detailed above. This should be determined by the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO). They may decide to elevate the project to a programme and widen the remit (for example looking at staff recruitment practices which could share common outcomes, improving retention, attainment and progression of BEM students). Similarly a decision may be made to reduce the objectives with a focus on a smaller scope.

This will be a decision made by the SRO based on resource implications against benefits. A number of objectives may already partially exist in a similar form, however may be for more general groups.

4. Business Benefits

The 3 key business benefits that link to the Corporate Strategy are:

1: Improved League Table positioning (LTP):

RU is currently 81 in the UK League Tables. Improving this position is part of RU's Corporate Strategy. A number of projects currently running have a clear remit to support LTP.

The CCRLT project can support this outcome in a number of ways:

Student Satisfaction: All projects objectives, particularly **1 & 5** should have a positive impact on feedback in the National Student Survey.

Degree completion: 11% RU students left without an award. Data does not breakdown the reasons for this. If this is due to poor progression then Objective **4** should ensure students can progress into HE study in a timely manner, and Objective **5** should enable tutors to identify difficulties at a much earlier stage and respond accordingly. If the issue is due to exclusions then Objective **2** will support the joint understanding between students and staff of expected and respective responsibilities and accountabilities.

Attainment Levels: BEM students experience lower attainment levels than white/other students. Approximately 50% of graduating students at RU achieved a good degree. RU has a population of 39% BEM students which is significantly higher than the sector average (14%) Therefore there is a strong business case for implementing measures which should improve attainment levels for BEM students. Objectives **3 & 4** should improve the attainment levels for the BEM student population which should impact on the overall score for '**Good Honours**'.

With improved attainment, '**Graduate Prospects**' could also improve.

2: Income:

Student fees are an important part of RUs overall income. Over 50% of RU income is generated from the category of Fees (and education grants and contracts), which is standard in many post-92 universities (Coventry University 53%). It is therefore essential we minimise the number of student drop-outs to minimise loss of fee income. In 2012/12 RU reported a drop-out rate of over 1000 students with 46% coming from the BEM student population. Therefore the potential to drop-out from a course is statistically higher for the BEM student population. It is not currently known what year of study drop-outs occurred, however if this is prior to the second year of study the potential loss of fee income from BEM students alone amounts to **over £7M**.

Drop-out rates should be carefully analysed particularly with the increase in university fees. It could be argued that if progression is poor in year one, students need to consider the risk of continuing in their studies. As BEM students are statistically recorded as having poorer progression and are 3 times more likely to be unemployed following graduation than white students, the risks for continuing may be higher.

It is therefore critical that interventions are in place which support progression and ensure an improved sense of confidence and inclusion for BEM students.

Objective 1 will deliver required emotional and practical support for BEM students

Objective 4 will deliver practical knowledge and support to enable BEM students to have a more equal footing in understanding and producing academic standard material

Objective 5 will ensure progression levels for BEM students are monitored and issues of risk are identified at an earlier stage.

3: Reputation:

Reputational enhancement and benefits is a more complex and difficult area to measure, however branding and reputation are critical for recruiting students, recruiting and retaining staff and generating other income. The Times Higher Education World Reputation Rankings is demonstration of the importance placed on reputation and yet acknowledges they are based on nothing more than subjective judgement.

Research has shown that a university's reputation is the top priority (over location or even salary) for academics moving jobs, and it is the number one consideration for internationally mobile students, above tuition fees and course content.

Focussing on the domestic market, it is important that students believe the university they are/were studying at is responsive to and supportive of their individual learning needs; that they have progressed well and will/have attained a good degree. Likewise, reputational damage can occur if RU is considered to be a university which does not demonstrate a willingness to support the diverse learning needs of the whole student population.

Objective 3 will demonstrate the commitment to providing an inclusive learning programme for a global and diverse market.

Objective 6 will provide external verification of RU's commitment and achievement to provide an equitable service delivery for BEM students.

In a world of growing online social media, any such peer-to-peer recommendation has increasing impact.

(Data from 2012/13 Unistats Dataset, RU Student Diversity Report 2011/12, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) 2012 and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) 2012)

5. Constraints and Risks

Full constraints are not currently known as it will be dependent on the final scope of the project being determined and the availability of resources. The below highlight likely constraints:

Culture:

A key constraint will be regarding current cultures, beliefs and behaviours of stakeholders. Research highlights the following issues which would act as barriers to implementing beneficial changes. These may be applicable at RU:

- Limited staff awareness of the existence of an attainment gap and/or the extent of the issue
- Low aspirations for BEM student attainment
- Beliefs regarding the location and/or cause of the problem (ie with BEM students rather than the institution)
- Staff unwillingness to examine and discuss due to fears of 'saying the wrong thing'
- Although a strong commitment from staff/institutions to provide inclusive learning and teaching, this is generalised and not specific to address the needs of BEM students.

Time:

Time / capacity is a key resource constraint. Academic teaching staff experience significant time constraints with balancing the demands of their role. Specific time should be allocated to staff and faculties to develop a culturally responsive learning, teaching and assessment strategy. This would require an examination of curriculum, speakers and assessment models with in-built flexibility. Consideration should be given to when standard course evaluation activities occur and link specific project tasks to this. Guidance should be provided to support staff to easily identify issues and how to develop more inclusive programmes.

Consideration should be given to the development of a Personal Tutor System. This includes specific training requirements so staff understand the purpose of the role, particularly understanding and recognising risks regarding BEM progression and referral to appropriate support. Reporting and monitoring of effectiveness and time implications should be undertaken.

Faculties should consider aspects of their programmes where identified learning / knowledge gaps exist within current student cohorts. This would support the development of bespoke academic preparation programmes. Academic writing etc. could be managed centrally, however consideration should be given to processes and equipment in each faculty/programmes which is specific to the particular school (for example use of large science equipment, technology etc). This task should be allocated to specific staff within faculties.

For full benefits to be realised it is critical that this work is undertaken across the institution. This is particularly important to evidence when applying for the Race Equality Charter Mark. Collecting data required by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) will be time consuming and would need to be allocated to a team/individual.

Effective coordination of key activities required, particularly when activities shift to 'business as usual'.

Budget:

Due to the considerable time constraints that are likely during implementation and maintenance of an ongoing programme, consideration should be given to resourcing new roles as well as adding tasks to existing roles. Student consultants / frontrunners would be a cost-effective resource, particularly when monitoring benefits and evaluating the effectiveness of changes.

The impact of not undertaking the project is as identified in the Business Case section of this paper.

There are some risks for undertaking this project:

- The project is viewed and treated as a distinct piece of work rather than an institutional-wide change project
- That targeting interventions for BEM students is viewed as inappropriate and/or as creating risks for other student populations.
- Could be costly (time and finance) to implement
- Overlap with other projects requires careful analysis to reduce both duplication of effort and to avoid belief that generalised equality interventions will automatically improve attainment and progression levels between BEM and white students.

6. Key Dates and Milestones

There are no regulatory/statutory/funding deadlines for this project, other than those associated with the acquisition of the Race Equality Charter Mark. An application to be considered as part of the trial group has been submitted to the Equality Challenge Unit.

Many of the objectives would feed-in to the acquisition of the Charter Mark the project may be subjected to a number of external time constraints and milestones.

Where possible any interventions which can be attached to processes already occurring should be appropriately linked.

7. Interfaces

There are a number of projects currently looking at
University League Tables
Teaching and Learning Strategies
Personal Tutors

8. Stakeholders and University Areas Affected

BEM students
Teaching and Academic staff
EB
SAAS
POD, including Equality and Diversity Unit, Learning and Development Team
RAEMS Group

Student Career Service
Strategic Planning Service

Appendix N: Student Profile

The information for 'overseas' students is more complicated and this information was not available to me. However as a result of asking more questions about the students profile, further work is currently being undertaken by the university Strategic Planning Service department.

First degree full time 1st year home (UK) students

Ethnic group	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	% change 2010/11 to 2012/13
BEM	1562	1814	1710	9.5%
White	2181	2425	2053	-5.9%
Grand Total	3743	4239	3763	

Significant growth in 1st year home (UK) Black African females on full time First degree courses in RU from 2010/11 to 2012/13.

Student population - Overseas Students and home students

Period	Gender		Ethnicity		Age		Disability	
	Male	Female	BEM	White	20 under	21 Over	Disability	No disability
2011/2012	43%	57%	39%	61%	53%	47%	16%	84%

In relation to the BA Youth and Community Development the student Profile the approximated percentages are indicated in the table below. This shows that there are significant differences between the overall student population and the population as reflected at the programme level. These differences are important in considering the intersectionality of BEM students experiences and what strategies are required to enhance the experience of all students.

Period	Gender		Ethnicity		Age		Disability	
	Male	Female	BEM	White	20 under	21 Over	Disability	No disability
2011/2012	20%	80%	65%	35%	35%	65%	40%	60%

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