



**Black African Students' Experiences of Social Work Practice Learning in England:**

**A Critical Race Inquiry**

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Professional Practice in Health and Social Care at the

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## Declaration

This is to certify that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis, that the original work is my own except as specified in acknowledgments or in references, and that neither the thesis nor the original work contained therein has been submitted to this or any other institution for the award of a degree.

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## Dedications

This thesis is the culmination of hard work, tears, laughter and reflection spanning four years. During this time, I have gained many new friends whom I will continue to treasure. I could not have achieved this without the love and support of my family, friends, colleagues, supervisors and participants.

I would like to dedicate this to my sons Joel and Kevin who I hope will grow and live in an era in where their characters have precedence over the colour of their skin. To my husband Joshua, who stood by me throughout this time, reminding me of deadlines but also encouraging me to take a break when he saw it was needed.

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## Abbreviations

ADP	anti-discriminatory practice
AOP	anti-oppressive practice
ARP	anti-racist practice
BAS	black African student(s)
BME	black minority ethnic
CRT	critical race theory
ECU	Equality Challenge Unit
GSCC	General Social Care Council
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
HEI	higher education institution
NI	narrative inquiry
PA	practice assessor
PCF	Professional capabilities framework
PE	practice educator
SU	Service user
SW	social worker
TCSW	The College of Social Work

## Abstract

The experiences of black African students (BAS) in the context of social work placements in the UK have received limited attention within academic and practice discourse. This is despite the reported evidence of growth in numbers of students of black African origin enrolling onto social work qualifying programmes and experiencing delayed progression and poorer attainment. This thesis seeks to examine the experiences of black African students on social work placements, drawing upon critical race theory as a methodological and explanatory framework. Using data from semi-structured interviews and reflective diaries, narratives from eight (8) participants studying social work at undergraduate and graduate levels in England offered insight into their experiences in addition to strategies which they perceived would enhance the experiences of ethnic minority students in the future.

The findings revealed that BAS experienced racism, over-scrutiny, isolation and exclusion, differential treatment and were racially stereotyped on a regular basis. BAS experienced successful placements when their practice educators (PEs) were supportive, respectful, encouraging and understanding. The study also highlighted that HEIs and practice placements require more open and transparent processes in terms of matching, allocation of workload, monitoring and supporting black African students.

The study identified the need for a robust system of training for PEs, regular auditing and maintaining a register of PEs and ensuring ongoing CPD in the areas of equality and diversity. Practice guidance has been developed (Appendix 9) alongside a web portal [www.diversityinpracticelearning.com](http://www.diversityinpracticelearning.com) and a Twitter account to disseminate findings from this study and to support the teaching and learning needs of this group of students.

## Introduction to thesis

This first section sets the context and outlines the structure of the thesis. It presents a background and rationale for the study, introduces the international definition of social work and attempts to explain the concepts of race and racism and the term black African. A rationale for the use of the term black African is provided followed by the aims and objectives of the study and the research questions the thesis aimed to address. Finally, the structure of the thesis is presented.

## Background to study

Recruitment efforts in recent years have resulted in an increase in the number of black minority ethnic (BME) students attending universities in the United Kingdom. The rise is significant, from 14.9 per cent in 2004 to 17.2 per cent in 2009 (Weekes-Bernard 2010). It has been further suggested that social work enrolments by BME students in 2012/13 stood at 27 per cent (3,180) for undergraduate programmes and 26 per cent (375 students) for enrolment on graduate social work programmes in English higher education institutions (HEIs) (HEFCE online). This growth has resulted in the visibility of this group in terms of progression and attainment and in terms of attainment, white students are reported to be more likely to achieve first class degrees and less likely to attain third or lower class degrees than students of BME backgrounds (Skills for Care 2015). In addition, a student's nationality is said to influence the degree classification achieved in social work, with British students more likely to achieve a first class degree and non-British more likely to achieve a third class degree. In term of second class, there appeared to be little difference in profile of student (Skills for Care 2015).

Historically in the United Kingdom, social work education was viewed as a ‘closed profession’ for minority and other disadvantaged groups (Shaw 1985) and it was only from the 1980s that minority groups began to join the profession (Wainwright 2009).

This thesis is an empirical study of the experiences of black African students on social work placements in England. The study examines the experiences of eight students using narrative inquiry, a qualitative research method discussed in more depth later in the thesis. In addition, the thesis uses a critical race theoretical lens as a framework (Johnson-Ahorlu 2012) to critically examine, explain and understand these students’ experiences within the context of a higher education system which appears to be producing differential experiences and outcomes for students of black African ethnicity. The thesis also seeks to inform social work education more generally and could be of benefit to professional programmes which have steady numbers of BME students and which have work-based learning components such as nursing (Scammell and Olumide 2012).

This study aims to contribute to the limited empirical research about the practice learning (placement) experiences of black African students of social work in higher education institutions in England. It is not clear why research in this area is sparse. However, it may be concluded that the umbrella categorisation of black minority ethnic (BME) often used by researchers and academics renders specific ethnic groups invisible in research.

The profession of social work has continued to witness change whilst undergoing review and reform as a result of its failings to protect some vulnerable people in the UK (Wilson and Campbell 2013). These changes have affected not only social work practice but also social work education (TCSW 2012), resulting in changes to the content of the curriculum and length of practice learning on social work qualifying training. The current three-year

undergraduate degree or two-year masters qualifying degree involves a substantial period of practice learning as the centrality of practice learning continues to be highlighted as a key determinant in the 'professional formation' of students (Walker, Crawford and Parker 2008: 28). More recently a number of alternative fast track masters level routes (Step Up to Social Work and Frontline) have been established to train social workers (Curtis, Moriarty and Netten 2012) and have adopted a model of employer sponsored opportunities which have already revealed an under-representation of BME social work trainees, (Smith, McLenachan, Venn and Anthony 2013). Specifically in relation to applicants from black African backgrounds, the evaluation into the effectiveness of this scheme found that 'whereas 12 per cent (154) of all white candidates were offered and accepted places on the programme, none of the 132 black British-African candidates proceeded beyond the assessment centre' (Smith et al. 2013: 84).

As a consequence of the changes to social work education, the current degree provision includes a 50 per cent component of practice learning (Wilson et al. 2008). However, there is a level of uncertainty about whether this will change to ensure that qualifying students are adequately equipped for the task of supporting vulnerable people and advocating on behalf of service users. There are a number of people involved in supporting, assessing and enabling the learning of the student, the primary person being the practice educator (PE). These terms have been explained in Appendix 1. The practice educator is usually, but not always, a qualified social worker who has undergone specific training to enable and support the learning of students. However, from October 2015 in the UK, only qualified and registered social workers will be able to work with students as practice educators (TCSW 2012), known in Australia, the USA and Canada as field instructors. Their role is to support and assess social work students in the areas of confidence, competence and suitability for social work

with vulnerable people. The practice educator works alongside the social work student, identifying and providing opportunities for learning, personal growth and self-reflection (Parker 2010). The practice educator is also responsible for the formative and summative assessment of the social work student with specific reference to the quality of their practice with service users. Throughout the practice-learning period, the student is expected to engage and work with their practice educator to identify any areas of particular strength, difficulty and competence. It is therefore unsurprising that the quality of the relationship between a social work student and their practice educator is of immense importance (Tedam 2012a).

Sussman, Bailey, Byford, Richardson and Granner. (2014: 84) suggest that PEs are responsible for 'gatekeeping' and 'determining practice readiness' and many factors are considered in determining whether or not students have achieved this. Baum (2011) observes that the quality of the supervisory relationship between the student and the PE is an important ingredient not only in a successful placement in terms of outcome but that it also serves as a space where values and conduct of the profession are modelled. A PE can be based on site (working in the same team or organisation) or can be off site (working elsewhere and away from the student). The on-site/off site arrangements have been variably constructed and operationalised by different HEIs globally and in the UK. For example, Zuchowski, Savage, Miles and Gair (2013) report potential tensions between the various people involved in supporting and assessing students on placement and these tensions can impact negatively on a student's placement opportunities and final outcome.

PEs and students have a high level of involvement, with a minimum of 1.5 hours direct contact a week, though this is often more, particularly if the PE is in the same team as the student. PE duties include developing and delivering a learning curriculum and assessment of student competence. The PE role is often extended to include supporting the student's

general professional development, such as confidence and workplace survival skills (Basnett and Sheffield 2010).

Having briefly examined placements and the role of the practice educator, it is appropriate to define social work and its relationship with principles of equality, non discrimination and social justice.

In 2014, the global definition of social work was altered and provides a useful starting point for any discussion about the profession and its contribution to equality, diversity and non-discrimination. The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW 2014) agreed the following definition:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. (IFSW 2014)

It is expedient that this definition is given prominence at the start as it demonstrates the profession's commitment to social justice, empowerment and respect for diversities which were found to be minimally exhibited within the experiences of participants in this study. In this thesis, it is argued that social work education needs to implement a far more robust system of monitoring and reviewing not only of students' placements but also of their practice educators (PEs) and that HEIs should be held accountable for placing students in situations that prove to be detrimental to their wellbeing, are oppressive, discriminatory or unresponsive to the needs of students.

## Understanding race, racism and black African

Omi and Winant (1986) have suggested that up until recent times 'race' was an unproblematic concept only becoming open to challenge from the 20th century. Garner (2010) argues that 'race' is not a universal concept in that there is no global acceptance about what it means. This has resulted in what McCarthy and Crichtlow (1993: xiii) refer to as the 'elusiveness of racial identity' in that race is 'a social, historical and variable category' (p.xv). The concept of 'race' has been fuelled by Social Darwinism and Darwin's theory of evolution and the survival of the fittest, which some propose views t people of European descent as physically and mentally more able than those from Asia and Africa (Laird 2008). This view, it is argued, is what enabled the subjugation of some races of others. Garner offers the view that the concept of race will never be static due to the multitude of ways in which people can be described and categorised. The fact that people can have many different features but be described using terms such as 'black', 'white' or 'mixed' has become an area of ongoing debate. Subdividing groups of people by biological heritage, skin colour and other markers, according to Miles (1989) has resulted in 'race' being an ideological construction.

As a social construct then, it is the meanings ascribed to these descriptions of race that influence social relations. However, Winant (2001:181) claims that viewing race as a social construct does not go far enough in explaining what it is. Race can be understood as 'products of their times and places', which means changes in socio-political priorities result in changes to the articulation and understanding of race. In the nineteenth century, race was perceived as a biological category in which people were distinguished according to physical markers such as colour of skin, hair texture and physique (Solomos and Back 1996). Pilkington (2011) argues that such categorisation resulted in some groups being defined as inferior and alien in comparison to others. It is for this and other reasons that race is



conceptualised as a social category, mediated by language and used for varying purposes. Consequently, the scientific/biological argument weakened as people began to recognise race as not being an objective reality.

Using race therefore as a reason to deny, disadvantage or oppress individuals is what results in racism or racist attitudes and as much as race is a social construct, racism is reproduced and sustained by social structures. It is a complex system of power and ingrained in the very fabric of British society on a personal attitudinal level and on institutional levels (Pilkington 2013. Harper (2012: 10) defines racism as:

individual actions (both intentional and unconscious) that engender marginalization and inflict varying degrees of harm on minoritised persons; structures that determine and cyclically remanufacture racial inequity; and institutional norms that sustain White privilege and permit the ongoing subordination of minoritised persons.

This definition of racism is a useful one when considering Razack's (2001) study of the experiences of ethnic minority students on social work placements in Canada, where she describes a tendency for field instructors to adopt a colour-blind approach, which in her view encourages the silencing of dissenting views. In addition, the 'hierarchy of acceptance' (p.225) argument is put forward to explain the differences in perception, treatment and acceptance of various minority groups in her study for example where a Chinese student identified that they were treated differently to their black African peer.

Engaging with discourse around race without examining racism, according to Harper (2012) will continue to cloud our understanding of differences in outcome for diverse groups of students and will compromise efforts to minimise the achievement gap between white students and their black peers at many levels of the education system.

For Berman and Paradies (2010), the Marxist understanding of racism as resulting from class discrimination is discounted in favour of an approach that incorporates the use of power and prejudice to produce undesirable outcomes for black people. They further argue that racism occurs on three levels (direct, indirect and internal), which concurs with the experiences of BAS during placements (Bartoli, Kennedy and Tadam 2008; Bernard, Fairtlough, Fletcher and Ahmet 2011; Fairtlough, Bernard, Fletcher and Ahmet 2013; Tadam 2014).

Before any examination of the experiences of BAS can be undertaken, it is crucial that the term 'black African' itself is conceptualised. According to Aspinall and Chinouya (2008) it is used to describe communities in the United Kingdom who are not only black but also have their roots and heritage in sub-Saharan Africa. The term first appeared in the 2001 national census (Aspinall and Chinouya 2008) and debates are ongoing about how this group should be categorised, owing to specific groups of Africans who do not wish to describe themselves as 'black' (Aspinall 2011).

Critiquing the term 'black African', Agyemang, Bhopal and Bruijnzeels (2005) suggest that it is not only a term which is too broad but also that it has the potential to cause offence. For this reason, the term 'African' has been proposed as a more inclusive term by some critics who argue that 'African' avoids the use of colour and can be more inclusive whereas the inclusion of colour or 'blackness' is not (Aspinall 2011). Similarly, Modood (1994) rejects the use of 'black' in relation to Asian people, stating that it equates colour discrimination with racial discrimination and suggests that its use is harmful to Asians. In short, Modood advocates distinguishing between people's 'mode of oppression' and their 'mode of being' (Meer and Nayak 2013). A contrary view is held by Gilroy (1993) who has proposed that people of African origin are more likely to accept the concept of 'black' due to cultural, historical experiences which have resulted in them embracing their colour in the diaspora. It

would therefore be unwise, given the scope of this research, to restrict use of the term 'African' due to the potential inclusion of Africans of European heritage such as those from parts of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Botswana for instance. This thesis works from the understanding that the term 'black African' is a legitimate and relevant categorisation for this research as it draws from national statistics about a specific group of students. The term was used by the now abolished General Social Care Council (GSCC), and in national reports about progression and attainment of students in higher education.

The author is clear that the use of the word 'black' is an important categorisation as it sets black disadvantage against white privilege. Its use reflects a social structure which is not only racialised but also one in which 'whiteness' is respected, unquestioned and accepted (Kowal 2008) in contrast to 'blackness' which is often perceived from the othered lense with stories of over-scrutiny, low expectations and rejection on social work placements (Fairtlough et al. 2013). It has also been argued by McDowell (2009) that people with darker skin are more susceptible to racist and racialised abuse, a view which has been corroborated by Harrison and Thomas (2009).

The African continent boasts of some of the world's oldest and newest countries – Egypt and South Sudan – and with a population of 1.069 billion people, is the world's second most populous continent (Stock 2012). The continent is home to 47 countries and over one hundred languages and dialects. War, insecurity, famine and natural disasters have resulted in the migration of many people from the African continent to Europe and elsewhere (Stock 2012). Nzira (2011) identifies that African people living in the UK have varied characteristics arising from their immigration status, countries of origin and their places of residence in the UK and has cautioned against viewing them as a homogenous group.

The 2011 Census in the UK revealed that about 1.8 per cent of the population are of African heritage and that people from sub-Saharan Africa are one of the fastest growing immigrant communities in the UK (Mitton and Aspinall 2010).

The participant recruitment letter stated that a key inclusion criterion was that ‘participants must self-identify as black African’ in order to be considered. This strategy is one that enabled participants to self-determine their ethnicity and was not imposed on them by the researcher.

The rationale for the focus on ‘black African’ for this thesis is threefold:

- 1) In terms of demographics, the black African ethnic group in the UK is becoming more significant with a predicted growth of 37 per cent by 2026 (Klodawski 2009).
- 2) ‘Black African’ is the ethnic category revealed by the GSCC as progressing slower and attaining below other ethnic groups on social work programmes.
- 3) The growth of ‘black African’ students on social work qualifying programmes is documented as is their place as the second largest ethnic group enrolled onto social work programmes (GSCC 2007, 2009).

The view by Aspinall and Chinouya (2008) that the term ‘black African’ potentially conceals and neglects the heterogeneous nature of people from these backgrounds is acknowledged and consequently in Chapter 2, a description of participants’ countries of origin in Africa is provided to reflect how they view their own ethnicities. Specific country and regional subdivisions will be utilised in recognition of the diversity of the ‘black African’ population.

This thesis makes a unique and original contribution to the broader area of social work education and more specifically to the practice learning (PL) component of social work education in England. As a social work academic, a practice educator, a registered

practitioner and a female of black African heritage, I feel I am strategically placed to listen, interpret and report the narratives of BAS, examine the implications for social work education and practice, and to propose relevant and appropriate recommendations for implementation.

At the point of writing up this thesis, I have found no empirical research which utilises critical race theory (CRT) and narrative approaches to examine the practice learning experiences of BAS in England. The author's own pilot study (Tadam 2014) is the only exception.

### Aims of study and research questions

This study had four main aims, which were:

- to understand from the perspective of participants their experiences of practice learning in England
- to become aware of the strategies that could enhance practice learning outcomes for black African students
- to seek to understand how black African students navigate practice learning
- to offer some interpretation of the data for the purpose of informing the development of practice learning guidelines and processes.

The research questions which would assist in achieving the above aims were:

- 1) What are the experiences of black African students on social work placements in England?
- 2) To what extent do ideas of race and racism impact upon the negative practice learning experiences of black African students studying social work?

3) What factors promote and inhibit positive placement experiences for BAS in England?

It was considered that the use of CRT for this study would help to evaluate and centralise race and the racialised placement experiences of BAS and a critical discussion of CRT is outlined in chapter two. Existing literature and research about the outcomes for BME students in higher education provided me with the rationale for foregrounding race within my thesis and did not preclude me from offering a critique of CRT (chapter two) and highlighting aspects of my research which were incompatible with this framework.

### Structure of the thesis

This thesis is composed of six chapters which come together to provide a comprehensive overview and analysis of the practice learning experiences of BAS in England.

**Chapter 1** is presented as the review of the literature and essentially provides a detailed scope of existing research relevant to my area of inquiry. It is set out thematically under two broad themes: the experiences of black African students in UK higher education and black African students' experiences of social work education in the UK. This chapter is critical in setting the conceptual basis for the thesis and in highlighting the gaps and limitations in existing studies which have formed the rationale for this current study.

**Chapter 2** outlines the methodological contours of my study and uses a reflexive approach in discussing the methodology and data collection procedures and methods. It provides profiles of the research participants, their countries of origin and placement type. In addition, ethical considerations, the role and value of an independent mentor, the value of the pilot study, strengths and limitations of my study are highlighted. This is also the chapter in which CRT

is introduced, explained and critiqued.

**Chapter 3** is the most extensive of the chapters, where the data from the interviews and reflective diaries are reported, discussed and analysed using principles of CRT. Participant narratives and direct quotes have been utilised to evidence their experiences of placements. To enhance clarity and understanding, this chapter is further divided into parts A (narratives of racism) and B (narratives of negotiating racism).

**Chapter 4** provides an analysis of black African students' experiences in relation to CRT and its usefulness and challenges for this study. A framework for practice is introduced and a visual representation of participant experiences linked to the principles of CRT is tabulated and discussed.

**Chapter 5** presents implications for social work education and practice in pre placement, placement and post placement circumstances. There is a discussion of recommendations and areas for future development by universities and BAS themselves.

**Chapter 6** concludes the thesis, beginning with a statement of its contribution to knowledge and also the ways in which the study addresses the initial research questions and aims. The chapter ends with recommendations for future research, personal reflections and concluding remarks.

### 1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide historical and contemporary insight into the practice learning (placement) experiences of BME students studying social work more generally and black African students in particular studying in English institutions of higher education. To do this, existing research and literature will be interrogated in order to provide the reader with a rationale as well as situate this study within the context of social work education. This review will take a thematic approach, grouping relevant literature according to themes to enhance clarity and coherence. Research in relation to black African students studying social work in England is limited, with the majority of research referring to the broader category of BME. For this study, there are two central themes which will assist our understanding:

Theme 1: Black African students' experiences in UK higher education

Theme 2: Black African students' experiences of social work education.

### 1.2 Black African students' experiences in UK higher education

The experiences of black and ethnic minority (BME) students in higher education is well documented and examples include the United States of America (Johnson-Ahorlu 2012), Canada (Clark, et al. 2014), Australia (Zuchowski et al. 2013; Gair, Miles, Savage and Zuchowski 2014) as well as the UK (Stevenson 2012; Johnson 2011). These studies identify the presence of unequal treatment and outcomes in relation to the higher education experiences of BME students, described variably as 'African American', 'Indigenous' and 'minority groups'. Writing about the specific experiences of African-American students at a



particular university in the USA, Johnson-Ahorlu (2012: 635) asserts that often a 'student-centered deficit perspective' is applied which results in students feeling reluctant to seek help or ask questions in class as they do not want others to interpret their need for help as them needing additional support. This is not dissimilar to the experiences reported in the UK. For example, there is the concern that BME students in UK higher education have persistently reported less satisfaction with their student experience than their white colleagues (NUS 2011, HEFCE 2010). Connor, Tyers, Davis and Tackey (2003) and Connor, Tyers, Modood and Hillage (2004) concluded that white students were more likely to achieve higher degree classifications while BME graduates had poorer job prospects and higher unemployment and underemployment rates. With growing numbers of African students in UK HEIs according to Stevenson (2012), categorisation which reflected the entire BME group is being challenged by researchers. BAS occupy a unique socio-cultural space within higher education in the UK and their more recent migration has meant their needs and experiences are different from other longer settled immigrants such as 'African Caribbean' populations, particularly in terms of formative education and familiarity with UK systems and structures (Nzira 2011).

Much of the research about African students in the UK approach the subject from the perspective of international students, a term which is in itself problematic as it is often used to distinguish between fee bands (Bartoli 2011).

Writing about professional nursing training in the UK, Johnson et al. (2013) found that BME students were more likely than their peers to experience differential negative treatment by course tutors, clinical staff and patients.

Whilst this plethora of research exists under the broad category of BME, little is known about

specific black and ethnic minority groups who collectively form the broader BME category.

A qualitative study by Andrews, Brodie, Andrews, Wong and Thomas (2005) into the clinical experiences of student nurses studying at three different universities in the UK found that African students experienced different forms of racism on the ward, directed at them from nurses and patients. One African student concluded that ‘the treatment we get compared with our fellow white students is discouraging and unbelievable’ (p.150).

Writing specifically about African women’s experiences in two universities in the United States, Lobnibe (2013) concludes that often the presence of minority groups in higher education is viewed as the outcome of affirmative action and not as a result of a competitively earned place at university. This, she argues, can result in what her participants described as feeling marginalised, undervalued and disrespected. The forms and levels of disrespect existed on a spectrum. For example, one senior faculty member is quoted as suggesting to a black African woman in relation to a job interview:

You know this job requires self-initiative and motivation (he said) and I find it difficult to imagine that the spirit you show here today can be sustained...I hardly come across African women and...I think it’s a total waste of resources to fund such women since their only purpose is to serve their husbands and give birth to countless children. (Lobnibe 2013: 205)

This response mirrors what Clarke et al. (2014: 116) in their study of Aboriginal students’ experiences of micro-aggressions in Canada, describe as ‘encountering expectations of primitiveness’ and where there is the assumption that an ethnic minority identity is incompatible with modern-day sophistication and understanding.

Bowl (2001) highlights the differential experiences of ‘non-traditional’ students in higher education concluding that shock, trauma, isolation and a feeling of powerlessness impact on overall wellbeing and motivation. A combination of time and financial poverty as well as institutional barriers had to be navigated in order to succeed. Her study involved black women, one of whom was studying social work.

### 1.3 Black African students’ experiences of social work education in the UK

Some of the earliest research about BME students and their experiences on social work courses were undertaken by Aymer and Bryan (1996) who believed that existing research focused on student deficits and what students did not or could not do. By the late 1990s, researchers began to change focus to understand the experiences of BME students and to highlight the positives, wherever possible. This focus on the general experiences of BME students in social work is not only helpful in understanding what works but also in opening opportunities for strategies to be developed to enhance their learning, progression, outcomes and employability.

Slower progression and lower attainment of BME students studying in UK higher education institutions is well documented (for example, Stevenson 2012; Berry and Loke 2011). There is also evidence of this trend in the area of social work education (Aymer and Bryan 1996; GSCC 2007; Bartoli et al. 2008; Dillon 2011; Daniel 2011; Bernard et al. 2011; Hussein, Moriarty, Manthorpe and Huxley 2008; Tadam 2014). The majority of studies have focused on outcomes for BME students with a few empirical studies focusing on the experiences of black African students.

Hussein et al. (2008) undertook a large-scale quantitative study into diversity and progression of students on social work programmes in England over three years (1995–1998). The

study revealed that male students, students with disabilities, and students from black and ethnic minority backgrounds had poorer progression rates than other students. Of particular significance was the revelation that sites of practice learning (placements) posed particular challenges for people from these minority groups. This study provided the first large-scale analyses of progression on social work programmes linked to diversity, which is a clear strength of the research. Another significant contribution to our current understanding is the fact that the size of student cohort did not impact on progression rates except in pre-1992 universities (Universities which were established before 1992). A major limitation in this study was its focus on the broader categories such as 'BME' and 'people with disabilities'. Such categorisation poses difficulties when trying to understand the experiences of specific groups.

Research by Bartoli et al. (2008) provided a useful insight into the black African student experience at a university in the East Midlands. It focused specifically on the practice learning component of social work education and found that overall students experienced homesickness and various forms and levels of racism and discrimination during their studies. It outlined a rationale for the study and its target population, drawing upon findings from the GSCC (2007, 2009) which confirmed students of black African origin as the second largest group enrolled onto social work programmes in England. A major contribution of this study is its exclusive focus on black African students. The qualitative nature of the inquiry meant that students' narratives and experiences could be captured in rich descriptions. However, the number of participants (n=15) meant that their experiences did not represent the views of the wider black African student group. In addition, its use of focus group discussions and its localised nature meant that all participants belonged to the same university, making it difficult to provide a comparative analysis of their experiences. Students in that study

identified a need for a student-led support group where they could meet and discuss their concerns and achievements and which would offer a safe space for reflection, peer support and reflexivity. The group named by students as 'Padare' was established at the University of Northampton and continues to meet the needs of BAS (Bartoli 2013).

Writing about the practice learning experiences of BME students of social work, Thomas, Howe and Keen (2011) argue that although the social work profession attempts to minimise racist practice towards service users, there is still some way to go in order to replicate this in social work education and in practice learning settings more specifically. They argue that students from BME backgrounds can 'become isolated in unfamiliar placements' where there is minimal ethnic diversity (p.45). In their small-scale study, one respondent examined the difficulties associated with having English as an additional language, stating that 'professional social work language differed from everyday spoken English' (p.50) and how she had felt put down when her practice assessor responded to her cry for help by stating, 'I'm not your English teacher.' This sort of response mirrors what Sue (2005) refers to as 'microaggressions' where verbal, non-verbal and subtle put-downs are used as a means to perpetuate disregard for, and to undermine, minority groups. Whilst students in this study highlighted difficulties such as racism, lack of support and lack of preparedness on the part of teams and organisations to take on students, they provided insight into their positive experiences, which included proactive support from practice educators who also valued and respected diversity.

The Department of Health funded a study into the diversity and progression among social work students in England, the findings of which were subsequently disseminated through a number of publications (Bernard et al. 2011, 2013; Fairtlough et al. 2013; Fletcher, Bernard,

Fairtlough and Ahmet 2013) and is a major contributor to this body of knowledge.

The study by Bernard et al. (2011) focused on the experiences of marginalised groups studying social work in England. Lesbian and gay students, disabled students and BME students from across eight HEIs participated in this study. The BME participants described their experiences as blemished by racism and racist attitudes from their peers and from service users. The study utilised a qualitative methodology drawing upon grounded theory principles. Whilst this was a large study examining the experiences of ‘marginal students’ of social work in the UK, the richness of the data gathered from BME participants was significant in that it provided powerful oral representations of their experiences of social work education, which included placements. One unfavourable finding from this study was that BME students named racist assumptions and stereotypical attitudes as impacting negatively on their experiences. Similar to previous research by Aymer and Bryan (1996), Wainwright (2009), Hussein et al. (2008) and Dillon (2010), the use of the umbrella term ‘BME’ meant that the specific experiences of black African students became embedded in the overall narrative. That said, there were instances where the ethnicity of the respondent was evident due to the nature of the comment. For example, a comment about ‘African accents’ provided an opportunity for individual comments and narratives by black African students to be highlighted. In addition, students’ experiences of the whole social work programme, not only practice learning, were sought.

More recently, Tadam (2014) undertook a pilot study into the experiences of black African students studying social work in the Midlands and concluded that their experiences were not always positive. The two participants experienced a range of difficulties, including what they describe as unfair and ill treatment, and consequently were awarded fail grades by their PEs. A major limitation to this study is the small number of research participants – two – whose

experiences are by no means representative of a wider BAS population. The value of this study is that it provided a rationale not only for further examination of this area but also for the involvement of a larger sample size of participants. The students in this pilot study felt marginalised, excluded and disrespected, resulting in one of them referring to an incident where her practice educator 'put the phone down on me, saying she didn't understand my accent' (p.139).

Of particular concern was the view by a participant that her failure on placement had been pre-determined. She stated that despite trying her hardest, 'Within a few weeks it was clear that nothing I was going to do would be OK' (p.139).

Overall the participants in this pilot study conceded that they preferred to have failed their placements (thus ending sooner) than to have continued to undergo daily micro-aggressions and undermining. Another contribution of this study is its use of CRT as a theoretical and methodological framework (Hylton 2012) to make sense of participant narratives. The study concludes with some suggestions about how BAS experiences could be enhanced on placement.

Nzira (2011) draws upon qualitative data generated from her research into the experiences of African social work students at the University of Reading, UK. She examines the importance of education, which one participant considers as central 'enhancing employment prospects' especially as 'higher education is synonymous with better opportunities' (p.73). Forty survey questionnaires were administered to former and existing students of African origin with 36 responses being returned and all questions thoroughly answered. This study focused on the experiences of black African social work students working with African families. The synergies between Nzira and the current study lie in the responses to questions such as 'What

do you consider to be the main pressures experienced by African families living in the UK in relation to education and employment?’ (Nzira 2011: Appendix 1), where participants named discrimination and racism as hindering their educational and employment opportunities.

Hillen et al. (2013) offer a Scottish perspective in relation to outcomes for BME students studying social work in Scotland following evidence that a higher number of BME students were taking longer to complete their studies or were failing when compared to their white Scottish peers. This study utilised semi-structured qualitative interviews with ten BME students and 17 tutors from six universities and describes the range of BME ethnicities as African, Asian, European and American. The key findings relate to personal pressures, discrimination, placement issues, language, literacy and differences in perceptions of social work. Whilst this study adds to what is known about BME students in social work, it is specific to Scotland and draws upon a wide range of ethnic minority individuals. In some cases, participants confirmed their ethnicity through their responses. For example, a respondent of African origin referred to difficulties ‘understanding and avoiding plagiarism’ (p.13). Whilst this study is located geographically outside the interest of this current study, it provides insights into PE perspectives which this thesis has declined to interrogate. For example, a PE suggested the presence of institutional racism embedded in Scottish culture stating that a local authority had refused to offer a placement to a BME student on the grounds that it would be ‘unfair to the service user’ (p.17) due to the student’s ‘language difficulties’.

In her study on the impact of gender in failing students, Furness (2012) reported cultural differences, patriarchy and authority as being a cause of the poor relationship between a PE and the student. In her particular example, the practice educator was white and the student who had failed was described as a black African male. The practice educator cited



examples where the student showed deference towards the male manager but failed to complete tasks she set, missed appointments and generally displayed a lack of respect for her. The study concluded that male students and students from BME backgrounds are more likely to fail practice placements than any other group (Furness 2012). The implications of this outcome will be explored within my area of inquiry.

Research suggests that these issues are not specific to England or the UK as studies from Australia, the USA, Canada and South Africa appear to suggest similarities in terms of experiences of minority groups studying social work. For example, a recent Australian study by Gair, Miles, Savage and Zuchowski (2014) which examined the experiences of Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on social work placements concluded that racism and white privilege contributed to students' poor experiences. More worryingly, it identified these encounters as being present in the daily placement experiences. It can be argued that whilst the students in this study are Indigenous and are considered the traditional 'owners' of Australian land, the BAS studying social work in the UK are largely first generation immigrants with many recently settled. This evidence suggests that skin colour is a significant marker of difference and another system of oppression (Harris 2008) as it is the colour of their skin which is a shared attribute between black African students and students of Australian aboriginal heritage. Masocha (2015) acknowledges the significance of race relations borne out of colonial legacy and with reference to the participants in this study, there are further synergies between students of Aboriginal heritage in Australia and students of black African heritage in the UK.

Another Australian study, by Harrison and Ip (2013), which examined the experiences of international students studying social work in Australia introduced the term 'inclusive field education' to refer to a form of placement/field education which meets the needs of its

diverse student population. They argue that the university as an institution is responsible for ensuring that all the students it enrolls have a level playing field. This view is corroborated by Fletcher et al. (2013) who argue that HEIs in the UK should strive to move beyond equal access to university and concentrate on equal outcomes for its students from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Using what she refers to as the three C's (capital, competition and credentialism), Dillon (2010) considers the impact of widening participation on the outcomes for BME students from access to social work courses into HEI's. The mixed methods study involved fifty-five students who completed questionnaires in relation to social backgrounds, 12 students who were close to completion of their access courses completed a HEI choice questionnaire. Also, 21 students took part in focus groups and interviews were conducted with four students and three tutors. Overall, the study concluded that barriers to HEI existed disproportionately in respect of BME students and that HEI's need to address their admissions processes in terms taking into account applicants social locations and contexts. The strengths of this study lie in its adoption of a social justice and critical race perspectives utilising a mixed methods approach to examine the challenges experienced by BME students when trying to enter HEI's to study social work in England. In addition, this study contributes to an understanding of BME students on Access courses and their experiences of gaining access to Universities. It gives a useful contextual background to the issue of admissions discussed later in this thesis, and concludes that students needed to be made aware of the differences between pre and post 1992 HEIs as this appeared not to be discussed or explained to Access students seeking admission to University. Like other studies already examined, the use of 'BME' has restricted the focus on students of black African ethnicity which is considered a limitation in relation to this study.

This thesis is also interested in discovering any strategies which can enhance the placement experiences of BAS in England and in this regard Cropper (2000) and Singh (2006) have articulated the importance of support for black students in the form of mentors and black practice educators. One of the outcomes of the Bartoli et al. (2008) study was the formation of a student support group which students owned and named ‘Padare’, a Shona term for meeting place. This support group, localised to the University of Northampton, has contributed to a more positive black social work student experience over the last five years Bartoli (2013). Mentoring schemes, such as the kind set up in Goldsmiths University, for black students of social work is also reported to have resulted in some positive experiences for BME students (Bernard et al. 2011).

In relation to students from ethnic minority backgrounds who may be isolated on placement, Doel (2010) proposes the use of support groups to minimise isolation and exclusion.

The main themes arising from existing studies, specifically related to practice learning and BME students, include:

- students’ misunderstanding of placement requirements (Bartoli et al. 2008; Thomas et al. 2011)
- students’ personal circumstances and cultural issues (Bartoli et al. 2008; Bernard et al. 2011, 2013)
- practice educator/assessor relationships and attitudes (Razack 2001; Lefevre 2005; Wainwright 2009; Cropper 2000; Parker 2010; Baum 2011; Furness 2012; Tedam 2014).

It is significant to note that supervision is a core activity within the practice educator–student relationship and it has been suggested that ‘supervision is more than a professional activity;

it is also a personal relationship requiring a great deal of investment of time, knowledge, skill, and commitment' (Everett et al. 2011: 262.) This is an important consideration for any research into the area of practice learning experiences in social work.

#### 1.4 Conclusion

This review of the literature has sought to provide a background to this current study by highlighting key research in relation to my area of interest and has evidenced the timeliness and relevance of this study. It seeks to add to the limited literature about the experiences of BAS on social work programmes by utilising narrative inquiry and centralising race, drawing upon critical race theoretical frameworks to examine how the experiences of this group contributes to our understanding of the slower progression and poorer attainment at the point of qualification.

### 2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the philosophical and conceptual principles which underpin this study and to describe the research design and data collection processes. Illustrating and explaining one's research approach, according to Creswell (2007) is an effective strategy in supporting the validity of social research and also demonstrates an accountable and transparent research process. This research adopted an interpretive qualitative approach to examine the practice learning (placement) experiences of black African students (BAS) studying social work in universities in England. Silverman (2011) presents qualitative research as the exploration of the experiences of ordinary people. Using narrative interview methods and reflective diaries this critical race inquiry offers an opportunity for documenting and understanding the experiences of this ethnic minority group in social work practice learning in England. A key consideration was a commitment to social justice and seeking appropriate approaches which would not only acknowledge and respect the experiential knowledge of black African students of social work but that would also result in critical reflection about 'pedagogy, curriculum and research agendas' using a critical race theoretical framework (Solórzano 1998: 7).

### 2.2 Critical race theoretical framework

There are a number of approaches to studying and researching issues of race such as racial formation (Omi and Winant 1993), the ethnicity paradigm (Carter and Fenton 2010) and class-based perspectives (Cole 2009a). However, these will not be rehearsed here as they have not been considered for this study. Critical race theory (CRT) is in its infancy in the

UK (Cole 2009a) when compared to the United States where it emerged in the 1970s (Taylor et al. 2009). In the UK, its application has been primarily within the field of education by researchers such as Gillborn (2006a, 2006b), Preston (2007) and Chakrabarty (2006a, 2006b).

CRT originated in the United States in the 1970s by scholars of critical legal studies with the work of Derek Bell (1980) and Alan Freeman (1978) who felt that the pace of reform after civil rights was slow and had not produced sufficient changes in race relations as originally envisaged. CRT 'spans many disciplines and the work often crosses epistemological boundaries. There is no single authoritative statement of CRT rather, it is a developing perspective with constant changes and debate' (Gillborn 2009, p.64). It has been described as theory and methodology (Tuitt 2012). The theoretical basis of CRT is drawn from history, ethnic studies, women's studies, law and sociology (Taylor et al. 2009) and its pedagogic relevance is aimed towards transforming structures that maintain subordinate racial positions both within and outside spaces of learning. As a methodological tool, Parker and Lynn (2002) argue, CRT's use of narrative/life stories, its clear recognition of the importance of researcher positionality in meeting research validity and its epistemological grounding aligns to qualitative research. These views will be examined in greater depth later on in the thesis. Scholars such as Ladson-Billings drew upon CRT in education as an analytical framework to understand inequalities in higher education in the USA. Johnson-Bailey and Lee (2005) provide a useful examination into the way in which race impacts on the educational experiences of black people in higher education classrooms and associated spaces of learning. They suggest that gender and class differentiations are in themselves insufficient to explain the progression, attainment and future employability of black students in higher education and value the intersectionality of these characteristics. In relation to higher education, Back (2004: 5) asserts that 'racism has damaged reason, damaged academic and civic freedoms and

damaged the project of education itself’.

In the UK, Hylton (2012) suggests that an increase in the use of CRT in research has been witnessed over the last ten years and in a range of disciplines such as education, sports, gender and business studies. This study provides further opportunity to integrate CRT into social work education in the UK. CRT attempts to place the ‘black’ voice and experience at the centre, challenges discrimination, racism and oppression and is underpinned by social justice. For the purposes of this study, CRT is defined as ‘a form of oppositional scholarship which challenges the experiences of whites as a normative standard and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color’ (Taylor 1998: 122).

Scholars of CRT differ in their articulation of its key principles with Solórzano (1998) articulating five key principles and Delgado and Stephancic (1993) proposing six which assist in understanding the experiences of black people in educational settings. It provides a framework for researchers to centralise race and promotes the acknowledgement of the experiences, history, language and culture of black people (Jett 2012). As a framework, CRT has been used to examine marginalised and discriminated against black people for whom education produces differential outcomes in comparison to white peers (Savas 2014). A summary of the six principles used in this thesis is provided below:

- 1) CRT sees racism as endemic, a daily occurrence for black and minority ethnic groups and therefore not an abnormal experience. Proponents argue that if racism is seen as being produced and reproduced in systems, organisations and processes it often goes unnoticed by people who are racially privileged. For BAS studying social work, Tedam (2014) has argued that this was the experience of the participants in her study. Acknowledging that racism is real, according to Harper (2012), and is experienced in

varying overt and covert forms on a regular basis may offer a useful starting point in trying to understand its effects and implications for the educational experiences of black people.

- 2) A second principle of CRT is that it promotes and advances the voices of the otherwise voiceless and marginalised. This view further argues that marginalised people are better placed to 'tell their story' than dominant groups who have the tendency to recount these on their behalf. This has been referred to by other authors as 'counter storytelling' which 'help[s] us understand what life is like for others, and invite[s] the reader into a new and unfamiliar world' (Delgado and Stefancic 1993, p.41).

DeCuir and Dixson (2004) contend that counter storytelling enables black people to tell their stories in their own words thereby contradicting the 'othering' discourse. In their study of the experiences of two black students in an independent school in the United States, Decuir and Dixson conclude that the student's narratives served to illuminate their experiences of being educated in a primarily white institution and produced alternative versions of their educational journeys. Storytelling lends itself to narrative inquiry which is the methodological approach adopted for this study and which according to Riessman (2002: 220) enables us hear 'voices that we record and interpret'.

- 3) A third dimension of CRT is that of differential racialisation in which dominant groups possess the power to decide which groups are deserving and undeserving, the 'in' group who benefit from resources, opportunities for success and other privileges whilst the 'out' group lack access to similar opportunities for success and associated privileges. For example, in the 1990s, 'black' social workers were employed en



masse to work as 'ethnic specialists' (Singh 1992) in social services departments and were continually reminded that they had been employed because of their race. This kind of strategy represents the differences in opportunity offered to 'black' social workers whose expertise resulted in them being in the 'in group' and worthy of employment. The funding for these posts was enshrined in s.11 of the Local Government Act 1966 (Singh 1992). This principles argues that whiteness is property as it gives agency to bearers of this identity.

- 4) The fourth principle of CRT argues that race is a social construction and these constructs often contribute to the outcomes of black people. Where these constructs are positive, then BAS will be more likely to succeed and where they are negative or largely emphasise a deficit model, then BAS face additional barriers in trying to navigate and change them into successful outcomes.
- 5) Interest convergence is another dimension of CRT which proposes that the majority group are only interested in the minority group when there are benefits of a material, psychological, political or other gain to be made. This argument resonates with the core of this thesis, which is that BME students' progression and attainment affects wider university outcomes and league tables – hence a growing interest across UK HEIs to devise strategies to improve the progression and attainment of this minority group.
- 6) The final principle of CRT is around what is called the intersectionality of identities. Race is the main concern of CRT. However, it recognises the importance of social class, religion, sexuality, gender and the implications for outcomes within academic discourse. A study by Bowl (2001) into the experiences of non-traditional students in UK higher education concluded that being female, older and of BME heritage created

a 'dislocation' for students often resulting in them having to navigate difficult and multiple circumstances in order to achieve success.

Critical race methodologies emphasise the importance of listening to stories and 'counter' narratives to make sense of the experiences of black people. Closson (2010) urges researchers to avoid colour blindness, which perpetuates racism. She suggests that once we accept racism as endemic, we can begin to identify who is infected and to what degree and then begin to consider how these infections can be addressed. Within the field of higher education, Reynolds (2010) argues that CRT allows interrogation of the ways in which race and racism influence the experiences of black people in higher education. CRT also challenges the view that attainment and achievement are necessarily based on meritocracy.

The use of CRT in social work education and research globally is relatively new and sparse (Hall 2005; Young and Zubrzycki 2011) and even more so in the UK context (Mattsson 2013). This has led to researchers such as Constance-Huggins (2012) proposing CRT as a useful framework to be embedded into social work education and suggesting that CRT has a 'natural fit' with social work. Although no explicit links are made with social work placements, the paper acknowledges the role of CRT in shaping thinking and intervention with service users.

### 2.3 Critique of critical race theory

Like many other theoretical perspectives, CRT has its critics, both in terms of its theoretical underpinnings and also as a research methodology. One of the main critics of CRT is Mike Cole whose principal arguments are around use of the terms 'white supremacy' and the positioning of race over class. In relation to 'white supremacy', Cole (2009a) identifies inherent difficulties in the term, stating that it homogenises people of white ethnicity

without effectively taking into account the differences. He argues that the term 'white' does not address anti-Gypsy Roma traveller racism, Islamophobia, or xeno-racism (racism against the stranger). He instead proposes the term 'racialisation' used by Miles (1989) which is based on the idea that the object of study should not be 'race' itself but the process by which it becomes meaningful in a particular context. The use of the term 'white supremacy' is avoided within this thesis and instead the terms 'white privilege' and 'whiteness as property' have been adopted to explain the ways in which being white affords greater recognition, respect and agency to those who bear these characteristics.

CRT asserts that 'racism' is a fundamental part of US society and this has been criticised as concerning, especially because of the efforts being made to minimise racism and its impact on minority groups in the USA (Savas 2014). Similarly, in the UK legislation exists to afford protection to people who belong to vulnerable minority groups. However, the death of Stephen Lawrence and the Macpherson Enquiry resulted in the naming and recognition of institutional racism which provided a renewed insight into the ways in which racial disadvantage manifests through conscious and unconscious ways and through organisational, procedural and structural processes (Pilkington 2011).

According to Delgado and Stefancic (1998), 'the color line is not the work of a few racist individuals but a system of institutions and practices' (p.616). CRT claims that human actions cannot be separated from the institutional arrangements of society. This idea is very much in line with what Pilkington (2011) means when he suggests that there are organisational processes which intentionally or unintentionally disadvantage specific ethnic minority groups. Guiner and Torres (2002) further add to this position when they state that 'current institutional arrangements do not work for people of color because they were not created with their assumptive worldview and it is not possible to address the present racial hierarchy

without addressing these institutional arrangements' (cited in Vaught 2008, p.578). Nor is it possible to understand individuals' personal narratives outside of these arrangements. In other words, it is natural and effortless for most members of the dominant group to fit into existing institutional arrangements; this is not so for members of non-dominant groups.

Adding to the critique of CRT, Cole (2009a) suggests that by prioritising 'race' over class, CRT is theoretically inadequate in explaining racist occurrences in capitalist societies. CRT centralises race whilst acknowledging and promoting the intersections with other aspects of identity.

Within this thesis, the limitations of CRT have been addressed in part by the author recognising the presence of institutional racism within HEIs and practice learning environments through the literature and data generated.

## 2.4 Researcher identity and positionality

A qualitative approach was thought to be the most appropriate for this study, primarily because of the emphasis it was placing on stories being told by the participants (Duncan 2005). The choice of qualitative methods was not pre-determined (Silverman 2011) but rather developed from my research interests, my position, the questions to be answered as well as what had been done before. This method was considered most suitable as it also synergises with CRT as an explanatory framework which favours qualitative, rich descriptions of experiences (Yosso 2006).

It has been argued that a researcher's positionality influences not only the type of research undertaken but also the interpretation of data and findings. Dunne, Pryor and Yates (2005: 29) propose that 'researcher identity is critical to the production of knowledge about the

complexities of the social world'. Miller and Donner (2008) advise that when writing about issues of culture, race and/or ethnicity, it is essential to identify and locate one's own identity. This is because categories such as gender, age, culture and so on can influence the area of inquiry. For this reason, I wish to self-identify as a black African female social work practitioner, with practice links to the UK Border Agency where I advise on child safeguarding matters relating to children at risk of removal from the UK, and as an educator with over ten years' teaching experience in the higher education sector in the UK. Born in Ghana, West Africa my formative primary education was in Canberra, Australia where my parents were located in duty to the country as diplomats. My secondary and university education were undertaken in Ghana, a country in West Africa with evidence of British colonial occupation. I trained as a social worker between 1992 and 1996 and so can relate to the complexities of social work education, especially since British welfare systems influenced how social work was taught in Ghana (Kreitzer, Abukari, Antonio, Mensah and Kwaku 2009). Following accreditation in 2000 of my qualifications by the Council of Education and Teaching in Social Work (CCETSW) in the UK, I began to practise as a social worker, rising to senior practitioner through to principal social worker supervisor within the children and families specialism before moving into higher education in 2006.

Over the years, my understanding of racism (covert and overt) has been heightened by personal experiences and the experiences of others within my professional and personal circles. Of particular relevance to this study is the ongoing tension between how students of black African origin are perceived and stereotyped within higher education in England and how this invariably impacts not only on their attainment and outcomes but also on their self-esteem and sense of self (Walker et al. 2008). My multiple identities (black, female, social work academic and researcher) afford me some benefits – albeit limited – but also present me

with numerous challenges (Ochieng 2010). I am therefore not invisible in this research, but by recognising the validity of what Riessman (1994: 135) views as an outlook shaped by values, social and cultural biography and emotions influence ‘the problems we choose, the ways we go about studying them’. I am effectively locating myself in my work and not claiming to be absent. All my participants are black African and the majority female and so by recognising that these similarities could result in an overlap of personal and professional experiences in the research relationship, I was adhering to what Ochieng (2010) referred to as altering my identity. Cultural sensitivity in research is important (Ridley 2005) and similarity in ethnic backgrounds of the researcher and participants can increase disclosure and be reassuring. However, researchers need to be alert to the fact that this does not necessarily guarantee better quality research (Sherman 2002). Asselin (2003) proposes a strategy for insider researchers, which is to gather data with their ‘eyes open’ but assuming that they know little or nothing about the phenomenon being studied. This is an interesting proposal and as the researcher, my only acquaintance with placements has been as a former practice educator and now as a university academic. As I have not had personal experience of undertaking social work placements in the UK, to some extent I am an outsider to that experience. However, my students have often shared with me their experiences of social work education and specifically practice learning, which has made me aware of how their experiences have impacted on their outcomes. The Bartoli et al (200) and Tedam (2014) studie has also heightened my awareness of the experiences some BAS face during practice learning in England.

I have continuously reflected on my identity as being ever-present in my research because according to Fook (2002: 135), ‘my emotions, values, social biography and institutional locations’ have influenced my choice of research questions. For example, my institutional

location and role make it imperative that recommendations about improving the educational outcomes for BAS are considered and operationalised. In addition to this, my use of CRT (chapter two) as an explanatory framework might produce interpretations which may not necessarily have synergies with my lived experiences. Fine and Weiss (1998: 17) caution researchers to consider ‘how to enable participants’ voices to be heard in ways that are not too strongly filtered through the researcher’s lenses’. Qualitative approaches emphasise the centrality of reflexivity in the research process which, according to Flick (2009), on the part of a researcher is a reflection of their: ‘...actions and observations in the field, their impressions, irritations, feelings which become data in their own right.’ (2009: 6). This reflexivity is captured in my own research diary (Appendix 2) and identifies a plethora of thoughts, ideas, dilemmas, frustrations and conclusions during this research process.

## 2.5 Theoretical and methodological frameworks

Yin (2009) suggests that a methodological design should be harmonised with research questions in order to fully address one’s area of inquiry. In reaching a decision about my research design, a number of assumptions were apparent: BAS had experiences on placement that were important to hear and understand; these experiences could assist us to understand the slower progression and lower attainment of this group of students; there was a place for ‘race’ within the discourse, which was likely to be perceived as contributing to their experiences on placement.

The research questions and assumptions seemed best to be approached using qualitative methods of data collection and explained using CRT due to the centrality of race. A number of studies of black students’ experiences in higher education have utilised CRT methodological approaches: Munoz (2009), Hiraldo (2010), Savas (2014) in the United States

of America, and in social work education research in the UK, Dillon (2010) ; Tedam (2014) and Masocha (2015). These have been examined in the literature review. An interpretivist approach was central to this study in that reality could not be divorced from language nor from the context in which language is situated (Mclaughlin 2012) and each of my eight participants would construct their reality uniquely. CRT champions the use of qualitative approaches with particular association to one of its principles– counter-storytelling. Storytelling, according to Parker and Lynn (2002), relies on participants’ thick descriptions to illuminate the influence of ‘race’ on their experiences. It supports Delgado-Bernal’s (2002) view that any story produced by others about the experiences of BME people is incomplete without hearing from BME people themselves who live that experience. Counter-story telling then provides a challenge to deficit theorising about the achievement gap between black people and their white peers (Love 2004). As an explanatory framework, CRT challenges traditional research paradigms and theoretical approaches which have been used to explain the experiences of black people (Milner 2008). These traditional approaches, for example the ‘colour blind’ discourse which claims that HEIs are race neutral, objective and function on meritocracy (Solórzano and Yosso 2002) therefore have obvious drawbacks for use with this particular inquiry. CRT offers a method of knowledge generation which listens to the perspectives of epistemologically marginalised and silenced groups such as BAS and connects the knowledge with practice in higher education. It proposes a framework for analysing the narratives of participants and advocates the centrality of black students when devising research questions, data collection, analysis and presentation of findings in research (Solórzano and Yosso 2009). Any study utilising CRT is aimed at empowering ‘human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class and gender’ (Cresswell 2007: 27). This study also employs a social justice position in that it seeks not only to give voice to the traditionally marginalised but also to illuminate and propose strategies that



could enhance the experiences of black students on social work placements, which according to Graham, Brown-Jeffy, Aronson and Stephens (2011) is also an incitement for action. As Shaw and Gould (2001: 15) state:

Qualitative research can support values of decreasing inequalities and increasing life chances of all citizens by documenting inequalities in lives and analysing precisely how social structures and social policies enhance and restrict opportunities for individuals and group.

## 2.6 Narrative inquiry

In considering which methodology would address the above, narrative inquiry (NI) was deemed to be an appropriate approach, primarily driven by the choice of CRT theoretical framework as proposed by Graham et al. (2011). Narrative inquiry, according to Clandinin and Huber (2010) is ‘a way of understanding and investigating the experiences through collaboration between the researcher and participants over time and place. In this study, I engaged the participants over a period of eight months from initial contact, through to recruitment, interviews, checking of transcripts and the return of reflective diaries. Narrative research does not set out to prove a hypothesis, nor does it recognise the existence of a single truth. Instead NI supports and recognises relativism and is sensitive to human experience (Polkinghorne 2007 and whilst CRT privileges race, it also values the individualised experiences of black people and their articulation of that experience, which supports Collins’ (2000) view that there can be no homogenous ‘black’ experience, as it intersects with other identities. Listening to these individual experiences is what Collins (2000) refers to as connecting with the knower. This is why Reissman (1993) refers to narrative as ‘subtle, complex and difficult to interpret’. Experiences are subjective and the aim of NI is to

understand from the participant's point of view 'what life means at the moment of telling' (Riessman 1994: 52). NI is considered as both a phenomenon and a methodology (Connelly and Clandinin 1999) in that narrative names the experience (stories) as well as being the mode of inquiry. Narrative approaches are heavily embedded in social work as practitioners interact with people's lived experiences and information in order to make decisions about intervening (Riessman and Quinney 2005). Narratives can be oral or written, with oral narratives enabling participants to elaborate on their stories uninterrupted (semi-structured interviews) whilst written narratives (reflective diaries) present the researcher with a finished product (Graham et al. 2011). The use of semi-structured interviews (oral) and reflective diaries (written) are two useful strategies to capture narrative data, which in CRT is referred to as storytelling and which Elbaz-Luwisch (2001: 134–135) proposes is:

A way of admitting the other into one's world and thus of neutralizing the otherness and strangeness.... Telling our stories is indeed a matter of survival: only by telling and listening, storying and restorying can we begin the process of constructing a common world.

The stories of black African students' experiences on social work placements emerged from the interviews and participant reflective diaries, which enabled the detailed articulation of their experiences.

This thesis adopts a constructionist ontology which aims to understand the meanings BAS attach to their placement experiences, using narratives. Social constructionism can be thought of in a multiplicity of ways, according to Stam (2001). Gergen's (1973) seminal work outlines knowledge as being culturally and historically specific and that there is no one set way of understanding a phenomenon outside of its socio-cultural setting. Social

constructionism according to Burr (2003) has many features and not all have to be present to claim a social constructionist approach in one's research. These features include: the relevance of language; cultural and historical situatedness; a critical opposition of knowledge which is taken for granted; the connectedness of knowledge and social action and the sustenance of knowledge through social processes. In applying these features to my research, connecting knowledge to social action, for example, supports the examination of BAS' experiences of social work placements and whether their slower progression and poorer attainment can be attributed to systems and processes outside their control. The boundaries of this thesis harmonise with many of these features in a number of ways. For example, the use of language which Burr (2003) explains as often resulting in practical consequences is articulated through the stories told by the BAS. Language use changes over time and this is significant for BAS participants, for all of whom English is an additional language and for whom their use of English language within placements was sometimes perceived as problematic. An interpretive epistemology focuses on making meaning, which in this research will be achieved through a CRT framework.

## 2.7 Sampling strategy

In keeping with a CRT framework and narrative approaches which propose the use of few participants in order to capture rich data it was envisaged that a maximum of ten (10) participants would be purposively recruited to take part in this study. A purposive sampling strategy was used to procure 'information-rich' participants from whom the most could be learned (Merriam 2009, p.77). Due to the nature of the research questions, participants had to meet certain criteria to be eligible to take part. They had to:

- self-identify as coming from a black African heritage

- be studying social work on a recognised and accredited programme in England at either masters or undergraduate level
- not be studying at the University of Northampton (see below for rationale)
- be currently undertaking practice learning or have had at least one previous placement.

Recruitment for the pilot study (Tadam 2014) resulted in additional participants who met the above criteria and who expressed an interest in being contacted as part of the larger doctoral study. These leads were explored and yielded three participants prior to the wider recruitment campaign. It was initially envisaged that ten participants would be preferable; however, in the end eight participants were interviewed with four agreeing to complete reflective diaries. Unfortunately, only two diaries were returned and have been considered within this thesis. According to Patton (1990), the

logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling. (p. 169)

In reaching the decision to exclude participants from the researcher's own university a number of considerations were taken into account.

- 1) Black African social work students in the researcher's university have participated in previous research (Bartoli et al. 2008, 2009; Bartoli 2013).
- 2) The researcher's prior knowledge of the participants and the implications of interviewing people who the researcher is familiar with (Garton and Copland 2010).

- 3) The need to broaden this research, which would include students from a range of HEIs across England to understand whether any parallels or differences existed. The participants eventually came from HEIs in the East of England, South East, North East, North West and Midlands. Participants' countries of origin were South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Zimbabwe and Nigeria.

### 2.7.1 Participant profiles

Table 1 Participant profiles

Name	Age /Gender	Country of origin	University location
<b>Vicky</b>	33/F	Zimbabwe	North East
<b>Grace</b>	40–45/F	Uganda	South East
<b>Jane</b>	43/F	South Africa	South East
<b>Ama</b>	33/F	Ghana	South East
<b>Tolu</b>	40/F	Nigeria	South East
<b>Tom</b>	35/M	Zimbabwe	East
<b>Mavis</b>	30–35/F	Kenya	North West
<b>Maki</b>	38/F	Zimbabwe	North West

All participants' names have been changed to protect their identities (Details on Table 1)

#### National heritage

That three of the eight participants are of Zimbabwean heritage is unsurprising given the high numbers of Zimbabwean social work students who anecdotally appear to be the second highest nationality within the African student population in the UK after students of Nigerian heritage (HESA 2013). In addition, Tinarwo (2015) identified Zimbabwe as being one of the major source countries for qualified social workers during the shortage in the UK and this may in part have contributed to the growing interest in social work education by people of Zimbabwean origin living in the UK.

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## Gender

Figure 1 represents the gender distribution of the research participants: one male and seven female participants, which is consistent with the national picture in relation to social work students, which shows a significantly higher proportion of female than male students (Hussein et al. 2008; Parker and Crabtree 2012).

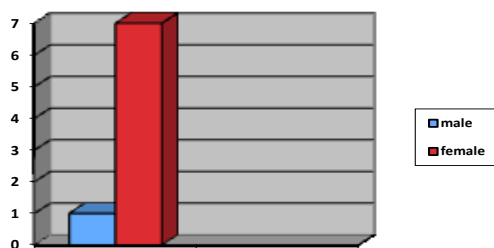


Figure 1 Gender of participants

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## Age

The majority of the participants (5) are in their thirties and three are in their forties. The age distribution of my participants mirrors studies by Bartoli et al. (2008), Dillon (2011) and Fairtlough et al. (2013), which found that BME students on social work programmes tended to be older than the general population of students (Bernard et al. 2011).

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## Programme of study

Two participants (Ama and Tolu) were enrolled on a masters level social work course and the other six participants were studying on BA programmes across the country. Ama and Tolu

are from the same university in the North West, and Maki and Mavis from the same university in the South East. This means that participant experiences are across six HEIs which all happen to be post-1992 universities, consistent with findings by Richardson (2013) that significantly higher numbers of BME students are located in post-1992 higher education institutions.



Figure 2 Level of study

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### 2.7.2 Methods of data collection

This study involved the use of two main methods of data collection: face-to-face semi-structured interviews which allowed for in-depth narrative accounts of participants' experiences, and reflective diaries which were available for participants to continue to record any critical incidents, feelings or experiences for an extended period during their placements. The decision to use these two methods seemed a logical one, considering the study's aims and questions as well as the location and number of research participants.

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### 2.7.3 Semi-structured Interviews

I chose the face-to-face, semi-structured, open-ended interview as my main data collection method. The rationale for using this method is that the semi-structured format allows the researcher to have some control over what questions are asked and any supplementary



questions or clarifications that may be needed. The open-ended nature of the questions also allows respondents to provide accounts as detailed as they deem appropriate and avoid monosyllabic responses to interview questions (Parker and Lynn 2002). It has been suggested by Fraser (2004) that researchers using narrative inquiry should be fully prepared for interviews by researching the historical, political and social context of participants' lives, and should avoid cross-examining participants and giving the impression that participant stories do not make sense to researchers. It proved difficult to research participants' lives prior to the interview except by way of general preparation in terms of reference to my inclusion criteria, which gave me some idea of the context for participants. I also ensured that my opening question allowed a level of rapport building and disclosure about their motivations to become social workers and other demographic information.

As useful as face-to-face interviews are, they have some limitations, one of which is resourcing (Schostak 2006). Depending on factors such as venue and convenience, researchers may have to travel some considerable distance in order to reach a participant to conduct interviews and this travel which had cost implications, especially as I recruited from across England with participants based in the North East, North West, South East and the Midlands.

Participants were sent the participant information sheet in advance of their interviews to allow them time to read the information and to opt out if they changed their minds about participating. However, I elected to provide copies of the interview questions at the start of interviews on the same day. Interviews lasted anywhere from 28 minutes to two hours with some participants providing more detailed responses than others through the use of follow-up questions as appropriate (Kvale 1996). Interviews were audio recorded using a recorder and

an application on an iPad as back-up (Dahlberg and MacCaig (2010).

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#### 2.7.4 Reflective diaries

Diaries have been used in a range of research designs, either on their own or in combination with other methods (Alaszewski 2006). Reflective diaries for my study captured critical incidents and experiences which occurred outside of the interview arrangement. Although the completion of diaries has been viewed as time-consuming by some researchers, its use within my research served as a bridge between the face-to-face interviews and the end of students' placements (Furness and Garrud 2010). The interview questions were left as a guide and focus for participants' recordings. According to Jacelon and Imperio (2005) diaries can and do provide clues to events and experiences which participants view as important or relevant to the study and are a useful data-collection strategy. Participants were offered the choice of bespoke dairies (diaries covered in African fabric) or hardback A4 note books during the data collection phase to use as an additional space for further reflection. Interestingly, four of the participants consented to complete reflective diaries and all chose the bespoke African fabric diaries. The main reasons for participants who opted out were that placements were nearing the end and participants felt that this would add to their workload. This view of diaries as additional workload is corroborated by Jacelon and Imperio (2005) who suggest that any requirement for participants to complete diaries that exceeds two weeks may 'tire out participants' (p.995), a view which is also supported by Wiseman, Conteh and Matovu (2005). It is for these reasons that I proposed flexibility of daily, weekly or monthly recordings as appropriate. I reflected on the ethical issues raised by this view and did not wish to disrespect nor disempower the participants by specifying how often they should make diary entries. There was the option to decline on the consent form and participants reserved the right to do so. For one participant though, the reflective dairy would afford her the

opportunity to reflect somewhere other than the required university reflective journal which was often also assessed. I was, however, aware of work by Furness and Garrud (2010) in which their research participants completed diaries for up to one year about their adaption after face surgery. They concluded that diary methods provided useful insights into the post-operative journeys of their participants and that the method has potential to provide 'immediate outlet for difficult emotions' and 'can replace talking' for participants with 'few supportive contacts' or where there is a fear of the consequences of talking (p.270). Participants in my study were provided with pre-paid recorded delivery envelopes to return completed diaries (Appendix 5). However, the return rate was low (2) and will be examined in the limitations section.

The findings from this study cannot be generalised to all BAS studying social work in England. However, it could be suggested that by and large BAS have experiences on social work placements which are worthy of exploration and dissemination if social work educators wish to understand what changes, if any, need to be made within practice learning. The data generated from the eight interviews and two reflective diaries, provides some insight into the experiences of BAS on social work placements and meets the requirements of a professional doctorate.

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#### 2.7.5 Ethical considerations

It could be suggested that registered social workers for whom ethical concerns are a matter of daily consideration should not be problematic (McLaughlin 2012). This suggestion is unrealistic when one considers the potential risks involved in social work research. Whilst many professions have their own codes of ethics such as the British Sociological Association and the British Psychological Association, Butler (2002) proposes a framework for ethical

social work research. This framework includes scope (which is when the researcher decides to whom and when the moral principles are applied), respect for autonomy, justice, doing good and the avoidance of harm and confidentiality. Whilst the application of these codes can be fluid and not necessarily linear, McLaughlin suggests that they need a ‘morally active researcher’ (p.55) to embed these codes within their research. These ethical codes bear synergies with CRT, for example in its commitment to justice and the empowerment of subordinated groups (Solórzano and Yosso 2002). The dilemmas between doing good for the ‘individual’ versus the ‘society/community’ is an ongoing one within the context of social justice and human rights. The profession of social work espouses these principles and it is through affording individuals their rights that a broader social justice agenda might be achieved, particularly in the area of higher education (Dillon 2010).

A formal application to the Research Degrees Board (RDB) at the University of Northampton was made and included a critical articulation of my ethical position and approach. Formal ethical approval was granted by the RDB in June 2014 following recommended amendments to specific areas of the research proposal. Once approval was received, I circulated recruitment emails via academic contacts teaching social work at different institutions across England. Interestingly, I started with contacts in the London area with the assumption that this would result in participants coming forward. I was wrong. I then decided to contact a few participants who had previously expressed their interest during the pilot study. This resulted in three participants. The other participants were recruited through word of mouth.

Each participant was contacted first by email and given a participant information leaflet and a consent form (Appendix 3). Interview dates were mutually agreed and the researcher travelled to the agreed venue local to the participant. Interview venues were chosen by the participants with two occurring in cafes and six in participants’ homes. Gill, Stewart,

Treasure and Chadwick (2008) support this approach by suggesting that the venue for interviews chosen by participants can enhance the quality of interview.

As part of my research approach, I drew upon the services of an 'independent external mentor' who phoned my participants after interviews and debriefed. Debriefing serves educational and ethical purposes. The use of this mentor was written into my ethics application and agreed. Participants were aware and had agreed to this third party having access to their phone numbers and ringing them after the interview (Appendix 3 Consent Form). The value of this arrangement was that this independent mentor was tasked with making contact with my participants after interviews and provided a channel for any concerns, complaints or areas of clarification. Whilst I had my supervisors to discuss my concerns with and to debrief, my participants may have felt constrained to do this through me and so I made the decision to engage a black female mentor who also has professional experience of working with emotion, trauma and grief. This was a significant ethical consideration.

Qualitative research involves detailed and specific narratives from its participants. This means that the content of interviews can sometimes result in participants being identified by people not involved in the study. Kaiser (2009) highlights such difficulties with her research about breast cancer sufferers, explaining that by deduction some of her research participants could have been identified from their accounts of their experiences. For this reason, the geographical location of HEIs, placement and PE details, have been anonymised to protect participants' identity. Baez (2002) cautions against changes to facts such as age, sexuality, gender and race as this could have a profound impact on the findings of the study. Names, on the other hand, can be changed to protect anonymity and pseudonyms are an effective protective strategy for maintaining participant confidentiality. For this reason, I offered

participants the option of giving themselves a pseudonym. However, only one participant took up this invitation. The remaining seven asked that the researcher allocate a pseudonym. I was mindful about participants' names and for the seven participants I chose to allocate a pseudonym which reflected the names by which they are currently known (traditional/cultural names or 'western' names).

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#### 2.7.6 Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. The benefits of self-transcription have been immense, resulting in familiarity with the content. This familiarity with data resulted from the multiplicity of times I listened to the audio recordings of interviews which enabled me to embed myself in the narratives. This has enabled ongoing reflexivity in this research endeavour (Kvale 1996:14), which is defined as 'the asymmetrical power relations of the research interviewer and the interviewed subject'. The reflexive journal has enriched the study design as well as contributing to the trustworthiness, objectivity, transparency and accountability of the interpretation of outcomes (Finlay 2002).

Following transcription, I resolved to code my interview data manually, organising them into thematic areas using colour codes on the computer rather than using NVivo, which according to Bazeley (2007) enables researchers to manage and analyse vast amounts of qualitative data. NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, according to Hilal and Alabri (2013) can ensure that researchers are methodical, thorough and attentive in relation to their data in the five areas of managing data, managing ideas, querying data, modelling and reporting however NVivo can also be a slow process and has the potential to distance the researcher from their data (Kidd and Finlayson 2009)

Data from interviews and diaries were thematically analysed using an inductive approach, which according to Braun and Clarke (2006) is a useful method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Frith and Gleeson (2004) perceive inductive approaches as patterns which are strongly linked to the data and therefore 'bottom up'. Clarke and Kitzinger (2004) acknowledge that themes capture central ideas in relation to the research question and offer a level of patterned responses across data. The data revealed two broad themes of 'racism' and 'negotiating racism' with sub- themes emerging from these. The written data gathered from the two participant reflective diaries were also coded into the themes and sub themes mentioned above. An example of this process is given overleaf and further examples in Appendix 12.

Table 2 Example of coding

Participant quotes	Initial coding	Interpretation	Final coding
<p>“I think it is best for a student to go into placement with a willingness to learn with enthusiasm”</p> <p>“Whatever is going on around me, I’m not going to look at it at all”</p> <p>“I wanted to continue with my placement, I didn’t want to walk away from my learning opportunity”</p> <p>“being a black person, I’m resilient. I’ve been through a lot”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student’s personality, resilience or motivation</li> <li>• Students not wanting to complain or voice concerns</li> <li>• Students not giving up, persevering and continuing despite the odds</li> <li>• Student’s external support systems</li> </ul>	<p>Considerations pertaining to the student that enabled them to complete placements successfully</p>	<p>Coping</p>

### 2.7.7 Reliability and validation

It has been argued by Cresswell (2007) that there are at least eight strategies which could give any research strategy a good level of validity. These strategies include: thick and rich descriptions, triangulation, refining and reviewing the research strategy as it proceeds, member checking, audits by external audiences and peer reviewing. Cresswell also suggests that at least two of these strategies are used for any one study. In relation to this study, I explicitly utilised four of these strategies – for example, in undertaking a pilot study, the research questions were reviewed and amended, presented to an external audience via conference papers (Appendix 10), and utilised thick participant narratives in the chapters to follow. Narrative inquiry is not without its critics; with researchers such as Hammersley



(2000) describing the inability of narrative research to provide solutions for the problems it unearths and articulates. A key expectation from this study is the illumination of the experiences of BAS, and while there is unlikely to be a ‘quick fix’ to any problems which come to light, there will be clear and robust recommendations about the ways in which the problems might be addressed in the longer term. For a start, practice guidance (Appendix 9) has been developed from this research. Other critics have suggested that narrative research is time and labour intensive (Gubrium and Holstein 2001), hence the recommendation that participant numbers are kept low. These and other criticisms of narrative research do not, however, undermine the validity of this strategy, especially as it aligns closely with my theoretical approach. In addition, critics of CRT have identified as problematic its reliance on ‘truth’ claims, suggesting that it offers a one-sided view which often draws sympathy (Duncan 2006). The issue of truth claims in NI is a complex one, especially with qualitative research (Polkinghorne 2007). Consequently the procedures used were robust and transparent. Eight participants from six different institutions across England have described their experiences of social work practice learning and two have provided written diary entries. Transcripts were sent to participants for checking and emails received with areas for correction and/or confirmation that the transcript was a true representation of their interviews.

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#### 2.7.8 The pilot study

It has been suggested by Sampson (2004) that the use of a pilot study can present an opportunity to address any potential problems with the research questions, design or implementation plans, which can assist researchers in avoiding last-minute difficulties. The pilot study was conducted between December 2013 and February 2014 and one of the main reasons for undertaking the pilot study was to ‘test’ my own vulnerability in terms of my emotional capacity to undertake what is effectively sensitive research with people from a

similar cultural heritage (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong 2007). This need to 'test' my emotional capacity followed a crucial point in my career where I was struggling due to experiencing racism within the academy. My dual identities of being both black and female resulted in experiences of being undermined, my achievements minimised and being at the receiving end of micro-aggressions and overt racism (Vakalahi and Starks 2010). I wanted to know how I would react/respond to participants' placement narratives, if for example they resonated with my own experiences. Another reason for the pilot study was to ensure fit between my research questions, methods of data collection and my conceptual framework (CRT) (Kim 2010). Following the pilot an additional question directly related to 'race' was included in the interview schedule in recognition of CRT and the importance of foregrounding race. Also, the inclusion of a reflective diary as another method of data collection was added to the main study as a direct result of the pilot study. This would enable participants who have ongoing experiences and reflections during their placements to have a space to document this. Whilst the use of pilot studies is encouraged, particularly for novice researchers (Fonger 2011), there are a number of limitations which need to be considered. One limitation relates to contamination of findings (Peat, Mellis, Williams and Xuan 2002) which is when either data from the pilot is used for the main study or when participants from the pilot are approached to take part in the main study. It has been reported by Prescott and Soeken (1989: 60) that pilot studies are likely to be 'under discussed, underused and underreported'. Consequently, the findings from this pilot are reported in a published peer-reviewed article (Tadam 2014) and no participant nor their data is reused in this study except by way of citation. This was also an area addressed in the application for ethical approval. Bryman (2007) argues that the earlier research questions are identified, the better the opportunity for the researcher to decide on the methods to collect data. Indeed, he views this

as a 'crucial first step', another reason for undertaking the pilot study.

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### 2.7.9 Limitations of study

It has been suggested that every research study has limitations and this exploration into the placement experiences of black African students of social work is no different.

First, the sample size: whilst a sample of eight (8) participants is consistent with my qualitative methodological approach (narrative and CRT) it is small. Consequently the findings cannot be generalised to other BAS studying social work in England, although the findings may resonate with BAS studying other professional courses with a placement learning component. Also, the use of reflective diaries appeared not to have worked on this occasion. To begin with, only four students agreed to make further contributions using the diaries however in the end only two participants (Vicky and Grace) returned their diaries. Despite the diary entries not being extensive their value cannot be underestimated as they provided emotional data as well as data which reflected a current concern or incident, which Spowart and Nairn (2014) suggest adds value to any study of participants' experiences.

The nature and requirements of this doctoral award has further limited the breadth of this study but not the depth. Not all the data generated has been used in this thesis and so it is considered that a case study approach, may have been beneficial.

Another limitation is the issue of validity through participant self-reporting. Freeman (2011: 544) argues that 'validity in qualitative research refers to the characteristic of a study design that convinces others of its soundness or quality'. Whilst I have adhered to what is perceived as good research practice – such as utilising a pilot study, being guided by a theoretical framework, the use of multiple methods of data collection, transcription and member

checking – the fact that participants self-reported could indicate that the narratives they shared are not a true representation of their experiences.

Despite the high numbers of BME students reported to be studying in London (Elevation Networks Trust 2012), this study attracted no participants from HEIs in London despite beginning the recruitment via a social work academic at a London university. This is considered a limitation as the location of a university may have resulted in a different kind of experience which could have enriched this study further.

The recruitment of a single male participant, whilst consistent with the reported low numbers of men studying social work in England (Parker and Crabtree 2012), is considered to be another limitation of this study and it would have been useful to have had additional male participants as this may have presented opportunities to hear a range of experiences from a male perspective. Furness (2012) has also argued that men are more likely than women to fail their placements or discontinue their social work training and it would have been beneficial to understand the implications of this for black African males studying social work.

A challenge in undertaking this study is that it did not attract any UK-born African participants and consideration has been given to why this might have been the case. Using the category of 'Black African' may in part be the reason for this, and perhaps the use of Black British/African might have resulted in participants who were UK born and whose experiences may or may not have differed from the African-born participants.

## 2.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide the context and rationale for my choice of methodological and theoretical approaches. The most important rationale was the absence of research utilising these two approaches in social work practice learning in the UK, thus providing a direct and obvious original contribution to knowledge. Additional reasons have already been highlighted in the preceding discussion in the context of the value of CRT and its relationship with narrative inquiry. The chapters to follow will share and analyse the research findings and attempt to highlight the connections (or lack of) with CRT.

### 3.1 Introduction

In my opinion, I think one area that racial background has influence is the area of placement. (*Tolu, interview, June 2014*)

In this chapter I present and analyse the findings from the study into the experiences of BAS in social work placements in England. As discussed earlier, a thematic approach was used to organise the data in categories which were recurring across participant narratives. The findings have been presented under two broad storylines (narratives of racism and narratives of negotiating racism), which broadly highlight the experiences of BAS on placements and directly address the research questions. A number of sub-stories (themes) were identified and outlined. By drawing extensively on the narratives provided by the participants, the findings have provided a mix of results.

The main finding from this study was that racism was a significant contributing factor to participants' placement experiences, and this is captured in Tolu's comment used at the beginning of this chapter and will be elaborated upon in the subsequent analysis. Other findings from this study were that:

- BAS rarely perceive their placement experiences as positive, experiencing discrimination, racism and oppressive behaviours frequently.
- Utilising personal resilience, determination and avoiding conflict proved useful coping strategies to circumvent difficulties on placement.
- BAS experienced micro-aggressions and micro-invalidations routinely on placements.

- Relationship difficulties between BAS and their PEs created poor experiences on placement.
- BAS felt excluded, isolated, invisible and avoided whilst on placement.
- There are practices that guarantee poor placement experiences and outcomes.
- There are strategies which can enhance placement experiences and minimise poor placement outcomes.

### 3.2 Part one: Narratives of racism

This section presents participant narratives which have been interpreted by the researcher to reflect broader sentiments of covert, overt and institutional racism experienced by BAS on placement. This racism came from PEs, colleagues/peers, service users and in some cases their universities. Consequently it is important to begin with a discussion about the meaning of racism within this context.

Racism escapes a precise and concrete definition as it is broad and difficult to define exactly. An understanding of the concept has been previously examined in the introduction. However, Dominelli (2008) suggests that racism exists on a structural level as well as on a personal level. Structural racism as a term refers to disadvantage which is perpetuated towards BME people through institutions and societal structures. This type of racism often results from the availability of power and resources to disempower and keep BME people from progressing. Personal racism refers to negative feelings, thoughts which encourage the denial of equality and dignity towards black and minority ethnic people, operationalised through individual prejudice. Racism can be overt (obvious) or covert (subtle) and while overt racism appears to be decreasing, the more subtle and hidden racisms persist. According to Harries (2014) it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify and name racism as it continues to be denied

and silenced. This silencing of race results in a lack of acknowledgement of the presence and effects of racism. The narratives of racism provide a number of themes through which the experiences of BAS are examined and explained. They collectively identify covert and overt messages of otherness, resulting in differential and unequal treatment of black and white students on placements. Race and ethnicity are considered significant markers of difference and for these participants this was reinforced by the behaviours and attitudes of their PEs. Much of this can be directly linked to the principles of CRT, the theoretical framework used within this study.

A growing acknowledgement and use of the term unconscious bias in higher education (ECU 2013) requires further examination within this thesis. Unconscious bias refers to:

a bias that we are unaware of, and which happens outside of our control. It is a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences. (ECU 2013: 1)

This is a useful concept that can assist in making sense of the experiences of BAS on placements and reference will be made to this as the thesis progresses.

The figure below shows the four sub-themes relating to the broader narratives of racism. Relevant literature has been used as a prelude to examine each sub-theme before integrating participant narratives.



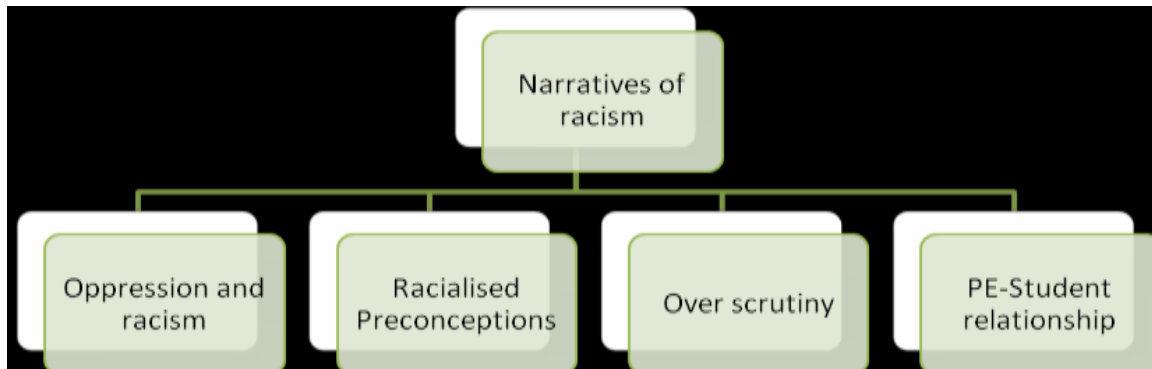


Figure 3 Narratives of racism

### 3.2.1 Oppression and racism narratives

The narratives of oppressive, discriminatory and racist behaviours and attitudes directed towards BAS were a key theme across the interview and diary data. Mavis' experience came at the start of her placement, making her narrative a useful starting point in this section of the analyses. She recalls:

My first supervision was just awful. My PE asked 'where have you come from, why are you in the country, why did you come here? I felt like I was in the Home Office. I felt frustrated. I felt that it was irrelevant what I was being asked. (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

This approach did not change and instead continued very much along a similar trajectory

within the same supervision session, where the PE is alleged to have probed further asking:

Why did you chose social work, are there social workers in Kenya what are they doing? There's a lot of FGM, so OK, why? Are you a migrant, are you a refugee? Did you take part in it? I sat there thinking 'really?' I must say I was very upset by that, actually I was really hurt. (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

Mavis' first supervision narrated above appeared to be an unpleasant experience likened to the experience of being in the Home Office. The Home Office holds overall responsibility for working on and deciding immigration cases, in addition to counter-terrorism, police and drugs policy (Home Office Online). In relation to immigration, the process of being granted leave to remain in the UK is usually a long and protracted one (Bosworth et al. 2011). Immigration authorities need assurance and reassurance that they are granting the right people permission to live and/or work in the UK for a period of time or indefinitely. The process therefore requires applicants to be screened, interviewed and checked in terms of their backgrounds and history. The Home Office interview is crucial in determining eligibility or otherwise for leave to remain (Bogner, Bewin and Herlihy 2010) and assesses applicants' credibility through disclosure of personal histories and information. The screening and interview process has been described by applicants as pressured, traumatic, painful, difficult, anxiety provoking and harsh (Bogner et al. 2010), resulting in applicants feeling powerless and distressed. It could be suggested that the PE had knowingly or unknowingly become part of what Warren and Mavroudi (2011) refer to as a surveillance culture which ensures that immigrants remained restricted in many areas of social and economic mobility in the UK. This first supervision for Mavis was not a positive experience and the PE appeared to be compounding the situation by proceeding to ask about specifics relating to female genital mutilation (FGM). Whilst the PE may be applauded for linking Mavis' country of origin

(Kenya) with a high incidence of FGM, it remains unclear what the rationale was for not only raising the issue but also for asking whether Mavis was a victim of FGM. One can only speculate how this PE would have reacted if Mavis had responded in the affirmative. The daily experience of racism in its many guises has become normal for many black African people in the UK (Likupe 2015). The comments made by this PE can be viewed as representing a discourse that singles out black people as 'other', thereby resulting in actions and omissions which reproduce this 'otherness' (Savas 2014). The insensitive use of language by this PE reflects exclusionary and stigmatising discourse which reinforces negative stereotypes about black people (Thompson 2006). Drawing upon CRT, Mavis' experience on the first day of her placement is a good predictor of the 99 days she is still to experience. A white student would enjoy the privilege of whiteness, would not have been asked this question and would not have been humiliated in the way in which Mavis describes. Furthermore the PE's lack of sensitivity is called into question as she appears not to understand or afford Mavis the common courtesy of the appropriateness of her questions. There is also the intersectionality principle here where it is envisaged that a black male from Kenya may not have been readily and easily linked to FGM, thereby making Mavis susceptible to this treatment as a result of her race, gender and nationality. Engelbrecht (2006), writing about social work education in South Africa, proposes the concept of 'cultural friendliness' and suggests it is important that supervisors on placements view students within their cultural contexts to avoid making assumptions and stereotyping students as lazy, uncooperative, hostile or unmotivated. This could be a useful framework for PEs to use when with students from different cultures to themselves.

Tolu acknowledges other daily forms of racism in the form of African accents. She recognises the barriers which may be present when working with an accent which is

perceived as difficult to understand.

A lot of times when you work with clients who are white British or maybe white, whatever, they struggle to hear what you say sometimes. And that sort of creates a barrier you know in your work with them. Forgetting that they also have accents. And you also struggle to hear them because I remember somebody telling me that people complained that they didn't they don't hear you when you speak maybe because of your accent. And by the time she finished I said excuse me, I struggle to hear them as well because everyone has got an accent. Just as I have got my accent they also have got an accent. They struggle to hear me I struggle to hear them. (*Tolu, interview, June 2014*)

Ama contributes to this view, explaining that it is discouraging when people view communication as compromised due to not understanding accents and the way in which some words are pronounced phonetically.

Phonetics, you will pronounce words differently and somebody will think what is she talking about? These things tend to discourage you in a way. (*Ama, interview, June 2014*)

The value of language as linguistic and cultural capital is an important one (Harrison 2012). It facilitates economic and social mobility and is a requirement for all study in the UK and elsewhere. The statement by Tolu about everyone having an accent is not untrue. However, the African accent attracts greater scrutiny and non-acceptance than other accents (Bernard et al. 2013; Harrison 2012). The concern here is that social work is based on forming and maintaining relationships with people, and language is central to the formation of these relationships and mediates daily practice. To be reminded, told and scrutinised about one's

accent can become a daily experience for BAS and again lends itself to normalising the experiences of racism for BAS. Indeed, reactions and responses to African accents can be as extreme as putting the phone down on a student due to claims of not understanding their accents as was the case for one participant in the Tadam (2014) study. Lindemann (2002) articulates quite clearly that there is a joint responsibility on both the speaker and the listener to ensure that communication is not unclear or misunderstood and that when foreign accents are criticised as difficult to understand, the burden of responsibility is located firmly with the speaker, contrary to what Lindemann (2002) suggests. Graddol (2004) estimates that by 2050 native speakers of English will be approximately 5 per cent of the global population and this provides a good rationale for becoming familiar with other accents. For social work PEs this rationale bears relevance to their practice and demonstrates a step in the right direction towards working with service users with 'foreign' accents. Harrison and Ip (2013), writing about international students studying social work in Australia conclude that a social work student's accent can in some instances prevent PEs from accepting them in their placements. Given how regularly students are expected to communicate, it is easy to see how BAS may face daily ridicule from colleagues, peers and service users whilst on placement. Such a situation makes it easy for the reconstruction of racism within everyday social work placements.

Good communication is acknowledged as central to social work practice (Nicholas and Kerr 2015) and its value cannot be over-emphasised. It is not the intention of this thesis to argue to the contrary. Instead, what this study wishes to highlight is the intolerance, impatience and outward show of disrespect experienced by some of the BAS in relation to accents which have been socially constructed as unwelcome and problematic.

Evidence of oppressive practice continued to emerge from participants' narratives, with Jane expressing her frustration with an organisation where there appeared to be a lack of understanding and appreciation of disabilities and the implications for hosting and supporting a student on placement who has a disability. She is unsure whether what she is experiencing was racism, disablism, sexism or an amalgamation of all three. Whatever the underlying reason for her poor placement experiences, it is clear that the intersectional nature of her race, gender and disability resulted in her unique experience of discrimination. Intersectionality, according to Crenshaw (1989), is the recognition that multiple oppressions are experienced as a single occurrence and not suffered separately. This might explain in part the uncertainty expressed by Jane about her experiences on placement and which aspect of her identity it was related to. Crawshaw (2002) argued that social workers with disabilities were under-represented in the profession in the UK and that one of the reasons for this was the concern around placement providers and placement opportunities. In 2014, almost 12 years later, Jane's experience suggests that in at least one HEI in England, the barriers for people with disabilities are not fully dismantled. Jane says:

I said well if for any reason the organisation doesn't want someone that has crutches; I said first of all its discrimination; you know I said and I did say to her I'm not sure if I'm being discriminated here because of my race or because of my disability and I was open with her and I said you know I have to tell you this because I'm not sure right now. I'm walking out of here thinking you know it can't be my disability is it my colour you know and I did. And I said to her I cannot understand why you being a social worker and I'm a student and I'm actually saying to you that if you need to tell someone that they can't have crutches and work in your organisation, you need to give them a reason with that and that should come with a risk assessment from

someone that's qualified to do so. (*Jane, interview, July 2014*)

In relation to CRT, this experience fulfils the intersectionality principle where Jane's race, gender and disability result in a unique experience. Crenshaw argues that black women face subordination on account of their race and gender as they consistently negotiate these aspects of their identity. For Jane, though, her disability adds another layer to her identity. Wing (2003) refers to this as 'multiplicative identity'. However, Hill Collins (2000) cautions us that there is no homogenous black women's experience.

Jane reflects on the role of her disability or race in her being discriminated against and surprisingly does not mention her gender. All three aspects of her identity are visible and so it is unclear why gender was not explicitly mentioned. The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone in relation to the nine protected characteristics and although universities must be satisfied that placements have the required adaptations to meet the needs of students with disabilities, it is fair to conclude that the PE in this organisation appeared not to be acting in Jane's best interest. There is the view by Razack (2001) that PEs by and large do not actively discriminate; however, it is concerning that Jane appeared to be her own advocate in terms of her reference to risk assessments and other health and safety requirements. It is important that HEIs demonstrate a commitment not only to equality in access to higher education but also to outcomes for diverse groups of students (Fletcher et al. 2013).

Mavis faces what can be described a situation which appeared to be fuelled by a colour-blind approach which can be said to be oppressive and racist.

You can imagine me sitting in front of three white people. Me being there, I'm

thinking ‘Oh my God’. I’ve never felt that I can’t do anything. I felt I was being told that I was good for nothing (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

Mavis’ feelings here resonate with findings by Zuchowski et al. (2013) where an indigenous student reported feeling ‘vulnerable and outnumbered’ by white people in her placement (p.59). Again, the normalisation of ‘whiteness’ and the lack of awareness of the implications of the ratio 3:1 in a meeting where Mavis is the student and the only ethnic minority, puts her in a position of dual disadvantage both in terms of status and race. The psychological, emotional and material benefits that come with being white and belonging to a group which is perceived as a powerful majority (Dovidio, Gaertner and Saguy 2015) did not appear to influence the constitution of the group.

Vicky echoes the feeling of discomfort when isolated in terms of race and also recognises the wider structural issues of her university not attracting high numbers of black students, resulting in placement providers having limited experience of hosting and working with this group of students.

I was the only black and they have never had a black student there because University of [name] on my course were just 3 black out of 40. So the chances of them getting black students within [name of town] is just too...too slim. They don’t really take black students. (*Vicky, interview, June 2014*)

Vicky perceived this as resulting in her being undermined and feeling like a ‘space invader’ (Aymer and Bryan 1996), and referring to other non-professional roles as not occupied by black people. This comment is significant for a number of reasons, one of these being that people of BME backgrounds have been over-represented in manual work and cleaning in the UK (Nzira 2011) and so Vicky’s assertion could be analysed as the existence of



institutional racism within that organisation. Doel (2010) has suggested the value of identifying relevant support systems early on in the placement for students from BME backgrounds who may be isolated on placement.

It made them undermine me a lot by being black. It was a team of 70 people. And even their cleaners were not black. I was the only black student. And they just felt like I shouldn't be there. (*Vicky, interview, June 2014*)

Jane's sentiments closely align with Vicky's and further emphasise the personal impact the lack of racial and ethnic diversity has on students from these backgrounds. It is not being suggested here that people from BME backgrounds should be employed in every organisation/agency providing social care and social work services. However, due consideration must be given to the ways in which staff collectively and individually view people from these backgrounds. Jane alleges that she 'noticed' how Asian, Indian and black people were 'looked down at' and 'frowned at'. A CRT perspective can be attributed to the socially constructed nature of race and the ways in which race produces stereotypes and negative perceptions.

And the organisation I was set in, and I'm gonna be honest there was no black employees. It was all white employees and I just don't like saying it but it was the truth. And obviously when people like you know Asian people or Indian people or black people came into the organisation, they were looked down at they were frowned at and I, I noticed it. (*Jane, interview, September 2014*)

The fact that Jane 'noticed' the ways in which BME service users were perceived in itself implies that this was not subtle, even if intended to be, and that as Dovidio et al. (2015) argue, biases can shape the behaviours and attitudes of people.

Vicky expresses dissatisfaction throughout her placement, especially as there appeared to be different approaches and responses by PEs to different students, and in her case this differential treatment was in comparison to a white student.

We were two students there from the University of [name of university]. When the other white student would ask a question she would smile when it's me she'd you know she wouldn't even smile. Sometimes she'd we'd go for visits and you know on our way if I try just to initiate a conversation she would be very rude. I remember the other day I was just asking her 'so when we get back to the office what are we going to do'? She banged her steering wheel like this [demonstrates this] and said what do you expect we have to do? I was so shocked. I couldn't say anything to her. It was just horrible to the extent that she was trying to influence other people within the team.

*(Vicky, interview, June 2014)*

Vicky's realisation that her questions to her PE attracted a different response to that of her white peer is an example of an unearned social and racial privilege, which according to McIntosh (1998) constitutes privileges which go with being white. Whiteness is used to refer to the advantages, deliberate or accidental, which are only available to non-blacks. Within the context of social work placements in Australia, Bessarab (2012: 83) states that:

a liberal-minded supervisor who believes they are racially aware and on top of racism can inadvertently also be colour blind; failing to recognise...when their white privilege is operational and their racial bias is challenging and/or denying an Aboriginal...student's experience.

This statement reminds us about the effects of a colour-blind approach which leaves BAS at risk of ongoing discrimination and exclusion due to the inability or unwillingness to

address issues of race (Modica 2015). This approach highlights ‘racism without racists’ (Mitchell 2013: 339) and can be directly connected to principles of CRT such as the regularity of racism and the social construction of race.

Vicky describes her PE as rude and one might conclude that the banging on the steering wheel evidenced impatience and intolerance or as Sue (2005) claims, micro-aggressions which in this example served to undermine and denigrate Vicky. Following on from this encounter, Vicky perceives her PE as influencing other members of the team. This could have far-reaching implications for Vicky who already felt that she was not accepted or valued within the team.

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### 3.2.2 Racialised preconceptions

Participants experienced some people on placement, particularly PEs, as holding preconceived ideas about them which resulted in differential treatment formulated from an underestimation of BAS’ skills, abilities and knowledge. For Tom, this resulted in him not being allocated what he describes as challenging cases, which in his view culminated in difficulty in meeting and achieving the learning outcomes he set out to achieve on placement. He suggests that:

They won’t give you challenging cases cos they think you are not capable enough to work on them as well, compared to whites. You find out that the cases you end up getting or the tasks you are meant to do, they’ll make them light or the cases they give you are not so difficult because they think you are not capable and so they will give you less challenging cases which at the end of the day will not allow you to meet your learning outcomes and key roles. (*Tom, interview, June 2014*)

Tom's statement is suggestive of the fact that the allocation of level-appropriate case work was absent from his placement experience. He states that the allocation of 'light' cases is less likely to result in students meeting the requirements and learning outcomes. The use of the word 'light' is interpreted as 'less complex' and this experience is consistent with research by Bartoli et al. (2008) where BAS felt their PEs avoided giving them challenging cases and work packages. The outcome of such an approach would likely result in a low grade or possible failure of the placement, which would then be attributed to the student being a weak student. By deduction, Tom is inferring that white students are given more tangible and complex cases, resulting in them being perceived as more able and competent, allowing them to achieve and meet the requirements of practice learning. This experience is suggestive of the racialised nature of work allocation for students and a covert way in which this process reinforces the social location of BAS (Ortiz and Jani 2010).

For Mavis, her PE's preconceptions about her meant that work which she had completed to a good standard was not viewed as her work and resulted in accusations that someone may have assisted her, mirroring the findings from the study by Tadam (2014).

So on that day I submitted on time because she had said I don't submit on time. I submitted all the key roles and then she said, I doubt if it's Mavis that has done this work. She said, 'I wonder whether someone must have helped you? I don't believe you've done this yourself. (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

Mavis' experience here is littered with racialised and discriminatory undertones: first there is the assumption that someone else completed the work for Mavis, reinforcing the PE's lack of confidence in her student's abilities. Whilst this is not necessarily a negative incident, the implication that Mavis is a fraud and cannot be trusted could have resulted in a protracted and

lengthy fitness-to-practise investigation. As the onsite supervisor, there are a number of strategies, which together with the external PE could have been instigated in order to determine the genuineness or otherwise of Mavis' claim. Zuchowski (2014) offers a useful critique of the on site/off site PE arrangement, identifying the strengths and limitations to such an approach. She argues that the skills of an onsite supervisor who is not a qualified social worker may be undervalued, thereby resulting in conflict with students. She further suggests that the on site supervisor, who is also usually a manager of an organisation, may have the challenge of multiple roles and may struggle to manage their student's expectations as a result of this. According to Curtis et al. (2012), 27.7 per cent of social work placements in England utilise the expertise of offsite PEs.

Commenting on preconceptions as an inhibitor to positive placement experiences for BAS, Maki states:

I think being undermined before given a chance to even prove yourself. Because some people just have this perception that because she's black or you know what I mean? And that's usually the case in most cases. I work as well; sometimes people don't have that respect for you cos you're deemed not to know anything. (*Maki, interview, June 2014*)

It is interesting to note that Maki utilises her experience from her workplace to support the issue of negative preconceptions. Whilst Maki did not feel that this was problematic for her on placement, she was clear that colleagues could be disrespectful to her because of her race and the associated racialised stereotype of not being intelligent.

For participants like Ama, preconceptions were both unhelpful and disempowering and this

became apparent when her PE made reference to her writing skills even before she had a chance to get to know her or see samples of her work. In Ama's own words:

What happens is that some PEs, for instance the very first one I had, although she has had contact with other black Africans, the first thing she said was that 'where are you coming from oh you're from Africa, do you have a problem with your writing?' That was the very first statement she made. That means she had a preconceived idea before I got there and she wasn't helpful at all, I think it's about the PE. They need to understand each and every one. (*Ama, interview, June 2014*)

Rai (2004) argues that issues of poor academic literacy should not be viewed as exclusive to BME students and that non-traditional students from a range of backgrounds appear to find some academic conventions unfamiliar and challenging. The study by Fairtlough et al. (2013) uncovers similar findings where BME students expressly articulated feeling prejudged and stereotyped. The stereotype threat according to Steele (cited in Taylor et al. 2009) is a real threat for BME people and in Ama's particular case her PE's master narrative was based around the myth that students from Africa have problems with their writing and that there was the likelihood that Ama had problems of a similar nature. Such a view, according to Ama, was unhelpful and further illuminates the daily experiences and encounters with racism. It is only speculative; however, it is unlikely that questions of written language literacy would have been asked to a white student, although as Rai (2004) identifies this is not a race-specific issue. Such a comment also does not recognise that aside from being black African, Ama could have had difficulties with her writing, linked to disability or a learning difference (for example dyslexia) and not her race. Clearly for this PE, the correlation between poor written literacy and her race was at the fore of her considerations. Ama also expresses surprise that her PE spoke in this way despite having previously worked with other

students of black African ethnicity. It may be that the previous BAS presented challenges to this PE arising from poor literacy. However, the question remains about why Ama was not given the benefit of the doubt and considered positively until she had the chance to confirm or disprove the PE's perceptions.

Vicky conveys a similar sentiment, stating:

I think they should instead of having a preconceived judgement of a person, they should take a person as they are, than to think just because I'm black, I won't be able to do this they are the only one that can do this. Which I think is very wrong. And majority of practice educators are very oppressive. You can't say anything to them. Like the way that report was you know, written, it's so oppressive. (*Vicky, interview, June 2014*)

Vicky used the word 'oppressive' twice within the same sentence and this gives an indication that she is grounded in her conviction that some PEs act in ways that can be perceived as oppressive towards their students. Thompson (2006) describes inequalities, discrimination and oppression as existing in the personal, cultural and structural levels in society. On a cultural level it is important to understand the contexts within which people have been brought up as this shapes the ways in which they think and experience the world. A structural approach emphasises the idea that power and opportunities in society are not evenly or fairly distributed and that subgroups emerge due to these inequalities (Thompson 2012). In relation to Vicky's experiences above, the report she refers to is the final placement report in which the PE provides a final grade or outcome of the student's placement. The requirements of these reports vary across social work programmes. However, on the whole they must provide feedback on the strengths and areas for development of the student (Nicholas and Kerr 2015).

It is this report which Vicky considers as providing further opportunity for some PEs to undermine BAS and may be a result of structural and institutional discriminatory processes (Masocha 2015) which can have a negative impact on black African students.

Tolu also shared her experience of being at the receiving end of preconceptions. She said:

one other thing that I believe affects placement in terms of race is the predisposition, the belief of those people on placement. I think there is a general belief that as long as you belong to the BME category, there is a stereotype in terms of what has she got to offer; in terms of oh they can't speak good English; in terms of they can't write well; in terms of oh they shout; oh they are loud. So sometimes there isn't that openness to see what this person has got what she's got to offer in placement and that stuff put some pressure on the student (*Tolu, interview, June 2014*)

Tolu's revelation is indicative of the danger of stereotyping and holding preconceived ideas about individuals or groups of people. She is clear that there is a belief about BAS which undermines their competence even before they have started on placement. There is also the suggestion that colleagues and peers are unenthusiastic about uncovering the strengths that BAS bring with them to placements. Such a situation works contrary to adult learning theories (Knowles 1970), which argue that students should not be regarded as blank slates but bring to placement a range of skills, knowledge and expertise from their lived experiences which also include experiences of previous placements (Bellinger 2010).

Another BAS expressed her experience of misconceptions thus:

I just wanted to get on with placement. I just wanted to have a placement just to finish. But it was very tough...the practice educator was just belittling me if I ask questions. It was just constant, I don't even know what to say you know. I think she



had a preconceived judgement about me you know. She had her own opinions about me already that I can't do this I can't do this. There's nothing that I could do that she could say you know Vicky is doing well regardless of how much I was working.

*(Vicky, interview, June 2014)*

Vicky's experiences of feeling belittled and referring to this as 'constant' is reflective of micro-aggressions (Sue 2005), intolerance and impatience, unhelpful attributes which PEs should not adhere, possess or demonstrate. These experiences are reflective of assumptions and preconceptions which have been borne out of racialised constructions and relates to the daily experiences of racism for black people.

Mavis comments that potential is often overlooked in favour of a deficit-oriented discourse (Johnson-Ahorlu 2012) which relegates BAS to spheres of incompetence. She affirms that she has the potential to achieve but laments the scarcity of support needed to be successful. She concludes:

I think it's lack of expectation, it's like having low expectation that a black person can achieve or can be competent in anything. It's put down rather than realising that I can achieve. How can I be helped to achieve? I have the potential to achieve. *(Mavis, interview, June 2014)*

Mavis concludes that there was the potential to be judged purely on the basis of her being black, a situation which warrants the recognition and discussion of meritocracy, a concept which critical race theorists argue is a myth in relation to black people (Mitchell 2013). A myth because 'merit' is redefined according to the ECU (2013) to align with the preferred profiles. That black students in educational institutions are assessed solely on the basis of merit is contentious (Savas 2014), leading Mavis to state:

I didn't want to be judged on my race, I wanted to be judged on my merit and didn't want her to feel like if you aren't competent enough, why are you here? Can you do this? (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

It is important to acknowledge the value of CRT in drawing out new understanding of social work practice placements and how the interactions within these spaces have the potential to produce racialised experiences for BAS.

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### 3.2.3 Over-scrutiny narratives

Narratives in relation to being overly scrutinised refer to situations in which BAS felt monitored, watched and investigated on a level they perceived as unequal to their peers.

Mavis provides the example below:

What I usually did, I paid for my kids for before school club so I can do my studies because I do not drive, I'm learning to drive. I have an hour that is free in the morning and I had asked for a key to the centre so when I drop the kids I can come to the office rather than go home, waiting for the bus, wait till opening and come in to let myself in in the morning to start work before the office opens. I was told 'no' when I asked for the key to come in. When they are short staffed, they give me a key to open the office. They said I was resentful about it. I was resentful about it? When I needed it, you said no. It is two way. How do you entrust me with such a big building? Why would you trust me that there will not be any breakage. Because she said if anything goes missing I'd be in big trouble. Are you not going to be in trouble when you've given me the key because you want to come at 11 not one day but every day? (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

It can be assumed from Mavis' narrative above that she valued her placement opportunity and in order to meet the demands of the placement made arrangements for her children to be looked after before the start of the school day. These arrangements resulted in Mavis having some time between dropping her children off and the start of her own working day. The fact that Mavis' request to be given the key to the office for convenience was rejected with no evident explanation or rationale appeared to have upset Mavis. It was only when no one was available and it suited and benefited the agency that Mavis was permitted to come into the office on her own, work and open it up for business. This indicates a convergence of interest with her PE and the Agency. The narrative goes on to suggest that her PE had commented that if anything had gone missing, Mavis would be in trouble. It is difficult to know precisely what this statement meant. However, implied within it are a number of value-laden judgements such as Mavis is unreliable, careless, dishonest or untrustworthy, all of which possess racialised undertones. Taken on its own, this comment could have been disregarded. However, considering it within the wider context of Mavis' experiences with this particular PE, it can be concluded that this very much reflected the PE's views about Mavis. It is entirely possible that the PE was following Organisational policy and procedure in relation to students' possession of keys for the building, however in the absence of any clear or laid out policy alongside the fact that she appeared to have changed her position when it suited her, Mavis had clear reasons to be 'resentful'. Feeling over-scrutinised and monitored continued to emerge from participants' narratives. Vicky describes her experience of being scrutinised during placement:

It was as if somebody was watching behind me you know and setting me up to fail. I wasn't allowed to use my own initiative. It so much affected me that whatever I want to do I had to go and check you know; if she thinks it's right which I don't think is

good enough you know. (Vicky, interview, June 2014)

Participants in the Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason (2012) study felt that they were ‘underneath a microscope’ and likened the experience to being in a ‘fishbowl and pressure cooker’ (p.214), where white colleagues within the workplace waited for opportunities and behaviours that would confirm their stereotypical views of their black peers.

In a diary entry dated 8 July 2014, Vicky reflects on arriving late for her first supervision. Despite being out with the manager on what can be described as a learning event, her PE appears unforgiving and Vicky is met with the threat of failure. The reflection is captured in Figure 4 below.

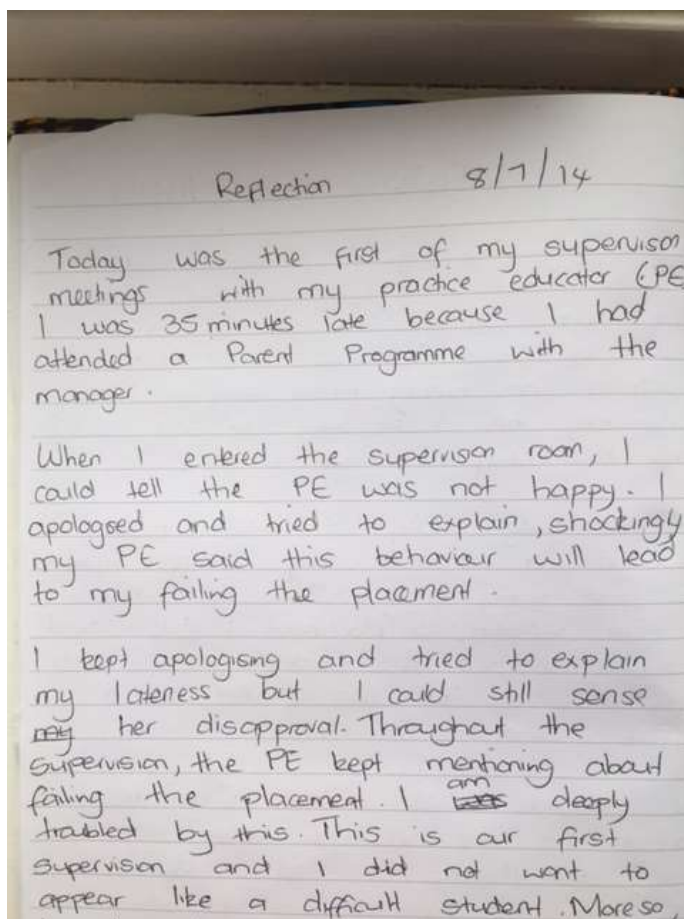


Figure 4 Participant diary (Vicky)

The fact that Vicky could sense her PE's unhappiness indicates that this was obvious through non-verbal and verbal communication. Vicky alleges that she 'kept apologising' however it would appear that this did not appease her PE.

Tolu also felt that despite this being her final placement, she was prevented from using her initiative and viewed such an opportunity as contributing to her personal growth and development.

I should be able to use my own initiative that's how I can build my confidence. (*Tolu, interview, June 2014*)

The ability to use one's initiative is reflected in domains 8 and 9 of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) which social work students are assessed against whilst on placement, requires social work students be proactive and to take responsibility for their own learning and development (TCSW 2012).

Mavis continues along similar lines of over-scrutiny and micro-management saying:

My supervisor is about 'is work done?' She keeps a record. On this day she's done all her work, no workload on her desk. She's done her key roles, has done all the work on the reports. She goes through all the files I've done. They have no errors, yeah, because she said I cannot proof read. She signs it. Adding more and more pressure and stress. (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

That this form of over-scrutiny contributed to Mavis feeling stressed is of concern, as is her perception that errors by black people are magnified and exaggerated within placement settings (Tadam 2014). It should be noted here that Mavis did not appear to take issue with being corrected; however, her concern was around the fact that black people could in a sense

not be forgiven and the magnifying of mistakes made them visible and vulnerable to others. She alludes to the fact that being white may afford her peers a more relaxed response to mistakes made by white people.

Looking for every single mistake and magnifying it because it is a black person who has done it. (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

Students on placement are generally anxious about the quality of their work and whether or not they will be successful and be viewed as competent to practise and so it is in their best interests to have their practice observed, assessed and scrutinised. The way in which PEs do this is important so as not to give the impression like the one described by Mavis above.

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#### 3.2.4 PE-Student relationship narratives

The nature and quality of relationships is considered central to a successful placement experience for any student (Lefevre 2005). This is because a friendly and supportive working environment facilitates students' learning and development on placement (Baum 2011). Whilst there is evidence of this in social work, Woolf, McManus, Potts and Dacre (2013) in a study of medical students in the UK concluded that the teacher–student relationship was the biggest and most likely cause of under-attainment for BME medical students, who often perceived their experiences as racialised, resulting in poor relationships with their tutors.

Mavis claims:

At times I would go into the office in the morning and they would say 'hello' and ask 'did you have a nice evening' and then they would go make a cup of tea, shut the

door at the kitchen and start talking. I wanted to know if they could include me in this group of theirs, I wondered, when will they include me in this group of theirs. I started feeling left out. (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

This feeling of isolation is not uncommon and research by Fairtlough et al. (2013) and Razack (2001) into the experiences of BME students on placement supports this view. If one considers Mavis as a BAS in an environment where she faces multiple isolation in terms of her race and status, then the challenges she faced on an interpersonal level are illuminated. Probyn (1996) asserts that 'If you have to think about belonging, perhaps you are already outside' (p.8) and this was a missed opportunity for her PE to address the institutional exclusion going in within the organisation and amongst the members of the team.

Ama articulates a similar experience, stating that BAS are sometimes made to feel unwelcome:

I don't know how to put it, sometimes your relationship with other people, sometimes you feel you're not welcome. And sometimes it's a bit, I wouldn't use the word demeaning but you feel a bit left out. (*Ama, interview, June 2014*)

Jane's experiences of poor relationships appeared to be at a different level from the other BAS students in this study. Her disability created a kind of hypervisibility which only served to further undermine her and create a tenuous relationship with her PE. She recalls:

We had a learning agreement meeting and I'd just come from a horrible blood test that morning, come straight into my learning agreement meeting and my PE walked in and she said to me – what is your blood test for in front of everybody and I (I wow). I said to her I'm sorry err I just don't know what to say you know, I said I don't know what to say to you I said but I'll probably discuss it in my supervision, you know

because I felt it was very intrusive questioning you know. (*Jane, interview July 2014*).

Being black, female and with a disability continued to present difficulties for Jane on placement. She expresses what appears to be the tactless and insensitive questioning about a blood test she had had one morning prior to supervision. Jane is of South African heritage and asking about the purpose of a blood test was perhaps unintentionally laden with bias and another example of micro-aggression (Huber and Solórzano 2015). This can also be linked to the ever-present racialisation and regularity of racism for black people. It would appear that other people in the meeting did not openly question or challenge Jane's PE which could be understood as them being complicit in a system which fails to challenge discrimination, oppression and insensitivity (Razack 2001).

Vicky views her PE's conduct and behaviour as premeditated in that:

It seems like she was trying to make it difficult so that I will end up saying I can't do it because she just didn't want me there. So it was just, it was very hard. It was difficult. (*Vicky, interview, June 2014*)

Vicky perceived her PE as deliberately creating unfavourable conditions for her on placement in the hope that she would quit and leave the placement, and this was after the incident described below when only four days into placement, her PE expressed the view that Vicky was unlikely to pass her placement. This mirrors findings in relation to the potential to fast-track black African students to failure (Tadam 2014). BAS are fast tracked when failure is discussed at the start of placement with little or no evidence to support this. The principle of meritocracy is evident here and represents a real quandary about how any outcome for Vicky would be perceived as fair and warranted. Proponents of CRT argue strongly that race is a social construct and that being black can result in people being assigned to or denied group



membership. This is also commensurate with the examples cited by the PE as contributing to her deciding that Vicky was heading for failure on day four of her placement.

On the fourth day, we had a placement learning agreement meeting with my tutor and the PE. I was shocked that the PE already had concerns about me. She cited my alleged 'lack of motivation'. Her opinion was based on the fact I kept asking questions, have childcare commitments and do not drive but all this was on my application form. (*Vicky, interview, June 2014*)

It is difficult to know what evidence the PE had in her possession to reach such an early conclusion. However, from Vicky's perspective, her family commitments, questions and inability to drive contributed to these concerns. It might be considered that a student who asks questions about work is demonstrating an interest in learning and a commitment to understanding the role of a social worker. For this PE, Vicky's constant questions indicated a lack of motivation. That Vicky was shocked indicates her disagreement with such an assertion. Vicky stated that all this information was made transparent prior to beginning placement and so it would appear that her PE was retrospectively applying conditions/circumstances to justify her concerns about Vicky.

The extent to which some BAS experienced poor relationships with their PEs is captured in a comment by Vicky who states:

I wish I had chosen another career, one that doesn't involve practice educators.  
(*Vicky, reflective diary, 2014*)

It is disappointing to note that the existence and involvement of PEs in social work contributed to this assertion by Vicky. The gravity of her comment does not go unacknowledged and reinforces the value of PEs possessing interpersonal skills such as

approachability, sound role modelling and creating a positive practice learning environment (Andrews et al. 2005) which could contribute towards a more positive perception of PEs. It would be detrimental to the profession if the role of PE no longer existed; however it would show the profession in a more positive light if PEs could be supported through training and professional development to truly embrace the values as articulated by the College of Social Work (Appendix 8). Tolu points out the tendency for PE's not adhering to what they teach. She states

“If you teach us to go out and practice with those values, you should demonstrate those values as well” (*Tolu. Interview, June 2014*).

BAS articulated their experiences of being at the receiving end of hostile and aggressive behaviour and attitudes which impacted on their relationships with PE's and others involved in their practice setting. They describe regular patterns of micro-aggression and micro-invalidations which are consistent with the realities of daily racism experienced by black people. Theories of personality, behaviour and attitudes are extensive in psychological, biological and sociological sciences (Cervone and Pervin 2014) and whilst it is not within the scope of this study to produce an extensive analysis of personality traits and types, it is important that some recognition is given in order to understand the narratives of BAS. Personality is used to refer to ‘characteristics of a person resulting in a style of thinking, feeling and behaving’ (Schacter, Gilbert and Wengwer 2012: 490). This resonates with personal/individual racism (Dominelli 2008) already discussed. However, it is useful to consider that the language used to describe personality is unique to the speaker (Allport 1937). For example, being assertive in one context can be perceived in another context as being difficult, stubborn or confrontational (Sheppard and Charles 2014).

Stoetzer, Ahlberg, Bergman, Hallsten and Lundberg (2009) have concluded that interpersonal relationships are crucial to good health, progress and satisfaction at work and that negative or oppressive relationships are detrimental to overall wellbeing. This is supported by Ruggs et al. (2011) whose research revealed that in the context of the workplace environment, black people were treated more negatively than white people. Mavis alludes to a degree of hostility in the narrative below:

One thing my PE is very blunt, she can just say a word and you just feel hmmm . I don't think I should have asked that. She can say a word it can really upset you. She may be thinking that it's alright but it's not really. She needs to think if I say that how will she [student] take it? (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

Mavis refers to her PE's manner as being 'blunt' in her verbal approach and although its exact interpretation can be varied, the fact that the approach left Mavis feeling 'really upset' implies something deeper and stronger perhaps more related to what Sue (2005) refers to as micro-aggressions. Mavis perceives her PE as not considering the impact of her language and tone on their relationship, a consequence of the power dynamics (Razack 2001). This experience appeared to have left Mavis regretting asking the question in the first place which does not bode well for her future learning.

Jane offers a similar view in relation to power, suggesting that:

If you look at the PCF and you look at everything, the power is, the judgement is on those practice educators. If the students see practice that is unacceptable they're afraid. They're afraid to speak because they feel that because they're voicing something, it might go against them. But it shouldn't be like that. (*Jane, interview August 2014*)

The power differential between the PE and the BME students has been widely examined (Razack 2001; Fairtlough et al. 2013; Zuchowski 2014) and this contributes to students feeling unable to speak up or challenge poor practice for fear of negative consequences. For black African students, the situation does not appear to be much different and it could be suggested that the reasons for this mirror those mentioned above.

Vicky shares a similar sentiment around the fear of negative consequences, so much so she did not challenge her PE's reluctance to negotiate a flexible start time.

She refused for me to start at 9am she said I should start at half 8. She wanted me to start at 8. I would get off the bus and start running. Because the moment I get into the office she would check the time like this [looking at her watch] at what time I have arrived. (*Vicky, interview, Jun 2014*)

This narrative is suggestive of a PE who appeared to be inflexible and inconsiderate to the extent that Vicky dreaded the outcome of being late to placement. Whilst social work placements are aimed at preparing students for the world of social work practice by instilling sound work ethics such as good timekeeping and time management skills in students, it is also acknowledged that BAS, like other students, have additional home and caring responsibilities (Bartoli et al. 2008, Fairtlough et al. 2013) which mean that start and finish times on placement need to be carefully discussed and considered. The absence of this understanding resulted in Vicky feeling compelled to start running to her placement whenever she got off the bus. Having met Vicky for her interview, this process would not have been easily achieved and would no doubt have caused her additional anxiety and pressure on a daily basis and even before her day commenced. This view is shared by Lister (2003) who suggests that the black women in her study felt that they came under increased

scrutiny by their white lecturers with regards to their domestic and child care commitments.

Tom approaches this from a different angle and describes how BAS might be supported to express their concerns without fear of hostility or backlash. He suggests that:

If students go on placements and they make any complaints about PEs, they should make it clear that they are not going to fail if they complain, cos that's what makes us not feel like complaining or even about the placement itself the students should not be penalised. Because that's what makes us not complain. You think oh if I complain it will jeopardise my placement. *(Tom, interview, June 2014)*

Tom's statement is consistent with the view of most students who feel that challenging and/or complaining about their PEs will result in them failing their placement (Parker 2010). The difference with BAS relates more specifically to complaints or concerns linked to discrimination. The idea of power as capital is one that Bourdieu (1991) maintains is reproduced generationally and across structures. In light of this, it is fair to conclude that perhaps historically PEs were viewed as knowledgeable and unchallengeable. Hence the reluctance to challenge or complain about their current practice and attitudes.

Jane goes on to suggest a link between being liked and the placement outcome by saying:

Cos if a person doesn't like you they'll just fail you. No one is there (you know) you can't justify yourself as a student that (you know) I was trying to do everything. *(Jane, interview, July 2014)*

Jane's perception that being liked in the practice setting was crucial to achieving success on placement is to some extent supported by Lefevre (2005) whose research about the relevance of relationships between supervisor and supervisee identified that students were more likely

to accept grading and assessment outcomes from supervisors who liked them than ones that they perceived did not.

### 3.3 Part two: Narratives of negotiating racism

The findings in relation to negotiating racism broadly reflect the narratives of experiences which were empowering and supportive or which the participants found useful in their placement settings. They range from narratives about personalities and attitudes of others (external) to articulation of participants' personal coping strategies (personal). On the whole, these narratives reflect the strategies BAS drew upon to cope in environments which were personal, a pattern which can be concluded as limiting the direct involvement of their PEs. hooks (2010: 19) contributes an 'engaged pedagogy' approach which she says works from the premise that every student has something valuable to contribute and that an interactive relationship between teachers and students facilitates learning.

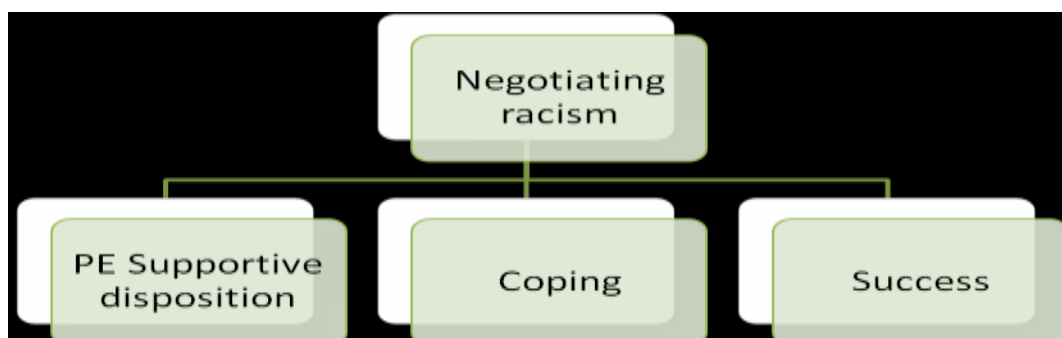


Figure 5 Negotiating racism

In 1978, Ogbu surmised that BME students were under-represented in higher education and the ones that managed to enrol onto university programmes had poorer attainment. Thirty-

five years later, this assertion remains true, with researchers such as Richardson (2008) attributing BME under-achievement in higher education to their under-achievement as children in secondary schools. None of the participants in my study was born in the UK and they all had their formative education in Africa and so it could be argued that progression and outcomes for BME students in higher education is different for BME students generally, irrespective of where they had their formative education.

The idea of anti-racism in the UK has a long history in social work education and practice (Bartoli 2013). However, the profession took its time to fully embrace the idea that as an agent of the state it was implicitly involved in the discrimination and oppression faced by black people through its systems and structures. Anti-racism in social work has been replaced by an umbrella term ‘anti-discriminatory’ which some argue has not only diluted the emphasis on racial discrimination but also perhaps unknowingly reinforced the message that it is a devalued consideration for contemporary social work education and practice (Laird 2008; Dillon 2010; Bartoli 2013). It has been further argued that for anti-racism to be meaningful and sincere, better connections must be forged between the articulation of theory and the practice (Wainwright 2009). Given the centrality of race within this research and the prominence contained within the findings, it could be suggested that factors which might enhance the placement experiences of BAS are likely to have some connection to anti-racism in placements and placement settings. That said, the narratives in this section evidence the ways in which BAS negotiated racism, rather than a distinct anti-racist response.

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### 3.3.1 PE Supportive disposition

Narratives were shared about PE attitudes and behaviours towards some BAS which appeared to be helpful. For example, Maki experienced her PE positively and comments on the value

of providing a structured learning environment.

When I first started, I met up with my PE, she was very supportive. She's very structured so we had a learning agreement put in place and we agreed on the dynamics on everything that was going to be happening. I found it helpful because from the onset I knew what was expected of me and what to expect of her as well. I've had regular supervision every...was supposed to be weekly but we agreed to do it fortnightly for two hours which works out roughly at once a week and during supervision we alternate with the note taking and she said that benefits me, you know to build on my recording skills as well and when you go into practice you'll be expected to do that so she thought it would be like you know a good learning curve and I agreed to that. (*Maki, interview, June 2014*)

Maki's experience could be argued is what is expected of PEs and of supervisory relationships more generally (Jones 2010). By encouraging Maki to take notes during supervision, the PE is enabling the development of her listening and recording abilities and skills which are central to social work (Lomax, Jones, Leigh and Gay 2010). It is also clear from this that Maki's PE provided her with a rationale for the requirement to take notes. Without this rationale, BAS could misinterpret the suggestion. There also appeared to be sharing of tasks as they took turns in note taking. This partnership approach is good practice which is valued by Maki and should be emulated by others. She concludes by saying she 'agreed' to the suggestion, again reinforcing the message that her view is necessary and important in that context.

Maki continued to propose that her PE's eloquence and supportive nature went a long way to enhance her placement experiences. In the same discussion, Maki commented on the nature



of her relationship with her PE, stating that mutual respect was a key ingredient in their positive relationship. This idea of mutual respect is also advocated by Engelbrecht (2006) who terms it 'cultural friendliness' and which is about being accepting, sincere, accommodating, respectful and warm to people whose backgrounds are different to ours (p.257). She states:

I'll start with my PE – I can't fault her for anything, she's been really supportive and she's very articulate, if you know what I mean. She said when I started my placement if I fail my placement it's a reflection on her. We did things by the book and if there are any issues or things that I don't understand, we've discussed like all my cases in supervision she's helped me to apply, to link theory to practice you know like in our supervision sessions. (*Maki, interview, June 2014*)

It could be suggested that the PE felt a sense of duty towards Maki in that she perceived Maki's success as her success and her failure as a shared situation/event. Writing about behaviours in the workplace Burnes and Pope (2007) suggest that negative behaviours characterised by bullying, degradation, undermining and lack of support, which usually but not always comes from people in management roles, are discouraged in favour of sound leadership practice which is also supportive and ensures team members are afforded every opportunity to excel. This approach corresponds with the supportive function of supervision, which according to Walker et al. (2008) includes ensuring that students have adequate support on placement, have opportunities to discuss their concerns and assistance with dealing with daily pressures when working with service users.

Maki continues to express her views about the usefulness of being supportive and working to processes and procedure. There is an unspoken clue about Maki's feeling of being near

confident that her PE would do anything and everything to ensure she is afforded the best opportunities to succeed. Maki's narrative continues along similar lines:

Our relationship is very professional. When I first met [name of PE] she came across as, that's my own personal judgement – she came across as aloof – that's my own personal judgement anyway, but getting to know her and working with her, I just realised that it's her personality and nothing to do with...you know. You know she's got a poker face, you can't really tell what she's thinking...and I've not felt discriminated against in any way. You know the dynamics of our relationship obviously we discussed power and there's always going to have that power imbalance, but it's never been something that has come up, we've just had that respect like I'm her student, she's my PE, if you know what I mean? (*Maki, interview, June 2014*)

Professionalism in social work is one of the nine domains of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and is a requirement for social workers at all levels (TCSW 2012), including students. Qualified social workers are members of a profession with a protected title and are expected to demonstrate professional commitment by taking responsibility for their conduct as well as for practice learning while being accountable to the regulatory body, the Health Care Professions Council. Membership of a profession does not prevent one from being unprofessional, as is evident from the preceding discussion. What it does provide is a strict set of criteria about what is acceptable or unacceptable when working in a professional capacity and the channels through which people can seek redress where practitioners evidence unprofessionalism. The HCPC provides a channel through which unprofessionalism can be reported and sanctions be applied, alongside a range of training and development

recommendations. This will be further examined within the recommendations for practice section.

Maki's acknowledgement of the inherent power differential between her and her PE and this open, honest dialogue appears to have contributed to the respectful relationship which ensued and culminated in a positive placement experience for Maki.

Social work is underpinned by the values such as respect for persons and being non-judgmental and Tolu is convinced of the importance of PEs role modelling this with their students. She says:

If you teach us to go out and practice with those values, you should demonstrate those values as well (Tolu, Interview, June 2014)

Placements are considered 'guided journeys' (Doel 2010:100) and it appears to be in the spirit of guidance that Tolu acknowledges that PEs may not always demonstrate values worth emulating. Thompson (2006) suggests that professional values should be adhered to by PEs to provide a template for students to follow and in keeping with the social work profession. Tolu hints at a PE who spoke about values but did not appear to adhere to them herself.

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### 3.3.2 Narratives of coping

West, Donovan and Roemer (2010), in their study of black women in a university in the USA, propose problem-focused coping and avoidant coping as strategies which have been adopted by black women in trying to mitigate the effects of racism and discrimination. Problem-focused coping involves actively identifying and attempting to change the source of stress whilst avoidant coping strategies entail preventing the ongoing thoughts and focus on the situations giving rise to stress. They argue that the latter strategy (avoidant coping) is

more disadvantageous to black women in that women who adopted this strategy were more likely to experience depression, low mood and ill health.

BAS articulated the importance of personal resilience and perseverance they had to demonstrate during their placements. High levels of determination to succeed appeared to limit the impact of external pressures and stresses on placement outcomes. This was the case for Maki, who emphasised the importance of going to placement with a strategy. She stated:

I think for me when I went into my placement I had a goal, you know like I want to achieve this and I'm going to come out of it. That was my drive. Not that I'm saying other people don't have goals but it's about how you go about achieving those goals. And I if you meet obstacles on the way what are you doing about it? Another factor, being a black person – I'm resilient I've been through a lot and you really have to go through a lot to get places so that's another thing. (*Maki, interview, June 2014*)

Maki's comment is laden with features of coping in placement. Her coping strategy begins with a goal and determination to succeed, then the drive. She refers to resilience but makes a specific claim that being black has meant that she is resilient. This is a powerful statement requiring further deconstructing. Grant and Kinman (2012) conceptualise resilience as promoting wellbeing and state that it is 'a positive construct which enables individuals to overcome stressors or withstand negative life events and, not only recover from such experiences, but also find personal meaning in them' (p.1). This form of armouring, according to Bell and Nkomo (2001) is a typical response to stereotypes and discrimination. Ama's view is similar, articulating it differently thus:

If you don't wear that kind of, you know, telling yourself that, OK fine, I'm here to learn this. Whatever is going on around me, I'm not going to look at it at all. I'm

just going to focus. You just have to get the strong will, OK? Other than that you won't be able to proceed at all. (*Ama, interview, June 2014*)

Ama's determination to succeed suggests that she resolved to focus on her learning and placement and not everything else going on around her. Whilst this appeared to be a useful strategy, it could be argued that Ama's strategy of ignoring what was going on around her could have had unplanned consequences for her overall experience because, as Razack (2001) argues, students' placement experiences are affected by organisational and environmental factors. The existence of 'aspirational capital' according to Yosso (2006: 7) enables BAS to be hopeful for the future and to challenge the odds of poor attainment through their resilience and aspirations for the future. These strategies for coping mirror the findings by Zuchowski et al. (2013) in an Australian context where Aboriginal social work students utilised strong determination in order to navigate placements.

Following initial difficulties with her PE, Mavis was asked to consider an alternative placement with a different PE. However, she viewed such action as abandoning her placement and therefore did not pursue the suggestion. Baum (2011) states that social work students often utilise avoidance tactics such as getting by or remaining silent in order to progress on placement. Mavis offers a further rationale for not changing her placement:

I wanted to continue my placement; I didn't want to walk away from my learning opportunity. There were chances to give me another PE from another university.  
(*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

Mavis considered that another placement would extend her programme of study and being aware of her situation and family commitments stated:

I'm not getting younger, I wanted carry on and finish. With my family responsibility, I need to finish early so I can look for work and look after my family. So I felt it was not the right time to go. (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

Interestingly, the delay in progression and attainment of BME students on social work programmes is often as a result of a failed or extended placement (Moriarty et al. 2009) and so to some extent Mavis' strategy could be serving a number of useful purposes such as not becoming a statistic in the delayed progression data for BME students. This approach, it could be suggested, resulted in Mavis continuing her placement with the PE with whom she had a poor relationship.

Tolu identifies another dimension to coping on placement as a BAS. She suggests that in order to combat negative preconceptions:

You have to prove yourself. You have to work extra hard to erase or remove all those biases (Tolu, Interview June 2014)

The biases she refers to consist of the negative stereotypes associated with racial identity which, (unwitting or conscious) requires BAS to work hard to ensure they are not maintained.

### 3.4 Inhibitors and enhancers of success

*There is no easy or quick fix to the highly complex issues involved in improving access, student success and progression (OFFA 2014)*

This section presents and analyses the data from participants in relation to factors which inhibit and enhance positive social work placement experiences for students of black African ethnicity. The opening quote from the *National Strategy for Access and Student Success in*

*Higher Education* summarises the findings succinctly.

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#### 3.4.1 Factors that inhibit positive placement experiences

A key finding in relation to inhibitors for BAS appears to be the lack of representation of ethnic minorities more generally in their placement settings. This proved to be a key contributor to their poor placement experiences and heightened their visibility and ultimately their vulnerability. Participants also referred to being black as contributing to the treatment they received on placement by the range of stakeholders.

And I was the only black and they have never had a black student there because University of [name] anyway on my course were just 3 blacks out of 40. So the chances of them getting black students within [name] it's just too...too slim. They don't really take black students. I wasn't treated fairly. The other students, I remember when we started placement we were told that we need to (you know) to talk to other members of the team like occupational therapists, speech and language and just to find out about their roles, what they do with people with learning disabilities. If I approach them myself they were not willing. But if another student that I was working with approached them, they were accommodating. She was white. So I ended up noticing and she noticed she even told me that 'Vicky leave this to me, let me be approaching them myself' because they didn't want to know me but I would end up just going when she's approached them already. Sometimes they would just appear as if I'm not there. When they're explaining things they'll be just referring to the other girl [name] that oh we do this [name] as if I'm not even there. (*Vicky, interview, June 2014*)

Vicky perceives that a lack of experience on the part of the placement agency in hosting previous BAS contributed to her poor placement experience. Vicky felt invisible due to being ignored by other professionals within the building despite being a visible minority. What is interesting is the fact that questions from her white peer were accommodated but hers were not. Her strategy then was to work alongside her peer in order to learn about the work of other professionals in the team. Patton and Bondi (2015) remind us of the value of 'white allies' who work on behalf of or support black people to get by in a racist society or environment. Vicky suggests that her white peer was aware of this situation and expressed her surprise at the differential responses and attention received. It is important to consider how this blatant favouritism positively impacted on her white peer more generally and the message that such behaviour was conveying to the rest of the team. Again, being white has afforded this student certain opportunities unavailable to Vicky, cognisant of the whiteness as property principles of CRT and reinforcing the everyday nature of racism. A number of complicating factors come to mind in this situation. For example, what would have happened if Vicky had a falling out with her white peer or that her peer had chosen not to be an 'ally'? This would have inevitably contributed to ongoing difficulties for Vicky and ultimately created barriers to her placement learning. The role played by Vicky's PE is unclear here and although Vicky should have felt able to discuss these difficulties with her PE, it is recognised that this was not the case. Such a situation is even more concerning as there is the implication that other members of the multi-disciplinary team did not value the presence of a BAS and were intolerant to her learning and development needs. Vicky continues to comment about the issue of power between students and their PEs, noting the value of timely feedback, stating:

There is great power imbalance between a student and a practice educator...[long



pause]. And I think it's important (for you know) if a student is making a mistake to be told there and then than to be keeping quiet and then suddenly you start bringing it up. (*Vicky, interview, June 2014*)

Vicky describes a process in which feedback on performance was not shared until a later stage. This approach has the potential to undermine students' learning and provides opportunities for oppressive and heavy-handed practice. It could also be perceived as an unfair technique used by people in power when they lacking evidence to bring against an employee, or in this case a student.

The daily experience of racism is again implicit in Vicky's comment below. She perceives the process of placement allocation as problematic and laden with racist outcomes for people with 'African surnames'. Bass (2014) concurs with the view that foreign-sounding names have the potential to create barriers to employment and opportunities for progress for many people of ethnic minority backgrounds. Here, race is seen as socially constructed and placement allocation processes such as this heighten the potential for discrimination.

In 2012 the author became aware of a number of students whose profiles were rejected by potential PEs during the placement matching process. The commonality shared by these students was that they were all of black African heritage. A decision was reached to change the names to student ID numbers, a strategy which resulted in no students being rejected. Whilst such an example can be viewed as anecdotal within the context of academia, it is nonetheless a very real experience and goes some way to support Vicky's comments. This strategy continues to be used at the author's university.

Vicky also recognises differential treatment between her and other students where the reasons

given for not identifying a placement for her were unfounded and were not applied equally to her white peers. She states:

I think the other thing about universities, instead of putting, writing my name as [first name last name], I think they should put either a letter for everybody because now local authorities when they are picking students, the moment that they see an African surname, they don't pick you regardless of what experience that you have, because I don't understand why I couldn't get a placement in 2013. I don't even understand up to now. They kept telling me that because I am not driving but there were other white students who were not driving who managed to get a placement. (*Vicky, interview, June 2014*)

Vicky alleges she waited for more than eight months for a placement to be identified for her, and at the point of this interview she was unsure about the cause of the delay and concluded that her form/profile was not being selected by prospective placements and PEs due to what she believes is unfair negative identifying and stereotyping based on her 'African surname'. This is indeed lamentable and the situation exacerbated by her university which claimed to be experiencing difficulties identifying a suitable placement for Vicky. She proposes the use of some sort of anonymisation of students' profiles to facilitate placement allocation for BAS. What is even more concerning is that Vicky claims that experience is ignored and irrelevant in relation to BAS. Vicky explained that when her situation became known to the vice-chancellor at her university, she received a letter from them, apologising for her poor experience and assuring her that the situation would be resolved at the earliest opportunity.

Vicky's account is not isolated in that other participants lament matching and placement allocation processes which lack clarity and transparency. Indeed, Grace articulates in a diary

entry for 17 September 2014 that her HEI's placement coordinator 'warned' her against rejecting placements, stating that this would result in a late placement start and consequently deferred graduation. Ironically, the placement providers did not confirm this placement and Grace started an alternative placement in December but with a change of tone by the placement coordinator that despite the late start, Grace could graduate at the same time as her peers. This overt show of hostility and oppression is unhelpful and again identifies the daily experiences of racism and interest convergence principle in that it was the placement, not Grace, that had effectively declined the opportunity and so Grace stood to benefit from a placement more in line with her original placement requests.

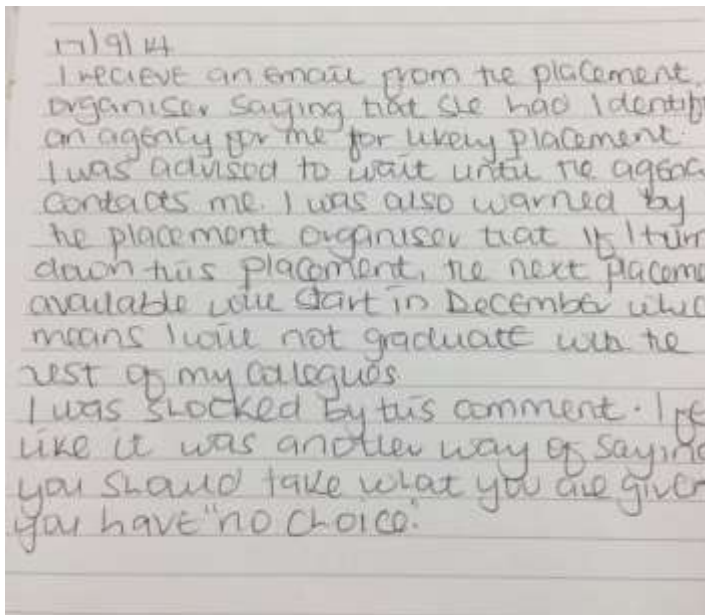


Figure 6 Participant diary entry (Grace, September 2014)

Vicky's exposure of differential placement allocation practices for white students and their black peers is again supported by Grace who states that some of her colleagues believed that their white peers had been allocated placements of their choice whilst many black students had been allocated to teams and organisations contrary to their preferences.

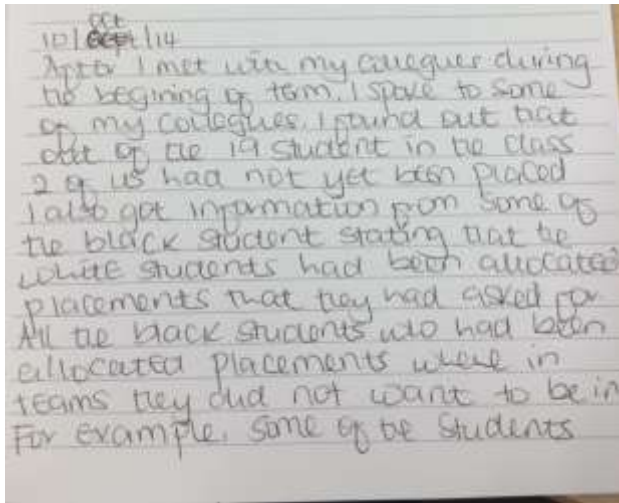


Figure 7 Excerpt from participant diary entry (Grace, October 2014)

Ama's experience in a different HEI mirrors Grace's above. She shared that despite BAS being a larger group than white students on her programme, the identification of placements for BAS appeared to take longer. Ama also stated that this had happened the year before and laments the unfairness of such a process. Interestingly, Ama and her peers highlighted this discrepancy to their university; however it is not clear how or whether this was resolved. She states:

What happened on campus was, the BAS were the last people to get their placements and it's just a few British students but they had them first. We pointed this out to the university. First year was like this and second year it's like this as well and it was a statutory placement so why don't we get the opportunity to have ours? Why do we always have to struggle to get our placements while the small section of white students get theirs? What's happening? It's not fair, not fair. (*Ama, interview, June 2014*)

Mavis raises the issue of power differences as not conducive to learning and contributing to poor placements. O'Leary et al. (2013) have argued that the issue of power imbalance is

present in any professional relationship and if left unaddressed could result in exploitation and discrimination. Mavis states:

...you cannot compete with these power issues really. (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

Walker et al. (2008) suggest that this power emerges from the authority which has been vested in the PE by virtue of their role but that power can also be derived from structural inequalities in relation to race, disability, gender, sexuality and so on. Mavis' point about being unable to compete with the power differential is valid and supported by Shardlow and Doel (1996) who describe power in practice learning as 'inescapable'.

The issue of hearsay, preconceptions and poor team relationships are captured in the comment below:

Rather than judge a person on hearsay because if the working relationship is poor, and the team relationship is not working as well; you can imagine you are between two people you have no voice. You'll just be stuck there. (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

The issue of having a 'voice' is perceived by Mavis as an important one, especially as she viewed herself as not having the opportunity to speak up and share her concerns about her learning and progress on placement. This is not dissimilar to BME students in the Razack (2001) study who felt that their voice would not be heard and so focussed on completing tasks and getting on with placement (p.227).

Tolu reflects on the future, explaining the need for PEs to be supportive and protective of their students. This, she feels, is how her own PE ought to have worked with her. She insists:

If eventually I become a practice educator I'm gonna protect my student because I

realised that she opened me and subjected me under pressure from everybody in the team. (*Tolu, interview, June 2014*)

The shortage of social work PEs from BME backgrounds has been written about (Wainwright 2009; Parker 2010). This has resulted in a number of initiatives aimed at training and recruiting PEs from minority groups. However, it remains to be seen whether these initiatives have resulted in an increase of BME PEs in England. Channer and Doel (2009) examine the experiences of BME students on post-qualifying (PQ) social work training and conclude that overall BME students are under-represented on PQ programmes as these are usually linked to career progression and first level line management, levels at which BME social workers are under-represented. Tolu recognises that her PE was unsupportive and that this resulted in team members exerting pressure on Tolu. Clearly, with this experience, Tolu is keen to ensure that as a future practice educator, she would be as supportive to her students as is required.

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#### 3.4.2 Factors that enhance placement experience

Black African students reported first hand some of the situations which could contribute to a positive practice learning environment. Whilst some factors were real and had been experienced, others were more speculative and related to the student, the PE, the university and in some cases service users. It would appear that BAS felt valued when spoken to respectfully and politely whilst on placement. Maki concluded:

I've never felt any animosity or felt undermined, she would say 'do you mind doing this?' she'll talk nicely not in a patronising way, but like for me to learn something  
(*Maki, interview, June 2014*)

Admittedly, this non-patronising approach was viewed positively by Maki who insists that this worked in that it was aimed at empowering her to learn and make the most of her learning opportunity. Black, Maki and Nunn (1997: 44) conclude that within supervisory relationships ‘issues related to culture, race and ethnicity may play an important role between the student and field instructor, and may hinder or promote the establishment of an accepting, comfortable and mutually respectful environment for learning’.

Mavis concurred, although not having personally experienced a good working relationship with her PE felt that this was important as was the working environment more generally:

I think good working relationship because for me that one was a big one. Good working environment. Good working relationship. (*Mavis, interview, June 2014*)

Feeling valued and supported permeated other aspects of Maki’s placement when her work was singled out as an exemplar to be retained by the agency. She states:

I designed a leaflet and the agency have said they’re gonna keep that leaflet and use it for future training. (*Maki, interview, June 2014*)

Whilst Maki’s achievement is laudable and should be celebrated, one cannot help questioning whether this is genuine or whether the interests of the agency have converged with Maki’s leaflet creation to result in the decision to retain it for future use. Milner (2008) reminds us that Maki’s white PE would be unlikely to adopt this poster at a gain to Maki and a loss to the agency and so in this ‘win-win’ situation, there is more than one winner.

A similar experience is shared by Ama, where her university had retained some work she had completed to use as exemplars for future students.

Recently I had feedback from university that they wanted to use my feedback form for a promotional document at our university and I was like ‘Oh really? That’s good.’  
(*Ama, interview, June 2014*)

Tolu suggests some strategies for BAS themselves:

I believe that if a student goes into placement with open mind and willingness to learn, they will come out as better individuals. If they are willing to take on board criticism. (*Tolu, interview, June 2014*)

Tolu’s suggestion that BAS have an open mind when going into placement mirrors the view by participants in the Tadam (2014) study. This open-mindedness can be constructed as not allowing oneself to be constrained by anxiety about their placements.

She goes on further to say:

Also as a student, I think it is important that we strive not to cut corners because when we were discussing power imbalance, one of the ways I think power imbalance between student and assessors could be addressed...it’s when a student is able to challenge their assessors. (*Tolu, interview, June 2014*)

Challenging one’s PE and effectively the person who will make the decision about whether a student passes or fails a placement is not easy or straightforward to achieve. Indeed, participants like Tom articulated their reluctance to challenge their PE due to possible repercussions and negative impact on their placements. Not all PEs accept challenge from their students easily.

Tolu makes direct reference to the use of ‘trainee’ PEs and how in her opinion this impacted on not only her knowledge base but on how she was perceived by Tolu. Certainly PEs



have to go through formal training and learning to be allowed to supervise and assess social work students and as part of their training; they will need to demonstrate that they have enabled the learning of another (TCSW 2012). The PE training is comprehensive and has recently undergone review and like already practising PEs, trainee PEs are bound by social work codes of practice and practice educator values and practice standards. Tolu compares her first placement to this current one:

In my first year placement I had a very experienced assessor and I didn't have any problems with her. But the second year placement I had, I had an assessor who was on her own practice educator training, and I suppose I was either her first student or a second. *(Tolu, interview, June 2014)*

Contributing to factors which could enhance BAS placement experiences, Tom proposes a rather obvious but necessary assertion:

I think to make it a positive placement; I think they have to make sure that they treat everyone equally, rather than according to your minority. *(Tom, interview, June 2014)*

Tom continues by proposing the value of sending BAS to placement in pairs:

But you find that if you go with another student who is white the white person will be put on top and the black person will be put at the bottom. But if you go out as two black students, you'll be taken equally which is good for the black African. *(Tom, interview, June 2014)*

Tom's comment is suggestive of discrimination between the racialised groups when a black student is placed with a white student. His comments point to the whiteness as property principle of critical race theory. He consciously or unconsciously uses the language of

hierarchy in a way that indicates his view that race is a determining factor in terms of hierarchy between students on placements. Colic-Peisker (2009) argues that it is often such visibility that creates the differences in treatment and acceptance between black and white people. What is even more poignant is that Tom believes the white student 'will be put on top', suggestive of external support to make this happen. If this is indeed the case, the PE will have to be even more cautious of the messages they send out to students when they are working with them. The suggestion that perhaps if black students are sent out in pairs then the possibility of discrimination or favouritism may be minimised is an interesting one which requires further exploration. There is evidence to suggest that as a pair, the black African students can support each other, thereby minimising the impact of discrimination and isolation if it occurs. However, it is potentially simplistic to suggest that discrimination and racism will disappear because of the numbers of black students. It is highly likely that both students experience discrimination and in the absence of a 'comparison' this treatment may be more difficult to evidence or articulate. Gillborn (2006a) suggests that approval and respect for black people is usually reliant on the views of white people. Tom's strategy will be successful only when the white PE acknowledges and recognises the uniqueness of students and the value the BAS bring to the practice learning setting.

It is Tom's view that two BAS allocated to the same placement has benefits for both students. It could be suggested such a strategy could go a number of ways – that they both experience and suffer discrimination that they both have positive experiences, or that additional intersectional factors such as gender, disability or age might contribute to differential treatment. Whatever the outcome, it is concerning that Tom views the presence of a white student as resulting in automatic hierarchical advantage for the white student at the expense of the BAS.

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### 3.4.3 Success narratives

These are the narratives of strategies, ideas and perceptions which participants view as necessary and essential to ensuring positive placement experiences which ultimately are also successful. Tolu begins with a suggestion for BAS themselves; she articulates the importance of beginning one's placement with enthusiasm:

I'll start with the students; I think it is best for a student to go into placement with a willingness to learn, with enthusiasm. (*Tolu, interview, June 2014*)

Tolu's contribution, whilst valid in its own right, can be interpreted as fairly simplistic within the wider context of the research findings. The 'willingness to learn' and 'enthusiasm' at the start of placements appeared to be at the fore of BAS's considerations. This, it would appear, was insufficient to prevent the negative experiences they faced. It may possibly be more realistic to include enthusiasm and willingness to learn under a broader umbrella of 'student' attributes.

Maki reflects on her association with other BAS whose studies have either been terminated or who generally had felt let down by their placement. She expresses the need for BAS to be more assertive, saying that this is likely to result in more positive experiences on placement.

I've got so many people that have done social work, that I know and there seems to be so many people feel let down on placement and some have had to be chucked off the course. And from talking to my friends I think (this is my opinion, my opinion, I might be wrong) you have to be more assertive in yourself you know what I mean if you're going to go into an agency and going to be meek, let people ride over you. (*Maki, interview, June 2014*)

Maki's view about being 'meek', whilst interesting, requires deconstruction and reflection. Female BAS may be at risk of being labelled 'angry black women', a stereotype which is used when black women try to assert themselves and stand their ground (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas and Harrison 2008). This assertiveness can also be perceived as hostility (Hall et al. 2012). For black men, the stereotype about them being aggressive is likely to be applied to them should they stand their ground. An awareness of this has led many black professional men and women to be overly patient, calm and meek in the workplace (Atewologun and Singh 2010) but perhaps this is what Maki understands to be the reason why some people within her network experienced their placements as disappointing. Shorter-Gooden (2004) suggests that black women who value themselves and demonstrate this through resisting negative perceptions, having a positive self-image, respecting themselves and having the determination to succeed are often better placed to 'buffer the sting of oppression' (p.417). It is also interesting that Maki feels the need not to be meek but assertive. In my experience as a PE not all white students have been assertive whilst on placement yet this has not resulted in poor placement experiences or failure. It is useful that Maki considers this view as a personal one and acknowledges that it may not be valid for all BAS.

### 3.5 BAS' experiences with other stakeholders: Service users and their HEIs

It must be reiterated here that the focus of this study is not BAS and their relationships with their PEs; rather it aimed to gain insight into the experiences of BAS within practice learning. It is therefore interesting that participants' narratives were heavily influenced by the relationships with their PEs, however in this section; focus will be given to BAS experiences in relation to service users and their HEI's.

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### 3.5.1 Experiences with service users

A few reported that their relationships and experiences with service users, whilst central to social work practice, were not always positive. There appeared to be some reluctance by services users to engage with BAS on placement and the reasons for this were not always clear:

While I was on placement we used to have drop-in sessions at the hospital. And we would take turns to go in obviously. And the times I've been there, I didn't get any service user come to access the support, and the nurses would tell me that most of the service users they would be referring will always ask, is the support worker you know black or white and if they are told that it's black they would not come. But on the other hand some of the students who were white or some of the staff members who attended drop-in would come back with service users who had signed up. So that, [laughs] that was a bit surprising because it was clear that they only wanted to see white people doing the drop-in. (*Grace, interview, June 2014*)

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### 3.5.2 University narratives

Not all the participant experiences concerned placements directly; however, these experiences are relevant in that they tell a story about the ways in which different BAS personalities attract differential responses from people with whom they are in contact. In this section, Maki draws our attention to the differences in treatment meted out to her and another black peer by the same person who happens to be a university tutor.

What's really sad is that one of my friends we have the same personal tutor, I can go

to her with issues and they will be addressed. When she tries to do it it's like, a different story, she's hitting her head on a brick wall. I don't know where that difference comes in. I say 'oh you've got to go she's really supportive but she got the opposite to what I got so I didn't understand that relationship. We are talking about the same person with different behaviour with two different people so I don't know.

*(Maki, interview, June 2014)*

This narrative further evidences an interesting area of differential treatment towards two BAS. Whilst Maki's issues are readily addressed, her colleague is reported to be 'hitting her head on a brick wall' and getting nowhere. It is difficult to understand why this appears to be the case, however Maki has previously alluded to BAS needing to be resilient and strong in order to navigate their way in social work education and it is entirely possible that her black colleague is negatively positioned in the opinion of the University tutor.

Vicky vocalises the role of Universities in acknowledging the quality of PE's who are engaged to support BAS. She states that:

And the other thing it's important that Universities should know that there are Practice Educators that are not good at all *(Vicky, interview June 2014)*

There are recommendations arising from this in chapter five.

This section examines the utility of CRT in advancing our understanding of the experiences of BAS on social work placements in England. To achieve this, the principles of CRT will be identified and discussed and practice guidance proposed (Appendix 9). That racism was a daily experience for these participants cannot be over-emphasised. Seven participants experienced racist behaviour and racism in their daily interactions, not only with their PEs but also their peers, members of their teams, service users and also from some university staff. The nature of racism was not always expressed explicitly by participants, who chose (knowingly or otherwise) to use other language to describe their experiences. The reasons for this have been considered carefully and it can only be assumed that they, like many others, chose not to name it for fear of repercussions or simply due to the emotional strain which could arise.

The sample was made up of seven females and one male consequently their experiences of Intersectionality (arising from their gender and race) were recognised and acknowledged through their narratives. From Mavis, who felt she was unable to disrupt her placement as she had a 'family to look after', to Tom who chose to 'stay part time near his placement and the rest of the week at home', the impact of participants' gender was evident. In addition, all eight participants had female PEs and the implications of this have to be considered more critically. Also, for Jane who had a visible disability, it would appear the barriers to her success were even more marked and severe. She was her own advocate, she had no choice but to explain her condition over and over again in different meetings and on different occasions, and she educated people on their Equality Act 2010 duties and responsibilities, and faced discriminating, degrading and disrespectful behaviours and attitudes often.

All eight participants drew upon and expressed principles of fairness and equality as being absent from their experiences and the lack of social justice is integrated into their narratives.

The study also revealed the salience of whiteness as property and white privilege which is closely aligned to one's physical features, accent, perceptions of ability and outcomes. Indeed, such was the sentiment that Tom recommended sending BAS on placement in pairs and not with white peers who in his view were automatically accorded a higher status than their BAS colleagues. All eight participants implied this principle in some way. For Vicky and Grace, it manifested in the form of their white peers being accorded more respect and their learning needs being met more readily than theirs. For Mavis, Jane, Tolu and Ama it was a case of feeling outnumbered, errors and mistakes magnified, and issues of communication in terms of accent and writing regularly surfacing. Mavis experienced a particularly distressing situation and one which I have reflected on in depth. During her first supervision, she was confronted with a PE who interrogated her about female genital mutilation, asking whether Mavis was a victim of this practice after Mavis had indicated she was of Kenyan origin. Furthermore, it is argued that a white student would not have been asked a question of this nature, even if they had stated their nationality as African.

It can also be argued that a colour-blind approach was at play in some of the BAS' experiences and narratives. For example, whilst Maki's PE did not present her with difficult or exclusionary practices and behaviour, she appeared not to notice Maki's race and ethnicity at all. There is the danger sometimes that when differences are not named, they remain unacknowledged. As a student of social work, discussion and openness about issues of diversity is encouraged (Shardlow and Doel 1996). It is also interesting that Maki describes the 'power imbalance' between her and her PE as arising from her position as student and not her position as a black student. It has been argued throughout this thesis that the principles



of non-discrimination, equality, fairness, respect for persons and social justice are central to social work practice with vulnerable people. These principles, however, appear to be at best minimally present and at worst absent or ignored in these PE's practice with BAS and it is important that a framework is proposed to correct this anomaly and to contribute towards a more respectful and non-discriminatory relationship. The practice guidance draws from the findings of this study and attempts to integrate PE values (TCSW 2012) with social justice and empowerment principles with a view to facilitating a dignified and respectful approach to the needs of BAS on placement. The ultimate aim would be to make CRT a redundant theoretical framework in the future.

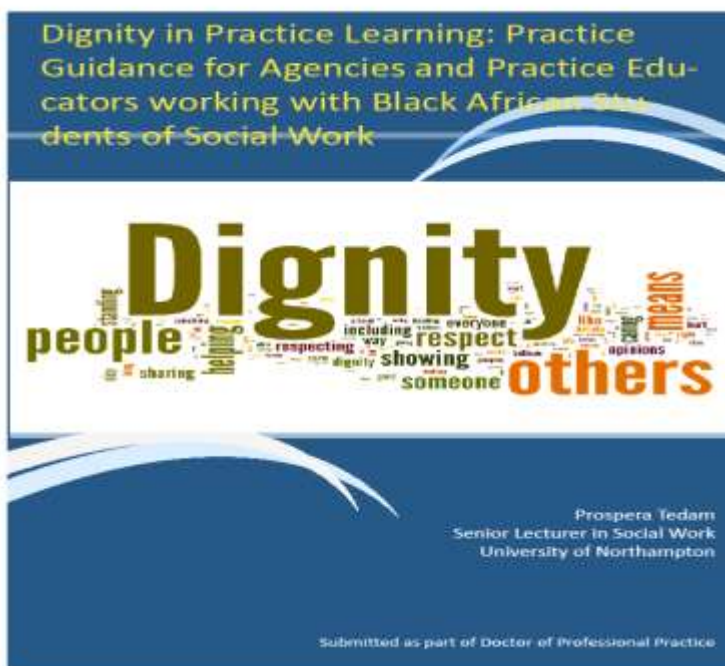


Figure 8 Practice guidance (Appendix 9)

The use of such guidance should be considered alongside other frameworks such as the model for anti-racist practice teaching by Shardlow and Doel (1996), the Personal, Cultural

and Structural (PCS) model by Thompson (2011) or MANDELA model (Tadam 2012a) to mention a few and can be adapted when students become qualified practitioners.

Research by Mbarushimana and Robbins (2015) identify the experience of racism by qualified BME social workers which is not dissimilar to findings from qualified nurses of black African origin by Likupe (2015), already discussed. The findings from both studies, whilst not explicitly using a CRT frame of reference can be viewed as consistent with many of its principles – for example, privileging white colleagues, regular interactions with racism and racialised stereotypes in the form of bullying, name-calling and over-scrutiny.

As already stated, the range of principles articulated by proponents of CRT are not unanimously agreed. However, within this study, six of the principles have been evident. Table 3 provides a visual illustration of the principles of CRT and identifies where BAS have come into contact (or not) with the principles. It shows that Vicky, Mavis and Jane have experienced all six of CRT's principles and that Maki's experiences linked to three of the principles. It has to be stated that not all participant narratives have been incorporated in this study which has reported a few common themes. Consequently, there are elements of CRT which arose for some participants which are not reflected in Table 3 below.

Table 3 BAS' experiences and CRT

CRT participant	Daily racism	Interest convergence	Intersectionality	Social construction of race	Whiteness as property/	Promotes voice
<b>Vicky</b>						
<b>Maki</b>						
<b>Mavis</b>						
<b>Ama</b>						
<b>Tolu</b>						
<b>Tom</b>						
<b>Grace</b>						
<b>Jane</b>						

Key- CRT Principles (Evident or Not evident)

	Evident
	Not Evident

#### 4.1 Conclusion

A recent report by OFFA (2014) concluded that in UK higher education institutions, non-continuation rates for black entrants were the highest, with 11.3 per cent of 2010–2011 entrants no longer in HE after one year and that the issues relating to attainment for BME students are complex. Consequently, existing strategies are ineffective. This chapter has

reported the findings from the data collected through interviews and reflective diaries and has attempted to analyse the findings drawing upon relevant principles from CRT. Notably, CRT has offered some benefits through which social work educators can understand the experiences of black African social work students and their experiences on their qualifying programmes. The study participants have articulated their various experiences on social work placements in voluntary and statutory sector agencies. Their narratives of racism far outweigh their narratives of coping with racism as they recognise the centrality of race and the contribution of racism to their experiences and outcomes. BAS offer views about how their experiences may be improved in the future. Their recommendations set the tone for better monitoring of PEs and placements, additional training for PEs, and careful matching among others and these will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 5 will identify where and how the research questions, aims and objectives have been addressed in this study, and will highlight key recommendations and implications for practice.

This section of the thesis reflects on the research findings and attempts to examine the implications for practice in social work education. Social work practice and education like many other professions and academic disciplines is not immune to attracting people who hold particular views and attitudes about black and minority ethnic people. Given the profession's stated principles about non-oppression, non-discrimination, equality of opportunity, respect for diversity and enhancing social justice, it is concerning that the findings of this study have identified social workers in PE roles to be complicit in undermining these values and principles. BAS' experiences on placement (positive and negative) have implications for HEIs, social work education and social work practice.

This study has sought to add to the limited knowledge about the specific practice learning experiences of BAS studying social work in England. A key outcome of this professional doctorate is about how these findings can change and/or improve social work education and practice. The use of narrative research methods and CRT have contributed to an understanding of these experiences and illuminated the otherwise hidden experiences of this ethnic minority group as well as provided new knowledge which can be applied to social work placements involving black African students. In order to provide some structure for the discussion, the implications for practice will be examined under three main headings: pre-placement, placement and post-placement contexts.

This study has concluded that race and racism contribute to BAS' experiences on social work placements and as such cannot and should not be ignored. It is imperative that all stakeholders involved in social work education become aware of this key finding and devise strategies to minimise racist practice. This would involve individual and structural

commitment to change at all levels and the will to understand racism in all its manifestations. The experiences of BAS in this study are largely consistent, despite location of university, type of university, gender, country of heritage or level of study. An unexpected finding was that BAS shared similar experiences irrespective of the route and academic level they were studying at – masters or bachelors degree – and that all PEs in this study are female. Tom and Grace were the only participants with a PE from a BME background and Maki was the only student whose white PE is said to have acted in a supportive and empowering manner. The experiences of the remaining five participants –Vicky, Jane, Tolu, Mavis and Ama were poor overall to varying degrees.

## 5.1 Pre-placement

### 5.1.1 Admission, Progression & the Student experience

The findings from this study suggest there is the need to ensure that admission onto courses that offer work based or practice learning components are fair and transparent and that progression and attainment data is carefully interrogated to highlight any discrepancies that may exist among different groups of students. The case of Jane who disclosed her disability all through the admissions process yet appeared to be let down by the University and her placement because of her disability is a case in point and Holmstrom and Taylor (2008) have argued that there is a link between the characteristics of social work students and their subsequent performance on placement and on their programmes of study as a whole.

Entry criteria for HEIs are variable across social work programmes in England (Dillon 2010). Many programmes have strict and robust entry requirements and processes, often working with colleges and some further education (FE) providers to take on their students from access courses, which according to Dillon (2011) is a route which produces high numbers of

black African students. Jones (2006) heralds access to social work courses as grounded in principles of social justice. It is important that HEIs do not give mixed and unclear messages to their students at the point of entry. The push to widen participation has been viewed by some researchers as contributing to the poor outcomes of minority and other non-traditional groups. Fletcher et al. (2013) emphasised that HEIs focus on increasing access to higher education at the expense of a focus on equality of outcomes. It is being suggested here that at the point of admission onto social work programmes, HEIs in England consider their commitment to equality and diversity and ensure a robust and clear strategy to support students from black African backgrounds, particularly as this group of students are vulnerable to discriminatory practices whilst undertaking practice learning. Most social work programmes hold interviews as part of their selection process and at this stage African accents are presumably understood by academics, service users and PE's who are usually involved in the recruitment and selection of social work students . The issue then is why and how some PEs use accents to disadvantage BAS during placement. A recognition that these encounters impact on the BAS experience is important. In addition, the situation experienced by Vicky where being a non-car driver is alleged to have contributed to a delayed placement allocation, leaves unanswered questions about how fair, honest and transparent the criterion for admissions are.

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### 5.1.2 Careful matching of students to placements and PEs

The data further indicates the need for a more systematic and sensitive approach when matching or allocating BAS to specific placements and PEs. The matching of PE to student needs a careful, methodical and robust approach. Tom queried the value of same-race matching between students and their PEs and it is interesting to note that Mavis, Tolu, Vicky and Jane had white PEs with Maki's PE being the only white PE to support a positive

placement experience. Tom and Grace also had positive placement experiences. However, they described their PE as black. It would appear that students can be unsure or unaware of the existence of any process in relation to placement allocations within their HEIs. Although Tom, Maki and Ama were aware of a process of sorts, they were sceptical about how and whether these processes worked. The matching of students to placements according to Fairtlough et al. (2013) is achieved on a case-by-case basis by HEIs and there appears to be no standardised guidance to be followed. Such a situation puts BAS in positions where they are vulnerable to unfair and discriminatory processes, akin to institutional racism, which could result in delayed placement allocation as experienced by Grace, Vicky, Ama and Jane.

Where BAS profiles/CVs are declined, PEs should be required to provide reasons for their decision and HEIs should address any patterns with the appropriate Organisation and/or PE and delay in placement allocation should be communicated to the BAS swiftly and with the reasons for this.

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### 5.1.3 Pre-placement planning

The findings from this study testify to the need for careful planning before placements commenced. Pre-placement considerations are the activities and processes which occur prior to the BAS going on placement. It is generally known that a level of planning and preparation is required before a student can be allowed to go on placement and it is important that these issues are discussed and addressed. That students often feel anxious about placements cannot be overstated (Flynn, Kamasua, Brydon, Lawihin, Kornhauser and Grimes 2013). Students undertake preparation for practice, which according to O'Connor, Cecil and Boudioni (2009) needs to be more clearly defined and understood. Before placements commence, it is important that students meet with their prospective PEs and other members of the team in



which they are being placed to discuss the suitability of the student for the placement and other matters directly related to the placement (Simpson et al. 2014). The nature and content of these meetings are fluid and there is a lack of consistency about the form these meetings should take. Despite this, research by Simpson et al. (2014) found that overall, students and their PEs found these pre-placement meetings useful and productive and often used them as forums to hear about the student and what skills, knowledge and experience they were bringing to the placement. Negative preconceptions by some PE's may be minimised utilising pre-placement meetings and forums where BAS can meet their PE's and begin to discuss issues of significance to their placements. Vicky, Mavis, Ama, Jane and Tolu may have benefitted from such an approach. BAS noted that on many occasions they were ignored by PEs and other members of the team unless accompanied by their white peers and so while the argument of 'whiteness as property' has already been discussed, a recommendation arising from this experience is the importance of a positive professional relationship with peers and PEs. This can be facilitated by the PE and shared with members of the team especially where there are a number of students in one placement.

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#### 5.1.4 Regular training and auditing of PEs

The findings offered insight into the need for bespoke training for PEs in the area of equality and diversity, unconscious bias and anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice within the context of practice learning. The study highlighted gaps in PE skills and knowledge required to effectively support students of black African origin.

HEIs should require PEs to undertake training on equality and diversity and ensure that training is updated in order for PEs to remain eligible to supervise students. For PE's who have not supervised a BAS on placement, this training is even more crucial and should

address concepts such as unconscious bias, culturally sensitive approaches to supervision and re-enforce the PE values set out by TCSW (2012). This may have prevented the insensitive and inappropriate questioning directed at Mavis during her very first supervision. In addition to training, audits of PEs should be undertaken regularly. These audits should address and examine areas such as numbers of students supervised, diversity of students, outcomes for students, and so on as well as whether or not any grievances/complaints have been made in relation to the PE. As many offsite PEs are self-employed, it is important that HEIs satisfy themselves that PEs are maintaining good practice in all aspects of their work and with the range of HEIs they might be connected and working with. Tadam (2014) found that in relation to insufficient evidence provided to justify the failing of one BAS, the white PE had a string of failed placements all of BME ethnicity, a fact which the HEI had been unaware of until an investigation was instigated.

Consideration should also be given to PEs being struck off or admonished via HCPC codes of conduct. Currently, HCPC has the authority to investigate reports of inappropriate and unprofessional behaviour demonstrated by qualified registered social workers and administer a commensurate sanction. Under the GSCC, a social worker was struck off for comparing her black colleague to a monkey and attempting to justify it as banter (HCPC Online). There is no reason why an equally grave consequence should not be given to some of the PEs discussed in this study.

It is imperative that PEs move away from the regular threat of failure with little or no evidence to support this. Finch, Schaub and Darlymple (2014) has found that PEs can be hesitant to fail students on social work placements due to factors such as their own emotional wellbeing, lack of support from the HEI, and vindictive and hostile students. BAS should be made fully aware of the procedures for awarding a fail and should be kept informed of

any concerns that PEs or other qualified practitioners might have about a student's practice or competence on placements. Although none of the participants in this study failed their placements, the word 'failure' was often used by PEs with little evidence to justify the comment and created unnecessary anxiety amongst BAS. Vicky, Mavis and Tolu experienced this. Closely linked to the issue of PE's is the need for increased numbers of black African PEs. Current numbers do not appear to be proportionate to the numbers of BAS n in England. The Black Practice teachers programme in Manchester (Wainwright 2009) attempted to address this through recruiting and training people from BME backgrounds to become PEs.

## 5.2 Placement related Implications

### 5.2.1 Inductions, initial meetings and learning contracts

It became evident through participant narratives that once placements had commenced processes to ensure that BAS would be welcomed and supported were absent.

Inductions should be carefully planned and organised and students should be introduced to colleagues and other team members. This kind of preparation should be undertaken in line with the goals and objectives of the student and a clear programme about who they will meet, when and what knowledge they require (Parker 2008). Such a strategy may assist in minimising isolation for BAS and can be a good opportunity for members of the team to embrace the idea of a black student joining the team and their individual and collective responsibility in ensuring that the student is supported. This is also a useful approach which may have benefitted Vicky, Mavis and Ama has the potential to highlight any early warning signs about the fit between the BAS and the wider team.

Initial meetings are used to agree practical arrangements such as working hours, seating

arrangements, lunch breaks, time off and so on (Nicholas and Kerr 2015) and it is important that these issues are discussed and agreed from the start of the student's placement. Vicky's experience where her PE appeared to be inflexible about morning start times and Mavis' narrative about requesting the keys to the Agency to enable her start early are two cases where negotiations about flexible working did not appear to work in favour of the student. Their narratives are suggestive of PEs with whom Vicky and Mavis shared little rapport from the outset.

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### 5.2.2 Supervision/mentoring arrangements & workload allocation

This study made visible the impact of poor PE-student relationship on the overall well-being and learning experience of BAS and it is argued here that support offered to BAS should not be coincidental, but rather planned and strategic. Supervision is at the heart of the PE-student relationship and participants in this study have reported less than satisfactory experiences of supervision and of their supervisors. For Mavis, who reported hostility, a more empowering supervisory relationship is important. PE's are required to respect and value the uniqueness and diversity of learners and recognise and build on their strengths, and take into account individual learning styles and preferred assessment methods' (TCSW 2012). For PEs who require the use of tools and or models to enhance their supervisions with BAS, the MANDELA supervision framework may be useful (Tedam 2012a; Tedam and Zuchowski 2014). Consideration of the use of external consultants according to Shardlow and Doel (1996) is proposed, especially where there are minimal or no opportunities for students to self-validate within the context of race within practice supervisions.

A key recommendation arising from this study is the need for appropriate levels of work to be allocated to BAS. The view that BAS were given case work which would not enhance their

skills nor challenge them intellectually requires some attention. There must be a process by which case work is identified and allocated to students and it is the responsibility of the PE to work alongside their student to identify appropriate levels of work, commensurate with the student's skills, knowledge, experience and learning objectives.

### 5.3 Post-placement

Another unquestionable finding arising from this study is the need to offer a safe space for BAS to reflect on their placement learning experiences through debriefing and audits and evaluations once placements have ended.

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#### 5.3.1 Debriefing and Placement evaluation

It is being recommended that thorough debriefing sessions are held with black students to afford them the opportunity to evaluate their placement and placement experiences. A key finding from this study has revealed that BAS were generally unwilling to make complaints or share their concerns about their PEs or placements for fear of this resulting in unpleasant outcomes such as delayed progression or being targeted for failure. Such a situation calls for a more proactive approach by placement teams at HEIs who are in a position to offer black students debriefing and self-evaluation opportunities so that oppressive behaviour is picked up and addressed at the earliest opportunity.

Closely linked to the post-placement evaluation mentioned above, a detailed checklist of students' experiences should be mapped against the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 to provide additional protection to students who hold these characteristics. Such a strategy will ensure that any patterns are picked up and addressed early on in terms

of PEs specifically but also teams and organisations providing placements more widely. For Jane who was black, female and had a disability, such a strategy may have highlighted the extent to which placement providers ‘made necessary adjustments to provide an inclusive learning environment’ (Masocha, 2015:6) for BAS with her needs.

Where students have expressed or discussed difficulties in relation to PEs once placements have finished, it is not sufficient to assume that these issues will not crop up again with subsequent students. It is important that they are addressed swiftly and the outcomes made transparent. Universities should prioritise these meetings and ensure that they are fully recorded and action plans drawn up as appropriate.

An important recommendation is the need for HEIs to produce written guidance and policies for working with BAS on placements. Ad hoc plans and solutions should not be encouraged, nor should it be left to the ‘good will’ of HEIs or other staff to ensure that BAS are treated fairly or have positive placement experiences. The absence of policy and guidance often results in reliance on individuals to ensure the fair application of any existing rules and regulations.

#### 5.4 Implications for higher education institutions

Light et al. (2009) suggest that ‘excellence’ is a new way of thinking and talking in higher education, and that mission statements and other statements of purpose reflect this new strategy across HEIs. This strive for excellence is communicated through marketing literature to recruit students onto courses and programmes of study. This has further meant that the profile of universities has changed from being ‘elite’ to ‘mass’ (Trow, 2006) and resulting in increased numbers of women, students from BME groups and mature students. With specific reference to students from BME backgrounds, social work education in England is

continuing to be an attractive professional training option (Masocha 2015) and it is time for HEI's to understand that the causes of the differential progression rates between black students and their white peers cannot be attributed to personal individual factors alone. That racism has and will continue to shape the experiences and outcomes for BAS studying social work cannot go unacknowledged and if the status quo in relation to BAS on social work placements is allowed to thrive, there will be far reaching implications for HEIs. For example, the continued impact on progression and attainment outcomes will disadvantage BME and consequently national league and performance tables. Closing the achievement and attainment gap between white and black students is unachievable without the will to change unconscious or conscious racist institutional practices which are deeply ingrained in the structures of HEIs and some placement agencies.

Specific minority groups may be reluctant to apply to universities where previous minority students have provided examples about their unfavourable experiences and outcomes. Vicky alludes to this when she suggests that the student population at her University was not ethnically diverse.

In addition, there is the possibility that when BAS eventually find their voices and are supported to report their experiences of discrimination, this may increase the use of formal grievance processes against PEs, social work departments and/or HEIs

It is also important to recognise that students' wellbeing will continue to be compromised as racially hostile learning environments are detrimental to the health and wellbeing of BAS.

Another key implication for HEIs is that placement providers with whom a memorandum of understanding exists appear to be falling foul of legislation and in particular the Equality Act 2010 in the areas of race, gender and disability. This failure is manifested in the experiences

of the majority of the participants who contributed to this study and it is imperative that steps are taken to address this.

Finally, curriculum changes and amendments should be considered could include race-specific knowledge. Collins (2001) advocates the importance of understanding feminism from the perspective of black women, which values their lived experiences, privileges multiple knowledge creation methods and understands the intersectional nature of their oppression. Such academic teaching will expose BAS to the deep-rooted nature of race and racism and perhaps provide them with strategies for dealing more effectively with racism whilst on placements. It is regrettable that The College of Social Work (TCSW) will no longer exist by the end of September 2015 as has been announced by the current Conservative Government. It is unclear what (if anything) will replace it and leaves social work in a vulnerable situation. For now, the vulnerability of BAS on placements is even more acute as discussions are being held to determine whether or not the work done by the college and referred to in this study such as the practice educator standards and values will continue to exist.



This section presents the contributions of this study to theory, methodology and practice, highlighting key areas where knowledge has been generated when trying to address the research question, aims and objectives.

### 6.1 Contribution to knowledge: research questions and aims revisited

The key contribution of this thesis lies in its unique examination of the practice learning experiences of some black African students of social work in England, drawing upon critical race theory and narrative methods. This contribution can be broken down into several aspects. First, the focus on black African students studying social work in England and not the generalisation under BME ethnicity is a worthy originality element of this study. Second, the use of CRT in guiding the design, methods of data collection and analysis is another important contribution. Lastly, the use of interview and diary data to capture participants' experiences has resulted in new and unique understandings of the ways in which some BAS experience their practice learning in relation to other stakeholders in practice learning such as PEs, on site supervisors, team members and peers, service users and university placement teams.

The following sections provide a summary of the research questions and how these were addressed through the data generated and analysed as well as the findings generated from that.

#### 1) *What are the practice learning experiences of black African students in England?*

Despite gaining admission onto social work programmes at BA and MA levels, black African students appear to have poor and less satisfactory experiences on placement. The findings

show that some black African students have some negative practice learning experiences characterised by hostility, disrespect, negative preconceptions, stereotypical views, isolation and exclusion, and the unfair use of power and power structures. In some instances, BAS recognised that their experiences were different from the experiences of white students.

The findings confirm that experiences are positive when BAS had practice educators who were themselves from a BME background, when they had a supportive and fair PE, when BAS projected strong, determined and resilient attributes or when they avoided conflict by not challenging oppressive or discriminatory practice (see chapter 3).

2) *To what extent do ideas of race and racism impact upon the negative practice learning experiences of black African students studying social work?*

The findings show that black African students experienced racism and differential treatment based on negative racialised perceptions by peers, PEs, service users and university placement departments. Racism manifested in overt and covert forms: from their accents being perceived as less welcoming and difficult to understand to micro-aggressions and micro-invalidations during which comments were made about specific countries of origin and poor academic literacy for example. Issues of race were particularly highlighted when white peers were treated more favourably than BAS and when opportunities for learning and development were closed to them but open to their white peers. The use of white allies proved a useful strategy in trying to navigate the complexities of placements; however, these BAS paid the ethnic penalty (Fairtlough et al. 2013) in relation to their names, accents, countries of origin and for one student, her disability (see pages 60-91).

3) *What do black African students perceive as factors which promote and inhibit positive practice learning experiences and outcomes?*

Students referred to supportive relationships with their PEs, working towards a goal, being assertive and being allowed to use their initiative as factors which contributed to positive placement experiences. They highlighted hostility, a lack of confidence in their abilities, poor management skills, lack of empathy, impatience, misunderstanding of disability, racism, oppression, insensitivity and many forms of discrimination as inhibiting factors.

Overall, participants did not wish to verbalise their frustrations, anger and disappointment with their placements and practice educators for fear of losing opportunities on the course or for placements to be terminated. What is concerning is the fact that for many of these students the negative experiences began almost immediately and it is little wonder that some participants stated that they had maintained a low profile to enable them navigate their remaining placement days. It is vital that BAS remember the forces that sustain them through placements and offer these as strategies for future BAS pursuing professional social work training in England (see pages 100-114)

There were four aims of this research, all of which were successfully achieved. The first aim was to understand from the perspective of the participants, their experiences of practice learning in England. Participant narratives and data from the reflective diaries highlighted the experiences which also addressed the first research question.

The second aim of this study was to become aware of the strategies that could enhance practice learning outcomes for BAS. Again, these strategies were articulated by the participants within their narratives and directly answered one of the main research questions.

In order to understand how BAS navigate practice learning, participants offered a range of suggestions and ideas which have been discussed extensively throughout the thesis and particularly in chapters three and five. These address the third research aim.

The fourth aim of this research was to offer an interpretation of the data for the purpose of information the development of practice learning guidelines and processes. Whilst this will be an ongoing outcome of this study, the practice guidance (Appendix 9) directly addressed this research aim alongside the interpretation of data in chapter three.

## 6.2 Recommendations for black African students

This study has been about BAS studying social work in England and their experiences of placements and so it is appropriate that some of the recommendations identified relate directly to them. Students ‘need to be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses in terms of coping with stress and interacting with others’ (Williamson, Hostetter, Byers and Huggins 2010: 241). Such a strategy will enable BAS to understand themselves and the ways in which they react to adverse encounters. To some extent, Maki alludes to this when she referred to her personal strategies of survival and coping whilst on placement. Tom, Mavis and Ama also coped with avoiding distractions and keeping silent about their experiences.

BAS who have poor placement experiences linked to PE behaviours and attitudes may struggle to become role models to others in the future. It is also highly likely that they will be discouraged to train as PEs, or alternatively when trained could use their experiences to provide students a more supportive and positive experience, as was suggested by Tolu.

In considering the implications for social work practice, no unachievable or unrealistic recommendations have been highlighted. I acknowledge that I am part of the establishment

and would be keen to volunteer to implement some of these recommendations within my own institution and beyond, however it would be unwise and perhaps counterproductive for any race-related developments to be isolated as an area for black academics to address within HEIs. It is perhaps fair to conclude that higher education in itself does not provide immunity against some of the worst forms of oppression, segregation and racism (Pilkington 2013). However, it would be insincere to argue that there is little interest by social work academics to address these areas of inequality within their own programmes and there is evidence of at least one institution (University of Central Lancashire) who have instituted an Equality and Diversity Mediation provision which, in my opinion reflects good practice and seeks to provide students with an independent forum to discuss and deal with any issues from placement which are broadly in the area of equality and diversity. The profession cannot purport to promote equality, fairness and human rights, nor can it claim to advance empowerment and liberation to its service users, when it is clearly failing in its duty to afford some BAS similar principles.

### 6.3 Recommendations for future research

It would be worthwhile to examine the experiences of PEs who have worked with students from black African backgrounds to understand their views, experiences and perspectives in relation to their students. It could also be useful to track some of the participants from this study into their first social work jobs post-qualification to ascertain whether or not their experiences have changed alongside the change in their status from student to professional, although existing research such as that by Zuchowski et al. (2013) suggests that students from minority groups once qualified continue to experience racism and various forms of discrimination in their careers. Such an example from Australia provides a rationale for a similar study within a UK context. This is a likely post-doctoral project which can be

undertaken to revisit the experiences of BAS once they are qualified and in employment, however it is acknowledged that a recent report by Skills for Care (2015) found that six months post qualification, 60 per cent of white social work graduates found employment in comparison to 46 per cent of BME graduates. Channer and Doel (2009), in their study about the experiences of black social workers on post-qualifying training, identified that discriminatory practices persisted in terms of lack of support from managers and management to enable them complete their training effectively. It would also be interesting to explore the area of Black African PEs and their trajectories to understand whether or not Tom's suggestion of same-race matching between PE's and students is worthy of consideration.

Another area for future exploration is around service user attitudes when working with BAS in response to the study by Hillen et al. (2013) where a local authority declined to accept a BAS on placement citing the reason that it would be unfair to service users due to potential communication difficulties. This was also evident in the example cited by Grace where service users were keen to find out the race of the person undertaking drop-in service before availing themselves to attend.

Crucially, a study into the experiences of BAS at this university is important to ascertain any similarities with and differences from the findings of this doctoral study which purposely did not recruit any participant from this university for reasons already explained.

#### 6.4 Personal reflections

Reflexivity in the research process requires the researcher to understand and acknowledge the effects and influence of their personality in the research environment (Berger 2013). A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered

most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions' (Malterud 2001, p.483–484). According to Gilgun (2006), reflexivity can occur during six distinct stages in the research process. These stages include the design stage, implementation, analysis stage, findings, dissemination and application to practice stage, however only the first four stages are applicable at this point.

Throughout this research I maintained a reflective diary in which I recorded my thoughts, feelings and observations after interviewing participants and during transcription (see Appendix 7).

During the design stage, I was conscious that as a female of black African ethnicity, writing about race, my research needed to benefit its participants and to unearth new or different understandings of their experiences in a way which would be beneficial to them and others to follow. In analysing the data, I was acutely aware of the emotional impact of some of the narratives as they resonated with my personal experiences as a black African female social work academic. I considered that my ability to challenge racism and discrimination was sacrificed by the personal emotional and mental toll such experiences brought to bear on my daily functioning. One advantage of having similar profiles to my participants was that I was never doubtful of their experiences and as a researcher drawing upon critical race principles, my role would not be to interrogate or cross-examine participants. Having an awareness of the existence and extent of racism and racist practices meant that I valued participants' narratives. I have been undeniably disappointed with the extent of some of the participant experiences and even more surprised to learn that BAS who expressed particularly difficult circumstances had white PEs and that all their PEs were female.

In light of the aforementioned, it is tempting to want to shy away from an area which has had

profound emotional impact on the researcher and it is acknowledged that research in the area of race is rarely viewed as ‘real research’ (Vakalahi and Starks 2010). However, it is clear from undertaking this study that such research affords opportunities for the majority race to enrich and enhance their own reality (Jett 2012) while contributing to the production of knowledge (Ladson-Billings 2000). In addition, there is scope for exploration of a range of other areas which serve a social justice purpose and which can contribute to the growing research in this area.

A main concern of mine during these months of working with the data was around how some PEs may be treating or responding to service users from BME backgrounds. The concern remains, however, with more of a focus on how PEs may be assisted and supported in ensuring that that they practice is fair and devoid of discrimination, oppression, unconscious bias and racism. The Practice Guidance (Appendix 9) is my contribution towards addressing this.

## 6.5 Concluding remarks

The key finding arising from this study is that race is a significant contributory factor in the experiences of BAS on social work placements and that CRT, despite its limitations is a useful theoretical framework for analysing and understanding these situated experiences which are bounded in racism and discrimination.

The empirical work reported in this thesis found and highlighted the ways in which racism manifested in subtle and unsubtle ways and confirmed that unacknowledged privileges associated to being white contributed to the marginalisation and isolation of BAS. This exclusion was evident not only during placement but also within the placement allocation and



matching processes.

Many of the placement agencies referred to in this study can be said to be toxic and detrimental to the health and well-being of BAS as they failed to empower or liberate this group of students. The post race and colour blind approach adopted by some of the PEs exhibited a lack of respect for diversity and viewed BAS as lacking in competence and incapable of achieving success. It has been suggested that in social work education practice learning is the component that students most remember (Shardlow and Doel, 2005) therefore it is imperative that BAS memories of their placements are not limited to their experiences of discrimination and racism but rather embrace and reflect the positive transformational potential that placements can have for all students.

In conclusion, social work practice education needs to interrogate its whiteness and put in place structures which support BAS and accentuate positives rather than reinforcing prejudice and outsider status. This thesis suggests that it is possible to identify and address coherently factors which contribute to poor placement experiences for BAS but this requires respectful dialogue and a change in institutionalised processes which currently work to make BAS invisible. The new empirical work reported in this thesis suggests that it is possible to understand the grounded experiences of BAS and develop proactive strategies which are bounded in anti-racism and value based praxis to challenge the double jeopardy and unfairness experienced by BAS which continues to be reflected in poorer attainment and slower progression rates.

**Word Count: 41,362**

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### Appendix 1 Glossary of terms

***Off site practice educator***, according to TCSW (2013) is a person employed through the agency or university social work degree course to undertake the role of practice educator who is not located in the same work site as the student. The off site practice educator normally partners a designated individual who is the on site practice supervisor.

***Practice educator (PE)***: This person takes overall responsibility for the student's learning and assessment, utilising information from his/her own assessment and other sources. The practice educator is the person who makes the recommendation to the course examination board about the student's competence in relation to the PCF and social work values.

***Practice supervisor***: A person in the same work site as the student who is designated to manage the day-to-day activity of the student and who contributes to the student's learning and assessment (TCSW 2013).

***Placement agency***: The Organisation or Agency where a student is placed for the duration of their placement. This can be the statutory, voluntary or private sector where the student will have access to people who use services.

***University tutor***: An employee of the University who liaises regularly with the student and the practice educator to ensure the students learning needs are considered and met.

***University placement coordinator***: Usually the lead person and/or academic responsible for matching the student to the placement.

***Supervision:*** Refers to formal meetings where social work students have the opportunity to discuss their work, learning, progress and any concerns with their PEs. These should be safe spaces which have educational, managerial, and supportive and/or assessment functions.

These roles and titles are not definitive and are referred to variably across HEIs in England.



## Appendix 2 Detailed participant profiles

**Vicky** is a 33-year-old female on the BA in Social Work at a university in the North East of England and is originally from Zimbabwe. At the time of interview, Vicky was between placements. Vicky also kept and completed a reflective diary. Vicky had two placements – one in a statutory setting and their other in the voluntary sector. Vicky is currently in her third year.



**Grace** is a female student aged between 40 and 45 studying for a BSc in Social Work at a university in the South East of England. Originally from Uganda, Grace was nearing the end of her first placement in the voluntary sector and agreed and completed a reflective diary.



**Jane** is a female student studying for a BSc in Social Work at a university in the South East of England. Jane experienced both statutory and voluntary placements. However, her second placement was discontinued. Jane, who is 43 years old, is originally from South Africa and did not complete a reflective diary.



**Ama** is a 33-year-old student studying towards an MSc in Social Work at a university in the South East. Ama is originally from Ghana and was near completion of her second and final placement in a statutory setting.



**Tolu** is a 40-year-old female studying towards an MSc in Social Work at a university in the South East of England. Tolu had recently completed her second and final placement in a statutory setting. There was no possibility of Tolu completing the reflective diary as she had completed her placements.



**Tom** is a 35-year-old male studying on a three-year BA degree in Social Work at a university in the East of England. At the time of interview, Tom had completed his second and final placement, hence did not complete a reflective diary. Tom is originally from Zimbabwe.



**Mavis** is a female aged between 30 and 35 years of age undertaking a BA degree in Social Work at a university in the North West of England. At the time of interview, Mavis was part way through her first practice learning opportunity and in the second year of her three-year programme. Mavis, who is originally from Kenya, agreed to complete the reflective diary however did not return it despite repeated requests.



**Maki** is a 38-year old female originally from Zimbabwe and enrolled on a BA degree in Social Work at a university in the North West of England. Maki agreed to complete a reflective diary, however did not return it despite repeated requests. At the time of her interview was nearing the end of her first placement in year two of her course.



## Appendix 3 Consent form

### Project Title:

Black African students' experiences of social work practice learning in England: a critical race enquiry

*Further details of this project can be found in the participant information sheet*

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Please ***initial*** the boxes.

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
I have read the study information sheet and understand what is involved.		
I understand that the information I disclose will remain confidential and my data will be destroyed or anonymised after being collated.		
I understand that I can withdraw my participation and my material up to 1 month after last contact with the researcher and this will have no effect on my studies		

I understand that the study will not directly result in increased service provision within the study topic area.		
I consent to being digitally recorded during the process of the interviews.		
I consent to providing a completed Reflective Diary at the end of my placement		
I understand that I will be required to select a pseudonym or for the researcher to do so in order to maintain anonymity.		
I consent to all methods of data collection, such as Reflective Diary, digital recording and written notes to be retained by the researcher.		
I consent to anonymised data and/or quotes being used in publications, the thesis and/or other methods of dissemination		
I am willing to participate in this project.		
I would like to get a copy of the research summary.		

Printed name of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact address \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Contact email \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4 Interview schedule

### Prompt Interview Questions

Project Title: Black African students' experiences of social work practice learning in England: a critical race inquiry

### Questions

1. Please describe your practice learning setting(s)
  - What is/was the duration of this placement?
  - Type of placement (statutory, voluntary, private etc)
  - Service user group (children, adults, mental health, housing, asylum etc)
  
2. Tell me about experiences of practice learning on your social work qualifying programme.
  
3. In what ways do you think issues of race have influenced your placement experience(s).

4. What do you feel are the factors that contribute to a positive social work placement experience?

5. What do you feel are the factors that might prevent a positive social work placement experience?

Supplementary questions may be generated following responses from participants.





**Transcription**

P – So will I be reading the questions myself?

I – I'll I'll read them with you or for you so no worries. Errr just as a start, good morning err #####, I'll take off your name when I come to transcribe. Errr good morning and thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my doctorate. My name is Prospera Tedam and as you know, I'm examining the experiences of Black African students on social work programmes in England. Just before I start, can we capture for the record that you have read the participant information sheet and that you have signed the consent form to partake in this study.

P – I have I've read it and err I have signed the necessary bits.

I – Ok and just also to say I'm recording on three devices just in the hope that you know if any one goes off I have backup. But in this study you'll be asked to think about a pseudonym for yourself so maybe you want to start thinking of what I should call you in my in my transcript err my transcription. Err some participants have said or you just give me a name others have been very err, what's the word, passionate about giving me a certain name or description that they want to to have within my research. So you might want to think about what name you are given. Once all the err the my interviews have been transcribed, I will send you by email the full transcription for you to go through just to make sure that I haven't added anything and I haven't missed anything, just to confirm that you are happy with what I have transcribed from our discussion today. So the discussion shouldn't be more than one and a half hours. Actually I'm aiming for an hour if that's ok with you. Please feel free to stop

and take a break, have a drink just let me know and I'll put them off and put them on as and when required. (P – ok) Err

I – Ok ##### so can I just ask a general opening question. How did you get into social work? What was the motivation?

P – Well, as an African, I relocated to United Kingdom, I had to look for a means of survival and erm; on getting to United Kingdom I realised it wasn't as I thought it would be. I had a degree in Nigeria I had 2 Masters degree I was on my doctorate before relocating from Nigeria to United Kingdom. And I worked as an academic/researcher in a university in Africa. But on getting to United Kingdom I struggled to get a job in that area and I was very unsuccessful. But because I still had to keep mind and soul together cos I know that errr my husband by himself cannot you know cannot maintain the family I have to look for a job. And the first job I was offered was err in social care area. My very first job was as a support worker in London, and I did that until I relocated again to Australia, and I came back to England, and while in Australia I had the same challenge getting a job as an academic or a researcher. So I came back to England after 6 months and ermm the same story continued (I only got a job as a support worker as well). So I did that job for about 5 years after which I got my indefinite leave to remain in England. But I wasn't you know fulfilled, cos I knew that I could do better than what I was doing. So I thought of what to do. How to make progress in life and my husband and I decided that the best thing for us to do was to go back to school you know. And because we couldn't afford the fees; we had to think of what we could do that we could get you know support from the government. And bearing in mind that I have worked as a support worker for 5 years and you know have developed interest, I have compared what it is you know here and in Africa. Because all the people with learning disabilities people with you know health issues they really don't have a symptom in

Africa compared to here. So like oh so I can still give hope to someone you know; that interest sort of built up in me though I never lost the focus, the interest in being an academic. So I thought I could still continue in my academic stroke research area but this time, moving away from environmental science into health and social care. So I decided to go and study social work at Masters level; such that when I graduate or practice for such a number of years and then I possibly find my way into academic again.

I – Ok. Well thank you very much for that #####. Ok so now err I'm going to give five questions errr; Can you please describe your practice learning setting? Now it may be one practice learning setting, both, a combination of the two err with information like the duration of the placement etcetera etcetera

P – I have had 2 practice placements. I had a 100 day placement over Christmas in my first year and that was in a voluntary setting where I worked with adults with mental health issues. And erm for my second placement which was also 100 day, this was in a statutory organisation and I worked with, I worked with children and families.

I – Ok so now can you tell me about some of your experiences err of practice learning on either or both of those placements. What are some of the experiences that spring to mind for you?

P – In my first year placement, (*phone rings in background*) I think I really have so much to say. Possibly because it was a voluntary organisation; I would say, I didn't have much to learn. And erm although I had opportunity of attending CP, which I would say maybe was a statutory task that you know that I probably did in my first year placement. And err to me I did more of support work in my first year placement. I didn't have the benefits of doing as much statutory tasks that I would have loved to do such that even now I am not so

confident to apply for jobs in adult social care; because I don't think I've got enough experience you know; enough exposure that would have given me the confidence to go into that area of social work. However in my second year placement which was in a statutory establishment, in fact I would confidently say that I would not have been bold enough to say oh yes I want to step out as a social worker without that placement. I would not take anything away in terms of you know that placement preparing me for actual, you know, social work practice. I got every experience that I think I need. Even with regards to section 47 investigation which I couldn't have done as a student, I still you know worked with qualified social workers and you know I have a feel of what it is like even at that level as well. I didn't do any court case but I'm sure that I had enough learning experience that I should have in a placement setting. The members of staff were you know quite welcoming, in the uni's eyes I had my placement; they were quite friendly very supportive; always willing to help you know. There was a particular lady who was never too busy to you know answer my questions and things like that.

I – So what can you add to your experience .. Ok now I'm going into the crunch really of my my thesis. So if you think about race, with a capital r, tell me about, what you feel or whether you feel, how you view issues of race have influenced your placement?

P – (sighs) Err in the first instance, this is a personal opinion. I don't have any evidence for it, and I have not researched to say yes somebody else carried out a research in this area and it has been you know verified or something like that. On my opinion, I think one area that err racial background has influence you know is the area of placement. For me it's in terms of culture. I think for me I experienced some form of, although I know that, as a professional I'm supposed to challenge my personal values, prejudices and cultural beliefs with professional ones; but I still believe that if we can do away with them, given that as a

professional I will make sure that I oppose professional values up against personal values and opinions. So I think in terms of errr cultural values, I think race can somehow influence placement. But as a student on placement, I had to constantly and regularly make myself aware of my own cultural beliefs and values. I'm gonna cite an example here; I dealt with a case in which errrm dad or a step dad now was reported as pinching, slapping and hitting with a stick his stepson. This is an African man, and err as an African who was brought up with such kind of attitude, either I had to stop and think; my beliefs as well as a Christian. The bible says that spare the rod, spoil the child. But I had to you know challenge all this with professional values. So in this placement I had to you know put a clause; if I'm if I'm if I'm not giving you the answer you want just let me know (I – ok..it's fine) . I had to sort of put it in my analysis that I believe that it's a cultural influence you know on this stepdad and I have to work with him in that with that understanding that look I understand your background but I can put support in place for you, to understand how to deal with the child cos the child was on the autistic spectrum. I'm an African he didn't understand what that was. Cos I'm so honest I'll be honest to tell you I don't find that, how was there a way of finding about autistic until I come to England? So I had to put support in place and signposted I signposted him to agencies that could support him in that area. So cultural I think has a very big influence on placement. (pause here). Another thing that I think has influence on placement is accent. A lot of times when you work with clients who are white British or maybe white, whatever, they struggle to hear what you say sometimes. And that sort of creates a barrier you know in your work with them. Forgetting that they also have accents. And you also struggle to hear them because I remember somebody telling me that people complained that they didn't they don't hear you when you speak maybe because of your accent. And by the time she finished I said excuse me, I struggle to hear them as well because everyone has got an accent. Just as I have got my accent they also have got an accent. They struggle to hear

me I struggle to hear them. And we just have to strike a balance and work with each other with that understanding. So having mentioned culture and accent, one other thing that I believe affect placement in terms of race is the pre-disposition, the belief of those people on placement. I think there is a general belief that as long as you belong to the BME category, there is a stereotype in terms of what has she got to offer; in terms of oh they can't speak good English; in terms of they can't write well; in terms of oh they shout; oh they are loud. So sometimes there isn't that openness to see what this person has got what she's got to offer in placement and err that staff put some pressure on the student (I – mmm mmm) because now you have to prove yourself. (I – mmmm) You have to work extra hard to erase or remove all those biases. (pause here) I think that covers I can remember that. (I – fine)

I – that's fine. Thank you very much thank you #####. So now the last 2 questions are aiming to get some strategies and I think it's all right that we are collating and we know some of the issues that are out there, but how do we, how do we recommend some strategies. So question 4; what do you feel are the factors or the things that contribute to a positive placement experience for Black African students. I mean you can talk about students generally because I think what affects us; some of the things that affect us or are good practice are good practice for everyone but in specific relation to our ethnic minority group, what do you feel are some of the factors that can contribute to positive placement experiences?

P – I'm going to look at it from 2 different perspectives. I'm going to look at it in terms of what the students themselves can do. And I'm going to look at it in terms of what Practice Educators are expected to do in order to give students positive placement experience. In terms of students, I'll start with the students, I think it is best for a student to go into placement with a willingness to learn, with enthusiasm and you start something you know the preamble is that our cultural background, we really don't think about feedbacks and things

like that. I'm an exception to that I'll say I'm proud to say that to you (I – good). But I'm an I'm an exception I take on board very well constructive criticism because I believe I'm not perfect and I believe the only way to learn is if you take on board criticism and work on it you know, such that you don't repeat the same mistakes, you improve on what you've done you know keep doing what, you know has been assessed as good (I - mmm) practice and things like that. I believe that if a student goes into placement with open mind and willingness to learn, they will come out as better individuals. If they are willing to take on board criticism; and if they are willing to come down to the level of a student, and I'm gonu use myself as an example. Recently I had a job interview, and I think the very first stage the second stage the, I received a mail that I've done very well the assessors were pleased and I was invited for a professional discussion. When I was talking to the manager, I think she got it from my CV, she now asked me; how would you feel taking orders from people, and said what about it with all this, your qualifications. I said I've got this qualification but they are not relevant for this job because they cannot be used for social work practice. If they can be used I won't go back to school to say I want to study. So in other words whoever is set above me is still my boss. And I have to tell that I've worked as a support worker for five years and I still do it part time now you know. So as a student we must be willing to pick onboard feedback, work on them and make ourselves better. Also as a student; I think it is important that we strive not to cut corners because you see when we were discussing you know and we were talking about power imbalance, one of the ways I think power imbalance between student and assessors could be addressed is through it's when a student is able to challenge their assessors. And the only way the only thing that can make a student do that is if you have done your own duty. I think it happens anywhere because you know that if you have some things to cover, you will not be able to challenge because you you know that oh I don't want to say that because she might (unclear statement here ). If a student goes into placement,



they do their work thoroughly, they make sure they are up to date with their reflective logs, they make sure that all tasks given to them are done if they don't understand they are not ashamed to ask, I think they will have good placement outcome. However on the flipside (I – mmm) I think (1) assessors should get appropriate training and experience as well before they begin to assess students. If at all they will do maybe no final year students if they've got no experience. I'm going to give my own example. In my first year placement I had a very experienced assessor and I didn't have any problems with her. But the second year placement I had an assessor who was on her own practice educator training, and I suppose I was either her first student or a second. If I am not her first student I'm her second I'm not sure she's ever supervised more than just a student. And that sort of reflected in her work. I worked in a team with a manager, she wasn't a manager but I realised that when she was meant to take a decision, she would refer to her manager, when I supposed she should be the one to take the decision. For example, and I think this will take me into my own experience on placement, I had a direct observation very close to the end of my placement which was done by another social worker, and immediately after the direct observation I asked for feedback, verbal feedback and she told me everything went well. It was okay, that I touched up on what she expected me to touch on and I reclaimed myself, ok, and then went away. 2 no not 2 days 2 working days including weekend one two three four five, five days later I had a supervise supervision with my assessor and then she asked me how do you think direct observation went? I said it went well, but in own way, I'm sure you might have understood from my discussion that I've become, I used to think that I am a very pragmatic learner but I've realised that I'm a reflective learner. I reflected on my direct observation and I felt that the observation would have gone better if the person observing me was the chair of that meeting. It was in a core group meeting so somebody else was the chair of that meeting. So she was in control of the meeting. So some of the things I prepared to feedback I couldn't touch on

them because you know the time constraint and things like that. So I fed back that back to my assessor that that's what I think you know would have been better you know and I think it was ok. She now told me no, she heard something different, that she was told that I asked another colleague a direct question; I don't know if I want to record all that cos it will present

I – no. you finish. You talk about all of it cos what I will do is when I, some of the, I won't use the general scenarios I'll use some quotes to support the theme the your name your student the university your practice teacher all of that nothing comes into it.

P – all right I will tell you ..... So when I was feeding back to her I did mention to her that when I was asked to feedback to the core group that about I did individual direct work with a couple but I only met the mother once. But I did three you know I met with the father three times. So when I was feeding back I purposely covered that I only met with the mother once but my colleague so so so and so met with her that so maybe she would be able to say something about her and she answered me immediately that no - I did different work with her I said oh I didn't understand that you did a different work that I thought it was the same kind of work that I was doing that you did and I left it. So I went to the father and I said well I worked with A, B, C, D. I met with him 3 times, this is what I did, these are the concerns I have and I didn't have any cos I was meant to explore it on upbringing experience you know such that I'll know if it's gonna have an impact on your parenting style, and I told them what I want, what I was going to say and I said the only concern I have is that he is into drugs. And research has proved that it has impact on parenting capacity

I - hmmm, hmmm, hmmm; .

P- And at that time the children, have been you know the father the father of those children has been stopped you know. He was only having supervised contact with the children and if mother was the one supervising contact at that time. So what I was interested in at that point was the mother's understanding; her own values around substance misuse because if as a mother she doesn't have she doesn't see anything wrong with drugs, then it means she wouldn't know what to do if the father of the children come into contact you know he comes into contact with the children under the influence of drugs. So I was interested in that and I was interested in the support that could be put in place for the father you know such that he goes up to drugs maybe we were talking about MARS, OASIS you know an other agencies like that. (I – hmmm hmmm). So I asked the mother, what are your own values around drugs? Yes from the feedback, I realised that I put her on the spot which I didn't realise at that time you know. I just asked her your values you know around drugs, alcohol and things like that; I should have asked her that she doesn't support it and she has never taken drugs herself and that she doesn't support any child taking drugs at that point. And I went further to explain that I am asking because you are the one supervising contact. (*door opens in background.*)

I – You're not expecting anything are you? (*Sounds in background*)

P – So I stood to be corrected while I have the questions, and after the direct observation as well, I met with the person that did the direct observation, I met with the grandmother and err his son now you know when you do the direct observation you have to get feedback from the service user, the you know and I went to ask as well and say well I hope you understood why I had to ask what do you think. She said yeah yeah yeah you know. So when I got to work on the my 97<sup>th</sup> day of my placement, I was at work the following day after the direct observation. Nobody told me nothing. I went home for the weekend, Monday was a bank holiday. Tuesday I was at work nobody told me nothing. So I got to work on Wednesday

of my placement, o o o on Wednesday which was the 97<sup>th</sup> day of my placement so I was more or less on my assessor for supervision that at the end of my placement let me know, let's hear of things you know so she started saying we don't have supervision today. I know why you think we have supervision and she asked me about the direct observation and then she told me no; that she got a different feedback. That I was that you was told that I asked my colleague to feed back to the core group. Beca..because when I was saying I was saying that oh that's one of the things that she was coming to. So when she told me that she got a different feedback; I now asked her that what were you going to say about that colleague that you told me that you were gonna that she said that she was told that I asked her to feedback to the core group. I said well, thank God I mentioned it and I told her how things went before (da da da). And then she said she was told as well that I used the word value, which the woman did not understand and that it was a technical jargon, that I shouldn't have used the word. Our problem from the onset of my placement she insists my English was too academic. She felt my English it's in my report I have to open my portfolio upstairs if you want to see I'll show it to you. I just submitted the one to Uni last week. I carried out the direct observation I used the word encompasses and I used the word debt consolidation. Fine I go to places and the word encompasses is a different word cos I was doing a financial assessment and I was telling the family that this financial assessment encompasses cos I thought I was talking to British you know whose language is English. Fine there may be some words I might have you know misconstrued some things that maybe most of them who are not well educated may not be familiar with some words which I quite agree with. But when I said debt consolidation I couldn't have used any other words. I could explain to them which I did because the lady told me that oh what does that mean, so I explained to her. Debt consolidation is not my words it's a term that people in the financial sector you know they use. And I don't think it's in my rights to patronise my service users. I believe I have to

deal with them based on the level of understanding that's one of the values of social work. We just communicate with them in a language that is open, honest and understandable. If for any reason they don't understand anything I will be willing to explain to them which I told them at the beginning of the direct observation; that I'm carrying out a financial assessment with you. If at any point you don't understand me, stop me. Ask me what I meant by that and I will explain to you. So I think that bias has been there right on the onset of my placement. Such that someone had to ask me, ##### what is your background. Because I once told somebody this and she said no this is strange because, usually you would ask students to be referred to the leaning and development unit you know for such. So for you now to be saying, to be told that your grammar is too academic, she wrote it there; reserve this for academic work. It's in my portfolio. (I – #####). ##### should reserve this for academic work. One day I was writing, I wrote some evidences and I said this was based on the tenets of it and she said what do you mean by tenets? If you do not understand a word I suppose you can go on man, and check what the meaning is. I think there is a bias that if you are a black minority ethnic group, you've got nothing to offer. So that bias has been there because I don't know why the word value would be a technical jargon. And the person I spoke to, she understood me. She did not even ask what do you mean and she answered my question. So when she told me that that was the feedback she got and then she now told me, you would have to repeat the direct observation. I bet you can imagine how I was feeling at that point, like the 97<sup>th</sup> day of my placement. I was so overwhelmed. I was so tearful you know I was I was I was shattered. (I – hmmm) Because it came you know unexpectedly. I said ok and I left. As soon as I left supervision I went for a break. All of my colleagues were around. We went together we bought something. She knew something was wrong but I'm very professional. I don't discuss things like that you know. So I came back and I was eating, and while I was eating my lunch she walked over to me and said.. Ok before I left supervision, she made another

arrangement for me to do direct observation with the same lady. She's got a new case so maybe I'll go with her for the first visit to do the assessment and things like that. I said that's fine. And then I went away, by the time I came back I was eating in fact I did not even get a chance to get a bite. When I was leaving she came to me and said oh I'm going home now, I'll be in court tomorrow morning but I'll come back to the office although the manager had told me that I could work from home after the court but I don't like working from home I'd rather come back to the office so I'll see you tomorrow. I said ok that's fine, but I saw that she turned her back you know it was like I think I just felt a prompt I said excuse me can I see you for a minute. She said oh yeah yeah that's fine I said please can I have written feedback of that direct observation that I had last week. And she said oh no, you see you want to have a direct observation the manager might say that will go into your portfolio. I said excuse me, it is my portfolio. She does not have the right to tell me what goes into my portfolio. The portfolio has my name on it. She cannot tell me what goes into my portfolio. She said well she doesn't say it goes into your portfolio she might say your tutor asked to see it. I said A, B, C, D if she says my tutor asked to see it, so be it. I said I'm here to learn and this is part of my learning. (I – hmm hmm hmm). She said and then I said beside you are my assessor. She is only managing the unit which I'm working so I don't think she has to dictate what happens, you take the decision. She said ok I'll see you tomorrow. The following day she did not come even though she said she was coming. Okay Friday which was now like the last day of placement (I – ya ya ya ya) she came to work in the morning, and then she didn't discuss nothing with me. We had a CIN meeting, yeah we had a CIN meeting that afternoon, went for the meeting, from the meeting (*door creaks opening*) I think the breeze coming in through the door. She came in the morning we I did my B went to C; went for the meeting and after the meeting she was going to pick some children for contact and she was going to go home from there. And she did not tell me anything. So I said excuse me, I discussed with you about

having the written feedback about the direct observation and oh yes I discussed with the manager, and the manager said so so so and so; who did the direct observation does not have the time to do the written feedback because she will still have to write another one when you repeat it. As you are looking at me I just said oh, if that is the case I am sorry I'm not going ahead with another direct observation. (I – wow) Yeah. I just told her that. And she said ok, and she left with a colleague. Went back upstairs because all these things we were conversing it was verbal, there is no record anywhere so I still have to go back to my desk and I sent her a mail. I can show you a copy of the mail I sent. I said I so so so and so following our discussion so that I substantiate that we've been discussing this matter. I am still of the opinion that I am entitled to direct err to a written feedback of the direct observation regardless of how it went. I am of the opinion that it is not meant to be perfect because I am learning and this is part of my learning. I don't want to live here and present myself to the whole world that I was right on point from day 1. If I was like that I wouldn't have gone back to the placement err to the university. And I'm also of the opinion that whosoever takes the responsibility to do a direct observation is taking the responsibility to write the feedback. I hope you would attend to this situation as I supposedly have one day left of my placement. Thank you for your co-operation, Kind regards and I sent it to her. And as soon as I finished that, picked up my phone and I was on the phone to my tutor. Because at that point I felt yeah I need to let her know what was going on at that time. And I spoke to her and wow she was fantastic. She said ##### you shouldn't even have called me you have done the right thing. She said you have done brilliantly. And she repeated the same thing that you're supposed to have a direct err a written feedback it's a direct observation. But we don't expect it to be perfect. And it does impact fail issues? direct observation is not about pass or fail. You just need the feedback to make adjustments for another time. Well I went home that Friday and I'm sure you will not be surprised that I couldn't sleep. I lost my sleep yeah even though

I've you know I've taken those steps I was still disturbed. I was you know, and then on Monday which was my last day of placement; I got to work and I did what I had to do. I packed all my things, my laptop you know I nearly and everything and err that morning she came to me oh ok ##### we've agreed to give you a written feedback. Ok, and then I asked – what about my placement, have I passed or have I failed. And then she said I would have to speak to the manager. (I – ah!) (P – Laughs..) Oh my God I'm sorry. I was like manager? Is she the one that will determine if I have per passed or failed my placement when you are my assessor? I said ok, and then I left. I tidied up my desk tidied up everything. Well at that time I had made up my mind that I wasn't gonna do a 101 days placement (I laughs in background). Because going back for a direct observation means I am doing 101 days placement and I am supposed to do 100 days placement. If I go back for 101 days placement they would have to pay me for that one day. So I went after that day and err surprisingly that was a Monday I finished placement on a Monday, on the third day of that week I got a text around 2:42 in the afternoon. ##### it's a pass. But then my written feedback was yet to come in. But then at least she had said it's a pass and I knew I wasn't going back for any err direct observation. So I went back no I I I came home and I continued. Then later on she sent me the written feedback. And the written feedback read that the mother did not understand when I said what are her values and that the mother asked me what I meant and that she didn't understand why I asked her. I now replied I now replied her email and said this is not true. So so so, I mentioned the manager's name, I mentioned the other colleague that was there. They were there and they could tell that I sought feedback immediately from the parents after the direct observation. And er she didn't respond to it but I didn't make much hassle about it because I just felt, I didn't want anything to delay me that oh we'll get back to the uni as long as she has passed me. At least it's only a a a written feedback. I know it didn't happen like that and I had a copy of the email and I sent. Initially I wanted to put it in the portfolio



just behind that report but I just felt that I don't need it. So I just overlooked it, she sent the report to me she sent my she sent all my documents and I put it in my portfolio and I left. What came to my mind was that this is nothing but oppressive practice. Why would you tell me that you are not gonna give me a written feedback? And there was somewhere that she told me that she had spoken to her assessor. Why didn't you consult with the assessor why were you consulting with the manager? To me it's oppressive practice which would have ruined the career of someone else because it's not everybody that will be as vocal (I – that's right) and as challenging as myself.

I – That's right....that's right.

P- And I want to believe as well that it's probably because I'm BME. I've written errr what's it called case notes to be picked up on things that I thought were not necessary. I wrote in one of my analysis I said this child is yet to start schooling. It was crossed off and it was written as this child is yet to start school. So basic, schooling is not grammatically wrong. Do I have to write the way you write. I quite agree that sometimes being an African we think in our own language and we speak English as such. I know that happens. In fact, honestly sometimes when our children say some things I could see the difference in their construction and mine. I'll tell you an example I would say tear or ... they would say rip rip and I do learn from them because I know that they are growing up here. My eldest she got here when she was 10 which was still a formative age you know, my children are three and my last I had here. In fact when she speaks you will think it's an American speaking. Because her accent is just (msteew, sucking of teeth) . I agree that sometimes we do make expressions that would reflect as such in our language which I try as much as possible to correct when I realise such. But because of the belief that people from the BME group they don't speak good English there is that bias I experience it first-hand which I don't think is good enough. I believe as

assessors they should be open you know to understand the student. They should have unconditional positive regard. Because if you teach us to go out and practice with those values, you should demonstrate those values as well. Now one of the feedback that I got in the first direct observation was that I didn't make eye contact. Now you as my assessor you have done 2 direct observations for me. You have reported that I make good eye contact. I suppose and I've been thinking about it I've reflected if eventually I become a practice educator I'm gonna protect my student because I realised that she opened me and subjected me under pressure from everybody in the team. There was an instance in which you see the manager of my unit, she also had a student at the same time that I was a student. There was a particular day that my assessor asked the manager, where is so so so and so. And she said because the girl was not on placement that day I mean the other student on placement, she asked the care manager where is so so so and the manager said oh that one leave her she knows what she's doing.

I – oooh

P- I lacked I lost my answer. What is the reason with her – she's my student. Do you understand what I'm saying. You should like people to know that this person is a student in this unit. She's here to learn. Don't set her up to fail. (I – mmm mmm mmm) eee ee ee eet there's an adage in my country that says 'it is how you call your goods that people will price it'. I believe that you should protect your student as an assessor and I have always looked for a way to feed that back. Another thing that I wish I could feed back was this one maybe to my Uni, because I know some Uni's do that, is that students should have the opportunity of feeding back on feedback of direct observation. (I – that's good) We don't do it in my Uni. We don't I think it should be recommended that all universities should put that in place, that all students should have the opportunity of feeding back. Not just what the person says

but then you take it like that and put in the portfolio. There should be a section for students, although there is a place that says students concluding summary which I know because in the final report she said that I lost my enthusiasm to learn, towards the middle mid of my placement. But that wasn't the case. I came across a professional abuse disclosure you know which made me shiver a 4 year old girl you know it was it was it was nerve cracking it was sickening for me. And then it shook me I didn't I never thought I could work in children services and I came back to the office and that's another point; I came back to the office I was open that ah I don't think I can work with children I don't think so I don't think that's for me you know not that there's anything wrong with her but I'm being honest.

I – yeah I'm sharing.

P – And then she turned it against me. That I said I don't wanna work with children; that I lost enthusiasm in learning. No, I didn't lose my enthusiasm to learning but I lost my enthusiasm to work with children. But the good thing is that I was able to overcome that challenge with supervision. I spoke with other professionals, I spoke to colleagues, I spoke to my assessor in supervision as well and she told me that look we are not all like that if you feel like that talk to somebody, talk to your manager talk to me; and at some point even me I carried out some home visits and I saw the situation of that children and I felt that oh somebody has got to speak for these children and then I dissolved that. Yeah. I'll do this job somebody's got to do it. Not that it affected my learning NO, that was a misrepresentation of what happened at that time. It never affected my learning. All that it affected was enthusiasm about working with children which I managed to overcome. So I put that in my concluding statement but that was ok. But my fear is for majority of BME students, how many of them

would be able to rise up to this challenge. I'll be honest with you it affected my confidence. It seriously affected my cos I wasn't sure of what I would do that would be right again. It was as if somebody was watching behind me you know and setting me up to fail. I wasn't allowed to use my own initiative. It it so much affected me that whatever I want to do I had to go and check you know; if she thinks it's right which I don't think is good enough you know. I should be able to use my own initiative that's how I can build my confidence. So in a in a in a way I think assessors they have a very very very big role to play in you know giving BME students a positive social work experience. They need to be conscious of their own values as well. That is value A I don't know if you can change now since you are using PCF. That's the first one be aware of your own values, beliefs, prejudices and how they can impact on practice. They really need to be aware of it and approach every individual. I felt that my assessment of those 2 observations, you said I m##### direct ob..(I – eye contact) eye contact what happened to you now raising, you should have said oh I don't know that of #####. Do you understand what I mean. (I that's right) I've done 2 direct observations for her she made very good eye contact. I don't I don't think she has a problem in that area. The only area that I think she has a problem is her grammar (laughs) which is the academic although I feel so strongly you know with good English. You you do you understand what I mean

I – I do. I do.

P – So I think there should be a protective factor you know for the student. Be, it will be beneficial for both the student and the assessor I think. Hope I'm not taking too much time?

I – Oh wow. That's fantastic a really good response to to that question. We are down to the final question which I think you've said somewhere but if you just want to highlight them again for me please in question 5. So what are I'm mean we were talking now what do you

think or what do you feel are the factors that prevent a positive social work experience. Please don't tell me the opposite of what you just said but you know ....it's pretty much in there.

P – yeah yeah..erm physically not going there ready to learn you know. They need to be prepared to learn. And assessors you know having open mind, making up their mind you see it's so it's so disheartening to and my assessor. Oh she's such a wonderful lady. She's such a wonderful lady she just she just allowed herself you know to be manipulated I would say. That she just got the feedback and she just took it on board but I think it's still based on its still based on her own values. Because I want to believe that if I was a white person she would probably not take everything they've said by face value like that. Because this time around it wasn't her fault. She was given that feedback and she wasn't there but she should have defended me in certain areas. You have done direct observation and you have written that I made good eye contact. You should have said no ##### did not struggle with this. (I – mm mmm) So practice educators' beliefs as well and biases could prevent positive erm placement experience you know.

I - Ok anything else you want to add ##### to the to the whole thing. Anywhere anything you've just remembered.

P – mmm I think we've covered it all. I can't remember anything...(muffles something unclear)

I – Ok thank you. I forgot at the start to take away some demographics from you sorry about that. I know you are female, can you describe your black African ethnicity for me please?

P – Ermm How do you mean do you mean African?

I -yeah do you subscribe to black African what particular region of Africa?

P – Africa - Nigeria.

I - Can you give me your age bracket.

P – Over 40.

I – Ok. Ok erm so I'm ending the interview I just want to say thank you very much to #####.

P – Thank you for listening to me.

I – What pseudonym do you want. What do you want me to call you in my research.

P - Call me anything.

I – Ok. I'll pick out a name and let you know via email. Thank you very much for your time today. Thank you so much. Ok I'll put off all the things now.

Appendix 7 Excerpts from researcher's diary

14/06/2014  
 So what's that about?  
 VC looking to get married?  
 Sorry, doing papers rather than  
 this job  
 Disrespect, disrespectful more  
 than just  
 - late placements - not placed  
 all seen out to fail  
 - From a few years - lots of things  
 change placement allocations  
 - Even if it might not be ideal  
 to happen  
 - Leaves students feeling 'grumpy'  
 but angry  
 - Does not appear to be prior  
 practice  
 - It feels v. unfair that a student  
 is made to wait for a whole  
 academic year  
 - From - not much clarity  
 - Even the claims were made  
 - powerful statement  
 - Student overcoming all of this  
 and still coming to support a bit

I'm disappointed - in  
 what, shocked and angry  
 about every part of what  
 is being reported to me  
 strong. That's exactly what  
 opposition have to do  
 nothing is said  
 about it. At points I felt  
 sorry  
 They are making it look like  
 VC. As I will be identified  
 as an academic  
 The on earth does one  
 from status become a  
 topic for discussion of a  
 very high supervisor?  
 There was no reason for  
 this line of questioning  
 especially as the student  
 felt like he was being  
 interviewed by the head  
 of the  
 I hope as soon as you can be  
 informed

After a few days of questions  
 about the PE that there has  
 been a meeting with the  
 VC and the academic  
 staff to discuss the  
 situation of the VC  
 what should have happened  
 in the student's case?  
 This incident led to the  
 loss of trust that continues  
 all through the placement  
 leads to  
 - daily meetings / discussions  
 - social construction  
 - trust

## Appendix 8 TCSW values for practice educators and supervisors (TCSW 2012)

This guidance focuses on the implications of social work values in relation to the assessment process. The values statements closely reflect The College of Social Work's core values for endorsement. In order to promote anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices, practice educators and supervisors will:

- identify and question their own values and prejudices, the use of authority and power in the assessment relationship, and recognise and act upon the implications for their assessment practice
- update themselves on best practice in assessment and research on adult learning and apply this knowledge in promoting the rights and choices of learners and managing the assessment process
- respect and value the uniqueness and diversity of learners and recognise and build on their strengths, and take into account individual learning styles and preferred assessment methods
- accept and respect learners' circumstances and understand how these impact on the assessment process
- assess in a manner that does not stigmatise or disadvantage individuals and ensures equality of opportunity. Show applied knowledge and understanding of the significance of
  - poverty
  - racism



- ill health and disability
- gender
- social class
- sexual orientation

in managing the assessment process

- recognise and work to prevent unjustifiable discrimination and disadvantage in all aspects of the assessment process, and counter any unjustifiable discrimination in ways that are appropriate to their situation and role
- take responsibility for the quality of their work and ensure that it is monitored and appraised; critically reflect on their own practice and identify development needs in order to improve their own performance, raise standards, and contribute to the learning and development of others







### 10 Principles of Good Practice

- Ensure fairness and openness when accepting or rejecting students who have been matched with you
- Arrange to meet your student in advance of the start of the placement
- Consider the implications of your language  
Maintain respectful curiosity
- Ensure transparency in allocation of work particularly when there is more than one student on placement with you.
- Be clear about your policies and procedures for making formal complaints. Ensure these are accessible to the student.
- Re-engage with anti-discriminatory, anti-oppressive and anti racist social work practice principles.
- Understand exclusionary practices and the impact on students
- Be clear about roles, expectations and targets., do not make these up on an adhoc basis.
- Start off on a positive: thinking of success rather than failure for your student.
- Avoid colour-blind approaches

## Background & Purpose

Students of black African backgrounds are the second largest ethnic group enrolled on social work courses in England yet research indicates that they can take longer to complete their studies and/or graduate with lower classifications in comparison to their white peers.

This guidance has been prepared drawing upon the findings of a doctoral study into the practice learning experiences of black African students of social work. The main finding from the study revealed that race played a central role in influencing the experiences of African students on placement.

This guidance adopts the term 'dignity' as an equality outcome and it is a useful term to understand why and how students of black ethnicity should be treated.

### Who is the guidance meant for?

- ⇒ Practice educators
- ⇒ Onsite supervisors
- ⇒ Agency representatives
- ⇒ Social work educators and tutors
- ⇒ Students.

### Pre-placement planning

The period leading up to placement is crucial, as is the planning that goes into identifying a placement and PE for a student. For University tutors, ensure student profiles/CV's are written to a good standard and portray them in the best possible light. When PE's/Agencies receive a students profile, consider it on the merits of its content. Avoid scrutinizing it for information or features that point to a certain profile of student and do not use the information to disadvantage the student. If there is a genuine mis-fit between the students profile and your service, make this clear in your feedback to the University.

### Practice Learning Setting

When your student commences placement, all efforts should be made to integrate them into the team in order that they are not isolated.

Due consideration should be given to the type of work allocated, shadowing and other learning opportunities.

### Over-scrutiny

Social work students expect their work to be reviewed regularly and constructive feedback provided. The need to scrutinize or micro manage any student should be evidenced within supervision notes. This safeguards PE's and students.

### Hostility

Hostility, in its worst form can be construed as bullying and/or harassment and leaves students feeling anxious and can be emotionally damaging. Subjecting black students to public ridicule, isolating them, asking questions of them that would not be asked of other students can be experienced as hostile.

### Negative Preconceptions

It is important to avoid using aspects of students identity to form a view of a student before they start. Problematising second language or accented speakers can cloud perceptions of ability.



**R**espectful curiosity is achieved when we ask sensitive questions in a manner that does not leave the student feeling exposed, targeted or disrespected.

### Practice Learning & Anti-discrimination Legislation

In addition to the Human Rights Act 1998 (Article 12) and the Equality Act 2010, many Organisations and Agencies should have 'Dignity at Work' policies and procedures which students should be able to use. Students should also be able to access University's procedures for reporting discriminatory behaviour which arises on placement.

#### PE values

*'recognise and work to prevent unjustifiable discrimination and disadvantage in all aspects of the assessment process, and counter any unjustifiable discrimination in ways that are appropriate to their situation and role' (TCSW 2012)*

Students have said they work best when they:

- Are made to feel welcome and part of the team/organisation
- Are clear about their roles, responsibilities and about the role of the PE/Onsite and others involved in their placement learning
- Are respected, valued and supported
- Experience their diversity as seen from a position of strength and not as a problem.
- Are academically challenged with appropriate levels of work
- Experience equal treatment alongside other students within the placement
- Are able to highlight concerns or poor practice
- Consideration is given to their individual circumstances

Dignity in practice learning

## Conclusion

This guide has drawn from an empirical study into the practice learning experiences of black African students on social work placements in England. It should be used as a quick reference guide for PE's looking to enhance their practice with minority ethnic students. The words below represent some of the phrases and terms used by the students or interpreted by the researcher to describe their experiences on placement. It is recognized that the social work profession does not insulate groups of students from discrimination and oppression and it is important that these experiences are shared widely in order that practitioners and enablers can develop their competence when working with minority groups.

### Additional Resources

[www.diversityinpracticelearning.com](http://www.diversityinpracticelearning.com)

Twitter- @DiPLSW

The recommendations for practice are numerous and include:

- ♦ Careful and transparent matching processes (anonymous where possible)
- ♦ A placement rejection form to be completed by the PE and/or placement agency when a student is turned down by a placement.
- ♦ Regular audits of PE training and professional development
- ♦ Maintaining a respectful curiosity
- ♦ Acknowledging the impact of race on BME students experiences
- ♦ Ensuring incidents of discrimination, oppression or unfairness are reported, recorded and addressed.
- ♦ Minimising isolation for BME students by signposting them to support and other groups.
- ♦ Working to PE values which respect the uniqueness of learners and ensures that teaching and assessment processes do not disadvantage students with particular characteristics



## Appendix 10 List of related publications and presentations

Stories every practice educator should hear: Practice learning narratives of black and minority ethnic social work students learning in England. Presented to the 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Practice Teaching and Field education in Health and Social Work. Glasgow Caledonia University, April 2014

Tedam, P. (2014) 'When failing doesn't matter: A narrative inquiry into the practice learning experiences of black African social work students in England'. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 3(1), 136–145.

Black African students' experiences of practice learning in England: A Narrative Inquiry Conference presentation to the 'Embedding Race Equality in Social Work Education and Practice'. University of Northampton. July 2014

Black Minority Ethnic students experiences of social work placements in England: Rac (e)ing to an early finish? Paper presented to the 'Approaches to Inequalities: Perspectives from Higher Education' Conference, University of Northampton, September 2014.

Tedam, P.(forthcoming) Enhancing the practice learning experiences of BME students: Strategies for practice education. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*. Special Edition.

## **Participant Information Sheet.**

### **Project Title:**

Black African students' experiences of social work practice learning in England: a critical race inquiry

### About the researcher

My name is Prospera Tadam and I am a Doctoral student at the University of Northampton. I am black African female academic, seeking to examine the practice learning experiences of black African students of social work in England.

### Invitation to take part

You are being invited to take part in a research study, leading to the award of a Professional Doctorate in Health and Social Care. Before you decide to take part, it is important that you understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information. If you require further information or are unclear about any aspect related to this study please feel free to speak direct to Prospera Tadam.

### Why is the study being carried out?

The aim of the study is to explore the practice learning experiences of black African social work students who are studying for a social work qualification in a University in England.



This is towards a doctorate level qualification.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to take part?

Your involvement will comprise of two main commitments.

The first will involve being interviewed individually for up to 1.5 hours at a venue/location which is convenient to you. Comfort breaks will be incorporated into the interviews if required. The face to face interviews will be tape recorded and the main questions to be asked accompany this form.

You will be provided with a bespoke reflective diary. The second commitment will involve the completion of the reflective diary which you will be required to submit at your convenience and preferably on completion of your placement.

Are there any risks?

There are no physical risks to you as a person; however, you may find as a result of the discussions that you feel uncomfortable to continue with the interview; if this becomes the case, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. You will not be expected to discuss anything with the researcher, which you do not feel comfortable with nor would you be expected to justify your withdrawal from the study. Should you become upset and/or tearful, the recorder will be switched off, a break will be offered and you will be asked if they wish to discontinue the interview and their decision to continue or discontinue will be respected.

Participants will be advised that disclosures which also constitute a concern relating to child protection or protection of vulnerable adults will be reported to the appropriate body in line with the code of conduct for social work students. Disclosures that might easily identify participants will be carefully considered during the transcription phase and attempts made

during publication or presentation of the data to anonymise aspects of disclosure that might identify who they are.

The information you will be providing will be personal to you and require 'debriefing' and/or further support. An independent mentor (who is also bound by confidentiality) will be available to support you. The website is <http://modernhuman.co.uk/> and they can be contacted via email on [enquiries@modernhuman.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@modernhuman.co.uk) or mobile 07725656816.

Should you become unhappy with the researcher and/or wish to speak to someone about their conduct, please contact either Dr. Jim Lusted by email [Jim.Lusted@northampton.ac.uk](mailto:Jim.Lusted@northampton.ac.uk) or Dr. Claudia Bernard at [C.Bernard@gold.ac.uk](mailto:C.Bernard@gold.ac.uk)

Will the information collected about me be kept confidential?

All information collected from you during the course of this study will be entirely anonymous. It will be stored in a secure place, and will be protected by a password if saved on a computer. I would also request that participants respect confidentiality in relation to their own colleagues, other professional staff and clients. All primary data will be anonymised and personal information about participant eg- consent forms will be stored separately from the anonymised primary data.

As a member of the academic staff with an interest in this area of research, the data will be kept for about 5 years in line with the general principles of the data protection Act 1998.

When the data is to be destroyed, IT services will be contacted to assist with the deleting/clearing of all electronic data and any papers/forms, securely disposed of using the 'Confidential' waste collection facility.

Am I obliged to take part?

No, you are invited to take part in the study. After reading this information, you will be offered the opportunity to ask questions, the investigator will explain anything you do not understand or would like further clarification on. Only when you feel happy to proceed will you be asked to sign a participant consent form giving your consent to take part in this study. However if at any time you wish to terminate the interview you can do so. Should you change your mind after the interview, you can request that the data/information you provided should not be used.

What will happen with the results?

The final results of the study will be discussed with you. Anonymised data may be shared with a range of audiences, including, practice educator and teaching and learning forums. Your identity, University affiliations, placement setting and practice educator details will not be disclosed. The study may be submitted to appropriate expert journals and presented at other relevant conferences at a later date.

Thank you for taking time to read this information.

Prospera Tedam

Doctoral Candidate

University of Northampton

School of Health

Boughton Green Road

Northampton

NN2 7AL

Tel: 01604892135

**Who has checked this research?**

**The University of Northampton Research Ethics Committee has reviewed this study  
and approved it on.....**

*Thank you for your interest and support.*

## Appendix 12 Organising data (Coding)

I (Interview) D (Diary)

Participant Quote	Initial coding	Researchers interpretation	Final Coding (theme)
<p>“they won’t give you challenging cases cos they think you are not capable enough” (I)</p> <p>“I don’t believe you’ve done this yourself” (I)</p> <p>“Oh you’re from Africa. Do you have a problem with your writing” (I)</p> <p>“there is a general belief that as long as you belong to a BME category..... you “can’t write well, can’t speak good English” (I)</p> <p>“After approaching this lady to show me how to operate their computer system, she has concluded that I cannot use the computer” (D)</p>	<p>PE lack of confidence in BAS abilities</p> <p>PE unfamiliarity with BAS</p> <p>PE stereotyping BAS</p>	<p>Preconceived ideas and views about ability and competence of BAS</p>	<p>Racialised preconceptions</p>
<p>“I felt degraded” (D)</p> <p>“How am I going to learn in this unfavourable atmosphere”? (D)</p> <p>“I’m not sure whether I’m being discriminated here because of my race or because of my disability” (I)</p> <p>“You can imagine me sitting in front of three white people” (I)</p> <p>“It was clear that they only wanted to see white people doing the drop-in” (I)</p>	<p>BAS placed in positions of vulnerability due to being in the minority.</p> <p>Learning environment not conducive to learning.</p> <p>Disablist attitudes which intersected with race and gender</p>	<p>Inappropriate use of power and power structures</p> <p>BAS feeling oppressed and directly discriminated against because of their race.</p>	<p>Oppression and racism</p>
<p>“ Our relation is very professional” (I)</p> <p>“We’ve just had that respect like I’m her student, she’s my PE” (I)</p> <p>“I’ve had regular supervision” (I)</p> <p>I’ve never felt any animosity or felt undermined” (I)</p>	<p>Professional PE, possibly experienced, understands the role of a PE as an enabler.</p> <p>Is doing what is expected of a PE.</p>	<p>BAS view their placement experiences as positive and supportive.</p> <p>This appears to be as a direct result of a supportive PE.</p>	<p>PE supportive disposition</p>

## Appendix 13- Diversity in Practice Learning Website

O2-UK 15:36

diversityinpracticelearning.com

**DiPL** Home About Us Current Projects Events Training and Development Reading Contact Us

This website is devoted to practice-based resources around diversity and is specifically relevant to students from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds..

**Feedback**

**Diversity in Practice Learning (DiPL)** website brings together a range of resources about practice learning/field education in social work. The website will be of interest to social work students, practice educators, social work tutors and academics as well as placement providers. Students studying nursing, midwifery, early childhood studies or programmes with a practice learning element may also find this site useful.

As you navigate this site, I welcome feedback on how it might be improved.

**CURRENT PROJECTS**

I am in the final stages of a professional doctorate, examining the practice learning experiences of Black African students in England and the intention here is to use this platform to disseminate the findings arising from my research. The most well-meaning people can act in ways that contradict the values they profess to hold ... [Read more >](#)

**PUBLICATIONS**

In this section I provide links and references to some of my own work and that of some of my colleagues here in the UK and elsewhere which may be of interest to students, practice educators, academics and others interested in equality and diversity in field education ... [Read more >](#)

**Help**  
EDUC: 101 helpline

**GET CONNECTED**

Twitter Facebook

**Reflections on Sample Size**

The limitations imposed by the sample size have been outlined in Chapter 2 pgs 57/58 and it is important to emphasise that the narratives presented in this thesis have been representative of eight Black African students studying social work in the North East, South East, East and North West of England. The qualitative theoretical approach adopted for this study (critical race theory) supports small sample sizes as a means to understanding the experiences of black people. It is entirely possible that these participants self-selected because they believed they had experiences of social work practice learning they felt were important and wanted to share, however this self-selection could also be viewed as BAS wishing to discredit practice educators. It is significant that none of the participants failed their placements, not all the participants shared negative experiences and that all participants proposed ways in which experiences of BAS of social work education could be enhanced. On balance, therefore it would appear that self-selection confirmed that participants were willing to participate and share their experiences with a view to improving the experiences of other BAS in the future.

**Reflections on Institutional racism**

Proponents of CRT recognise institutional forms of racism as crucial to understanding the experiences of black people within the context of Organisations and Institutions (Hiraldo 2010). The findings from this study indicate the presence of institutional racism for some of the participants. For example, Vicky identified what could be described as a culture of discrimination when her CV/profile was rejected by a number of placements for about one academic year. Institutional racism could be said to have been at play when her HEI in the North East of England failed to address this as a matter of priority. Instead, Vicky refers to correspondence from the Vice Chancellor of the University acknowledging the shortfalls and promising some action. When Vicky is eventually placed, her efforts to engage with members of the wider Organisation/Team were unsuccessful, except through her use of a fellow student 'white ally'. For another participant Jane, whose additional needs appeared not to be recognised and understood by the University and ultimately her placement Organisation further confirmed the need for HEI's to re-examine their support for students with

disabilities. Finally, some HEI's placement matching processes which could be described as following a colour blind approach were deemed to be detrimental to the needs of BAS.

The admission of black African students into Universities across England, whilst possibly serving a widening participation duty could be criticised for not ensuring equality of opportunity and outcomes for these students during their studies. Ultimately, BAS referred to in this study are students of specific HEI's and their wellbeing on placements and in the University should be of paramount importance.

Correspondence with the HCPC about how some of the students in my study and possibly others might formalise their concerns was met with the advice that social work students be encouraged to use the processes already available to them in terms of grievance procedures at the relevant Agency or Organisation where the PE is employed. Arguably, there are valid reasons why a student social worker, particularly ones from ethnic minority backgrounds would be hesitant to formalise any concerns in this way. The fear of being failed, targeted, labelled troublemaker or being ostracised present barriers to this strategy.

It could also be suggested that the recommendations made in Chapter 5 such as the need for centralised systems for monitoring and auditing PE's, regular compulsory training on equality and diversity and student evaluations post placement, linked to the 9 protected characteristics are indicative of institutional strategies which could disrupt the various forms of institutional racism highlighted by this study.





