

A Critical Review of Educational Psychologist Engagement with the Black Community: A Diverse Group Within a Local United Kingdom Community Context

Dr Selone Ajewole

Educational Psychologist, London Borough of Bexley

A diverse group within a community is described as a collective of individuals that are different from others within that same community (Pickup, 2021). Burnham (2012) highlights that these differences may pertain to factors such as gender, identity, class, sexual orientation or ethnicity. This perception of difference can lead to prejudice by the dominant group. The mere threat of deviation from societal norms can result in the marginalisation of diverse groups whereby they are overtly or covertly dispelled to live on the fringes of society (Pickup, 2021). Such groups often experience reduced functioning and disadvantage compared with the rest of the community (Brind et al., 2008). This paper provides a critical review of educational psychologists' (EPs') engagement with the Black community within the United Kingdom (UK); a diverse group within a predominantly White local community Educational Psychology Service (EPS) placement context. Relevant literature, insight into the experiences of the Black community and ways to promote group participation in professional practice are underscored. Critical analysis of factors that lead to underachievement, disaffection and exclusion among this group is also examined. A reflective writing style is incorporated throughout as I critically consider placement practice experiences of engagement with the Black community as a Black third-year Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) at the University of East London at the time of writing.

Keywords: Black, educational psychologists, diverse, groups, community

Introduction

Demographic Trends

It is important to present UK demographic trend data from over the last two decades to highlight why the Black community are referred to as a diverse group. The Black ethnic group (Black African and Black Caribbean) within the UK are considered to be a diverse group due to their ethnic minority status. Even though it increased from 1.63 per cent in 1991 to 3 per cent in 2001 to 3.3 per cent in 2011 and 4.0 per cent in 2021, the White ethnic group still accounted for between 94.1 per cent and 81.7 per cent of the population during the same period (Office for National Statistics, 2013, 2022). Whilst being *in minority* should not mean one is perceived by society as *a minority*, this paper discusses some of the negative implications of such prevailing thought which EPs ought to be mindful of (Ajewole, 2023).

Historical Context

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive historical account of the global Black experience as far back as export slavery (1400s to 1800s), in order to understand present-day experiences of this diverse group in the UK, it is crucial to emphasise notable historical UK

immigration, educational and educational psychology experiences of the Black community during the 1900s and 2000s (Eltis, 2007). The impact of such unrelenting oppression is outlined for EP consideration.

Immigration

Critical Race theory (CRT) posits that the stories of Black people are knowledge (Matsuda et al., 1993). In an effort to provide some real-world historical context of the experiences of Black people in the UK, it felt pertinent to briefly outline a second-hand account of my late Black Caribbean grandmother's Windrush generation arrival at Tilbury Docks in Essex in 1955. Of great significance, the largest West Indian migration to the UK occurred in the years directly after the Second World War whereby Black Caribbean people were invited to relieve the labour shortage in the British Empire (Akomaning-Amoh, 2018). My grandmother shared harrowing stories of the rejection she received in the UK. Monkey chants, shop entry refusal with "No Niggers" signs posted outside, and being spat at and roughed up, were commonplace. As a Black woman, she was perceived to be work-averse despite "Workers wanted, No Blacks" posters outside shops. Such ill-treatment was as a direct response to the chestnut brown hue of the skin she was born in.

A resemblance to my grandmother's story is found in Banton's (1967) early writings. Despite the UK being described as becoming increasingly diverse, struggles with adaptation to these demographic shifts are underlined in Banton's (1967, 1973) writings on anti-colonial and post-war race issues (Anderson, 2018). These writings describe a White British population strongly against the resettlement of ex-colony Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) people in Britain. Stopping too many Black immigrants from arriving in the UK and unsettling the homogeneity of the White dominant community in social and political contexts was a key objective (Solomos, 2003). In 1968, MP Enoch Powell predicted a British nation of rebellion and violent disorder if the immigration of Black or brown-skinned people was not instantaneously halted (Sterling Times, 1968). However, the influx of European workers during the same period was met with more acceptance than Black people, who were negatively stereotyped, abused and rejected based on skin colour (Miles & Brown, 2003). This further contributed to processes of racialisation of the Black community (Banton, 2001; Miles, 1989; Sivanandan, 1982). Sadly, this deleterious view of the Black man as inferior, troublesome, disadvantaged and incapable of achievement has continued to be perpetuated throughout history as far back as slavery (Ajewole, 2023). This has resulted in marginalisation and racial injustice towards Black people in various domains globally (Zamudio et al., 2011).

Education

In terms of education, inequality for Black people has historically permeated UK educational institutions (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). *Violent and dangerous* labels ascribed to Black youth during political uprisings and racial profiling in the 1980s filtered through to the schooling system (Cole, 2004). Academic and political research framed these issues as a problem with Black children rather than a problem with White society (Abijah-Libur, 2018). In actuality, factors that led to underachievement, disaffection and exclusion amongst the Black group include struggles with the enculturation process whereby Black people experienced difficulty in adapting to White British culture (Reber, 1995). Othering also took place in the educational system for Black people in the 1970s and 1980s with the objectification of Black bodies and negative judgements placed on our hair texture, shape and posture (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011). Hence, assimilation into the dominant culture would of course feel like an insurmountable prospect. Further, a refocusing of educational problems onto Black students alongside little change in educational inequality for this vulnerable group propagated the myth of an *anti-education Black culture*, further diminishing opportunities for Black communities (Abijah-Libur, 2018; Blair, 2008; Parsons, 2009).

Educational Psychology

Although usually glossed over, educational psychology's history is fraught with scientific racism, oppression, coloniality and a preoccupation with individual differences (e.g., Eugenics and psychometric testing) which all directly negatively impacted Black people (Bulhan, 1985, 2015; Fanon, 1952/1967; Gutherie, 1998; Ward, 1998). The pathologising of Black children and labelling them as educationally subnormal through early unsuitable use of psychometric testing placed Black people at a further disadvantage (Coard, 1971).

Impact of Black Oppression

While much of the historic immigration, education and educational psychology experiences of Black people thus far revealed factors that explain problems Black communities face, the majority of the information posed operates from a deficit view of Black people and fails to consider the advancement of African nations *pre-slavery* (Eltis, 2007). It is conceivable, therefore, that enduring such ongoing oppression is so toilsome that Black men are said to experience *invisibility syndrome*, contributing to the indignation in Black men who attempt to grapple with societal injustice, correlating with subsequent low self-worth (Franklin, 1999, 2004). With multiple societal factors working against Black people, coupled with the taboo nature of divulging problems outside the Black community, it is no wonder why Black people are therefore over-represented in the psychiatric system but are least likely to seek professional support (Brooks, 2009; McKenzie-Mavinga, 1991).

Although a more formal call to action is proposed towards the end of this article, EPs would do well to begin to consider how the historic (and ongoing) denial of belonging, a basic human need (Maslow, 1943), promotion of an anti-education Black culture fallacy and an educational psychology colonial past may impact professional interaction with the Black community in the present day.

Current Context

The information presented below provides current EP-related context and persuasive justification for the selection of this particular diverse group on a local, national and personal level. This segment ends with the responsibility I have assumed as a Black TEP to act as a change agent for the Black community.

Rationale for the Selection of the Black Diverse Group as the Focus Within This Paper

The recent surge in momentum of the *Black Lives Matter* movement after the murder of an unarmed Black man (George Floyd) by White police officers in America provides a false impression of increased tolerance and embrace towards the "other" (Miles, 1989). This significant event has,

in part, prompted dialogue around global reform of race relations and engagement with the Black community amongst many industries, educational psychology included (Rhodes, 2023). In 2023, Dr Cynthia Pinto, Chair of the British Psychological Society (BPS) Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) outlined previous educational psychology antiracist practice failings and the importance of addressing equality, diversity and inclusion concerns on a national level (Rhodes, 2023).

On a local level, discussions with placement EP colleagues reveal that whilst antiracist practice and bettering understanding of and relations with the Black community remain a priority, bureaucracy has led to a slowing down of affirmative action. Additionally, in predominantly White schools, fellow colleagues divulged that Black communities rarely access early intervention and only see EPs in acute difficulty, which misaligns with equity of service priorities. The scarcity of Black people in the local community is also reflected in there being no Black EPs (apart from myself as the only Black TEP at the time of writing) within a sizeable White British team. This majority-White EPS therefore acknowledges the need for better engagement with the Black community overall.

On a personal level, recent doctoral research into the lived experiences of Black young people who attend a predominantly White secondary school revealed the devastatingly negative experiences of this group (Ajewole, 2023). This research highlights that there are Black young people who have late-night thoughts of how much better life would be if they were White (Ajewole, 2023). This is, in part, due to negative encounters with educational professionals and EPs whose inequitable treatment towards them breeds doubt around attainment capabilities. Being that previous research suggests many of the Black community attain grades up to 4.5 per cent lower than the national average, this is a very legitimate fear (Department for Communities and Local Government [DCLG], 2009; Department for Education [DfE], 2016, 2017; Gillborn, 2010; Strand, 2012; Warren, 2005). Moreover, other research suggests that young people of Afro-Caribbean descent are up to four times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their White counterparts and 1.5 times more likely to be recognised as having behavioural difficulties whilst less likely to be streamed into upper sets (Department for Education, 2016). Questions arise therefore around how beneficial the UK education system is for this diverse group (Gillborn, 2010). My doctoral research findings assert that with minimal protective factors (e.g., namely friendship), racial injustice from staff and students and a lack of embodied cultural sensitivity within their school environment overall, these Black students remain in a precarious position (Ajewole, 2023). As a Black person who recounts analogous negative experiences in attending a predominantly White school twenty years prior, I feel com-

pelled to spotlight the lack of race reform progression within education today.

A Black TEP Change Agent for the Black Community

With social justice efforts being a key tenet of the EP role and University of East London teachings, this critical evaluation of EP engagement with the Black community is therefore necessary to reveal potential EPS blind spots, solutions for which can be embedded into antiracist practice policy (Duncan, 2010). As a Black TEP who is in minority in the EPS, I am not exempt from the lasting internal impact of societal negative stereotyping around incompetent Blackness. This requires a continual shooing away of imposter syndrome, as informed by my grounding as an integrative psychotherapist, well versed in the power of positive cognitions. Acting as a true change agent for the Black community within this TEP role is therefore a burdensome yet crucial undertaking (Agyeman & Lichwa, 2020; MacKay, 2006).

Literature Review Findings

Whilst we have garnered some understanding of the plight of Black people within wider society, in order to better understand the Black communities' experience with EPs and educational professionals, a search of relevant literature was essential. However, a historical point made by Coard (1971/2005) asserts that research that explores the Black community's engagement with educational professionals is limited (Rampton, 1981). Current literature review findings suggest that this is an ongoing issue. For example, whilst research into parental evaluations of various EPSs highlights satisfaction with communication but dissatisfaction with assessment wait times, these studies did not explicitly consider the impact of culture on their findings (Anthon, 2000; Cross et al., 1991; Cuckle & Bamford, 2000; Dowling & Leibowitz, 1994; McKeever, 1996; Sendrove, 2001). Hence, a synthesis of findings from a Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodology scoping review was necessary to uncover new insight into this complex phenomenon (Peters et al., 2015). Being that a preliminary scan of studies pertaining to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) engagement specifically with EPSs revealed its limited nature, the review question was extended to: "*What are the engagement experiences of Black and Asian Minority Ethnic groups within Health care, Social care and Educational Psychology professional services?*" The search databases used included PsychInfo, Eric and EPRAP, and the findings are discussed below.

BAME Engagement with Health, Social and Educational Psychological Professional Services

BAME communities are known to infrequently access community health services, with cultural differences, language needs and a lack of understanding of how belief sys-

tems impact decision-making being cited for the lower-than-average uptake (Diken, 2006; Lawrence, 2014; Marshall, 2000). Other studies highlighted barriers to BAME parental engagement with Children's Services which include poor service knowledge, stigmatisation and transportation difficulties (Katz et al., 2008; Page et al., 2007). Ineffective communication and healthcare inequalities are also predictors of poor BAME NHS service engagement (Begum, 2006; Mir, 2007; Randhawa, 2007; Stuart, 2008).

Black Parents' Engagement with EPs

The scoping review only revealed one study which was directly related to EP engagement with the Black community. This study sought to explore Black African parents' experiences of engagement with a UK EPS (Lawrence, 2014). Using an exploratory mixed-methods research design, this study found that Black African mothers were prone to isolation as their belief systems inhibited understanding, adaptation and management of the needs of their child. Fear of stigmatisation from the wider Black and White community created inward tension and reluctance to approach what they deemed to be insensitive and judgemental professionals. For many of the parents in the study, their child with special educational needs (SEN) subsequently became the "family secret", with professionals unknowingly being seen as intruders who would "take their child away". Moreover, professionals' rigidity over the child's long-term future prospects after a SEN diagnosis was also at odds with many Black African parents' beliefs of "healing of autism" through their Christian faith (Lawrence, 2014). Although insightful, the hyper-focus on the Black African group within this study leaves unanswered questions around the EP engagement experiences of Black Caribbean or Black Other groups.

Being that the knowledge base within this area is scant, it is beneficial to explore the role of the EP in engaging with the Black group using recent placement practice examples.

The EP Role in Engaging with Diverse Groups

In considering the complex and arduous experiences of the Black community aforementioned, it is important to contemplate the role of the EP in engaging with this particular diverse group. Reference to the values, skills and ethical frameworks we encompass and abide by is vital to forming this understanding. Examples of how such values, skills and ethical frameworks can be used to address power imbalance when working with the Black group in my placement practice are accordingly drawn upon.

EP Values, Skills and Ethical Frameworks

"Poor thing, she has no idea what she is in for ..."
Following on from my consciousness and direct experience of Black oppression and the potential for diverse groups to

be understandably reluctant to engage with outsiders, these were the thoughts behind my half-smile and squinted eyes when in conversation with a TEP acquaintance from another university. This White British TEP, who I *assumed* had only ever been socialised around other White and privileged groups, had been allocated a placement in the socio-economically deprived majority Black London community I had grown up in. Her hair was not afro-textured, nor was her skin tone representative of the multiplicity of beautiful brown shades that make us Black. Her use of language in the form of received pronunciation was in stark opposition to the "Wha gwan?" (What's going on?/How are you?) Black British colloquialisms she was likely to confront. How then would she display beneficence, encourage autonomy and advocate for social justice amongst a sea of Black faces with cultural practices unfamiliar to her? How would she actualise the EP's obligation to "support and promote the proper development of young people" within a Black community whose doors are often closed to foreigners? (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001; BPS, DECP, 2002). Unbeknownst to her, I felt a tangible sense of unease in my chest at what she or other White TEPs may encounter with Black communities they have had minimal interaction experience with.

Further, the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (2015) standards of proficiency maintain that EPs must "be aware of the impact of culture, equality and diversity on practice" and understand how ethnicity, culture and religion affect psychological wellbeing and behaviour (HCPC, 2015, p. 8). I was unsure how she would demonstrate this within the Black community, especially considering the often fleeting nature of interaction in assessment, observation or consultation within the EP role. Moreover, the doctorate thus far had been comprised of minimal cultural competence training; how equipped could she possibly be? Most concerning, EPs are known to encounter cultural issues when assessments employed with multicultural families are rife with cultural bias (BPS, DECP, 2002, p. 15; Ortiz & Flanagan, 2002; Reynolds & Suzuki, 2012). I was left perplexed, therefore, as to how she or other White EPs could practically display knowledge and understanding of diversity in ethnicity and culture that is experienced as adequate and appropriate by those deemed as *other*. Questions around whether one has to be Black to fully empathise with and relate to *Black tears* lingered. However, psychotherapy training and experience around our capacity to be fully present with those who are different from ourselves, reminded me that, with the right skills, values and adherence to sound ethical guidelines, all EPs can effectively engage with this diverse group (Rogers, 1980).

Non-discriminatory practice guidance, therefore, such as the HCPC (2015) standards of proficiency, the BPS (2021) code of ethics and conduct, and the SEND code of practice (Department for Education & Department of Health,

2014) alongside the Children and Families Act (2014) all provide frameworks prompting EPs' consideration of the differing needs and unique experiences of children and families from diverse groups (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2014; Pickup, 2021). Whilst EPs need to cultivate communication, interpersonal skills and critical self-reflection in order to meet these standards, it is vital to additionally hone in on the continual development of cultural competence, especially with socially excluded people (BPS, 2017). For instance, Campinha-Bacote's (1991, 2009) culturally competent model of care for African Americans operationalises cultural competence as the amalgamation of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skill, cultural encounters and cultural desire. Dogra et al. (2007), however, caution against the notion that understanding issues of culture is finite, but that rather consistent grappling and adopting *cultural humility* enables lifelong self-evaluation and therefore good EP practice (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). Assuming such cultural humility in a society that customarily positions EPs as *expert* is perhaps, however, no easy feat (Fox, 2015).

The Application of EP Values, Skills and Ethical Frameworks to Address Power Imbalances in Personal Placement Experiences

Tervalon and Murray-García (1998) acknowledge the power imbalances inherent in the interaction between majority and minority cultures whereby culturally-blind health/social care is seen to exacerbate the inequities and injustices that prevail (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Such power imbalances, however, are not confined to issues of majority and minority culture and can be intensified by perceived differences in expertise due to professional status. A recent placement joint consultation occurred between a group of White educational professionals, a Black Caribbean and not formally educated mother and myself as a Black TEP. This White professional female group felt a need to demonstrate a mob mentality whereby they joined the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) leader in berating the mother's personal lifestyle choices, hushing and smiling quickly before she entered the room. They attempted to enforce a "*special school is more suitable for your son*" agenda, which required me to explicitly position the parent as the "expert" in her own child's life. In doing so, I took "appropriate professional action to redress power imbalances" thereby decreasing the likelihood of engagement resistance (BPS, 2019, 2.1.4:3). However, to truly "embed principles of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice in all professional actions" I also had to be cognisant of the implicit feeling in the Black community of the superiority and dominance sometimes exerted by *educated Black folk* who can be known to belittle fellow Black people in professional situations (BPS, 2019, 3.3). I therefore became proactive in gently

eliciting the often silenced voice of a Black mother, actively involving her in decision-making which profoundly impacts her own life. This was despite the White educational professionals attempting to exclude her from any decision-making as she nodded off during the meeting after working nights to provide for her three children with SEN. Furthermore, using my knowledge of cultural delicacies such as "Ackee and saltfish, plantain, green banana and dumplings", which her son displayed restrictive eating around, encouraged additional participation (Sutcliffe & Birney, 2014). Seeking also to shift from a *within child* to *ecological* view of child need helped all professionals to understand the impact of cultural difference and assimilation struggles inherent in her son's recent move from St Lucia to the UK, which was overlooked as intensifying his learning needs (Oliver, 1981). This helped to demonstrate cultural awareness, build affinity and offered understanding, especially in a placement area that is only 1.1 per cent Black versus 93.7 per cent White.

Another placement experience example supports findings from the Lawrence (2014) study aforesaid. A SENCo chuckled at the prospect of a Black African mother taking her son to Nigeria to be "healed from autism". Considering that self-perceived culturally competent EPs are believed to have less understanding of theories of ethnic identity or minimal ethnic community experience, EPs have been known to demonstrate the same disregard for clients' alternative cultural beliefs (Anderson, 2018). In being reminded of my duty to facilitate cultural sensitivity and anti-oppressive practice, I tactfully challenged this negative construction of Blackness by citing relevant research (Lawrence, 2014), creating steady shifts in destructive thinking of educational professionals in their work with the Black community.

Reflection on Placement Anti-Oppressive Best Practice

Whilst upholding anti-oppressive practice on behalf of Black people within the preceding examples was second nature for me as a Black TEP, I am uncertain as to whether this insider's perspective provides me with an advantage White EPs are not afforded. How easy is it for those who do not hold a repugnant history of Black oppression to recognise and call out the oftentimes subtle nature of oppression, especially in professional settings? With tangible downward shifts in the White educational professionals' demeanour towards me after the anti-oppressive challenge, how sustainable will it be for me and Black professionals like me to continue to *stand* with the implicit feeling of "treading on thin ice" in embodying a skin tone historically repulsed by the masses?

Gravely significant, I have realised that demonstrating cultural competence as a Black TEP within this field is multi-faceted and complex. Even though I was momentarily able to engage in antiracist practice in the examples above, internal tension around Blackness suggests this may not always be an automatic process and that I still have more cultural com-

petence work to undertake. For example, reflective practice aided the realisation that as a Black TEP some of my inner thoughts and ways of being are incongruous with the Black community I seek to support. I was socialised around Black culture as a child but made a conscious decision to move to a more affluent and subsequently “Whiter” part of society as an adult (Finlay, 2008). Placement experiences with Black people, therefore, often stimulate a burning in my throat when I consider the painful experiences of this Black community which I appear to have abandoned, but am unavoidably still part of. Whilst I do hold racial pride around Blackness (Cummings, 2018), recent internal fighting of the “conscious” unconscious bias around “troublesome Black boys” during assessment reminds me that Black EPs can sometimes still internalise negative societal discourses about their own people which may negatively impact how they engage with Black people. Recognition of the destructive potential of such beliefs has ignited the working through and dispelling of such beliefs in personal psychotherapy, supervision and cultural competence research and training.

Recommendations for EPs’ Black Community Engagement

Despite the candid and challenging reflections above, the prospect of the EP profession forming more fruitful relations with the Black community is still something I believe is achievable. Following on from the material above-mentioned on the challenges experienced by the Black community, difficulties with EPS engagement and placement examples of Black engagement best practice, there are a number of recommendations that EPs can take on in order to increase the likelihood of productive and meaningful encounters with this diverse group.

Understanding of Race-Based Psychological Frameworks

In better understanding the needs and experiences of the Black diverse group, there are certain race-based psychological frameworks that are necessary to employ. CRT asserts that race is socially constructed and that racism is not purely the product of individual prejudice but it is also acutely ingrained at the societal level in wider forms of injustice (Gillborn, 2005, 2009). Since EPs have the unique opportunity to facilitate engagement and understanding between both school and family systems, they should remain cognisant of the larger and often hidden context of oppression, discrimination and inequality embedded within the micro- and meso-systems that negatively impact Black groups (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Moreover, by EPs engaging in reflexivity around social graces and intersectionality, they can become more able to question these underlying processes of White supremacy/racism that sustain inequalities in education for

Black people (Burnham & Harris, 2002; Burnham, 2012; Crenshaw, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Although CRT encourages practitioners to cross-examine Whiteness as normal, this should not be misinterpreted as an attack on White people but rather on the socially constructed and continually reinforced power of White identifications and interests (Gillborn, 2005; Vaught & Castagno, 2008; Wright, 2020). If we align with such heavy criticism of CRT this may mean, however, that we fail to question prevailing discourses that inadvertently shape human interaction or that we seldom attend to the differing levels of privilege, capital and power and their detrimental consequences for Black communities (Bourdieu, 1986; Foucault, 1977/1980). I believe EPs need to engage in an active process of conscientisation whereby we increase awareness of social, economic and political structures and use our privilege to shape policy to take action against their oppressive nature (Freire, 1968/1972). By keeping positioning theory and the co-constructed nature of discourse in mind, undertaking a process of repositioning, EPs thereby facilitate better conditions for this diverse group (Fox, 2015; Harré, 2012). Additionally, in incorporating decolonising psychology in our work, we embrace rather than marginalise African thought and, metaphorically speaking, do not encourage Black people to chemically straighten their naturally afro-textured tresses to conform to European beauty standards (Simango & Segalo, 2020).

Mindfulness of the Impact of Negative Experiences on the Black Community

With an understanding of CRT’s assertion that *racism is everywhere*, which disproportionately harms Black people, EPs should remain aware that the continued oppression of the Black community throughout history aforesaid bears modern-day significance. It is recommended, therefore, that EPs consider mindfulness of the challenges some (not necessarily all) Black people face as pertinent to the way we work with them. Further, the provision of person-centred practice in the form of the core conditions (empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence) is an important foundational step in building a positive working alliance in order to collaborate on educational psychology work that ultimately benefits the child (Clarkson, 2003; Rogers, 1959).

Cultural Competence Research and Training

As outlined above, it is important for EPs to remain aware of CRT and decolonising psychology’s stance alongside the impact of oppression on Black people. Furthermore, openness to regular cultural competence and responsiveness training and adapting practice to suit families’ differing belief systems will aid in understanding the nuances of Blackness and culturally based views of SEN (Muñoz, 2009). Kusi (2020) cautions EPs that whilst challenge is inherent in seeking to exemplify cultural competence, to avoid this may mean we

unwittingly maintain discrimination if we fail to be intentional about challenging it. The engagement of EPs in cultural competence training and research, therefore, ultimately enhances the support the Black community receives (Bolton & M'gadzah, 1999; Lawrence, 2014).

Other ideas include open discussion with EP colleagues and other educational professionals on engagement techniques that have been both effective and ineffective, which should be seen as providing essential learning opportunities. Solution-focused team brainstorming or organisational change work, perhaps through the use of a PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope), is a proactive way of understanding current issues and preferred futures in engaging with this diverse group (Burden, 1978; Morgan, 2016). In working with diverse communities, EPs must endeavour to epitomise the cultural competence aspects of the ethical frameworks discussed, tactfully educating other professionals as needed and being prepared to stand in isolation when practice of other educational professionals is contrary to antiracist practice guidance.

Black Inclusion

Whilst internalising race-related psychological theory, seeking to understand difficult Black experiences and engaging in cultural competence training is pivotal, inclusion efforts of the Black community within EP work are key and will be aided by this prior work. Actively promoting participation and inclusion for the Black community will require innovative thinking around meeting them "where they are at". This may require forging partnerships with churches, mosques and other religious organisations which many Black African/Caribbean communities frequent or Black community leaders as well as community events (e.g., annual Black hair shows, Carnival preparation classes), schools, play groups, community centres and nurseries. Rather than running "coffee mornings" which tend not to appeal to Black culture, perhaps utilising Black staple foods in the title such as hosting "Bun and Cheese and Chin Chin Educational and Child Psychological Conversations" events give the clear message that this meeting is for Black people. Holding open discussions about the poor state of educational attainment of Black children (more specifically Black Caribbean children), how to raise Black attainment, exploring reasons for the lack of EPS engagement with the Black community alongside explanations of what educational psychology entails and the benefits of engagement/early intervention for their families might prove useful (Strand, 2012). Correspondingly, hosting Black parental focus groups or collating data from questionnaires may also provide direct awareness of how the Black community would prefer to be approached and engaged with by EP professionals, allowing us insight into how to satisfactorily tailor our practice efforts to suit their need.

Broaching hard conversations by way of acknowledgement of educational psychology's historical failings previously stated alongside cultural competence progress information will also be crucial (Wright, 2020). Further, creating video content of positive service engagement experiences from Black families in tandem with actively seeking to target and train more Black EPs would be pivotal in enabling the Black community to feel affirmed. Cultural competence website information could additionally highlight current Black group engagement efforts, with anonymous suggestions or feedback from Black people enabling the sharing of their views. Lastly, organising "Black EP Career Days" led by Black EPs for primary- to university-age Black children and young people will demystify the often unfamiliar and obscure EP role, thereby raising aspirations and inviting more Black people to a seat at the table within a glaringly "White" profession (Squires et al., 2007).

Black Empowerment

By adopting a liberatory psychology approach in their work with the Black community, EPs are best placed to facilitate meaningful and positive change for this group. By engaging in holistic understanding, collaborative working, identifying and mobilising existing strengths and facilitating successful action opportunities, Black people can be reminded of their pre-existing agency and autonomy and be empowered to pursue "better" (Lazarus, 2018). EPs, however, must be prepared for the challenge of expanding Black people's awareness of social realities (e.g., oppression) and encourage critical reflection of self-sabotaging taken-for-granted Black community norms and values (Lazarus, 2018). Placement Black parental feedback suggests TEP unequivocal and non-patronising empowerment can be the catalyst towards positive change for their child, family and the overall community.

Closing Reflections

Moving forwards, EP engagement with Black young people and their families should positively and unambiguously reinforce cultural and academic aspects of their way of being as we work *with* them towards a better future. Abijah-Liburd (2018) suggests that the EP profession needs to hold up a mirror to current race-related practices. After this reflective inventory has occurred, the simple search for the humanity in a Black community that has often been depicted as animal-like is a good place for EPs to start bettering engagement with this diverse and promising group.



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