

# Challenge Plus:

The Experience of Black and Minority Ethnic School Leaders



Research undertaken with and for the  
National College for School Leadership  
*by*

**Jan McKenley**, Principal Consultant,  
Austin Mayhead

*and*

**Dr Gloria Gordon**, South Bank University  
Business School

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# 1. Summary

## Introduction

In November 2001, Austin Mayhead was pleased to respond to an invitation from the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) to deliver a small scale appreciative inquiry into the experiences of school leaders from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. The qualitative research was designed to assist NCSL in increasing the participation of those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds in senior leadership positions. It would help NCSL to:

- Generate knowledge and understanding of the challenges faced by school leaders from BME backgrounds, including those who have recently completed mainstream headship training programmes
- Increase the number of school leaders from BME backgrounds who participate in NCSL's online networks and other initiatives

A further aim of the research was to assess whether there were specific issues for school leaders from BME backgrounds that NCSL should take into account as part of its remit to support and promote effective school leadership. While the hypothesis that institutional racism and prejudice would be factors was inevitable, there was no presumption about how such factors might affect school leaders from BME backgrounds. Rather, there was a willingness on the part of the College to learn directly from school leaders of BME backgrounds, and to ensure that the College was taking sufficient account of the range of strategies adopted by school leaders to confront the negative stereotypes and low expectations that racism perpetuates.

## Main findings

- School leaders from BME backgrounds had a strong desire to capture the joys of their leadership. Many of the black and ethnic minority communities represented in this study were settled relatively recently. School leaders from BME backgrounds saw that they could add their rich cultural heritage to the common wealth of all schools and in the process could play a unique role in transforming educational opportunities in this country.
- A sense of vocation to one's community, an understanding of economic disadvantage, a feeling of shared aspirations and the privilege of being a role model – these are typical features of successful school leaders from BME backgrounds, regardless of their ethnic origin. However common features should not be overstated; the differences are many too. This is not a homogenous group. The sample is too small to draw any distinctions between the experiences of those, for example, from Indian or Black Caribbean heritage, between women and men or phase or status of school. The report reveals a diversity of approaches and strategies in meeting the challenge of leadership. Clearly there is no one way to be a BME school leader.
- One of the benefits of the AI approach was the opportunity to affirm the pioneering achievement of becoming a school leader from a BME background. The joys of leadership for headteachers from BME backgrounds were very evident as participants described what becoming a headteacher meant to them on a personal and professional basis. The route to headship for some has been straightforward and for others circuitous. One interesting feature is the positive benefits some of the school leaders attribute to early periods in Section 11 funded posts.
- These BME school leaders commonly expressed a lack of recognition of their success by officers and colleagues in their own LEAs. This was in the face of clear evidence either in the league tables or in glowing OFSTED reports about the quality of their leadership and management of staff, their commitment to innovation and their ability to raise standards, often in very challenging schools.
- Some of the school leaders in this sample felt a high level of personal pressure in being pioneers, including constant scrutiny and in some cases professional attack.
- The research also explored the issue of the relevance of ethnicity to school leaders from BME backgrounds. The responses expressed a full continuum from positive identification as role models to ambivalence, to categorical denial.
- Six of the 20 participants had spent time as the acting headteacher at their school, prior to being appointed to the substantive post. This was more often in schools in difficulties. However the most important leadership development experience cited was being managed by effective headteachers.

## Key issues for further consideration

Suggestions on how the assistance might be given to aspiring school leaders from BME backgrounds included:

- Stress the importance of equality and diversity by involving as wide a range as possible of school leaders from BME backgrounds in all aspects of the work of the College.
- Provide early career opportunities to shadow school leaders (including those from BME backgrounds), and more opportunities for young teachers to spend time with heads who share their cultural and ethnic experience.
- Encourage the development of courses for young teachers that explore issues of race, gender and class in ways that lead to real talk about the complexities and issues of school leadership.
- Investigate further the access and barriers to deputy headship for BME teachers.
- Create more opportunities for people to spend time away from their schools to reflect and understand the multi-ethnic context of teaching and leadership in this country.
- Offer sessions within leadership programmes on how school leaders should tackle the unique challenges that BME teachers face which might differ in intensity to those experienced by their white peers – the concept of ‘Challenge Plus’.
- Use a wider range of sources than just LEA link advisers to identify potential school leaders from BME backgrounds earlier in their careers.
- Conduct a comparative study on the experiences of teachers and school leaders from BME backgrounds working in the independent school sector.

Typically BME headteachers do not stay long in authorities, which do not have the policy frameworks to support their leadership and development. This is particularly important in areas where there is not yet a critical mass of BME headteachers, deputy and assistant headteachers. The research suggests that the College should consider working with LEAs to secure:

- Greater understanding of the steps LEAs have taken to achieve a critical mass of BME teachers in leadership positions, perhaps by publishing case studies of effective practice in this area
- Improved recognition of the senior management experience of headteachers (including those from BME backgrounds) as a potential source for LEA management
- Improvements in the quality of monitoring data on the ethnic profile of school leaders to meet the requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act (2001) which will require organizations to monitor the ethnicity of all staff



## 2. Overview of Sources

In reviewing the literature on the experiences of school leaders from BME backgrounds, emphasis has been placed on how their ethnic minority status has impacted and continues to impact on their experience of school leadership. This focus is especially important given the emphasis being placed by the Government on NCSL's role in developing the skills of all school leaders.

NCSL's Leadership Development Framework published in 2001 provides a framework for leadership training for headteachers and aspiring headteachers at varied stages of their careers. This preliminary research on the career histories of school leaders from BME backgrounds is intended to inform NCSL's learning. Therefore, the focus in this study on how 'race', ethnicity and cultural heritage impacts on the experiences of this group of school leaders is an important signal. Identification of the specific needs of school leaders from BME backgrounds will enable NCSL to act on its commitment to reflect the diverse backgrounds from which school leaders are drawn.

It quickly became evident from our searches that UK research on the specific experiences of school leaders from BME backgrounds is limited. In the course of our study we made contact with the relevant headteacher associations and found that no major studies had been recently undertaken on the needs of school leaders from BME backgrounds, although plans were underway to give such issues more prominence in the light of the Race Relations Amendment Act (2001). The National Union of Teachers is working with NCSL on a study of the experience of teachers of BME backgrounds. The London Leadership Centre is also about to publish the results of its large scale inquiry into the factors affecting take-up of the NPQH by BME teachers.

Interviews with a small sample of BME school leaders feature in research conducted by Audrey Osler (1997) whose recent work on the experience of teachers from BME backgrounds is most widely cited. Ethnographies of schools often feature contributions from the headteachers but those where the headteacher is from a BME background are rare.

This limited body of research on the school leaders from BME backgrounds parallels the experiences of their peers in other professions (Cox, 1990; Davidson, 1997; Bhavani, 1994). In trying to gain insight into why this gap exists, it seems that such research is frequently seen as a 'minority' issue (Cox, 1990). In addition, researchers from BME backgrounds report that they are frequently pressured not to do this type of research, similar to researchers in the field of women's studies, because they will be entering a 'research ghetto' from which they may never escape. Bravette (1996) writes of being advised not to commit 'career-icide' by focusing on race as a research topic. Cox (1990) also identifies the fear researchers have of being pigeonholed and labeled an 'ethnic researcher'.

This concern is echoed in the experiences of school leaders from BME backgrounds taking part in this preliminary study. Almost all reveal themselves as being mindful of being identified as a 'professional ethnic' (Blair and Naylor, 1993). As researchers from BME backgrounds, we are aware of these concerns but share NCSL's view that there is an urgent need to extend the limited body of knowledge that currently exists.

As a consequence of our initial findings, the College further commissioned Dr Gordon to consider the most relevant US research and emergent UK studies within the context of the Leadership Development Framework. Her work is appended to this report. Further consideration was given to:

- An exploration of the cultural context of the educational environment in which school leaders from BME backgrounds not only operate but are also consumers and the extent to which this culture supports their particular identities and therefore development of leadership potential. (Blackstone, Parekh and Sanders, 1998; Luthra, 1997; Smith, 1976; Bhatt et al, 1988; Braham et al, 1992; Skellington, 1992; Brown, 1984; Fryer, 1984; Husband, 1987).
- The relevance of the lived experiences of other professionals from BME backgrounds in British society to provide helpful insights into the attitudes (work and social), perceptions, values and beliefs which underpin their success or otherwise in overcoming the seemingly inevitable challenges to their credibility and the impact of institutional racism. (Davidson, 1992; Bhavnani, 1994; Connor et al, 1996; Morrison and Glinow, 1990)
- Consideration of the success and cost factors and the thriving/surviving strategies identified by managers from BME backgrounds (Bravette, 1997; Osler, 1997; McKellar, 1989; Dhurev, 1992; DES, 1989; Francis-Spence, 1994).
- Linking the Leadership Development Framework, in particular the models of school leadership, to other leadership or identity models, including Thomas and Ely's (1996) Learning and Effectiveness Paradigm, in order to explore the organisational and structural issues, which help or hinder in the progress of teachers from BME backgrounds.

# 3. The Voices of Black and Minority Ethnic School Leaders

The experiences of the 20 school leaders from BME backgrounds are grouped under the following headings:

- Career histories and progression routes
- The successes and challenges
- Common features of leadership evidenced by headteachers from BME backgrounds
- The impact of mainstream and other leadership development programmes
- Legacies

## Career histories and progression routes

Schools, LEAs and other public bodies will have a duty under the Race Relations Amendment Act (2001) to collect, monitor and analyse the ethnic profile of their staff. Currently there is no national data on the ethnic breakdown of headteachers.

One of the benefits of the appreciative inquiry (AI) approach used in this research project is the opportunity to affirm the pioneering achievement of becoming a school leader from a BME background. The accounts of what becoming a headteacher means on a personal level are probably similar to those felt by all school leaders – the absence of career planning in the early days and the unexpected pleasures of teaching. What is perhaps not so common are the career paths and barriers to promotion. In some cultures teaching is not considered a high status career. The route for some has been straightforward and for others circuitous to say the least, but an interesting feature of this work are the positive benefits some but not all of the school leaders attribute to early stints in Section 11 funded posts.

## Personal Satisfaction

“I feel very proud of myself now 10 years on, but then I was just getting on with it. Reflecting on what I am doing has helped me to see how much I have achieved.”

*“I was drawn to this school. I wanted to prove it could be over-subscribed and successful and it is. This school is 300 years old and I am its first black headteacher. I feel proud of my achievement.”*

“Achieving headship has been an achievement for me, my family and my friends. I was proud and happy at my first headship in Brixton. I knew as a child that I wanted to be a teacher.”

*“I think it is a significant achievement that I am head of this school. I am a past pupil of this school. I have lived across the road for 40 years. I am passionate about this school. My expectations are very, very high.”*

“I don’t feel particularly successful and I don’t particularly feel as if I have achieved very much. I felt successful when I first started to teach having come from a very working class family.”

*“Mixed feelings on becoming a head. I have always loved teaching but headship gave me the opportunities to implement policies to influence more children. In the early days of headship I missed the cut and thrust of the staff room.”*

“My children are proud of my struggle and hardwork. I came to England in 1959 and took evening classes. I got my first ‘O’ level at 26. I worked in a hospital so I had the flexibility to study and eventually I went to teachers college.”

*“Is my mother proud? Oh gosh, she is absolutely over the moon. My own daughter was speechless, thrilled. It has meant so much to friends and neighbours”*

“There is quiet satisfaction. I come from a family with high expectations. I have brothers who are surgeons.”

## Community Responses

*“I didn’t realise it was seen as an achievement for the community until I was invited to the local Gurdwara to be the guest at a prize giving, that was the first recognition.”*

“I was ecstatic about getting my headship. There was a tremendous sense of achievement amongst my family. No congratulations from the staff, not one.”

*“People who have asked me to come and speak within the Turkish community have recognised my achievement and contribution where I was not able to recognise it myself.”*

“As a young girl of 14, I was ‘adopted’ and mentored by key people in the North London black community – John La Rose, Paul Dash. They encouraged me to see the world in a political context and to give me that incentive to go on.”

*“Parents initially questioned the decision to teach in a primary school. In my culture, secondary school or university teaching has status but not primary school...but that’s what I had decided to do.”*

“My Indian family culture does not recognise teaching and headship as a ‘successful career’.”

*“There is a sense of pride in my achievement in my family. It is an important achievement. I fought and battled hard to get here. As a community (black Caribbean) we’re too muted about our achievements.”*

## Career Pathways

"I was a deputy headteacher for a long time. I lacked confidence because of the lack of support. Becoming a headteacher was a great achievement for me. I am always aware of my ethnicity and have to prove my worth all the time."

## Early Experiences of Section 11 Funded Posts

*"I have taught in all phases as a Section 11 teacher; 13-19 boys in Bradford and Leicester as well as primary. This served me in good stead because I was able to work alongside colleagues, pilot curriculum development and resources and because I was constantly having to apply learning in range of different context, I acquired skills which are essential for headship."*

"I spent 18 months as a Section 11 teacher but it was not my idea of teaching. I found it frustrating as you didn't build up relationships. I felt it was a mistake within a month of getting the post I was keen to get back into the classroom."

*"My colleagues from the multi-cultural service felt very positive when I returned to mainstream as a deputy head."*

## Fast Tracks

"I achieved my first headship of a big Caribbean and working class white school at 29. I was deputy to a headteacher in Brent who had brilliant people skills and utilised her staff according to their strengths. My second headship was in another LEA where white working class and Kosovan children are in the majority."

*"I was happy as a deputy headteacher, but I kept being told I had the skills to be a headteacher. I was just checking it out but the first interview was successful."*

"The governing body took a risk and gave me that benefit of the doubt – young Asian, first female headteacher."

## Career Breaks

*"Another achievement was, when I decided to have my daughter, to give up teaching. I was approached by Peter Mortimore, at that time Head of the ILEA Research and Statistics team who was putting together evidence for the Swann Report and that was an important learning experience. I was seconded there because the headteacher refused to accept my resignation."*

"I was probably too young for my first headship at 33. It was a very difficult experience. I felt attacked personally and on account of my ethnicity. The greatest attacks came from other black people. I had poor support mechanisms and sought sanctuary with genuine supportive members of my team (white and black) who remain my friends still. Getting married and having a child saved me. It allowed me to take time out from headship, to reassess and engage in self-nurturing. Walking into my second headship I recognise the old fear but also energy, drive and knowing the contribution I can make."

## Career Barriers

*"My predecessor did everything he could to stop me leaving the school. He held onto me to save his and the school's purpose without any care for my needs. Asked to do one job after another ostensibly to 'prove myself' so in the end I resigned without a job and decided to do an MA in order to get an open reference from him."*

"I aspired to, but never got, a call for interviews in those leafy white suburbs."

## Success and Challenges

The joys of leadership for headteachers from BME backgrounds were very evident in the interviews as participants described what becoming a headteacher meant to them on a personal as well as professional basis.

*“Early successes were important. We organised a performance to tell the community things had changed. We did a whole school performance (NOR:560) of Macbeth involving a community playwright. Lots of parents from Uganda who saw Shakespeare as high status. Teachers were amazed to find parents reciting Shakespeare. There were key parts for everyone. Adapted in a week and performed a week later.”*

“In my second headship I inherited a member of staff who had been shunted around the borough and was known for his inefficiency. Trust and help are the keys to leadership in my view. My role is to say, ‘this is the task but we’re all in it together’. After two months the member of staff handed in his resignation saying, ‘Mr X, I see what you’re trying to do here. I can’t do it, so I’m leaving. Thank you.’”

*“Getting rid of those teachers who were not pulling their weight and thinking of the children first. Wonderful to appoint my deputy and see some light and getting through OFSTED, which I found hugely motivating.”*

“I get my greatest pleasure in pupils. When I walk into assembly and I see 700 girls, dignified and looking immaculate, it gives me a great sense of pride. I want to be seen as a black head. It’s important that it is noted. I am keen to be a role model.”

*“The best moment was my OFSTED report, which commented on my ‘very strong leadership’. I needed that verification, to prove that I was right to press for changes new ways of working against the odds.”*

“When we came out of special measures with no serious weaknesses and OFSTED said, you’re on the right route, you’ve got the strategy right. It was totally unexpected. I cried.”

*“The first league tables were a shock in 1993 and the A-Cs were stuck around the 27 per cent for four years and I was ready to go almost. The OFSTED registered inspector told me to hang in there and the next year they jumped 10 points. I felt like hugging every child.”*

“I was talking to a Year 6 girl who was disappointed that she hadn’t got into the secondary school of her choice. I told her that I too had that experience as a young girl but before I could finish, the child interrupted to say, ‘but look at you now Miss’.”

The participants in this survey are no strangers to the pain of leadership. Internal as well as external oppression is one of the by-products of prejudice and the institutional racism, from which education is not immune.

*“I am the headteacher of a very good school. Perhaps I’m too conscious of how important it is to maintain the popularity of the school, its traditions. Any sense of failure will be seen as the black man failed. I carry that with me.”*

“I feel as a black person I carry a lot of baggage – deep inner feelings about our ability to make mistakes. This to me is the essential dilemma for black school leaders. To create the space to be allowed to make mistakes as person rather than as a black person.”

*“Racism has had an effect. In every context I had to prove myself. It doesn’t bother me. I know I am good. I don’t suffer from low self-esteem. I have a winner’s mentality. I get this from the people who I interacted with as a young teacher, from the black writers I met like Angela Davis through New Beacon Bookshop.”*

A common feeling expressed by the school leaders in this study was the lack of recognition of their success accorded to them by officers and colleagues in their own LEAs. This was in the face of clear evidence either in the league tables or in glowing OFSTED reports about the quality of their leadership and management of staff, their commitment to innovation and their ability to raise standards, often in very challenging schools.

“There is no system in place in my LEA to recognize the strengths of senior teachers from BME backgrounds. When I was a senior teacher, no one in the LEA acted as a mentor. Even now I feel I have so much to offer but I am an in-school person, so I don’t push myself forward unless I am invited.”

*“I have agreed to do some work in another LEA via informal networks. It’s too competitive locally.”*

Some of the school leaders in this sample have paid a high personal price for being pioneers, under constant scrutiny and in some cases professional attack.

“Nothing can prepare you for how you are perceived by others as a black headteacher. Your every move is scrutinised in the local media so you also need to know how to manage the press and to change their focus.”

*“There was some hostility when I became the acting headteacher. At the early staff meetings white teachers asked the black teachers why they were being so supportive of me. I came here in a position of authority and it has been difficult for some teachers to see beyond the colour of my skin.”*

“It took a long time for the white community of my school to accept me. When I first came, the school’s priorities were social not academic. School was seen as a social centre with corridors full of parents observing teachers and checking them out. When I stopped that it was described as ‘locking parents out’ of their school but the governors were very supportive and my way prevailed.”

*“I have had to prove myself in every context I have worked in. I have suffered racism and because of my ethnicity people have reacted to me in a particular way. It’s something that you have to develop strategies for dealing with it. I dress the dress and walk the walk. I am a bolshie woman. I know how to use my power. I know when people are being covertly racist and don’t think I have two brain cells to rub together and they give it away and give me the power to develop the strategy to deal with them.”*

“Subtle challenges often posed as confusion. ‘I’m confused...I don’t understand...which is often a euphemism for ‘I don’t agree with...’”

*“Dealing with challenging parents as well as challenging pupils is the hardest part. Experience is the only qualification.”*

“I found teacher training college very difficult in the late 70s. I had an accent and had some very challenging situations with some tutors. I finished the course and decided that I wasn’t good at teaching. I had struggled hard to study and was put off and made to feel as if I was not very good. I gained a lot of experience that I have been applying to my teaching. I yearned to be a teacher and found that when I eventually got to school I was actually ahead of my time and didn’t need any more training.”

*"I have to adopt and wear an armour that doesn't fit well but is a requirement of the position I'm in. I am totally myself with the children but I am always in leadership mode with the staff."*

As one officer from a BME background said wearily, at the end of a particularly taxing day:

*"We will have made good progress when the presumption that BME professionals have to work harder for acceptance than their white peers has diminished. Equality is an acceptance that black people can be mediocre too."*

However such a statement might be viewed, that day appeared a long way off to our respondents and mediocrity is low on the list of aspirations described by the school leaders in this study. The work ethic expressed below is more typical.

*"I am driven by a need to be in control of my own destiny. I want to know how I can make a greater impact. I am impatient, urgent. I would not be a good head in a high achieving school."*

*"I was not as academic as my sisters but I strive to achieve and have reached the top of a ladder that I set for myself. For me to have got here, I have had to have far more qualifications – that is the level of insecurity."*

*"My style of management is very hands on. I am out in the corridors, classrooms, in the playground, lunch duty, play duty and on the buses with them. I want to know everything that is going on in my school. I know this pace cannot be maintained, I give myself 10 years."*

### **Challenge Plus**

School leaders from BME backgrounds face the inevitable challenges to their authority that all school leaders face once the 'honeymoon period' is over. For many school leaders from BME backgrounds however, the honeymoon is extremely short and all too soon they face what Martin Coles at NCSL has described as 'challenge plus'. These examples illustrate the concept.

*"When I was appointed there were questions asked by officers including the school adviser. No one rang to congratulate me and invite me to the LEA HQ as was the custom then. A personal friend and mentor said, "Enjoy today, tomorrow there'll be white flags, but we'll face that." How right he was. By nine that evening I had a threatening phone call."*

*"My biggest challenge was eight years ago when colleagues people I had considered friends, wrote a letter to the governing body objecting to my appointment as deputy headteacher as an example of unfair positive discrimination. They were represented by the NUT. I cancelled my membership."*

*"It has been hard to sustain the war of attrition on standards. The first year was full of challenges and blocking by the staff. The school was like a feudal system. Lots needed sorting – attainment, expectations, exclusions. I was fighting racism from day one, from the disrespectful treatment of parents to innovation. My line was 'it's not about banners and slogans'. I was very straightforward about the task ahead and the outcomes. It took a long time to build momentum and assemble a critical mass of staff who saw things my way. There was huge turnover of staff. I found the standards agenda my most powerful weapon."*

The surviving/thriving strategies are complex and often idiosyncratic.

*“My first teaching post was in a huge 700 FTE primary. The antagonism towards me was shocking from teachers as well as pupils. I concentrated on my teaching and sought a solution. I began to watch the school football team. I started a badminton club, which ran four nights a week, and gradually I drew them in, won them over. If you’re not accepted and you want to be, you have to do things to be accepted. It’s better than listening to the derogatory statements.”*

“Originally parents expressed fears that I would make their children eat curry with their hands. I am no longer seen as the foreigner but the headteacher. In this school we celebrate Diwali, and Chinese New Year. I wear Punjabi suits, carnival suits. All cultures are available to me. I want my children, my own and those at school, to feel at ease in any community.”

*“I apply for jobs knowing that there will be questions in people’s minds about what they are going to get. I feel I have an important role to play in crushing stereotypes in terms of speech. I am very anglicised – clothes, attitudes. After 11 months I came to school in a sari for the first time and took great amusement in witnessing people’s responses. I was pushed to reflect with staff that I did not see them approaching Indian parents with the same interest and curiosity.”*

## Common features of leadership

### Strong Sense of Vocation

*“I like to teach in the inner city. I like to make a difference to children who I think need the most.”*

“I was an engineering graduate. I was at a parents evening and I was blanked by a teacher who spent 20 minutes telling her colleague about her holiday while I waited and I was angry about it for two days. My husband said there’s only one solution. You become a teacher and you treat your mothers properly. So I did.”

*“I was ‘born again’ as a Christian in 1983. I felt God’s hands upon my life and very much so when I came here as a deputy. I feel a powerful call to leadership and I have a passion to see these young women come through this school and make their mark.”*

### Confidence of Expert Practitioners

*“First and foremost I am an educationalist. I am secure in my pedagogy and that permeates everything. I never react. I set my own agenda. You have got to be proactive and anticipate strategies to deal with every eventuality.”*

“My leadership model derives from my personality. I am strong, confident practitioner. I have strong values about education and the strategy to put them in place. I am a completer-finisher. It’s important for staff to have a strategic view about the whole school. I learnt that from two very good headteachers.”

*“I had a very supportive black inspector when I first got my headship. When the racism was at its more tangible, he would say, ‘Remember that you have been a successful teacher in successful schools and do not take any of their rubbish on.’”*

“I am very much a hands on headteacher. I am the first to identify with teachers’ needs. The systems and structures are in place but I don’t watch paper. Staff know that I am the front buffer and will not let them down. I trust the emotional intelligence of my staff.”

#### **Applying Curriculum Knowledge Innovatively**

*“I want to be the head of innovation, not just the headteacher.”*

“We do things in small steps because our children come from very volatile backgrounds. Reward, praise and celebrations, a strong focus on delivery and core skills. There is language and cultural deprivation among this poor white community which is not acknowledged so we apply English as an Additional Language (EAL) techniques without the funding.”

*“My vision is to see children achieving life skills before they leave the infants, reading confidently so that when they get to Year Three they can take off.”*

“I have three key themes: achievement, quality and entitlement. I pay attention to detail in all aspects including language. In my school staff don’t talk to children about being late instead they ask ‘Why have you lost five minutes of your learning time?’”

*“I am enthused and excited by witnessing the changes occurring both with children and staff. I talked to my staff about starting booster classes in the evening to open opportunities for children in a school that has been a deficit model for so long. I had expected to bring outsiders in but the existing staff has bought into the idea and now there are seven out-of-school activities running.”*

#### **A Respect for Parents**

Involving parents as ways of pushing teachers’ thinking. Year 6 teachers shared QCA moderation samples with parents and identified developmental issues for individual children and their parents took those issues on. When teachers saw that level of engagement, it was motivating.

“I decided to work on the school’s mission and to involve parents and the community as well as staff. I asked everyone, ‘If I were a parent at this school what would I want?’ And this was very powerful. Parents gave very different answers than anticipated by most of the staff, who felt the parents would be grateful for their contributions. Instead parents said involvement was on the teachers’ terms. So I had to act quickly. I drew up a five year plan with short, middle and immediate response, focused on values and valuing each other. Listening and acting was the right thing to do.”

*“I have meetings with parents and am able to say things to them because I too am black. I empower parents to set boundaries, to keep their daughters focused on work.”*

“We have put in new systems for managing behaviour which are shared with parents. Different categories of disruption and each category treated in a different way. Strong on discipline. Rewards go hand in hand with sanctions.”

*“I put a lot of effort into making relationships with parents I spend an hour with every new parent going through the ethos of the school because I find it is time well spent. That initial investment moves them and their children much faster. With such a mobile intake (serving a RAF base) I make it my business to go through all the expectations and opportunities to participate. I find out what they’re good at and how the school can use it. This is their school and I believe in an open management style.”*

“There is a historic memory in minority ethnic communities of aspiration and struggle which I see as a positive gift – that feeling that I’m doing well as long as my child has done better which I hold on to and work with.”

### **Strong Identification with Children from BME Backgrounds**

*“I say to the children, it’s a privilege to teach with you.”*

“All children call me by my first name. I want them to learn how to develop relationships that sustain them for the rest of their lives.”

*“It’s the children who sell the school. ‘Tough love’. They know I love them, it is us, it is we together. I am a role model for all the children who come here. A lot of children are happier in school than they are at home. I want this to be a home.”*

“The love of children sustains me. My children come from women’s shelters, bed and breakfasts. Their parents don’t come into school and shout at me any more. They know I mean business.”

### **Encouraging More Teachers from BME Backgrounds into Leadership**

*“I have inherited a situation where most middle and senior managers are not from ethnic minority backgrounds. I do want to change that but it can’t be done overnight. I promote on merit. Some BME teachers don’t project and sell their qualities when they come for interviews.”*

“I encourage staff from BME backgrounds in a myriad of ways. I have to be much more flexible if I want to retain Asian women staff.”

### **Making the Physical and Social Environment a Source of Pride and Self-esteem**

*“There was a total breakdown in discipline to the point where you would get police cars at the gate because teachers couldn’t control children. The building was completely trashed with graffiti everywhere. You won’t see any graffiti now. Since September not a drop. I believe that if you give children the right environment you get a different response from them.”*

“Getting a new school building was a lovely project to involve everybody. We were first put on the capital building programme in 1951 and 50 years later we have a new school. It wasn’t the first time a head had tried to do it but it was the first time a headteacher had managed a sustained campaign. I inherited a school with serious weaknesses and four years on we got a brilliant OFSTED report with the same team of teachers.”

## Ethnicity as a feature of school leadership

One of the issues that the research was interested in exploring was the relevance of ethnicity to school leaders from BME backgrounds. The responses expressed below reflect the full continuum from positive identification as role models to ambivalence to categorical denial.

“I do see myself as an ethnic leader. My culture makes me a different leader. I think there is a time when we need to separate ourselves as a group in a way for a period of time in order to acknowledge, in order to find out more, in order to let other people see us as role models and see that it can be done.”

*“I distinguish between blackness as a political term and my ethnicity as an Indian. My ethnicity causes me to think in terms of ‘we’ rather than ‘I’ and this is reflected in my approach in school which is one of inclusion where we take on responsibilities rather than blaming individuals.”*

“I got this job on merit. It was my second application. I have an academically strong record. I feel a need to be better than the rest. I am often the only black person (adult or child) in my school so there is always an issue of curiosity. This is a close community serving an RAF base and everyone knows who I am so new families come already knowing, as I overheard one saying: “She’s an Asian head but she’s very good.””

*“I made a very conscious choice to be seen myself as a teacher. I have always stayed away from the notion of being a teacher of minority ethnic pupils.”*

“At first I didn’t consider headship as having an ethnic dimension until I overheard a discussion among parents. Someone said, ‘I think it’s some Indian woman’, and that was a real eye opener. I was perceived as an Asian first.”

*“What makes the greatest difference is the quality of leadership, not vision, how you manage the staff you are working with, how understanding you are, how compassionate, how you manage them on a day-to-day basis. Being completely up front. This engenders the spirit of a community where everyone feels safe. I never raise my voice at staff. I have the utmost respect for them. I have the same values for my staff as for the pupils. My ethnicity doesn’t come into it.”*

“I am not interested in being labelled as a head who might only have got the job because I’m black. I only apply to schools where my credibility is not in doubt.”

*“I don’t want to be recognised as an Asian head. In some affluent areas parents couldn’t care less, it is purely to do with achieving success for their child. The governing body went for the best person on the day instead of the most experienced. My ethnicity has never been an issue in this school.”*

### The Significance of Cultural Heritage

“My cultural background influences my values: determination, being as good as anyone else. My grandfather couldn’t read but he was determined that I should. That is a very powerful motivation. I have always felt trusted and loved by my family. This gave me the skills and understanding to know that neither poverty nor blackness are barriers to learning.”

“I have good interpersonal skills from being a member of a mobile and highly sociable family. My father was a risk taker. We were trained to talk well, have good manners and were given a lot of responsibility which boosted our confidence. This plays a big part in my confidence as a headteacher.”

*“I come from a family of achievers. My father came from the Caribbean to serve in the RAF. I was born in Lincolnshire. We’re used to being role models.”*

“I have a strong sense of my ethnicity. I have always been very clear that I am an East African, which shows my allegiance to Africa. Indian is a reaction to my skin colour rather than my heritage.”

## The impact of leadership development programmes

Take-up of the NPQH programme by teachers from BME backgrounds is a concern and is the subject of two research projects to be published this year. One is funded jointly by the National Union of Teachers and NCSL. The second is the initiative of the London Leadership Centre and is funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Trust. Both consider the barriers to promotion experienced by teachers from BME backgrounds. Of the 20 school leaders interviewed in this study, four had completed the NPQH and were generally positive about the experience.

*“I found the NPQH refreshing and relevant. I felt I needed to be out there debating issues, finding out from others what was going on. I enjoyed the seminars at the Institute. I would have liked a laptop at awards ceremony rather than a star but...”*

Others mentioned courses which been personally significant which they felt NCSL should consider either sponsoring or emulating.

“NPQH came too late for me. I chose different programmes to LPSH, like Common Purpose, because I believe in the value of community education and business links with schools. The course broadened my outlook.”

*“The best course I ever did was the five day residential Effective Leadership in Schools course run by the Industrial Society.”*

“I did a three day leadership residential course run by the Teacher Training Agency which was very good and confidence boosting. I was amazed at the analysis of my leadership.”

Only one school leader from this sample had completed LPSH but four others were actively considering applying this year. Others cite the importance of courses which focus on gender or ethnicity. However opinions varied on the virtues of LEAs running such courses to complement the national programmes, unless they take account of the local context and policies.

*"I went to a one day conference in Tower Hamlets on raising black achievement and I took nourishment from two other black headteachers who now act as my unofficial mentors. One did a presentation on her 'classroom' which is how she organises her office. That was really powerful."*

"I started on the fast track for NPQH but got my first headship five weeks later so did not complete. I intend to do the LPSH. The only LEA courses of any value in recent years have been the national strategies and the OFSTED self-evaluation courses. I prefer independent courses. I found my MA in Education Administration and Research very helpful."

Increasingly school leaders (including those from BME backgrounds) are questioning the value of sending their senior staff on generic courses and are developing their own customised training. As job pressures increase, many school leaders are ambivalent about the value of time spent off site.

*"My school runs good staff development programmes which we manage. Our own stamp works and is most powerful. We've grown our own senior and middle managers. The key to recruiting and retaining staff is to push the excitement of teaching through the induction scheme. I am able to appoint from within my increasingly diverse staff."*

"I declined offers to participate in secondments. I am not interested. My professional development has taken second place to the needs of the school."

*"I haven't gone on a lot of courses. Too many courses impact on my quality of life. All my focus is on my school."*

Six of the 20 participants had spent time as the acting headteacher at their schools in difficulties. However the most important leadership development cited was the experience of being managed by effective headteachers.

"My predecessor was one of the best headteachers in the country. In 25 years of headship at least 20 of his deputies are now headteachers, including me. He believed in appointing young deputies and giving them opportunities to learn quickly and move on. He used to say: 'I'd rather have someone good for five years, than someone mediocre for 20.'"

*"My last headteacher saw the deputy role I held as a training partnership."*

"In my second year of teaching, the head said, 'I can see a future head in you. To achieve headship, this is what you should do. Whenever you apply for a job or a course and are unsuccessful, write and find out how you can do it better next time.' Simple powerful advice. Inspirational."

## Legacies

Each interview ended with a question about what colleagues saw as their legacy - the difference that they would or felt they had already made to the school. Most said they found this to be the most testing question of the interview and reflected back to their initial vision for the school.

*"I have changed the school from a place where children were brought for child-minding to an educational establishment. It is very much an environment for learning."*

"This is my second headship. I was asked to take on a primary school on one of the most disadvantaged and challenging estates in West London. One summer during the holidays I was working in my office and outside in the playground some children came in and I heard one say: 'Let's steal into the school and remember some good times'."

*"I want to be seen as someone who didn't give up on the school. When I came to the school I was a happy 14 stone. I am three stone lighter now. The parents asked me why I was losing weight, and I said it was 'so much swimming upstream'. The current Year Six children have seen seven headteachers come and go. When I first used to go out to meetings, the children would ask, 'Is she coming back?'"*

"A school that is self-reviewing, a learning organisation for children and teachers alike. A school where staff feel safe to pick up an idea and run with it. I want to see school move away from 'the culture of the keys' to a more open team sharing culture."

*"I think it is important to build up traditions in schools where there is so much mobility. Plays are always written by staff and performed with pupils in Year Four and Year Six. We have good work assemblies where children stand up prepared to share what they've done and to answer questions."*

"Every year we start with a two week theme on respect. It reminds everyone of the ethos and values of our school."

Perhaps the most important lesson in this small inquiry is what becoming a school leader from a BME background signifies – not just to individual, their families and friends, but as an indication of the progress, however uneven, we are making towards a more tolerant and dynamic multi-ethnic society.

*"I drifted into teaching after a degree in politics. I never set out to be a head but I love being the Bengali head of a Bangladeshi school. I feel I'm part of what the future for Britain will be like."*

And, last but not least, there is the difference BME school leaders can make for pupils.

"In my school the head cannot do it alone. I need the parents, the children, the teachers' support. Informal feedback from inspectors said that the children understand what you're trying to do here. It is a school where the children talk the talk and share the vision. I have been successful in sharing the vision."

*"When I came to this country, I was very grateful, but when we went to our first school, I was really badly treated and made to feel as if we were nobody and if you were foreign you were really thick. I was automatically put into the D stream at secondary school, nobody thought about what concepts we might understand. Finally a teacher encouraged me to write down my experiences in the world, seemed to think I had something to offer and from that point I didn't look back. These are the experiences I apply in school. Helping pupils to raise self-expectations. I have such an obligation to ensure that every child that walks into this school that we give them every opportunity of the very best. I think back to myself, so frustrated because I knew I wasn't a thick person."*



# 4. Methodology

The research team comprised Jan McKenley, Principal Consultant for Austin Mayhead in association with Dr Gloria Gordon of South Bank University Business School. The research used semi-structured interviews within an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach. Developed by Dr David Cooperrider and colleagues at Case Western Reserve University and the Taos Institute, the approach is based on the principle that organisations change in the direction of what they study. Inquiry is fateful in planting the seeds of the future.

By assuming the best of people, organisations and relationships, the AI approach leaves deficit-oriented approaches behind. Instead the research focuses on what gives life to the school leaders from BME backgrounds. The approach maximises the opportunities for positive feedback on current effective practice as well as practical solutions to any concerns or gaps in provision that might emerge. A more detailed description of the AI approach has been written by Dr Gordon and is appended to this report.

The study was designed to give NCSL insights into the career histories and progression routes of a small sample (20) of school leaders from BME backgrounds. A convenient sample was derived from the professional networks of the researchers, recommendations from the College, HMI, officers and serving headteachers. Over two thirds of the sample were drawn from urban settings to reflect the distribution of the black and minority ethnic communities that school leaders from BME backgrounds typically, but not exclusively serve.

Over 40 school leaders were nominated and contacted in late November 2001. Interviews were then scheduled in December and January 2002. A number of headteachers made contact in the new year but unfortunately by then the target number for the preliminary study had been achieved. Despite a number of approaches to national and local organisations, only one special school leader of BME heritage was identified and this was not until after the closing deadline. Headteachers from BME backgrounds other than those in this sample, for example of African, Chinese and Vietnamese, Greek and Greek Cypriot heritage were mentioned, but no firm names put forward.

Interviews were held with 20 school leaders who were invited to respond to questions framed within the four 'D's of Appreciative Inquiry. These are:

**DISCOVERY.** Each interview began with open questions which asked headteachers to reflect on their achievements in becoming school leaders and what that meant to them, their families, to pupils, staff and their wider ethnic communities, where appropriate. They were asked to describe when they felt most excited, enthused and most effective as school leaders and to consider the features and factors which contributed to those experiences. This tended to lead into a more wide ranging discussion about career histories and progression routes. What were the key interventions that allowed some school leaders to achieve headship early in their careers and why had others taken such a circuitous route?

**DREAM.** Questions were asked about how the situation could be or has improved for BME teachers aspiring to become school leaders.

**DESIGN.** Colleagues were asked to describe the kinds of strategies they had adopted/adapted in their leadership styles and asked how about the relevance of their cultural background. They were asked, if they had the benefit of hindsight, how their career paths might have been more straightforward and how they might have avoided some of the pitfalls, false trails and meanders. They were asked about the success factors, as well as the personal costs, of leadership and how these have been achieved or overcome.

**DELIVERY.** The impact of training programmes for aspiring and established headteachers was discussed. What contribution have the national leadership programmes (or any other significant training) made to your effectiveness as a school leader? How might NCSL encourage aspiring school leaders from BME backgrounds?

Each interview was taped and the findings analysed. Each session ended with a question about what they hoped would be their legacy, the difference that they would or had made to their present school.

## A short note on terminology

The use of the term 'black and minority ethnic' in this study is an attempt to reflect the shared experiences of school leaders whose ethnicity is neither white UK nor European. Past usage of terms such as 'black' and 'Asian' no longer capture the diverse range of communities who are now settled in the UK. Increasingly the term 'black' has become associated with people of black Caribbean and African heritage and 'Asian' to people from the Indian sub-continent. Neither convey the recent experience of refugees and asylum seekers.

In the end we asked the participants to define their ethnicity themselves. The exercise was problematic even with a small sample. Two participants expressed a deep ambivalence about 'ethnic' categories and their relevance to their perceptions of themselves as school leaders.

The range of categories used highlights the diverse cultural heritage that enriches our education system. A summary profile of the research participants is appended. The ethnic breakdown therefore reads as follows: British Sikh, Turkish Cypriot, British Jamaican, Bangladeshi, Indian (three), British citizen of Indian heritage, Asian, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, Black British (two), Kenyan Indian, Jamaican, Antiguan, Black Afro Caribbean, East African and East African of Indian descent.

As a consequence our usage of the collective term 'black and minority ethnic backgrounds or heritage' at this stage is essentially pragmatic.

## Endnote

This has been a timely study for NCSL to commission. There are worrying signs that the recruitment of teachers from BME backgrounds has been as problematic as that of their white counterparts. Recent concerns have been expressed about the potential pool of senior BME staff, from whom the next generation of school leaders might be drawn. The study has allowed the College to increase its network of contacts and has broadened its understanding of the diverse contexts in which school leadership by BME headteachers is discharged.

This preliminary study adds to the small body of qualitative research on the experiences of school leaders from BME backgrounds. NCSL in collaboration with the National Union of Teachers has been seeking to address the shortfall in the numbers of BME teachers applying to the NPQH. The London Leadership Centre is completing a similar study on the barriers to recruitment and promotion for teachers from BME backgrounds in London, funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Trust. The findings from all three studies provide an important agenda for action, which NCSL is now well placed to deliver.

The process of inquiry continues. The leadership concepts expressed in the Leadership Development Framework have been interrogated in terms of their relevance to a group of school leaders from BME backgrounds. Most of the participants in this study are at least established and in some cases advanced leaders. Most are ready to be involved in consultant leadership to support their local education authorities, governors' organisations and national organisations such as the College and the Teacher Training Agency in their strategies to increase the numbers of school leaders from BME backgrounds.

The concept of a National College for School Leadership enjoys a high level of support from the BME school leaders in this study. Colleagues were keen to participate in this study and many of those who rang after the sample was complete, expressed goodwill towards the College in its endeavours to be representative of all school leaders.



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# 7. Appendices

The appendices include a summary profile of the research participants, an additional bibliography and two research papers which have been written by Dr Gloria Gordon especially to accompany this study: 'Becoming and Being BME School Leaders' and 'The use of Appreciative Inquiry in Researching the Career Histories of BME School Leaders'.

# Summary profile of the research participants

Context	Number of Headships	Ethnicity (self-defined)	Completed NPQH or LPSH held	Previous Section 11 or EMAG experience	Other significant management development training	Involved in LEA strategies	Likely next move
Female headteacher (HT) of large urban multi-ethnic primary school	First headship, in post for 7 years. Previously acting HT and DHT at same school	British Sikh	No	First appointed as ST1 teacher in both primary and secondary settings	Common Purpose – strong community education and networking focus. Women into Education Management Course hosted jointly by local university and LEA	Currently on p/t secondment to LEA special task force. Previously part of local multi-cultural service	Considering options. Also involved p/t with NCSL. Would consider second headship but also other options
Female HT of multi-ethnic urban primary school	First headship in post for 10 years. Previously AHT and DHT at same school	Turkish Cypriot	Considering LPSH	None	None mentioned	None mentioned	Enjoying confidence of being an established HT. Keen to develop accelerated literacy for U5s in her school
Female HT of medium sized predominantly black African and Caribbean inner city VA girls secondary school	First headship, in post for 3 years. Previously DHT at same school	British Jamaican	Considering LPSH	None	Effective Leadership in Schools course run by the Industrial Society	No	Not at this stage
Female HT of large urban secondary. Majority of pupils are of Bangladeshi heritage living in urban centre within rural county	First headship, in post since 1991	Bangladeshi	No	None	OU Maths Degree	Consultant on leadership courses. Involved with NCSL and other national for a	Would like to stay on in current school although interested in considering executive headship model – more external facing role
Female HT of rural almost exclusively white primary school	First headship	Indian	HEADLAMP courses. Considering LPSH and MED	Early experience as a Section 11 teacher working in both primary and secondary settings	OFSTED Self Evaluation Course	Used recently to assist the LEA on recruitment strategies for m/e teachers	Ready for a challenge. Keen to become involved in education policy and promotion of BME teachers
Female HT of large multi-ethnic primary school in a disadvantaged inner city area of high mobility	First headship in 1995, previously AHT and DHT	British Citizen of Indian heritage	No	No	TTA 3 day residential course on leadership	Recruitment interviewing	Not at this stage
Female HT of small nursery and infants school in mixed inner city area	First headship, in post since Sept 1999	Black British	No. Considering LPSH	None	None mentioned	Recruitment interviewing	Not at this stage

## APPENDIX 1, continued

Context	Number of Headships	Ethnicity (self-defined)	Completed NPQH or LPSH held	Previous Section 11 or EMAG experience	Other significant management development training	Involved in LEA strategies	Likely next move
Female HT of large urban primary school	Second headship. Since 1995. First headship in 1991	Kenyan Indian	Completed LPSH		Currently in second year of MA course	Tutor for various mgt dev. courses. Occasional speaker on NPQH courses	Recently appointed as Inspector in another LEA
Female HT of medium sized primary school in a very advantaged area	first headship in Sept 2001. Previously AHT and DHT	Jamaican	Currently on NPQH	None	No	No	Not at this stage
Male HT of large urban secondary school. Majority of pupils are of Indian heritage	Second headship. In post since 1996, previously a DHT in school but first headship in 1993 in another LEA. Taught in rural county	Indian	No	No	No	No	No plans to move. Predecessor was a long-serving head of 26 years
Male HT of large estate based mixed primary school in disadvantaged area	Second headship, in post since 1990. First head in same LEA in 1987. Previously DHT in suburban school. Taught in semi-rural county schools	Antiguan	No	No	No	Asked by LEA to take on headship of challenging school	Intends to retire to the Caribbean and play an active role in village life
Male HT of large mixed secondary school in urban area	First headship since 2001. Previously AHT and DHT in school	Black Afro Caribbean	Completed NPQH				
Female HT of medium sized urban primary school	First headship since Apr 2001, previously AHT	Middle-Eastern	Completed NPQH	None	No	Intend to stay at least 5 years	
Female HT of large multi-ethnic mixed secondary school in disadvantaged urban area	First headship	African Caribbean					
Male HT of large multi-ethnic mixed secondary school located in very advantaged area serving pupils from outside immediate catchment	First headship, in post for nearly 4 years. Previously senior teacher at school but DH elsewhere	Black British	No	None	No	Not at this stage	

Male HT of medium sized VA mixed multi-ethnic secondary school in inner city area	Indian	No	No	None mentioned	No	Plans to leave headship at 55 and go into consultancy
Male HT of large multi-ethnic junior school in disadvantaged urban area. Beacon status	East African of Indian descent	No	No	Various leadership and development courses	Yes though mainly in the area of Equalities and EMAG; not in 'mainstream'	Would consider inspection and consultancy in due course
Female HT of infant and nursery school serving an almost exclusively white disadvantaged outer ring estate	East African	No	No	None mentioned	No	Would consider LEA Management
Female HT of small suburban, almost exclusively white primary school	Asian	Began NPQH but stopped on becoming AHT. Intend to do LPSH	Worked as S11 teacher for 18 months only	OFSTED self-evaluation and the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy training Independent courses run by Brent Davis, MA in Education Administration	Declined offers to participate in secondment. Needs of school ahead of personal CPD	Recently appointed to head large urban PS
Female HT of small multi-ethnic primary school	Caribbean	Yes	No	None mentioned	Involved in LEA Raising Achievement for BC boys project	No plans at this stage

## Appendix 2: Literature Review

# The Experience of Becoming and Being Black and Ethnic Minority School Leaders

### Introduction

In reviewing the literature on school leaders of black and minority ethnic heritage focus has been placed on how their BME status has impacted and continues to impact on their experience of school leadership. This focus is especially important given the emphasis being placed by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) on developing the leadership skills of all school heads. The Leadership Development Framework (LDF) created by NCSL aims to provide leadership training for all school heads or potential heads at varied stages of their careers (ie established heads, emergent heads and so forth).

This review and primary research is intended to inform NCSL's thinking about what issues it might be taking into consideration where the leadership potential and capabilities of school leaders of BME heritage are concerned. The emphasis, therefore, on how the variables of the BME heritage status (ie 'race', cultural heritage and ethnicity) impacts on the experiences of this group of school leaders will allow any particular needs they may have to be identified. Identification of specific needs will enable NCSL, through its leadership training, to address the leadership needs of not only school leaders of BME heritage more strategically, but to also gain important insights into how diversity can be more effectively harnessed for the benefit of teachers, school leaders and those involved in education and policy development.

### Black and Ethnic Minorities In Management and the Professions

A brief review of the literature on the experiences of people of BME heritage makes it evident that research on the specific experiences of these school leaders is limited. The major piece of work on black teachers was carried out by Audrey Osler (1997) and is explored in more depth in a later section of this review. None of the individuals making up this sample of school leaders have been interviewed for research before. Limited research on the experiences of school leaders of BME heritage parallels that of the experiences of people of BME heritage in management and the professions in general (Cox, 1990; Davidson, 1997; Bhavani, 1994). Widening the research remit to gain insights into why this gap exists, it seems that such specific research is frequently seen as a 'minority' issue (Cox, 1990) rather than one of universal importance. In addition, researchers of BME heritage are apparently frequently pressured not to do this type of research because they will be entering a 'research ghetto' from which they may never escape. Bravette (1996), an HE lecturer, writes of being advised against committing 'careercide' through focusing on 'race' as a research topic. Cox (1990) additionally identifies the fear researchers of BME heritage have of being pigeonholed and labeled 'ethnic researcher'. This concern is echoed in the experiences of school leaders of BME heritage who reveal themselves as being mindful of being identified as a 'professional ethnic' (Blair & Naylor, 1993). Research on 'race' and 'ethnicity', it is shown, is also likely to be 'stigmatised' by white colleagues because of the sensitivity and emotiveness of the subject.

Conclusions drawn are that research on 'race' is more difficult to perform and get published at least in the leading academic journals. The approach adopted in this review of the literature, therefore, has been to move towards further developing and extending the limited body of knowledge that currently exists, recognising that particular needs cannot be satisfied unless their nature and content are known. Raising awareness of the issues/challenges faced by those of BME heritage is seen as an important means of initiating change and making a rupture in a dysfunctional pattern of thinking and behaviour that effectively silences these experiences and so contributes to the perpetuation of any problems/challenges.

### Structure/Format of the Literature Review

A more extensive discussion of the issues relating to BME leadership ensues and is structured as follows:

1. An exploration of the cultural context of the educational environment in which people of BME heritage not only operate but are also consumers and the extent to which this culture supports their particular BME identities and therefore development of leadership potential.
2. An exploration of the lived experiences of people of BME heritage in British society especially as it relates to their role in management and the professions. This will include the work of researchers on race as well as those written specifically by individuals of BME heritage reflecting on their own societal and institutional experiences. Such exploration should provide helpful insights into the attitudes (work and social), perceptions, beliefs and, therefore, how individuals of BME heritage might construct social meaning and make sense of their lived experiences. The information should provide additional insights into what might happen to their leadership potential and skills as well as how it is recognised and utilised, or not, in organisations.
3. Consideration of success and cost factors as well as survival/thriving strategies identified.
4. Consideration of NCSL's LDF linked to Thomas & Ely's (1996) Learning and Effectiveness Paradigm as an organisational process that parallels the surviving/thriving strategies of people of BME heritage in organisations.

Continuing the pragmatic approach adopted in this research, the literature review will be concluded with a final summary of the lessons/insights drawn from the literature on the likely needs of people of BME heritage that need to be met to enable them to more effectively meet the leadership challenges of the 21st century. Implications for further research will also be considered.

### A Note on Terminology

Mason (1995) provides an analysis of the key terminology used to describe social diversity in Britain. The choice of the use of the terms 'black' and 'ethnic minority' in this study requires some clarification. Ethnic minority is widely used to denote a category of people whose recent origins lie in the countries of the New Commonwealth and Pakistan or former British colonies in the Indian subcontinent, the Caribbean, Africa and sometimes, the so-called Far East. The criterion that distinguishes those to whom the term normally refers is their non-white skin colour. Usage of the term 'black' captures the common experience of all those who are victims of the exclusionary practices of white racism.

BME as used, therefore, is inclusive of the different ways of categorising and self-naming used in both public policy and by individuals/groups that reflects the social diversity of modern Britain. It is also inclusive of the non-white categories of the Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) ethnic monitoring labels. These definitions are important in that they form the basis for seeking insights into how the sample of BME school leaders to be interviewed 'name' themselves - 'black', ethnic minority, both, neither or with ambivalence. It should be noted that the use of these terms are not unproblematic in that they tend, unhelpfully, to negate the diversity inherent amongst the different BME heritages in numerous ways (Mason, 1995; Madoo, 1988). It is hoped that this research will provide some important insights in this regard.

The term 'race' is used in various places in this review because of the commonality of its continued usage in contemporary English language where black skin colour has historically been constructed to mean being of a different race. It should, however, be acknowledged that 'race' when referring to blacks and whites is a misnomer since it is now commonly understood that there is only one human race: homo sapien sapien. Many people, both black and white, because of the silence and taboo that surround the subject of race politics continue to be unaware of, or else choose not to acknowledge, this fact. Malik (1996) has noted how, because of political correctness, 'culture' (and the same is likely to be true for the term 'ethnicity') as a term has replaced 'race' while the actual experience continues to be the same. Now, instead of superior and inferior 'races', we have superior and inferior 'cultures'. The terms 'race' and 'culture' and 'ethnicity' when they crop up in this literature review should be read with this critical awareness in mind.

## 1. The Cultural Context of the UK Educational System

The body of knowledge on race, race relations, ethnicity and the discrimination and disadvantage that is linked to these concepts and experiences is substantial and does not need to be replicated in this particular study (see for example, Mason, 1995; Blackstone, Parekh & Sanders, 1998; Luthra, 1997, Smith, 1976; Bhatt et al; 1988; Braham et al, 1992; Skellington, 1992; Brown, 1984; Fryer, 1984; Husband, 1982). In order, however, to gain important insights into the social forces that shape the experiences of people of BME heritage in Britain it is important to have an historical perspective on Britain's movement towards becoming a multi-racial society.

Studying the cultural context of the education system and how it has played its part in this process will provide just such a perspective because of the importance of its role in the reproduction of contemporary society. To more fully understand race, racism and race relations in contemporary Britain it is necessary to study the historical process of 'domestic racialisation' (Miles & Phizacklea, 1984) which took place in post-war Britain during the early 1950's as a consequence of how New Commonwealth (non-white) citizens, invited into Britain as migrant labour by government and employers alike, were socially constructed as different and therefore a problem. To fully detail this history goes beyond the remit of this analysis but such understanding is nevertheless fundamental to understanding the experiences of people of BME heritage in Britain today. It is these early 'labour migrants' (and their off-spring), who later became settlers, that the various governments over the years have struggled with identifying how to manage and integrate into British society without losing it's own sense of national identity or 'Britishness'.

Any study of the literature around race and race relations in Britain will highlight the subject to be a highly sensitive and emotive one. The reproductive functions of the education system are numerous extending from the acquisition of knowledge and sociocultural norms and values to the inculcation of dominant ideologies. The education system, schools and universities, affects the early development of social cognitions of children and do so with much authority.

Mullard (1982), Houlton (1986), Mason (1995) and others traces the various political discourse in relation to race, culture and ethnicity through how it was dealt with via the educational system and in so doing provides a critical evaluation of social meanings and educational practices. Their work typifies the multi-racial/cultural education models developed and employed since the early 1960s. The initial education policy model identified is that of assimilation (early 1950s to mid 1960s) whereby people of BME heritage were, it is argued, required to fit into an education system that was seen as a model of meritocracy and opportunity. Subsequent critical analysis by Mullard has identified that this approach has been successful in fostering the cultural subordination and political neutralisation of black and minority groups. Important underpinning assumptions of the assimilation model includes those of a nation having definable shared cultural values, belief systems and codes of behaviour into which all should be assimilated. These assumptions suggest that the underlying theme of the assimilationist model has been one of maintaining national stability.

What was not so openly discussed, its critics argue, was that the assumptions of this model rely on a deeper cultural belief in the cultural and racial superiority of the 'host' metropolitan society, therefore, on racism. Hidden in the recesses of rationalised thought and built into the very structure of policies was the view that black culture is inferior and black values and beliefs of secondary importance when considered against those held by dominant white groups. Assimilation, therefore, required blacks to discard voluntarily all that culturally defines their existence and identities as Caribbeans, Asians and Africans. Debates, social struggles and the 'underachievement' of large numbers of black children in the school system were, however, to highlight the problems of the assimilation model and its inappropriate attempt to flatten out differences leading to a gradual shift towards the multicultural phase (Houlton, 1986) which includes the integration and cultural pluralism phases detailed by Mullard.

The integrationist model and phase (1965 to the early 1970s) differed from the previous one in that it espoused the adoption of a more liberal ideal of cultural tolerance. It also accepted that equal opportunity in British society did not exist in relation to race. A critical evaluation of this phase, Mullard suggests, highlights the requirement of this model, therefore, for blacks to be selective in their values orientation in order to gain white acceptance while being allowed limited diversity in respect of religious beliefs, customs, dress and even language. In this phase it is argued equal opportunity is used as a mode of social control and those who desire social and academic achievement must conform to white standards.

The cultural pluralist model and phase (early 1980s), the final phase of Mullard's model is identified as a revised version of the integrationist model in that it expands the idea of cultural diversity and establishes the existence of this idea as a central observable feature of the social structure. Instead of being seen as a problem, cultural difference is conceptualised as something that is of value and to which schools should respond. Mullard argues that with this model nothing has really changed however, except the discourse. Blacks continue to have no power and are still expected to change themselves to conform to dominant values, belief systems and so forth. Mason (1995) notes too that 'in practice, rather than permeating the whole curriculum...there is evidence that multicultural policies are frequently partial and ill-thought out'.

Various writers have written about the 'racial' experiences of young people of BME heritage in the school system. See, for example, Coard, 1971; Stone, 1981, Mac an Ghail, 1989; Troyna, 1987 in this regard. Throughout the decades race, as political discourse, has been contentious impacting on all aspects of society. White and black children in the educational system have acquired and had confirmed ethnic and racial beliefs about minorities or Third World people in general. School integration, multicultural teaching and anti-racist education continue to be major topics in the press. The topical issue of the day is that of inclusion and attainment and how to ensure that all children achieve in schools as it is now acknowledged that 'underachievement' is no longer a problem common to only children of BME heritage.

In terms of this research it is worth asking how the above potted history has shaped the consciousness of the school leaders in our sample as social products of the system. How have their hopes, aspirations and sense of entitlement as members of British society been affected? How have their experiences of being of BME heritage impacted on their approaches to teaching and leading? Husband (1987) poses the question that if BME students/leaders achieve as much as they do in the face of disadvantage and discrimination what would be possible in its absence? Have they found a requirement for conformity? If so, how have they coped with it and what impact has this requirement had on their natural creativity? Have they remained in touch with their communities or have they felt forced to become a part of the 'professional middle classes' as a 'honorary white'? Do their stories indicate the extent to which operating discourses and seemingly shifting 'racial' and cultural paradigms are reflected in their lived experiences (internal and external) as practitioners? Do we see the assimilation model still strongly present in their worldview? Or, do we find that they have been able to implement an effective and functional cultural pluralist model because of their BME experiences? Have their particular 'success' strategies enabled them to identify more life enhancing and sustainable operating paradigms? To what extent have they been able to clarify and determine their own position (assimilation or cultural pluralism and to what end)? Elrich (1994) notes that people of BME heritage are the ones who '...carry the secret of racism inside them, harbouring questions and doubts about themselves and others'. How does their understanding of the 'secret of racism' be revealed in the stories they share?

If the above models and phases actually typify the educational discourse and practices that permeates the educational system then it also worth asking how these shared racial/cultural paradigms manifests themselves in the world of work through the experiences of people of BME heritage as detailed in the literature and through the experiences of the sample interviewed. In the next section we look at these experiences.

## 2. The Black and Minority Ethnic Experience in the UK

What is not so widely explored and conceptualised in the literature are the experiences of those men and women of BME heritage in the British context who seem to have been successful in either cracking and/or entering through one of the cracks made in the 'concrete ceiling' identified by Davidson (1997). Davidson conceptualised a 'concrete ceiling' for women of BME heritage as opposed to the 'glass ceiling' faced by white women (Davidson, 1996). How have/are these men and women of BME heritage moved/moving beyond the 'concrete ceiling', if such a ceiling does in fact exist? What have been their experiences of becoming and being school leaders and, therefore, education/management professionals? What can these experiences tell us about the challenges that aspiring school leaders of BME heritage are likely to face as they seek to progress?

It has already been acknowledged that the literature on race relations identifies clearly that people of BME heritage are disadvantaged in British society (Smith, 1976; Bhavnani, 1994; Connor et al, 1996, etc). Within this exposition it is important at the outset to note the fact that the experience of disadvantage is perceived and made sense of differently amongst the different groupings that fall under the categorisation of 'black and minority ethnic' in Britain. It is also true that social class and gender differences do pertain in ethnicity groups and should be taken into account in any analysis of their experiences.

Research findings also support claimed experiences of discrimination tending to be higher among those at the higher job levels. It is, in addition, noted that people of BME heritage with academic qualifications do lag behind whites with equivalent qualifications in getting white collar, professional or management jobs. Reasons offered for this 'lag' seem to fall under three main headings. The first reason offered is the fact of prejudice and discrimination and not least in the field of employment. The second reason offered is that because of differing life and limited and/or poor educational experiences, many individuals of BME heritage find themselves entering the labour market at a point different to the norm that employers would expect (ie having had to take the 'access route') and, therefore, with a career history that does not fit the expected pattern. The third explanation is that people of BME heritage actually have less relevant experience or

competence in the professional or managerial field than equivalently qualified whites (Smith, 1976). Morrison & Glinow (1990), in US research, add to the above the following two reasons: a) perceived deficiencies (genetic and otherwise) in minorities – a view that has been scientifically disproved and is no longer 'politically correct' to posit and b) structural, systemic discrimination (institutionalised racism) as the root cause of differential treatment rather than actions or characteristics of individuals.

In relation to major career development theories, Morrison & Glinow (1990) go on to make the important point these do not consider either race and/or ethnicity as factors yet evidence suggests that how black and minority identities develop may slow or alter the career development process. They acknowledge too that this may even affect the willingness of people of BME heritage to accept white mentors. Thomas (1989), another US academic, discusses this problem in some depth providing illuminating insights into black-white mentoring in organisations. The theme of racial identity development is an important one in the US literature but is not one that occurs in the UK literature. Bravette's (1997) explorations into her own career development as a black professional is an important exception.

Added to the above must be the socialised expectations (Lukes, 1974) of people of BME heritage in white society. Smith (1976) notes that experience has shown that some people of BME heritage will avoid certain situations on the sound expectation that they could give rise to discrimination against them the result of living in a society in which the inferior status of certain groups is officially sanctioned. Buccholz & Rosenthal (1998) support this view when they acknowledge that required patterns of behaviour are built into the law and into the mentality of all groups and affects, for example, perceptions of entitlement. As educational thinking and discourse has moved towards multiculturalism there has been a slow movement towards including in the organisational behaviour literature, race and diversity management as organisational issues. This literature shows that there are difficulties in identifying discrimination in promotion because internal procedures for promotion and progression are far more fluid than in recruitment. It is mainly in the anecdotal experiences of people of BME heritage that insights are provided suggesting that discrimination is identified as important a problem for people of BME heritage at promotion as at recruitment.

In the absence of sufficient UK research this literature search has drawn on the work of academic researchers in the US to gain additional insights. Thomas & Alderfer (1989) in the US have contributed important and relevant thinking on how race and race relations influence career dynamics. They identify race variables as a strong predictor of position in the labour market and career patterns. Major developing race research themes are identified as follows:

- Biculturalism: explores the postulated BME dilemma (and imperative) of living in two discrete worlds - the 'white' world of work and the BME world of home. Bravette (1997), in the UK context, problematises and re-conceptualises this idea of biculturalism to that of the importance of 'bicultural competence' as a thriving strategy for people of BME heritage.
- The impact of racism on the internal sense of self in the world: this research theme focuses on the internal world of people of BME heritage and how their racial identity (Helms, 1991) and career development (Dickens & Dickens, 1991) intertwines.
- BME experiences of gaining significant social and instrumental support from superiors and peers: developmental relationships - mentors and sponsors.
- BME women and how gender influences cross-racial relationships between men and women: focussing on gender and race in the workplace.

This US contribution is important in that they have theorised themes as relating to generalisable BME experiences. Thomas & Alderfer also include analysis of intergroup and organisational dynamics under two theoretical frames that are important here: Intergroup Theory (Alderfer, 1986) and Limited Black Mobility in Predominantly White Corporations (Wells & Jennings, 1983). Refer to Bravette (1997), who has explored a number of these US models for their utility in aiding understanding of the BME experience in British society, for further understanding of these models.

The above themes provide additional insights into what some of the prevalent issues might be enabling important research gaps in knowledge in the UK to be identified. If people of BME heritage are to manage 'race' and ethnicity dynamics in developing their careers then clearly knowledge is power, but where do they gain this knowledge? In relation to initial teacher education (ITE), for example, the CRE (1989) noted that ITE institutions were still failing to include on their courses adequate treatment of 'race', gender

and class issues. In fact Leicester & Lovell (1994) notes the difficulties the sample of HE institutions they approached had in answering questions in relation to race when compared to the ease with which they were able to respond to questions about disability and gender when carrying out research on equal opportunity policies. This is clearly an area for further research. It would seem, however, that the silence around 'race' as an issue (Jackson, 1976; Bravette-Gordon, 2001, Elrich, 1994) and the prevalent and strong 'suppression dynamics' (Dhruv, 1992) prevents this from happening leaving people of BME heritage to individually struggle to identify personal strategies for managing race and so ensuring their individual career survival. Silence and the official denial of the potency of race and ethnicity alongside the identified lack of research means that people of BME heritage are denied opportunities to learn with and from one another.

#### **Practitioner Experiences**

Blair & Naylor (1993) in carrying out research on black women student teachers have identified that these students were concerned about the low status of black teachers and their marginalisation into support services, in particular Section 11. They continue by noting that...as a general rule black teachers continue to feel undervalued, their skills unacknowledged, their careers stunted and their contribution marginalised'. It was also found that, regardless of individual levels of political consciousness, all students were conscious of the importance of skin colour in white constructions and assumptions of 'race'. A CRE survey (1988) revealed that where black teachers were employed they were generally on lower than average salaries, tended to be in shortage subjects and were on average older than their white colleagues. These concerns are confirmed by the experiences of other people of BME heritage in employment. For example, in the field of education, Channer & Franklin (1995) note that most black lecturers in FE/HE are located at lower salary scales and with practically nil representation within the upper echelons of senior management. Alongside this experience they are also likely to be encumbered with the hindering remit of Section 11 posts as previously noted. They also make the important point, and which needs to be acknowledged, that not all manager/professionals of BME heritage are sensitised to, or desire to be related to, the structural position of black communities.

It could be argued that some individuals of BME heritage may want to avoid the risk of being made into a 'professional ethnic' or 'token' BME. Blair & Naylor (1993) in their research acknowledges that the danger of the 'professional ethnic' status is that it frequently prevents teachers/school leaders of BME heritage from being acknowledged as teachers with a wide range of knowledge and skills to offer. There is in addition, of course, the marginalisation and lack of promotion that this status can lead to. Added to this is the widespread failure to recognise the importance of all teachers developing skills for working with diversity in an increasingly multicultural and globalising world community. There is a general agreement too, about how people of BME heritage have extra duties assigned to them, even if unofficially, on the basis of their 'race', culture and/or ethnicity as black teachers. This suggests, argues Channer & Franklin (1995), a limited set of assumptions about BME competence, aspirations and place within educational institutions.

In addition to the above, women of BME heritage see combating racism in institutions as a greater imperative for them, as black women, than sexism for example. Again this is because of the general tendency in positioning women of BME heritage in school management in Section 11 posts (a marginalised cul-de-sac) rather than the mainstream school management jobs that their white female peers are promoted into. The consequent double oppression they experience, in terms of their skin colour and gender, has been one of the most widely researched race themes in the literature (for example, Bhavani, 1994; Mama, 1992, Davidson, 1997). There is also the experience of people of BME heritage being employed as 'tokens' and 'solo' recruits and the strain this places on them that are discussed by Pettigrew & Martin (1987). Linked to this is Fawcett's (1994) acknowledgement of how people of BME heritage are frequently, even if unwittingly, set up to fail by being expected to represent black communities and to achieve unrealistic objectives set by the white male organisation.

### **Research on Black School Teachers/Leaders**

The research carried out by Osler (1997) on schoolteachers of BME heritage support the above findings. In addition her research also included interviews with several headteachers that provide important insights into how some individuals of BME heritage have been able to bypass or squeeze through the cracks of the 'concrete ceiling' identified by Davidson (1997) that has been posited as facing black professionals.

Osler's sample of school leaders totalled 10 individuals consisting of six headteachers in primary, special or secondary schools and a seventh was a secondary school deputy head. The remaining three all held senior positions in the inspection and advisory services of local education authorities. There were six women and four men in the sample. Osler (1997) placed emphasis on their 'career success' with the intention of exploring 'potential contradictions in defining career success for black educators and to examine some of the costs of success, both personal and professional, for individuals'. Main themes included: overcoming barriers; factors supporting career success; securing a first teaching post and career planning. Osler summarises her findings by noting that the BME school leaders in her sample demonstrated:

“...a variety of approaches to 'career' ... although some common features emerge: most have an expectation of success, and all are very determined to do their work to the best of their ability, sometimes seeing teaching as a vocation and often seeing their work as an expression of allegiance to the black communities. Individuals, although experiencing some setbacks to their education at various stages or in the process of migration, have built upon these early experiences and developed a high degree of determination and self-reliance.”

Osler's work notably concurs with other research in education when she identifies the importance of Section 11 funding to BME teachers gaining promotion. Only one of her sample of 10, described as 'exceptional' by the researcher, had gained headship via the mainstream route. All had come to realise the importance of developing political identities, through networking with other black leaders, to their professional development. Managing as a political activity is also identified as something that leaders were aware of. These individuals were cognisant of their isolated positions as black heads and experienced this isolation as a constraining force. The overriding aim of the headteachers in Osler's sample was to transform education through their presence. This finding concurs with that of Siraj-Blatchford (1993) when she identified that women educated in British schools had come to teaching with a strong belief that they could be role models and do something to reduce the disadvantages in terms of experiences and academic achievement of black pupils.

Equal opportunity policies (EOP) and their seeming ineffectiveness in relation to the above experiences require a mention since they are the contemporary institutional process for dealing with issues relating to race, culture and ethnicity and their management in the workplace/society. Equal opportunity policies in the literature, and in the opinions of those for whom they are intended to benefit, have proven to be ineffective because different people had different intentions about how they should work. Lawrence (1993) suggests that an overly simplified and de-politicised version/analysis of EO, for example, leads to policy interventions likely to fail because the complexities and obstacles are not faced. In addition, Blair & Naylor (1993) acknowledge the basic weakness of EOPs in relation to issues of race to be their failure to engage with the complex nature of individuals and with the structural and ideological aspects of institutions. These views are indicators of the impotence of equal opportunities in many organisations.

Given the experiences from the literature described above what are the 'key success factors' that can be identified and/or postulated? What are the significant 'costs' identified or postulated? These are considered in the next section.

### 3. BME 'Success' Strategies and 'Cost' Factors

The conclusions that can be begun to be drawn from the wider body of knowledge regarding race and ethnicity in modern Britain and the more limited body of knowledge on experiences of BME managers/professionals is that the problems of non-white BMEs seems to have become somewhat 'normalised' and 'personalised' as the problems of these individuals. As a result individuals of BME heritage have had to develop their own coping, surviving and thriving strategies. For example, common features of success strategies, extrapolated from Osler's work with BME school heads includes having a:

- positive mental attitude and an expectation of success
- high professional standards
- orientation to teaching as a vocation (rather than only a career-track) with a strong values orientation
- orientation to teaching as an expression of allegiance to the black communities (moral purpose linked to change agents or bringing about improvements, Fullan, 1993)
- determination/'overcomer orientation' and strong sense of self-reliance

McKellar (1989), a black career-oriented school teacher, identifies and shares a number of personal strategies for BME individuals based on her experiences within the British education system.

These include:

- being farsighted especially in analysing the nature of promotional levers
- asking questions about the educational developments on the horizon and how they can be a part of them
- gaining relevant qualifications – academic and professional – but also recognising that they are not enough people of BME heritage
- having a good relationship with those in senior positions to assist in ensuring that professional needs are known and met.

- of necessity, being bicultural
- developing a British cultural perspective during training and subsequently in their teaching career if advancement is the aim
- recognising and acknowledging that the norms of ethnic cultures do not apply and could potentially be a source of clash
- developing a professional identity which whilst accommodating British values relates to the social status of black people in society

More recently, Bravette (1997; 2001) in the UK context, advocates a personal and collaborative action research/inquiry process oriented approach as a sustainable life enhancing strategy that includes the complexity of issues in relation to race, culture and ethnicity in the professional context. This strategy provides/facilitates BME individuals, in particular, with a powerful methodological approach that encapsulates all of the above strategies as they develop the skills of 'life inquiry' including emotional and spiritual intelligence and lifelong learning capabilities.

Additional strategies identified from the US literature for working with internal and external barriers to advancement for individuals of BME heritage include:

- development of conflict resolution competencies enabling people of BME heritage to handle the racism they will inevitably experience as they develop careers
- skill-building programmes oriented towards BME individuals on how they can manage not only racism but also their own 'rage' over the experience of racism
- career management, highlighted as a key success technique
- pursuit of further education to increase academic and professional qualifications and to develop leadership skills inside and outside the workplace

What is immediately noticeable about these US strategies is that they are organisationally-based strategies, suggesting a shared responsibility between the organisation and the individuals of BME heritage. This is different from strategies identified by people of BME heritage in the UK where their race experiences seem to be something they work with individually. Who is responsible for dealing with such an important social issue as race/culture/ethnicity in schools when there is so little input in this area whether at ITE level or via professional development programmes? What support are these individuals provided with for working with, what seems to be, an inescapable fact of their lives in organisations/institutions? How do institutions/organisations that have traditionally adopted a 'no problem here' approach to race/culture/ethnicity issues support their BME employees?

The above UK strategies suggest people of BME heritage are acutely aware of prioritising the necessity for developing 'mental toughness' if they are to succeed. There seems to be a recognition of a need to struggle resulting from a BME socialised world-view of life in the UK context. This recognition of a need to struggle is suggested in the sense of entitlement that is suggested by career aspirations for school leadership roles even as there is also the acknowledgement that this entitlement is not something they will necessarily receive as of right. Is it that people of BME heritage who have achieved have internalised and even accepted the need to struggle have become accepting of their 'hardship experiences' (McCall et al, 1988) for personal and/or wider social rewards and outcomes?

### **Costs of Black and Minority Ethnic 'Success'**

In investigating the experiences of people of BME heritage it makes practical sense to explore how they experience their 'success' as school leaders. The problems with BME 'success' are illustrated in the literature by Osler in her analysis of school teachers/leaders and by Dickens & Dickens (1991) as detailed above, and the 'costs' that BME school leaders pay in order to achieve success. Very few BME leaders, in sharing their experiences, overtly identify the personal costs. The limited research on race/ethnicity carried out by BME individuals is in line with the rules of a traditional positivist 'received knowledge' approach in which they tend to adopt the stance of the 'objective researcher' with the problem positioned 'out there'. Bravette (1997) is a significant exception to this rule when she adopts an action research/enquiry methodological approach and uses her life-world as a black academic/professional to explore the dynamics of race, culture and ethnicity on her practice and life within the British context with the intention of transforming

it/herself. Bravette explores in some depth of the experience of being 'silenced' as well as the 'self-silencing' she engaged with in order to conform to the status quo in relation to race/culture and ethnicity in her professional context. This experience is supported by Dhruv's (1992) identification of powerful cultural 'suppression dynamics' that prevents BME individuals from naming their experiences openly.

Dhruv (1992), a UK social work education academic, brings another perspective to this review of the literature when he identifies all black professionals as in part social tokens in that their positions are always in danger of being used politically to spread the illusions that a) black interests and needs are being attended to; and b) there is an equal ease of social mobility for black people and that they occupy a significant proportion of powerful positions. Dhruv does also, however, identify another aspect to this and it is that these positions are also places to maximise a black voice of resistance from within the structures of the establishment. In recognising this possibility school leaders of BME heritage will be in a position to counteract the status quo and so take on the role of being a pioneer for change. This point could be understood to correlate with Osler's finding in relation to black head teachers and their understanding of managing as a political activity. In fact, the HMI report on Responses to Ethnic Diversity in Teacher Training (DES, 1989) in acknowledging that BME students act as a catalyst for change in ITE could also be understood as highlighting the greater potential that BME headteachers are likely to have in a leadership role. In contrast to this, however, is the perceived requirement (at a cost) of having to conform to certain cultural standards and become colourless (Douglas, 1985) or not too 'black'. This experience supports the view of critics of the integrationist and pluralist models:

*"To operate in two worlds, professional success and maintenance of our fragile acceptance in this 'white' world, requires the internalisation or blocking of pain, anger and hurt experienced as we encounter discrimination day by day."*

Dhruv (1992) argues that people of BME heritage are engaged in a struggle to maintain their identity and a place in society, but acknowledges that it is a struggle that lacks an equivalent institutional process (this issue will be taken up in the next section). Francis-Spence (1994) also offers a counter-balance to a research perspective that presents black people as passive dependent victims who are merely done to and take no control over their own lives. What are the costs? Is the inevitable struggle that people of BME heritage in Britain seem to be engaged in perceived to be a cost? Suzanne Lipsky (1987) conceptualised the notion of 'internalised racism' as a form of internalised oppression which occurs when people of BME heritage in a racist society actually internalises the negative perceptions and stereotypes ascribed and/or projected onto them as BME. Elrich (1994) refers to this experience as 'the stereotype within'. The cost of racism, especially as its manifestations are silenced and/or denied, has been written about, again in the US literature but also in UK literature in the field of psychoanalysis, as a 'disease' and a 'silent killer' (Skillings & Dobbins, 1991). How is this cost factor recognised and managed by our sample of BME school leaders? How will these dynamics (the stereotype within) be revealed through the stories of our interviewees? What about their joys?

#### **BME School Leaders – Pioneering Agents of Change?**

Dhruv's (1992) idea (supported by Bravette's (2001) transformational perspective) that people of BME heritage can alternately transform their perspectives by seeing themselves as pioneering agents of change is worthy of further exploration in the literature. Dhruv crystallises the importance of BME individuals developing conflict resolution skills (a US strategy identified above) in Britain when he highlights the importance of the negotiation of conflict towards development and change. He argues that the dominant culture in Britain tends towards avoiding conflict being instead oriented towards the adoption of 'compassionate oppression' towards people of BME heritage. People of BME heritage, it seems, are also likely to have internalised this conflict avoidance orientation as part of their socialisation in the UK. Dhruv suggests strongly, however, that since, culture is internalised and is integral to the individual, arguably, there are no victims or persecutors. There are, instead, people, black and white, with identities fundamentally connected to the cultures in which they live. These identities - black and white - direct the roles that people take in their actions in the external world. People of BME heritage are reminded by Dhruv that these identities are open to be renegotiated through struggle, something they are positioned to be

able to do with appropriate leadership acknowledgement and development. With this thesis Dhruv (1992) highlights another important research gap to be filled and another professional development need to be met.

#### **Organisational Responsibilities for Supporting People of BME Heritage**

Organisational responsibilities raised in the literature include the recognition and encouragement of a peer group of BME individuals by the organisation (Fawcett, 1994) and the identification of obstacles to advancement and strategies for problem solving and changing the culture devised – to which this research will make a contribution. There is also the necessity for a supportive working environment where indigenous norms and values do not dominate as well as the positive action of senior managers to recruit and retain appropriate staff (Woodley, 1993). Taylor (1990) argues for an institutional-based approach to management development that takes five factors into account if management development opportunities are to be valuable and relevant to black women teachers in particular: experience of racism in career development; the nature of career path followed; career planning; expectations of training/development and the shortage of role models and peers. Iles & Auluck (1989) argues for the strategic integration of human resource management functions (recruitment, selection, training career development, appraisal and reward) in the effective implementation of equal opportunities rather than the sporadic provision of race awareness training.

## **4. Diversity Management as an Institutional Process**

How can organisations help with the experiences being discussed here? How do people of BME heritage desire to be supported by their organisations? What are the societal and organisational constraining factors that limit their creativity and therefore the flourishing of their unique leadership potential? So far the literature review has explored the educational context and its discourse and practice in relation to race as well as the career experiences of people of BME heritage in British society particularly in the professions and management. Limited research has been identified on school leaders of BME heritage. Where these have been identified they have provided important insights into the experiences of people of BME heritage.

In this section of the literature review we propose to bring together NCSL's vision for school leadership into the future in order to explore what this might mean for the fuller utilisation of the largely untapped human and leadership potential of teachers and leaders of BME heritage. It was noted above by Dhruv (1992) that there is no parallel institutional process to support BME individuals in their race/culture/ethnicity struggles to retain their identity and place in this society. As previously mentioned above, Statham (1990) argues for the recognition and encouragement of a peer group of BME individuals by the organisation, rather than the continuation of tokenistic and solo appointments. She also argues for the identification of obstacles to advancement and strategies for problem solving and changing the culture devised by organisations.

Effective diversity management as presented in the literature seems to be a possible institutional process that offers a way forward that is in line with the NCSL vision. It is important to look at this movement critically and to note that it has been critiqued as simply being another means of control and rhetoric in the on-going race relations struggle. The work of Thomas & Ely (1996) in relation to a new paradigm seems, however, to be of fundamental importance here in terms of the vision of NCSL and its transformative agenda for the 21st century. The vision of a racially equal society and institutions will not occur without a breaking of old paradigms and creation of new ones - a key task of management in the 21st century (Drucker, 2000). The amended Race Relations Act of 2001 adds impetus to the relevance of this paradigm as does the CRE's leadership challenge articulated in 1996. The College's agenda for

transformative leadership and learning suggests the time is indeed ripe for a new paradigm.

In relation to this research to what extent do the sample of BME school leaders show that they are cognisant of the opportunities for change now available to them and that they are being driven by wider external forces? Are they aware of the importance of the career development/leadership strategies available to them and identified by McKellar (1989) when she emphasises the importance of asking questions about the educational developments on the horizon and how they can be a part of them? How do they see NCSL's role and what are their expectations of NCSL in relation to their own particular needs?

'Race', skin-colour, ethnicity and culture, for example, and how they are perceived and acted on are the issues that are of paramount importance to the experience of people of BME heritage being explored here and which Thomas & Ely argue can only be transformed: '...when senior managers abandon an underlying and flawed assumption about diversity (race, etc) and replace it with a broader understanding' (p 80). This applies to black and white senior managers. To initiate and move to a new paradigm is to achieve a cultural transformation. The flawed assumptions identified, based on empirical research, is that senior managers fail to appreciate and value the varied perspectives and approaches to work that diversity and therefore people of BME heritage, for example, bring. As a result they are unaware of, let alone able to identify, what the necessary developmental opportunities that these individuals may require are. They focus instead on diversity as relating to how a person looks ('race'/skin-colour), or where he or she comes from (nationality/ethnicity) and thereby inhibiting personal and organisational effectiveness. Thomas and Ely argues as follows in relation to diverse employees:

"They bring different, important and competitively relevant knowledge and perspectives about how to actually do work - how to design processes, reach goals, frame tasks, create effective teams, communicate ideas and lead. When allowed to, members of these groups can help companies grow and improve by challenging basic assumptions about an organisation's functions, strategies, operations, practices and procedures. And in doing so, they are able to bring more of their whole selves to the workplace and identify more fully with the work they do, setting in motion a virtuous circle." (p 80)

In the context of this research an important aim to be achieved is the identification of the different, important and competitively relevant knowledge and perspectives about how to actually do work in relation to school leadership that people of BME heritage uniquely bring to their schools and leadership role. In carrying out interviews our intent as researchers was to approach individuals of BME heritage with the explicit intention of appreciating their achievements given the major internal and external barriers they would have faced as their careers developed and progressed. We expect these school leaders, in sharing their stories, successes, constraints and vision, to provide NCSL with important insights into their unique qualities, knowledge and perspectives. We would also expect to identify areas for growth and development enabling NCSL to identify and make provision to facilitate their specific needs and to begin to meet the needs of individuals of BME heritage across the spectrum of leadership stages/phases identified by the College. Thomas & Ely's model visions movement beyond, while not ignoring the perspectives that have guided most diversity initiatives to date (the discrimination-and-fairness paradigm (based on a code of assimilation) and the access-and-legitimacy paradigm (based on a code of cultural pluralism), to focus on what they have identified as a new, emerging approach to this complex management issue - the learning-and-effectiveness paradigm (based on a code of integration). This learning and effectiveness paradigm is in line with NCSL's strategy detailed in its 10 propositions. It is a paradigm that incorporates the first two paradigms but goes beyond them by concretely connecting diversity to approaches to work. This could/should potentially be the next, more sustainable, phase of school discourse around race and diversity.

### **NCSL's Leadership Development Framework**

The College's Leadership Development Framework (2001) identifies 10 propositions towards a 'transformative agenda' of school leadership for transforming learning. These propositions are underpinned by strong theoretical assumptions about how to achieve viable transformative change for leading in the future. The framework acknowledges that transformative leadership should be underpinned by a focus that is:

- values based, inclusive and purposeful
- school context focused
- action learning orientated
- Instructional focus
- leadership distributed throughout school
- learning community orientation
- future orientation and strategically driven
- uses experiential methodologies
- serviced by a supportive policy context
- supported by NCSL

It seems to be important to collect some evidence to assess the extent to which BME leaders are demonstrating competences (and even excellence) in these aspects of their leadership and where they may be falling short. This information would provide NCSL with valuable factual information about what BME school leaders are achieving in their leadership roles that may currently be going unrecognised and unutilised in terms of the consultant leadership phase of school leadership (see below). There is strong evidence to support the view that a glass ceiling and/or 'concrete ceiling' (Davidson, 1997) exist where people of BME heritage are concerned. In this regard information can be gleaned enabling the College to identify where BME school leaders are and what they have achieved in relation to their leadership stage, based on the five stages of leadership that the College aims to make provision for:

- emergent leadership
- established leadership
- entry to Headship
- advanced leadership
- consultant leadership

It is assumed that gaps that exist for BME teachers will become apparent as these stages are held in mind by the researchers. Future research should attempt to provide important insights into what the significant strategies and/or support (internal and external), experiences are that have shaped BME experiences and routes into leadership roles. It is also anticipated that insights gained from school leaders of BME heritage will highlight or crystallise those BME teachers who demonstrate pioneering spirits in terms of their leadership styles. The research reported here shows that the BME experience does not have to be a purely negative one if BME teachers are able to advance in their learning and become skilled in learning from their unique experiences beyond the pre-conventional stage (Torbert, 1991) of adult learning.

Thomas & Ely (1996) have identified eight preconditions they have found to help organizations position themselves to use identity group differences in the service of organisational learning, growth and self-renewal. The preconditions identified are as follows:

1. The leadership must understand that a diverse workforce will embody different perspectives and approaches to work, and must truly value variety of opinion and insight.
2. The leadership must recognise both the learning opportunities and the challenges that the expression of different perspectives presents for an organisation.
3. The organisational culture must create an expectation of high standards of performance from everyone.
4. The organisational culture must stimulate personal development.
5. The organisational culture must encourage openness.
6. The culture must make workers feel valued.
7. The organisation must have a well-articulated and widely understood mission.
8. The organisation must have a relatively egalitarian, non-bureaucratic structure.

These preconditions clearly align with the 10 propositions of the LDF as they both place emphasis on learning, change and action (collaborative and experiential methodologies of change) and are included here because it is interesting to see how far school leaders of BME heritage interviewed here raise these (and other) themes as factors influencing their experiences and/or hindering their ability to make contribution. It is important also to assess the extent to which some of these preconditions are already evident in the school communities led by BME school leaders and whether any links can be made between their presence and the BME experience.

### Summary Conclusions

This pragmatic approach adopted in the review of the literature for this research follows NCSL's guiding ethos and philosophy towards an agenda for transforming learning in the 21st century in providing a literature review that endeavours to meet the practical and theoretical needs of school leaders in terms of its relevance and applicability to their experiences. In doing this it has engaged directly with the problems of people of BME heritage, as revealed in the literature, to identify reasons for the limited body of knowledge on their experiences within the educational context in particular.

In order to gain deeper insights into what factors might be preventing the experiences of people of BME heritage being openly discussed the educational and political discourse around race, ethnicity, culture and skin-colour and its effect on educational policies, thinking and processes have been briefly explored. The findings suggest a social issue that has been and continues to be contentious in British society and for which there is an official rhetoric but an as yet unrealised reality. As researchers we were interested in understanding how this is internalised and reflected in the consciousness of individuals of BME heritage in their experiences of becoming and being school leaders. This interest is underpinned by the understanding that early educational experiences/socialisation outcomes are reflected in later employment and life opportunities and choices.

Widening the literature search to include the experiences of people of BME heritage who are employed in managerial and professional positions, but also including important experiences from the educational field, enabled important insights into career development issues. The literature is unequivocal, limited though it might be, in the shared experience of struggle (against prejudice and discrimination) that BME individuals experience in employment. Especially important seemed to be insights gained

from the US literature that makes important and relevant links between race/ethnicity variables and career development choices and opportunities. Also important was the recognition of the personal and individualised struggle that BME individuals in the UK seem to engage with when compared with their US counterparts. This was particularly recognisable in the lack of a comparable institutional process to support them in their 'struggles' based on their BME status and which the literature suggests US organisations/institutions are putting in place.

A number of strategies were identified that seemed to be consistent to the experiences investigated in ensuring career success. A theme that comes through strongly in the experiences explored is the sense of strength of character, determination and energy as well as a strong sense of purpose that these individuals require to overcome obstacles and barriers. This other side of this theme raised in the literature review, are the cost factors that the experiences suggest. The question can also be raised about what has happened, or is happening, to those who have not made it through or have fallen by the wayside. The idea of school leaders of BME heritage transforming their perspectives to recognise themselves as, and equip themselves for, pioneers of change was raised as an important theme by both Bravette (1997) and Dhruv (1996).

This theme was explored in more depth as the literature was searched for a parallel institutional process that could be used by NCSL but would also be inclusive and indicative of the qualities that school leaders of BME heritage bring uniquely with them to their work. Thomas & Ely's (1996) new paradigm model for working with diversity is offered as one, comparable as it is with NCSL's LDF, that will advance its work and would provide the type of parallel institutional process that the literature identifies as being urgently required to support individuals of BME heritage within British organisations/institutions. Such a parallel process would also open the way for all societal members to begin to engage critically with the issue as appropriate for living and working in a multicultural society and increasingly diverse and globalising world.

## Appendix 3

# The Use of Appreciative Inquiry in Researching the Experience of Black and Minority Ethnic School Leaders

### Methodological Choice

Constructionist and interactionist methodological approaches have been adopted for this research project given the nature of the research being carried out. The particular research approach recommended was agreed by NCSL: semi-structured interviews with school leaders of black and minority ethnic (BME) heritage using an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) model. The methodological approach and research method was identified as being particularly appropriate because of the following factors:

1. The sensitivity and emotiveness of 'race', culture and ethnicity as a research issue
2. The transformative leadership agenda of NCSL and the research challenge of providing them with relevant, timely and credible data appropriate to their needs
3. The constructivist assumptions of the approach that supports the transformative agenda of NCSL
4. The emphasis on research ethics, not only in terms of confidentiality, interviewee safety, but also in terms of acceptance and authenticity for researchers and interviewees alike

The research team, Jan Mckenley and Dr Gloria Gordon, as researchers of BME heritage, were keen to bring to this research intervention a means of intervening that would enable us to leave our interviewees reflectively energised and valued in relation to themselves as human beings, their past and current achievements and with an heightened awareness of future possibilities of the contributions they have to make to modern Britain and the school system in particular. The AI interview interventions have, therefore, been perceived, on our parts as researchers, as the initiation of an on-going process, carried through in a thoughtful, learning/change oriented and appreciative frame of mind focussing on achievements and success strategies that have worked to overcome the particular constraints identified by the participants.

The research focus has been on what works and can, therefore, be built on and shared. The appreciative approach does not, as some have argued, ignore nor downplay what does not work. Rather, emphasis on what works allows the identification of BME career strategies, even as stories are shared enabling insights into the experiences engaged with in the past and currently in the role as school leader. Too frequently it is the experience of what does not work that is focussed on in relation to people of BME heritage. This research chose to break away from that pattern of researching. The achievements of these school leaders were being recognised by researchers, whose personal achievements had, in turn, been recognised by NCSL in commissioning them to carry out this work.

### Researcher Background and Contributions

Both of us, as researchers and practitioners, are actively engaged in our respective practices in exploring the BME experience as an important aspect of our how we engage with our work as educationalists and management developers. Jan Mckenley, the lead consultant in this research, brings to the research her in depth experience of schools both as teacher and OFSTED inspection background as well as her current consultancy/management development experience. I bring my experience as a human resources specialist working in a higher education business school environment with a PhD research specialism in action research/inquiry personal and collaborative research methodologies (of which AI is one) in developing professional practice with a particular interest in the BME experience. These backgrounds and experiences clearly bring important insights to this research effort and our different perspectives are openly acknowledged. As researchers of BME heritage, we have also been involved in inquiring together, enabling us to ensure 'critical subjectivity' as our

research findings are monitored and as we make sense of the data being collected.

### **Constructivism as a Research Paradigm**

Constructionism as a research paradigm holds researcher/subject involvement and participation as givens. Constructivism acknowledges that organisational stakeholders, at all levels of an organisation, do participate, they are involved and so they are the one's who define the organisation. This assumption concurs with NCSL's proposition of encouraging distributed leadership in schools. Whitney (1998) notes 'to change an organisation is to change the nature and quality of participation and interaction among the many organisation stakeholders. It is to change who talks to whom about what.'

An example of this constructivism paradigm at work was experienced most strongly in one school where the school leader shared that some members of staff (across what might consider to be hierarchical levels in other organisations) were actively struggling with working through what it meant for them to live up to the schools shared values of 'entitlement' and 'equality', for example, and celebrate Christmas as a religious festival when they had not celebrated the religious festivals, as a school, of the children of BME heritage who were also members of the school community. This debate had not been directly triggered by the school leader although it was apparent that it was the outcome of a leadership approach that had transmitted to staff their importance as stakeholders in the school and that their everyday actions ultimately defined the nature and climate of the school. This leadership approach was also reflected in the way in which conversation was managed in the school:

*"I have three key themes: achievement, quality and entitlement. I pay attention to detail in all aspects including language. In my school staff don't talk to children about being late instead they ask: "Why have you lost five minutes of your learning time?"*

### **The Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Approach**

The AI approach, developed by Dr David Cooperrider and colleagues at Case Western Reserve University and the Taos Institute, is based on the principle that organisations change in the direction of what they study. The intervention in this case was personal and specific to the experiences of the school leader of BME heritage, in his or her specific school context, as we studied their experiences in becoming and being school leaders of BME heritage and their successes/achievements. In the case of this research, studying what works for the school leaders in our sample, we anticipated, would enable us to begin to build a picture of what strategies are working and seem to be consistent for school leaders of BME heritage and so enable NCSL to make provision and provide resources to facilitate their leadership development more effectively.

Whitney claims that enquiry, as a research approach, is fateful in that it plants the seeds of the future. In approaching school leaders of BME heritage appreciatively and recognising them as actors with intentionality has been, for us, planting specific seeds. In adopting an AI approach, as researchers, we were deliberately focusing the attention, dialogue and learning of the school leaders, and ourselves, on what gives life to their/our leadership (BME leadership) when they/we are at their/our best. By assuming the best of people, organisations and relationships, AI leaves deficit-oriented approaches behind and offers affirmative processes for organisation development and the type of transformative leadership agenda being driven by NCSL. In adopting this approach BME school leaders are being acknowledged for their involvement and participation (as actors) and therefore ability, and responsibility, in actively defining what is to be in their schools, in relation to the values and purpose they have identified as being important to them:

*"I decided to work on the school's mission and to involve parents and the community as well as staff. I asked everyone: 'If you were a parent at this school what would I want?' And this was very powerful. Parents gave a very different answer than anticipated by most of the staff who felt the parents would be grateful for their contributions. Instead parents said involvement was on teacher terms. So I had to act quickly. I drew up a five-year plan with short, middle and immediate response. Focused on values and valuing each other. Listening and acting was the right thing to do."*

The interview schedule designed was based on the 4-D headings of Whitney's (1998) model where we engaged in dialogue with school leaders as they shared their experiences of becoming and being school leaders of BME heritage. These are:

- **Discovery.** Each interview began with open questions which asked headteachers to reflect on their achievements in becoming school leaders and what that meant to them, their families, to pupils, staff and their wider ethnic communities, where appropriate. They were asked to describe when they felt most excited, enthused and most effective as school leaders and to consider the features and factors which contributed to those experiences. This tended to lead into a more wide-ranging discussion about career histories and progression routes. What were the key interventions that allowed some school leaders to achieve headship early in their careers and why had others taken such a circuitous route?
- **Dream.** Questions were asked about how the situation could be or has improved for BME teachers aspiring to become school leaders.
- **Design.** Colleagues were asked to describe the kinds of strategies they had adopted/adapted in their leadership styles and how relevant was their cultural background? With the benefit of hindsight how might those career paths have been more straightforward and avoided some of the pitfalls, false trails and meanders? What have been the success factors as well as the personal costs and how have these been achieved or overcome?
- **Delivery.** The impact of training programmes for aspiring and established headteachers was discussed. What contribution have the national leadership programmes (or any other significant training) made to their effectiveness as a school leader? How might NCSL encourage aspiring school leaders from BME backgrounds?

The reader is referred to Whitney's (1998) article that provides important insights into the principles and practice of AI. As researchers we, through the questions asked, strove to leave them with the thoughtfulness of the inquiry we had provoked leading to more inquiry in their personal and school lives.

### Roles of Researcher and Research Subject

The school leaders were approached as 'actors' in the sense that they were seen as 'intentional', that is, active, reflective and creative individuals (Arbnor & Bjerke, 1998). As researchers we, recognising ourselves also as actors, were intending to engage them in dialogue in order to gain understanding of the experiences shared. As researchers we were interested in gauging their actions as creators of understanding. Our intentions as researchers and knowledge creators was to engage ourselves humanly in order to understand social action even as we periodically increased our distance in order to broaden the perspective of the data being collected. The combination of engagement through interactive development of understanding and disassociation through reflection-in-action also served the purpose of minimising any risks of our 'drowning' in the context being studied. Although it is my belief that ethnicity is a factor in the leadership of BME headteachers, the AI approach gave the researcher a disassociative distance. As a consequence the range of views expressed on the impact of ethnicity on leadership reflects the full continuum as evidenced by these comments:

"I do see myself as an ethnic leader. My culture makes me a different leader. I think there is a time when we need to separate ourselves as a separate group in a way for a period of time in order to acknowledge, in order to find out more, in order to let other people see us as role models and see that it can be done."

*"I distinguish between blackness as a political term and my ethnicity as an Indian. My ethnicity causes me to think in terms of 'we' rather than 'I' and this is reflected in my approach in school, which is one of inclusion where we take on responsibilities rather than blaming individuals."*

"I got this job on merit. It was my second application. I have an academically strong record. I feel a need to be better than the rest. I am often the only black person (adult or child) in my school so there is always an issue of curiosity. This is a close community (serving an RAF base) and everyone knows who I am so new families come already knowing as I overheard one saying: 'She's an Asian head but she's very good'."

“I made a very conscious choice to see myself as a teacher. I have always stayed away from the notion of being a teacher of minority ethnic pupils.”

*“At first I didn’t consider headship as having an ethnic dimension until I overheard a discussion among parents and someone said: ‘I think it’s some Indian woman’, and that was a real eye-opener. I was perceived as an Asian first.”*

“What makes the greatest difference is the quality of leadership (not vision), how you manage the staff you are working with, how understanding you are, how compassionate, how you manage them on a day-to-day basis. Being completely upfront. This engenders the spirit of community, where everyone feels safe. I never raise my voice at staff. I have the utmost respect for them. I have the same values for my staff as for the pupils. My ethnicity doesn’t come into it.”

The AI 4-D approach, therefore, provided us with a model that was focussed and purposeful but flexible and interactively oriented. With a suitable combination of engagement and disassociation as part of our approach we were able, we believe, to develop a more coherent total understanding.

As researchers we anticipated and were aware of ourselves as observer-actor. This means that at the same time we as observers were observing individual school leaders, we kept an awareness of them (as actors) observing our actions as observers – as we became actors to them. In these constant role shifts, where the observer becomes an actor and the actor an observer, the observer’s knowledge and theories as well as the actor’s understanding of his or her own situation will be improved. It is recognised as a dialectic necessity that observers appear as actors at the same time that they influence and are influenced by what they are studying to maximise on developing theory from practice in order to improve understanding and therefore action-taking. Given the time limitations of this research this aspect of process has not been as well developed as it could have been.

Searching the literature to gain insights into the BME experience, our own personal research interests and professional backgrounds/experiences and our membership of the BME community all provided us with important diagnostic pre-understanding bridging differences and providing language commonalities. An important purpose of our research as we have understood it is to improve, through the research, the ability of NCSL to engage with BME teachers more authentically by increasing the College’s knowledge and understanding of the successes and challenges BME school leaders face:

*“I am the headteacher of a very good school. Perhaps I’m too conscious of how important it is to maintain the popularity of the school, its traditions. Any sense of failure will be seen as the black man failed. I carry that with me.”*

Equally important is to provide a link for teachers and school leaders of BME heritage, as actors, to engage the support of NCSL. Our role as researchers in this respect is akin to that of artists, poets, and composers orchestrating new dimensions of experience. We understand, as researchers, that through a conscious and re-creative development of language, in relation to the experience of people of BME heritage, we give ourselves the chance to emancipate ‘the potential in what is factual’. We provide a powerful conversation between the College and a small but significant part of its constituency enabling a movement beyond old categories of created knowledge and to more transformatory ones.

The potential of the action research/inquiry methodology for developing professional practice even as adult development is facilitated beyond technical competence towards transformative leadership/learning is increasingly being recognised in a time of rapid change (Reason, 2001). Alongside the requirement for leadership capabilities that are able to ‘ride the waves of change’ is also the requirement for a values-based, democratic, learning oriented, inclusive leadership approach in an increasingly globalised world.

## **Other Research Sources Informing Our Chosen Research**

### **Approach**

As researchers we were sensitive to the dynamics of carrying out research on race and therefore considered how other researchers have carried out similar research. Juliet Evett's research on Gender and Secondary Headship has been helpful in this regard. She looked at what happens to women who manage/lead and who have built careers and achieved promotions. She explored, for example, the extent to which they had become absorbed by the managerialist values and structures that they have had to learn to operationalise in order to succeed? Can they as women headteachers operationalise a different style of headship? Are their schools different kinds of social organisations? Can race and culture liberate and transform headship or does the head-teacher role neutralise race/culture identity? Are their racial/cultural differences in managerial leadership styles and in the experience of being a headteacher?

### **Piloting the Research Model**

An initial pilot was carried out with Jasbir Mann, a BME headteacher on secondment to NCSL and the interview schedule was modified as felt appropriate.

### **Research Limitations/Constraints**

The discussion above extensively details and acknowledges the BME researcher perspective and why that underpins this research. It is, however, worth acknowledging in this section the fact that some people might argue that this limits the validity of our research findings. Clearly there are advantages and disadvantages of this situation. There are issues in relation to the sensitivity of the issue for both research subject and researcher especially in a culture where 'race' is a taboo subject. Also issues in relation to disclosure whether involving black-to-black or white-to-black researcher/interviewee relationships affects the information shared/acknowledged. Davidson (1997) discusses these issues in some detail in her book *The Black and Ethnic Minority Manager* where the researchers were white and the interviewees women of BME heritage. One piece of research discusses the use of tape recorders (Newsom et al, no date given). The paper entitled 'Is the Tape Off' discusses how African-American teachers waited until after the tape-recorder was turned off before speaking frankly about racial issues. The paper discusses how truths constructed from such data might differ based on researcher race, noting how research will shape education if only partial truths are available to all researchers and how racial context influences data interpretation.

The second constraint we acknowledge is that of time. As a young organisation NCSL is still evolving in its understanding of and delivery to an increasingly diverse field. It was agreed that a convenient sample, while by no means representative in statistical terms, would generate rich data for NCSL to consider in discharging the core business. Although one key finding has been the need to gain a more robust view of the field, since there is no national data on the number of school leaders from BME backgrounds, the research was deliberately bounded within three months time frame from conception to publication in order to meet the urgent agenda set for NCSL by central Government. The limitations of time estimated as reasonable for collecting data means that we, as researchers, have been unable to build into the process the means of going back to our interviewees. However, it is anticipated that the on-going nature of the dialogue that is developing between school leaders, researchers and NCSL will allow this to evolve. As this inquiry process continues there may be opportunities for further work with individual school leaders to develop their skills and competencies in this personal inquiry transformative mode of being.

## Appendix 4

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