

1 Introduction

The purpose of this book is to bring into sharper focus teacher attitudes to educating Black¹ children. It identifies weaknesses in teacher education in challenging the development of negative teacher attitudes about Black students. By throwing the spotlight on teacher education and the extent to which teacher educators are able to enhance pre-service teacher knowledge about Black children, the book sets out the rationale for teacher education being colour-and difference-minded, and why changes need to be made in teacher education programmes if Black children are to be effectively educated and their attainment raised.

Why a focus on Black children and teacher education? Black children are not a homogeneous group but in many ways are viewed homogenously and negatively in school. They are overrepresented in school discourse concerning problem educational behaviours. More than that, Black children's education is an important and topical issue because of their continued underachievement vis-à-vis the White majority ethnic group in Britain (DfES 2007, DfE 2013d). The underachievement of Black children (particularly African-Caribbean) has dominated government policy and research agendas in England since the late 1960s with numerous commissions and reports (e.g., Rampton 1981, Swann 1985) identifying the 'problem' and offering solutions to address it. Despite the wealth of research and reports about the educational experiences of Black children there is still a poverty of knowledge within the teaching profession and teacher education

about them and their attainment, and the ways in which Black parents support their children's learning. Although much has been written about the (under) achievement of Black children (e.g., Coard 1971; Nehaul 1996; Richardson 2005; Gillborn 2008; Mocombe and Tomlin 2012; Rhamie 2012, 2013), educating them and raising their attainment remains problematic in schools and educational discourse. Persistent underachievement has led to Black children being stereotyped as low/underachievers. This is despite research showing that when, for example, 'equally economically and socially placed Black Caribbean and White British pupils' are compared at Key Stage 4 (ages fourteen to sixteen), 'the Caribbean students are no more likely to be low achievers than the White British' (Kingdon and Cassen 2010: 409). However, research suggests that teachers perpetually underestimate the abilities of Black children (Gillborn and Gipps 1996; Gillborn and Mirza 2000; Demie 2003, Crozier 2005; Gillborn 2008; Tate 2008a). Perceptions of Black children as low achievers or underachievers are not helped by educational theories such as Bourdieu's (1977) theory of 'cultural capital,' which suggests that Black people are devoid of achievement capital, or indeed by stereotyped associations of Black youth with knife crime. In May 2012 my opinions were sought about a CD about Black males and knife crime. The colleague who gave it to me to review thought it would be useful to include within teacher education programmes. I questioned its usefulness then as I do now especially as it reinforced rather than challenged negative stereotypes about Black boys. Reading Ladson-Billings (2007) I should not have been surprised

that my colleague viewed Black boys in this way. She contends that ‘conceptual categories like ‘school achievement’, ‘middle classness’, ‘maleness’, ‘beauty’, ‘intelligence’, and ‘science become normative categories of whiteness, while categories like ‘gangs’, ‘welfare recipients’, ‘basketball players’, and the ‘underclass’ become the marginalised and de-legitimated categories of blackness’ (Ladson-Billings 2007:51). Thus Black people conceptually are always positioned negatively in opposition to Whites. This book questions and challenges the assumptions preand in-service teachers have of Black students.

Why bring color into difference in the school context when for many we are considered to be living in a post-racial² global society. The reason is despite the existence of race equality measures along with the implementation of multicultural education curriculum initiatives in schools, Black children still underachieve vis-à-vis the White British population. This means schools are consistently failing to prepare Black children to function at their highest potential (Walker 1996).

In addressing Black underachievement, English government policy has largely centred on the need for greater Black parental involvement in children’s learning, improved motivation, aspirations, and self-esteem and better behaviour from Black pupils (Maylor et al. 2009). In contrast, less attention has been given to exploring the role of teacher education in theorising Black children’s educational attainment and effectively equipping pre-service teachers with the necessary understanding and skills to address this

underachievement. Given such gaps in the literature, it becomes all the more important for teacher educators to enable pre-service teachers to better comprehend the nature of Black children's underachievement, including the ways in which teacher and school practice currently reinforce it.

As part of producing more effective practitioners, American researchers have called for teacher educators to examine negative student teacher beliefs about 'diversity' (Burbank et al. 2010) and Black children (Flowers and Flowers 2008). Such examination is necessary, as teaching largely recruits teachers who are predominantly White, female and middle class and who have little experience with the communities and backgrounds many of the children they will eventually teach come from. Narrow understandings of and experiences of students who may be culturally, linguistically, economically and ethnically different from oneself can reinforce rather than challenge deeply held stereotypical beliefs. But, notably, this applies as much to Black as it does to White pre-service teachers. The lack of attention given to 'diversity' and Black children in particular in initial teacher education (ITE) makes it difficult for teacher educators to fully appreciate the beliefs and attitudes student teachers might have about Black children, diversity issues, and the ways in which their beliefs and understandings would need to be challenged or developed.

Teacher education fails to address Black children's underachievement by its emphasis on teachers adopting a colour-blind attitude in their teaching as part of

facilitating classroom inclusion. Commitment to colour-blindness results in White teachers 'denying the very significance of race in their practices' (Castro 2010: 198) and the 'competencies' and 'contributions' of Black students being 'overlooked' (Myers 2002:67). At the same time it undermines teacher ability to support the learning and attainment of Black children (Tikly et al. 2006). The omission of 'race' from teacher education discourses (Tomlinson 2008) also means that flaws in adopting a colour-blind approach are not suitably examined.

Newly qualified teachers in England are known to feel inadequately prepared to teach minority ethnic children (TDA 2005, 2007), that is despite multicultural education having been a feature of teacher education for some time (Maylor et al 2006b). My own doctoral research included pre-service teachers who indicated their teacher education course had left them anxious and not properly equipped them to teach Black children in schools (Maylor 1995). In 2013 it seems little has changed. Appropriately prepared teachers are imperative if Black children are to experience academic success (Ladson-Billings 1999; Darling-Hammond 2006). Very often the focus in ITE is on cultural assimilation rather than examining the systems of oppression that marginalise or totally ignore Black children's educational experiences, and attainment outcomes.

This book is being written at a time of ideological policy shifts in the nature of ITE in England from a focus on pre-service teachers being required to develop insights about the ethnically diverse nature of British society in

order to qualify as teachers, to one where ethnic diversity is de-emphasised and pre-service teachers are instructed not to undermine British values (see [chapter 5](#) this volume). Noguera (2008: 184–5) observes that ‘when teachers are fully invested in learning and when they base their effectiveness on the academic growth of their students, they will routinely look for evidence that the instruction they provide is enabling their students to acquire the knowledge and skills deemed important’. But such analysis is less likely to happen where pre-service teachers are discouraged from engaging with student difference. In bringing much needed attention to ethnic diversity, this book seeks to indicate what can and should be done differently in ITE if student teachers are to be more effectively prepared to educate Black children.

Aims

The book is designed to challenge dominant mainstream thinking and educational discourses on the underachievement of Black children and to engender new understandings in ITE about the education and achievement of these children. Through empirical data from five research projects the book aims to

- widen understanding of Black children’s continued underachievement
- develop new insights about teachers’ views and attitudes towards educating Black children
- examine the role teacher education plays in preparing pre-service teachers to specifically educate Black children and facilitate their attainment

- raise important questions about the embodiment of ‘cultural capital’
- challenge teacher educators and pre-service teachers racialised ways of thinking about Black children/people and education, and dominant assumptions about Black children as poor learners
- demonstrate how student teachers can be better prepared to educate and improve the equity outcomes of Black children by being ‘race-,’ colour- and difference-minded.

Several of the issues discussed in this book are informed by research conducted with teachers (both Black and White) and Black parents in England between 2006 and 2010. The incidences they drew attention to and the concerns they raised as having occurred in school provided a basis for examining how pre-service teachers are educated about Black children.

Though largely a book about teacher education and Black children’s educational experiences in England, in theorising Black children’s educational experiences in English schools, and how to support their learning needs insights are derived from American contexts, research and literature. In making links between English and American educational (school and ITE) experiences the text addresses Bhatti’s (2006: 136) concern as to whether ‘American experiences can be imported into the British educational and social landscape.’ Analysis of African American educational experiences is germane as American educational policy calls for No Child [to be] Left Behind (2001) and, like England, American

educationalists are concerned to close achievement gaps between minority and majority ethnic groups (Lee 2002; Ladson-Billings 2006; Gregory, Skiba and Noguera 2010). Drawing on US research the book aims to demonstrate how the education of Black children in the UK can benefit from global perspectives. Notwithstanding, this volume is not intended to be read as a comparative book.

Underpinning this book is a belief that pre-service (and indeed all) teachers should have opportunities to engage in critical discussions with

teacher educators and teachers, and critical theorisation which enables them to think about ‘race’ and the education of children from different ethnic groups—in particular similarities and differences in educational experiences—and how they come to believe what they believe about ethnically diverse children and their attitudes to learning. It is my contention that research about Black children’s educational experiences can serve as a means to reveal how teacher education processes contribute to their lower attainment. Concurring with Noguera (2008:145), I maintain that ‘critical discussion ... must be the first step in the process of closing the achievement gap, for without such careful scrutiny, issues related to race and student achievement become obfuscated’, and the presumed failure of Black children remains unproblematised and misunderstood.

The book is organised into 9 chapters with some containing chapter end questions designed to elicit further discussion. It begins by outlining in [Chapter 2](#) the nature of Black achievement in England and the factors

identified as affecting Black attainment. In highlighting some of the complexity surrounding Black children's achievement, Chapter 2 advances that no single factor underscores Black underachievement.

Chapter 3 is concerned to understand how Bourdieu's (1984) 'cultural capital' thesis has influenced educational and policy discourse such that Black people are assumed to lack cultural capital. In counteracting such arguments, Bourdieu's theories are contrasted with those of Yosso's (2005) critical race theory/antiracist perspectives which contend that cultural and other capitals are prevalent in Black communities. Drawing on qualitative data collected with Black teachers and Black parents in England, the chapter examines how ideologies of Black people lacking cultural capital lead to Black children being negatively constructed in schools and wider educational discourse as unlikely to achieve. Through an examination of the types of capitals displayed by Black parents in English schools, salient questions are raised about the limits of cultural capital (as envisioned by Bourdieu) as a conceptual framework for understanding the achievement of Black children.

Chapter 4 examines White and Black teacher perspectives and attitudes to being both colour-blind and colour-conscious in English schools. Through a government-funded initiative with specific intentions to target support at Black children as part of raising Black children's achievement, it is possible to see how teacher support of Black children can be undermined by colour-blind (Black and White) teachers' perceptions. It demonstrates how inclusion strategies can have the

opposite effect of excluding rather than including Black children owing to teachers' lack of understanding of why a focus on these particular children is necessary. In making links with teacher education, important questions are raised about the limits of colour-blindness as a conceptual framework in raising Black children's achievement.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of the teacher profile and initial teacher education routes undertaken by those wishing to become teachers in England. It then contextualizes the ways in which teacher education programmes seek to develop pre-service teacher understanding of student difference and 'race' equality issues. Drawing on the voices of teacher educators, the intention is to understand the issues that facilitate and/or hinder pre-service teachers developing appropriate knowledge about ethnically diverse students and 'race' equality practice, and being able to meet their educational needs.

Chapter 6 calls for a re-conceptualization in teacher education of how Black children and their families are viewed along with a more informed understanding of Black parental value of education, parental involvement, and implementing a culturally relevant curriculum. In doing so it challenges stereotypical deficit constructions, assumptions, perceptions and understandings of Black children, their academic abilities and behaviour which have in the past fifty years become normalized in British schooling and wider society.

Chapter 7 is informed by the perspectives of two African American educators. Drawing on their experiences of

being teachers, school principals, a teacher educator (in the case of one), professors of education and education researchers over a number of years, the chapter highlights their perceptions of the state of African American education; factors affecting attainment (including identified weaknesses in the teaching profession together with how American schools are resourced, the curriculum delivered and consequent influence on educational outcomes); and how teacher education can contribute to addressing the achievement gap between White and Black students.

Chapter 8, by Donna Johnson, provides the findings of a two-year qualitative study of the experiences of thirty-two high-achieving African American female students who possess a history of aggressive and defiant behaviour. The study explores the root causes of the girls' behaviour to better understand their actions, the degree to which their behaviour is a response to the environment in their schools, and the impact that the girls' actions have on their educational attainment. Utilizing structured observations; formal and informal interviews with students, school personnel, peers and parents; student focus groups and a review of students' disciplinary records, Johnson reveals two primary types of aggression exhibited amongst the sample in the study: fighting and oppositional behaviour. The findings also show that the girls' behaviour is a response to environmental conditions within their schools.

Chapter 9 draws on the critical pedagogies of Freire, Giroux, King and hooks, and argues for teacher education to assist pre-service teachers in becoming

critical thinkers/teachers, to question their attainment expectations of Black children and to make changes to the way they view and educate Black children. Thus the chapter calls for the development of transformative teaching strategies, and sets out why this is important for both pre-and in-service teachers.

Chapter 10 concludes with some final reflections for future consideration.