

RACE, RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: EVIDENCE FROM ENGLAND AND SOUTH AFRICA

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Introduction

This paper reports some of the findings from two parallel research projects led by the authors. The first project, funded by the National College for School Leadership³, relates to black and minority ethnic (BME) leaders in England. The broad aim of this research was to establish how black and ethnic minority leaders are identified, developed and supported. The second project, funded by the University of Johannesburg, adopts a similar methodology to assess the experience of South African leaders who have crossed the previous Apartheid regime's racial barriers to become 'cross-boundary' leaders.

The main purpose of this paper is to present and compare evidence on the extent and nature of the problems experienced by (BME) leaders in England and 'cross-boundary' leaders in South Africa. We also examine the ways in which the participants have been able to overcome the barriers and progress to senior or middle leadership positions.

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³ The views expressed in the paper are those of the authors, not the NCSL.

Methodology

The authors, and their colleagues⁴, adopted a multi-methods approach to examine these complex and linked phenomena:

- a) *Two systematic literature reviews.* The first, for the NCSL project, examined what is known nationally and internationally about minority leaders in education, about the nature of barriers to their involvement as leaders, and strategies to overcome such barriers. The second, for the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance (MGSLG), examined the South African and international literature on school management and governance (Bush et al 2005). Part of this review relates to transformation and desegregation in education.
- b) *A survey of black and minority ethnic leaders in English state schools.* Given the lack of a national database of such leaders, this was undertaken by ‘snowball’ sampling (Cohen and Manion 1994: 88) where the initial participants are used as informants to identify other such leaders. Full details of the methodology can be found in Bush, Glover and Sood (2006).

Sixty four BME leaders completed the questionnaire. Forty two (68%) of the respondents are women. Thirteen (20.3%) were educated abroad and this was true of 30% of the men and 50% of the African respondents. The two African females both report considerable problems in securing permanent leadership posts:

‘I have been faced with racism at every step, compounded by a lack of support from management.’

Approximately one third (32%) of respondents were heads, 17% senior managers, 36% middle managers, and 15% other leadership posts. Most (71%) of the women are working in primary schools while 87% of men are in secondary education.

⁴ The English BMEL project involved Carol Cardno, Derek Glover, Geraldine Potgeiter, Krishan Sood and Ken Tangie, as well as the authors of this paper. The South African ‘cross-boundary leaders’ project included Raj Mestry as well as the authors.

- c) *Case studies of 47 individual leaders in English schools* and educational establishments, to examine their professional experience, establish the extent and nature of barriers to their career development and show how they have been able to succeed despite the barriers. These leaders, most of whom were identified from the survey responses, were interviewed in their own schools or workplaces by members of the research team. Many of the interviews eventually took the form of *life history* research (Cohen and Manion 1994: 58) as participants related their leadership practice to their wider experience as BME people living and working in England.
- d) *Case studies of 46 individual leaders in South African schools*, to examine their professional experience, establish whether and how they encountered barriers to their career development and assess the extent to which they have been able to succeed despite the barriers. These leaders, all of whom are from the Gauteng province, were identified through personal contacts and interviewed in their own schools by members of the research team.

Under-Representation of BME and CBL Leaders

England

The statistics show that English BME teachers are much less likely to be promoted to leadership positions than white teachers. Powney et al (2003), drawing on a survey of 2158 teachers, found that those from BME backgrounds enter the profession later, and have lower satisfaction levels. This seems to result in lower levels of participation in leadership roles (52% BME remain as classroom teachers compared with 29% white women and 35% white males). They add that this may be partly because BME teachers are concentrated in Inner London and are not geographically mobile for family reasons.

Singh (2002) claims that the barriers to progress arise from educational choices, gender issues, the lack of role models, and low self-esteem against societal expectations. Early

disadvantage with English as an additional language, female tokenism, differing gender values and home expectations impact adversely on career progress

The survey responses indicate that most teachers from ethnic minority groups are working in schools where there are also concentrations of pupils from similar backgrounds. The proportion of BME staff is much lower, and even schools with large numbers of BME pupils are likely to have predominantly white staff:

'I have been asked whether I am the cleaner or a teaching assistant – people don't expect to see coloured senior staff' (survey)

'It baffles me that the head and all senior teachers are white. It is not representative' (interview).

Participants provided wide-ranging examples of discrimination and racism that serve to reveal the complexity of social relations in many of the schools. These include:

- White pupils excluded from EMAS (Ethnic Minority Achievement Support) feel alienated and discriminated against.
- Kids of mixed heritage get enrolled as 'whites' because their parents do not want them to be identified as 'mixed'.
- White staff in a predominantly white school initially questioned every decision taken by a black head 'with an accent'.
- Black colleagues got jealous and resentful when a black teacher was appointed head of year; they accused him of 'selling out to management'.
- Feelings of racism dissuaded BME people from working in a white dominated school.
- Evidence of racist name-calling in one school

'One parent . . . is being really racist to me. Called me a "monkey" to my face'.

South Africa

There is a developing literature on the linked themes of transformation and desegregation in education. Most of these sources relate to issues of school choice for learners and their parents. Tikly and Mabogoane (1997), for example, adopt a critical perspective in examining desegregation and ‘choice’. They argue that the introduction of market forces in education ‘may have increased choice for whites and a minority of blacks but has not increased choice for blacks as a whole’ (p.264). Lemon (2004) makes the wider point that national policies have been rich in the political symbolism of equity and redress but with ‘very limited implementation of change on the ground’ (p.269). Gilmour (2001: 11) adds that there may be ‘discriminatory practices disguised as cultural freedom’. While these extracts illustrate the wider problem of limited integration, there is no published work addressing the specific issue of cross-boundary leadership.

The statistics show the enduring impact of the Apartheid era racial categories a decade after the establishment of majority rule. Table 1 shows that the overwhelming majority of leaders are still working within the schools previously associated with their race. This is particularly true for black and white leaders who constitute the largest population groups in this province. ‘Leaders’ are defined as those holding positions as principals, deputy principals or heads of department in primary or secondary schools.

Type of school/ leader’s race	Department of Education (Black)	House of Delegates (Indian)	House of Representatives (‘Coloured’)	Transvaal Education Department (White)
Black	97.8%	13.2%	6.7%	3.0%
Indian	0.6%	78.3%	0.9%	2.1%
‘Coloured’	0.3%	2.7%	88.0%	1.1%
White	0.8%	4.2%	3.9%	93.4%
Unknown	0.4%	1.5%	0.6%	0.5%

Table 1: School leaders by racial classification in Gauteng in 2004 (CEPD 2006)

The ‘population’ for the authors’ research comprises the 453 ‘cross-boundary leaders’. Their disposition is shown in table 2:

Type of school/ leader’s race	Department of Education (Black)	House of Delegates (Indian)	House of Representatives (‘Coloured’)	Transvaal Education Department (White)	Totals
Black	-----	53	36	100	189
Indian	36	-----	5	72	113
‘Coloured’	18	11	-----	36	65
White	48	17	21	-----	86
Total	102	81	62	208	453

Table 2: ‘Cross-boundary’ leadership in Gauteng in 2004 (CEPD 2006)

The researchers have conducted interviews with 46 of these leaders, 26 women and 20 men, just over 10% of the population (see table 3). Ten of the participants are principals, eight are deputy principals, 19 are heads of departments and nine are subject leaders.

Type of school/ leader’s race	Department of Education (Black)	House of Delegates (Indian)	House of Representatives (‘Coloured’)	Transvaal Education Department (White)	Totals
Black	-----	5	0	9	14
Indian	4	-----	0	1	5
‘Coloured’	5	4	-----	0	9
White	6	10	2	-----	18
Total	15	19	2	10	46

Table 3: Participants in CBL research by race and school type

The experience of these 'cross-boundary' leaders differs significantly along racial lines. White, Indian and 'coloured' leaders are generally welcomed in the former Black schools but they often face discrimination and even hostility in the previously white schools. Jansen (2002: 121) argues that these experiences are mediated by the way these 'cross-boundary' leaders understand and act on their value commitments, personal backgrounds and professional interests in the context of change. This links to the notion of 'identity' (see below).

The contrasting experience of black and white educators is illustrated starkly by the Gauteng interviews:

'The interview process was fair and accommodating as I was welcomed with no discrimination' (white).

'The local community members were strange, but welcoming and they shared their skills with me. The local community is 100% Black' (white).

'The Indian and White educators do not accept Black people readily.' (black).

"The school is fortunate to have Black educators who are knowledgeable and they can assist with transformation. The Black educators are able to approach the teaching of learners from a different angle but that change is highly resisted by the White educators' (black).

Family and community attitudes to teaching

Family and community attitudes to teaching influence whether BME people embark on teaching careers and or/seek promotion. Papadopoulos (1999) identifies the ways in which BME families in England form their own communities and then come to rely on tight local social contacts that may inhibit community and cultural integration until the second or third generations. Her conclusion is that this leads to a BME view that is fatalistic with limited aspirations.

In South Africa, Soudien (2002: 274) asserts that people's histories condition the narratives they construct because of the complexity of working with the historical baggage of apartheid and its racialising effects. In his study of teacher professionalism, there were 'several moments when racial realities were naturalised into people's

explanations, where people rendered their stories as if they were living in worlds which were structured naturally, as opposed to deliberately and in racial terms.'

Mullard (1985) refers to the importance of cultural pluralism to preserve the existing:

'Unchanging, and cherished stock of central values, beliefs and institutions. To be told that your culture and history count for nothing is to invoke responses ranging from low self-esteem and lack of confidence to political opposition and resistance' (p.50).

In referring to a wide range of professions, Davidson (1997) states that parental expectations that marriage is essential may conflict with career development and cause problems where this crosses racial groups. This leads to role conflict between home and career - not geographically mobile, not enough time for career, guilt feelings about career and motherhood, lack of emotional/domestic support from husband, and need to take work home. Similar problems arise in the South Africa context. Bush, Joubert and Moloi's (2006) research in Gauteng shows that middle managers experience role conflict because workshops on Saturdays and school holidays interfered with their personal and childcare responsibilities.

These arguments receive some empirical support from the BME research in England. Eleven women, including seven Asians, refer to the importance of home support and it seems that expectations of self-improvement were a major force in their development:

'My father, who helped me to believe in myself and what I could do for our community' (survey).

The South African participants also note the importance of family and community support:

'Family support plays an important role.'

'Families are supportive although some of them are influenced negatively by my White colleagues to discredit African educators.'

'The support from acquaintances and other members of my family has helped me to cope with my problems'.

'My husband, kids and the community are all very supportive'.

Identity

The sense of 'identity' of black and minority groups strongly influences their attitudes to teaching and leadership. This has two aspects, the historical in terms of the 'roots' of the individual, and the geographical, in terms of the concentration of people of similar groups within an area. Both these aspects are particularly powerful in South Africa. Most black and minority school leaders began their teaching careers under the Apartheid regime, where they were required to practice in racially prescribed settings (Mattson and Harley 2002: 285). While many English minorities have chosen to live in particular communities, black, Indian and 'coloured' South Africans were forced to live and work in areas prescribed by the Government under the Native Land Act 1913 and subsequent legislation (Johnson 2004).

Black educators also grew up with the ingrained belief that white people were 'superior' to those of other groups (Johnson 2004). One of the black participants in the South African research comments that 'Black educators believe that White is good and clever'. Another refers to widespread stereotypes about black teachers and leaders:

'Black educators are not respected. They are regarded as not well informed and skilled to teach. They are undermined and regarded as less educated and they are viewed as not having sufficient leadership skills'.

Rassool (1999), a South African but referring to the English context, says that identity is affected by the sense and perception of community, racism, culture and belonging, which are strengthened where geographical concentration occurs. Bishop (2003) stresses the importance of prompting BME community members to make sense of their roots and context through the cultural aspects of self-determination, reconciled aspirations, reciprocal learning, and mediation of socio-economic context, within the extended family, and its collective vision.

The concept of identity is complex when applied to multicultural schools in England. BME leaders come from diverse backgrounds and may be working with pupils and colleagues from very different cultures. Nevertheless, many (28) interviewees were able to point to perceived advantages in being a BME leader, including:

- Being able to understand the religious and cultural background of pupils (11)
- Adopting a 'black to black perspective', doing things differently and being more honest to black people. (3)

'I remember what it was like to be a black child in a white school'.

- Being able to provide pastoral care with a knowledge of the cultural background (5)

'I have lived in the community where the children come from for 22 years and I know the children and their families. I care about them and I am involved in community work'

- Overcoming barriers so that the community and parents recognize the voice of ethnic minority groups (2)

'Black boys who are not achieving can approach me. Angry parents want me to be their voice. Our voices are not heard'

- Being able to inspire others to aspire to leadership positions by offering a role model. (4)
- Being able to deal effectively with the community (3)

The greater fluidity of post-Apartheid South Africa also contributes to more complex notions of identity. Language, race and culture are all dimensions of identity mentioned by the South African leaders:

'I can speak their [black community] language' ('Coloured').

'The problems are challenging but they provide me with the opportunity to intervene when Black children are treated differently from White children' (Black).

'Black educators see me as their mentor' ('Coloured').

'I am reasonably accepted by whites, all Blacks accept me' ('Coloured').

'The SMT is cooperative and supportive' (Indian).

'The Black staff and learners have helped me to learn the Black languages' (White).

'I have started eating their (Black) traditional food and engaging in cultural activities and dress code' (White).

These comments attest to a softening of the previous racial demarcations and a readiness to value and 'celebrate' alternative cultures.

Discrimination

There is widespread evidence of covert or indirect discrimination in England, while this was blatant and statutory in Apartheid South Africa. Following the election of the first majority government in 1994, the South African Human Rights Commission stated that 'the State may not discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on [any] grounds, including race'. However, attitudes change more slowly than the law as the present research findings in both countries demonstrate.

Bhatt et al (1988) argue that 'at all levels it is the white construction and interpretation of black reality that prevails' (p.150) and this results in an alienating ethos where rules are not related to culture and where the use of diagnostic tools favours the English cultural heritage. These factors contribute to an atmosphere that makes for problems in securing initial employment and career progression at all levels. Harris et al (2003), in a literature review of the career progress of deputy heads in England, note reliance on informal networks from which ethnic minorities are excluded.

Referring to South Africa, Booysen (2003:3) posits that the numerous challenges presented by cultural diversity, including language, religion, race and gender, pose problems in the workplace that impact on the style of management. These management styles and behaviours can be complementary if they culminate in cultural pluralism, but if they are not properly understood and readily accepted, the diverse styles may cause

interpersonal conflict and organisational ineffectiveness. Adams and Waghid (2003:19) add that the failure of black cross-boundary leaders to function effectively, as perceived by their white colleagues, could be a result of their social and economic conditions.

The English survey respondents were asked to assess the extent to which they had suffered from or, indeed, gained from discrimination. Fourteen reported ‘no discrimination’. This was expressed in the following:

‘I have never at any time or place felt that my ethnicity has helped me progress or held me back in my career progression. I firmly believe that it is my skills and experience (professional qualities) that have helped me progress regardless of my ethnicity’. (survey)

However, the majority of respondents provided evidence of discrimination with 36 respondents detailing their negative experiences (see table 4).

Negative discrimination	Number of mentions	Example
Racist attitudes	10	Negative comments in meetings.
Management	12	Freezing out of conversations, false accusations.
LEA	6	Discrimination in recruitment and selection
Colleagues	4	A lack of understanding of what inclusion means. Being screamed at by teachers thinking I was a pupil.
Community	1	With a few parents, I had to prove myself as capable.
Other	6	I could have been in a higher position if I were not black and African.

Table 4: Negative discrimination in England (survey)

One survey respondent refers to overt racism within a predominantly white school:

'My LEA needs to do more to promote equal opportunity for all; the chair of governors should not be allowed to get away with offensive remarks to black and ethnic people'.

One interviewee notes that BME people sometimes do not have confidence in black teachers and leaders, an example of 'reverse discrimination':

'Due to colonisation many black people believe that "made in Britain is best", so are over respectful to white people and white heads'.

This view that white people are 'better' teachers and school leaders, also applies in South Africa:

'During the first few days it was difficult for people to give me work because of the view that white is better than Black' (White).

'White educators "label" Blacks as being laissez-faire' (Black).

There is significant evidence of negative discrimination across the racial divide, as the following comments from the South African participants illustrate:

'White educators [are unwilling] to learn and understand the cultural backgrounds of the Black learners' (Black).

'Coloured teachers, especially men, find it difficult to work under a White female' (White).

'Some parents and educators still practice racism towards me' ('Coloured').

Positive discrimination

Table 5 summarises the more limited evidence of positive discrimination in England:

Positive discrimination	Number of mentions	Examples
Positive discrimination	1	Internal promotions were made to encourage diversity.
Development opportunities	4	'It was a result of an equal access course that I was able to complete A Levels in order to commence a degree course to pursue a career in teaching'.
Management	3	'The school has been great about my beliefs, allowing for a prayer room, time off during Friday to pray, no meetings after school in Ramadan'.
LEA	1	LEA policy to actively employ ethnic minorities
Colleagues	1	'Colleagues recognizing my potential and giving me an opportunity to have a go'.
Community	1	'The community values me as a scientist first and as a black person way down the list'.
Other	2	'The Chair of Governors sought me out to say everyone would be treated equally'.

Table 5: Positive discrimination in England (survey)

'Most support came from my General Inspector who was very clear about issues of race - felt able to discuss issues with him that I would otherwise have kept to myself. This was very empowering' (survey)

The English interview findings provide some evidence of positive discrimination with black leaders being more welcomed in certain communities, notably in London:

'The head was very good at supporting my career. He believed in me'.

'I was accepted because I am a Black Caribbean person'.

'Being black was an advantage in getting the head of year and assistant head posts; the latter being linked to ethnic minority achievement'.

This latter point also has a negative dimension in that BME teachers may be considered suitable only for posts linked to ethnic issues, rather than for wider leadership positions.

The South African data are more limited and mainly relate to the previous racial hierarchy. White leaders generally receive a warm welcome while Indian and 'coloured' educators have a mixed experience and black participants did not report any positive discrimination:

'I have not experienced any racial tensions and this makes my leadership enjoyable' (White).

'Being White has enabled me to be accepted by the Black staff' (White).

'Cultural bias is slowly diminishing' (Indian).

The overall view in both countries is that negative discrimination is widespread while there are only limited examples of a positive approach. In England, negative discrimination is at its worst where the predominant ethnic group is white Caucasian, and to impact most strongly on those who have not been educated in Britain. In South Africa, discrimination is most prevalent for black leaders working in the former white schools.

Recruitment and selection

Recruitment and selection strategies, and the composition of the 'selectors', may constitute a barrier to employment and/or promotion. Bariso (2001) says that progress is inhibited because of the lack of black role models, racism, negative personal experiences, poor prospects and a lack of career advice. As a result, underachievement, stereotyping, poor employment prospects, low pay, and negative parental influence become embedded in institutional racism. Exclusion from teaching and promotion also operates through unrepresentative selection panels. Powney et al (2003) present evidence of hidden discrimination for teachers securing promotion in England.

Seventeen (36.2%) of the English interviewees refer to racial or ethnic factors inhibiting their career progress while many also mention culture and gender as negative aspects. Their comments include 'being treated with suspicion', experiencing outright discrimination and working with 'difficult' superiors:

‘I kept trying and finally got appointed as deputy head in a language school. The headteacher of this school challenged my appointment, saying it was based on favouritism. He repeatedly requested that I should be re-interviewed and I felt unjustly treated... my disgruntled headteacher made my working life unbearable by asking other staff not to cooperate with me’.

Table 6 shows that many different people and groups contribute to the perceived inhibition of BME career development:

People inhibiting career development	Male	Female	Total
Headteacher	3	6	9
Senior management team	7	12	19
Middle management	1	4	5
Colleagues	2	6	8
LEA staff	1	2	3
Governors	0	1	1

Table 6: People inhibiting career development (survey)

Table 7 shows the nature and direction of the career inhibitors. These range from perceived racism at various levels to a lack of confidence.

Factors inhibiting career development	Male	Female	Total
Racism by senior management	1	3	4
Racism by middle management	1	3	4
Racism by colleagues	2	2	4
Management attitudes	2	6	8
Overlooked for promotion	2	4	6
Parental attitudes	1	1	2
Community attitudes	0	2	2
Personal lack of confidence	1	5	6

Table 7: Factors inhibiting career development (survey)

These factors were illustrated by comments about racial abuse, lack of support and additional demands. One African woman says that black people need to work harder to achieve career progress:

‘Very few black people have managed to achieve . . . without working two/three times as hard as their counterparts’.

Seven survey respondents mention the existence of a ‘glass ceiling’ affecting their promotion opportunities:

‘I feel at the present time black people are faced with a glass ceiling as to how much they can achieve’.

Racism is the main problem facing black leaders in South Africa:

‘The Indian and White educators are not ready to accommodate the Africans, hence the school is not running smoothly’ (Black).

‘White educators discriminate against Blacks’ (Black).

Experience of the appointments process

The participants were asked to reflect upon the process of appointment to their present post to ascertain the extent to which this might be affected by hidden or overt racism. Nineteen English interviewees commented that the appointment process was ‘smooth’, ‘fair’ or ‘very positive’.

‘I felt as fairly treated as anyone else’

Fourteen spoke of negative experiences at this stage, including ‘unfriendly’ candidates, poorly organised interviews and ‘hypothetical’ questions.

‘When I told the head that I was from [country]. . . he was negative. Being a foreigner is an issue and that is sad. It is not openly said and blocks are created’ (interview).

‘Unlike Whites, I don’t stand as many chances of being appointed to a senior management position’ (interview).

All 14 black South Africans had a negative experience of the appointments process in the former white schools, describing it as: ‘very bad’ and characterised by ‘racism’ and ‘bitterness’. The appointments process for the white leaders was 100% positive in black

schools and overwhelmingly comfortable in the 'coloured' schools. Eight out of the nine 'coloured' leaders had a good experience in black schools. 'I was treated the same as other candidates'. The five Indian participants all reported a positive appointments process in black schools:

'The appointment process was fair, not biased, not discriminating' (Indian).

Professional isolation and exclusion

When BME and CBL teachers are appointed, they often experience isolation or 'exclusion' *within* the school. Bariso (2001) distinguishes between external and internal exclusion and says that the latter may impact on the experience and internal promotion of BME teachers and leaders after appointment.

Jones and Maguire (1997) point to prejudice against BME teachers, in predominantly white schools. This may be illustrated by Menter et al's (2003) investigation of BME achievement of threshold assessment in English schools. Threshold assessment provides a basis for increasing the salary of experienced teachers who, following assessment, 'cross the threshold'. Menter et al (2003) report that some headteachers are reluctant to recommend BME teachers for threshold assessment and conclude that there is implicit discrimination with 'inconsistent and prejudicial judgement' (p.319).

One survey respondent refers to the way in which his threshold application was handled:

'I worked extremely hard and raised the exam results by 13% and I failed to pass my threshold on 'pupil progress'. I found this treatment so unfair that I resigned from my post.'

The marginalisation of Black leaders in the former white schools in South Africa often surfaces in the form of conflict, condescension, superiority, disrespect, misunderstandings, prejudices, stereotyping and inflexibility (Booyesen, 2003:5). Allard (2002) links this to culture which 'envelopes us so completely that we often do not realise

that there are different ways of dealing with the world, that others may have a different outlook on life, a different logic, a different way of responding to people and situations’.

Several black leaders demonstrate clearly that racism is a major issue in many previously ‘whites only’ schools. One middle manager had a very difficult experience in a primary school, including:

- The [white] principal would not take advice from a black person.
- She was never invited to SMT meetings (which she was entitled to attend).
- The white educators [for whom she was responsible] would defy her.
- White managers and educators ‘displayed selfishness, racism and hatred’.

Several other black leaders described similar problems:

‘Change is highly resisted by White educators’.

‘It will take a long way before White discrimination and racism are addressed’.

‘White educators are disrespectful because of race’.

‘There are enormous problems concerning racial issues in my school’.

Overcoming the barriers

The research provides significant evidence of a range of problems experienced by respondents in England and South Africa. However, it is clear that the participants have been able to overcome the barriers, at least to some extent, because they have all become middle or senior school leaders.

Seventeen of the English interviewees say that there are no significant barriers to overcome. Others mention a range of strategies, including self-confidence, resilience, perseverance, and drawing on the support of family and friends:

‘Through perseverance and by avoiding being seen as a trouble-maker’.

'Support from and the sharing of ideas, grievances and coping strategies with ethnic minority colleagues'.

'Informal networking between friends and other BME colleagues is crucial because we feel more secure discussing these issues with someone close who can guarantee confidentiality. There is little support from the public domain'.

'I draw inspiration from the headteacher under whom I served in [previous city]. He was very supportive and encouraging'.

Seven refer to their determination to succeed:

'I am determined to do credible work. I do the best. Through determination I removed a barrier from my previous school.' (interview).

The South Africans displayed similar qualities of determination, hard work and a willingness to engage with alternative cultures:

'It is difficult and if I was not strong I could have long left the school' (Black).

'I am persuasive, confrontational and determined to succeed' (Black).

'Learning new languages' (Indian).

'Tolerance, acceptance and accommodating diversity' (Indian).

'Trying to get to grips with different cultures and traditions, and learning to speak the Black language' ('Coloured')

Seven survey respondents, and some of the English interviewees, comment that positive discrimination is not appropriate:

'Giving Black people a "stepping stone" will not solve anything – we don't want teachers because they are black. We want them because they can teach' (interview).

Conclusion

The research does not provide a basis for generalisation because the findings are based on self-selected respondents and participants in England and on sampling that is purposive and stratified but to some extent opportunity based in South Africa. However, the samples are more than sufficient to exemplify the issues facing BME leaders in England and 'cross-boundary' leaders in South Africa.

The participants offer a detailed portrait of life as BME and CB leaders and of the many hurdles to be cleared in order to progress within the English and South African education systems. Their enthusiastic involvement in the project demonstrates that the research met a perceived need for a systematic enquiry on this important topic in both countries.

Personal Experience

The responses of the BME and 'cross boundary' leaders are inevitably influenced by their experience as professionals and as members of their own communities. While the participants have many similar experiences, there are also important variations arising from their ethnic backgrounds and birthplaces. Teachers and leaders are shaped by their personal experience, and that of their communities (Bishop 2003).

Almost 70% of the English interviewees were born in Britain and most of these choose to describe themselves as 'black British', 'British Asian', etc. Others prefer to mention their family origins, for example 'black African'. This connects to the concepts of 'identity' and 'roots', discussed in the literature, but also confirms that ethnic minorities are complex and cannot be treated as a homogenous entity. For example, British born BME teachers are more likely to achieve senior positions than those born overseas. Some participants believe that their foreign accent has inhibited their career progression.

Beyond such differentiation, it remains clear that a majority of all these BME leaders have experienced racism and discrimination. This links to Powney et al's (2003) finding

that most BME teachers remain in the classroom. Some 60% of participants in the present research refer to race, ethnicity, culture or religion as factors inhibiting their career progression.

'If you are black you have to be exceptionally good if you want to progress'.

From a South African perspective, the CBL findings show continuing problems arising from institutionalised based racial bias. Although the policy of 'inclusion' is high on the agenda in South Africa, the deeply 'ingrained' separation of the four predominant cultures (Black, White, Coloured and Indian) have a strong influence on how individuals and groups perceive each other.

The CBL findings demonstrate that the great majority of the Black participants experienced racism and discrimination while the other racial groups had a generally positive experience. In particular, the White leaders who transferred to black schools were welcomed and accepted by all stakeholders.

Context

The importance of the context in which leadership is practiced is increasingly recognised. For English BME teachers and leaders, this has a particular meaning. Their professional experience is inevitably influenced by the nature of the community served by the school. Where leaders are working in their own ethnic communities, they are often able to derive the support needed to persevere in the midst of perceived racism and discrimination. Papadopoulos (1999) refers to BME families forming their own communities, leading to concentrations of particular ethnic groups in certain areas and schools. In these circumstances, the community often regards the BME teachers and leaders as their 'voice' because they understand their culture, speak their language and are perceived as more approachable than white teachers.

The great majority of the English interviewees work in urban areas with significant numbers of BME pupils from different ethnic groups. Only 22% are in predominantly

white schools. However, most of the schools are overwhelmingly white in terms of staffing and governing body composition. There are challenges in all these situations but these appear to be more evident in mono ethnic (white) schools and communities where more participants experience hidden or overt racism.

Similar challenges face 'cross boundary' leaders in South Africa. While the racial geography of the Apartheid era is less absolute in the 21st century, the great majority of South Africans still live in the areas previously prescribed for their race. This means that CB leaders leave their communities to travel to their schools. Most white, Indian and 'coloured' educators working in the former black schools are working almost exclusively with black learners. Black leaders, however, are increasingly working in multicultural contexts and may be regarded as role models by the black students.

Desegregation is now a major policy aim in South Africa but its implementation has been slow and uneven. While learner populations are becoming more diverse in city schools, changes in SGB and educator composition have been much slower. In the townships and deep rural areas, learner populations remain mono-racial and there are few school leaders from non-black groups. The CBL research will contribute to the desegregation agenda by showing how 'cross-boundary' leadership can break down historic suspicions and provide models for a truly non-racial society.

Facilitating factors and support

It is evident that overcoming the barriers facing BME and 'cross-boundary' leaders requires appropriate support, both formally through their respective education systems and informally through family, personal and community networks. Most of the English participants are able to point to encouragement from different sources, notably colleagues, middle managers, heads, LEA staff and NCSL training programmes. 'Sponsorship' from heads or LEA staff is often the critical variable in enabling BME teachers to progress into middle leadership and on to more senior positions. Many participants also refer to personal characteristics, notably resilience, determination,

courage and ambition, but some also mention support from family and friends. This confirms Davidson's (1997:29) view that 'strong extended family support systems tended to act as an important stress buffer for many'.

The South African leaders point to similar factors underpinning their career progression. They comment on their hard work, their determination to come to grips with the complexities of a multicultural society and the need to 'prove themselves' as capable and trustworthy. One notes the importance of showing 'that we are more the same than different'.

However, more needs to be done to facilitate access into more senior positions. One English participant specifically mentions a racial 'glass ceiling', a problem also referred to by Manuel and Slate (2003: 25). However, most BME leaders do not favour customised support, arguing that they are 'leaders' first and 'black leaders' second. Attitudes to this issue vary along racial lines in South Africa. Most black and white participants do not favour separate development, probably because this is uncomfortably close to their previous experience of training. However, most Indian and 'coloured' educators would prefer customised support for 'cross-boundary' leaders.

Barriers to career progression

The literature identifies several barriers that limit BME teachers' progress to leadership positions. Powney et al (2003) say that marginalisation and indirect racism create barriers, while Harris et al (2003) note the subtle influence of informal networks from which ethnic minorities are excluded. Tallerico (2000) mentions invisible or 'behind the scenes' criteria for promotion while Davidson (1997) notes that BME leaders may experience isolation as 'token blacks' and face lack of acceptance by professional colleagues.

The English survey and interview data provide empirical support for much of this analysis. The attitudes of heads, senior and middle managers, and colleagues, inhibit BME career development for many respondents while some also allege direct or indirect racism from these groups and from some LEA staff. Some BME leaders also point to racist attitudes from parents, mostly but not exclusively white, and from governors. These problems are exacerbated for women who face a 'double bind' of racism and sexism in some schools and communities:

'There is the old-fashioned perception of men as better leaders. It would have been better for me to be an Asian man'.

Participants adopt a range of coping strategies to deal with these problems. Most persevere in the face of such difficulties and several find comfort in the support of family, friends and professional colleagues. One of the participants says that she often cries and two mention anger:

'I become angry and I sink into acceptance that the world is against me'.

Those who experience racism and entrenched stereotypes often have to be assertive to deal with these attitudes:

'I want to show them that black people can do the job'.

The South African participants show similar qualities in responding to the barriers:

'Personal attributes, inner drive and motivation spur me on'.

Exceptional people

BME professionals who succeed in their careers despite the barriers may be regarded as 'pioneers'. McKenley and Gordon (2002) say that BME teachers have a sense of

vocation to their community, leading to a strong, pioneering feeling. Dhruv (1992: 45) adds that:

‘People of BME heritage can alternately transform their perspectives by seeing themselves as pioneering agents of change’.

Several English interviewees refer to a pioneering role, notably in being role models for other BME teachers, while others claim that they are modelling for a wider audience, including pupils, staff and the community.

The weight of evidence about barriers to leadership progression for BME teachers leads to the hypothesis that those who succeed despite the barriers are ‘exceptional people’, rather than being representative. Our sample of BME and ‘cross-boundary’ leaders displays several exceptional features:

- Determination, hard work and courage
- Drive, commitment and confidence
- Thorough preparation for leadership
- Resilience
- Respect for other cultures
- Building positive relationships
- Professionalism (meeting targets, dressing properly and eloquence)

The research shows that BME teachers and leaders do experience barriers and either direct or hidden discrimination. This has some cultural dimensions but also arises from the ‘invisible’ criteria used by selection panels, a form of covert racism. Most of these leaders have progressed despite these barriers rather than as a result of positive discrimination or any other systematic support. They have succeeded because their own talents and hard work justified it. Their promotion to headships and other leadership positions is often ‘against the odds’ (Coleman 2002).

One reflection poses a question of fundamental importance:

'The issue of ethnicity and leadership is one that is bound up with the whole history of race, colonisation and power, and the unconscious conflict that white people have in being led by black leaders especially in a majority white institution, whether it be a school, business or church. Also most black leaders would feel uncomfortable having to lead and exercise authority over a predominantly white institution . . . Our key question then is are we seeking to prepare ethnic leaders in order to lead predominantly ethnic groups, or to seek to develop leaders generally that will be able to lead any institution because of their leadership skills and talents.' (survey)

These points are even more powerful and poignant in the South African context. It is evident from the 'cross-boundary' research that, while Black people readily accept leaders from other ethnic groups, Black leaders are not usually welcomed in non-black schools, notably those previously reserved for White learners. The Black leaders articulate their concerns about discrimination and racism in the previously whites only schools but also resort to such labels when they 'intervene to help the black children'.

The problems of racism and discrimination in both countries will continue unless there is a wide acceptance that BME and CB leaders are a 'normal' part of the educational landscape in both countries. The presence of effective leaders at all levels is needed to provide the role models that will lead all but the most bigoted of parents and educators to acknowledge that what matters is the quality of leadership not the racial origins of the leader. If and when that happens, we might see an end to the despair encapsulated in the comment of one of the English participants:

'Despite all the efforts, and all that is said, racial prejudice is alive and well for staff in many of our schools'.

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