

Dealing with racist incidents: what do beginning teachers learn from schools?

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This article focuses on how schools respond to racist incidents, and what new teachers learn from their involvement in those processes. It analyses four incidents involving the pupils of four beginning teachers. The article suggests that in each case, schools either partly or wholly avoided addressing the incident, and that this avoidance can be understood in terms of the colour and power evasive discourse, which is the dominant discourse on race in Western societies, and in most schools. One aspect of this discourse is that racism is defined on the basis of individual intentions, not outcomes. The article argues that it may be possible to adopt a more race cognisant approach with student teachers and staff in schools, building on nascent understandings of institutional racism, which shifts the focus to outcomes rather than intentions. The article demonstrates this approach, analysing each incident in terms of its consequences for the learning of the new teacher, and for the promotion of race equality in the school. While the small number of incidents may initially appear heartening, their negative impact on both teacher confidence and children's understanding may be significant. The findings suggest that in the changing context of initial teacher education in England, approaches to supporting both schools and new teachers in this often misunderstood area are much needed, and that one way forward may be to give teachers time and support to critically reflect on and discuss their experiences.

Keywords: race, racist incidents, institutional racism, student teachers, beginning teachers, whiteness

Introduction

Racism remains an important problem in UK schools. In 2012 the BBC's news website reported that the number of racist incidents logged by schools rose steadily between 2007 and 2010, the year in which the current Coalition Government removed the obligation for schools to keep

records (BBC 2012)¹. In some areas, the number of reported cases increased by 40% in that period. The BBC website reported a leading anti-racism campaign group describing the 88,000 cases as ‘the tip of the iceberg’, since such cases are very often under-reported (BBC 2012). Yet one popular newspaper reported the story of the release of the figures under the headline, ‘88,000 children branded racists’ (Daily Mail, 2012). In taking this stance, the newspaper drew on the dominant discourse on race in British society and elsewhere, which fails to understand the purpose of monitoring such incidents, and sees racism only as extreme and violent acts, rather than a subtle and pervasive feature of our social structures. The headline suggests that the act of logging a racist incident automatically defines the individual involved as ‘a racist’: racism is only ever understood as personal prejudice. But some of the individual cases quoted in the story suggest another aspect of this discourse: some senior managers in school appeared to have defined any direct reference children made to race as a racist incident. According to this colourblind way of thinking, any form of race consciousness is equated with racism, and any discussion about race is therefore to be approached with trepidation.

In this article I suggest that this reluctance to engage with the meaning and consequences of racism is also common in English schools. In it, I present a detailed analysis of four incidents which took place in four different primary schools in London. In accordance with accepted best practice at the time², they were all defined as a racist incident by one or more of the people who witnessed it. In analysing the incidents, I draw on two theoretical sources. First, the somewhat discredited concept of institutional racism. The value of this term is that it shifts the focus from individual intentions to the outcomes of institutional practices. I argue that this is the key shift that needs to take place in the attitudes of those in schools who continue to define racism solely in terms of individual aberrant behaviour. In this article, following this approach, I examine the accounts of the four incidents for evidence about how each incident was dealt with, the extent to which that response advanced the cause of race equity in the school in general, and what the new

¹ The removal of this requirement coincided with the new Equality Act which drew together several separate anti-discriminatory laws, including the Race Relations Amendment Act, in order to make the law less bureaucratic. A further consequence of this is that it is no longer possible to know the scale of the problem of racism in schools.

² The MacPherson report recommended that a racist incident should be defined in the first instance as ‘any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person’ (MacPherson 1999). This definition has been widely accepted in local authorities and schools in the UK.

teacher learned about their role in promoting race equality in particular. The second theoretical resource I draw on to support my analysis is Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) seminal model of three discourses of race. This enables individuals to understand notions of race and racism as constructed, and to see that there exists a degree of agency in the stance we take on racism.

Definitions of racism in popular and academic discourse

In 1999, the publication of the MacPherson report into the failings of a police investigation into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence briefly challenged the dominant definition of racism in mainstream UK society. In its use of the term institutional racism, the report shifted the focus away from popular definitions of racism as a marginal, aberrant phenomenon, to more subtle and pervasive processes (MacPherson 1999). It stimulated an unprecedented level of national debate. Yet within days, politicians began to distance themselves from the term, and the change in perspective it signalled, (Gillborn 2009). While it is widely agreed that MacPherson's use of the term lacked a historical dimension, or a clear sense of how institutions are related to wider structural inequalities (Bourne 2001, Warren 2007), it did begin to raise public awareness of the more insidious forms of racism.

Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) work maps the different conceptualisations of race that gave rise to the controversy over the MacPherson Report over a decade ago, and- as the media debate over the number of racist incidents in schools shows- continue to cause misunderstandings. Drawing on earlier work by Omi and Winant (1986), she identified three discourses, namely essentialist racism, colour and power evasiveness, and colour and power cognisance. Each of these emerged at a particular point in history, thereafter existing alongside rather than replacing the preceding one. While colour and power evasiveness is a discourse that seeks to overemphasise the similarities between people, the other two discourses prioritise difference, but in radically different ways. The racist discourse upholds a belief that race is an intrinsic marker of individual value or ability, and the biological superiority of white people. Colour and power cognisance involves an acknowledgement that race structures societies, and that the result is inequality and injustice. It is also an assertion of difference not on the terms set by the white dominant culture: a

refusal to submit to merely being the 'Other'. Difference in this discourse implies autonomy, rather than inferiority, in terms of what is culturally and ethically valued.

Though the three discourses co-exist, and at times intermingle, Frankenberg suggested that in the context of the USA colour and power evasiveness currently dominates. I argue that this is also the case in contemporary Britain. Within this discourse, sometimes called colourblindness, the attitude that 'we are all the same under the skin' prevails. Frankenberg preferred the term, 'colour and power evasive' because it encapsulates the strategy of appearing to recognise and value cultural differences, while refusing to acknowledge the role of race in structuring social inequalities. Bell and Hartmann (2007) refer to this phenomenon as 'happy talk'. Moreover, colourblindness invokes a metaphor of disability, as if the problem is that individuals genuinely cannot see the issue. Pollock's (2004) term 'colourmute' is sometimes preferred as a way to highlight the fact that the real problem is not a lack of recognition of the significance of race, but an unwillingness to discuss it openly.

Within the colour and power evasive discourse racism is always and only defined as a matter of personal prejudice. Consequently, the non-racist way to behave is to ignore the issue all together. More recently Dickar (2008) and Buehler (2012) have argued that while many white teachers are indeed unwilling to engage with issues of race, this reluctance sometimes stems, not from a desire to appear non-racist, but from an acute sense of the complexity and personal threat involved in race talk. Regardless of the motivation, the effect of such evasiveness is to maintain race inequity. And, following the logic of my argument about the primacy of outcomes over intentions, motivation is not the key concern here. What matters is the consequence of these evasions. The consequence of some teachers' mistrust of the process of reporting racist incidents is that patterns of collective injustice are not identified, and therefore not addressed (Parsons 2009). The consequence of some teachers' definitions of children's comments about skin colour as racist is that race talk is prohibited. In both cases, progress is blocked.

The policy context

During the period in which the data for this article were collected, and until 2011, English schools were required by law to have a policy on promoting race equality, and to monitor and

assess the impact of their policies on different racial groups. This legislation can be understood as drawing on the colour and power cognisant discourse in requiring schools to identify children's ethnic backgrounds and to log racist incidents as a route to identifying and eradicating patterns of race inequity. Supporting documents encouraged schools to discuss racism and any perceived inequalities openly with all interested parties (CRE 2002). Yet the dominant discourse in schools was and is colour and power evasive: as such open discussions about the emotive and confrontational issue of race, highlighting children's ethnic differences, and dealing proactively with racist incidents were all practices which were likely to be resisted. Several research studies found that this was indeed the case: schools were found to be the slowest of public institutions in their response to meeting the new requirements (Schneider-Ross 2003), and only a minority had progressed beyond the stage of drafting a policy to evaluating the impact of it (Parsons 2009). Experienced school staff, too, were found to lack an understanding of racism that went beyond overt verbal and physical aggression (Gillborn 2002; Pearce 2005; Parsons 2009).

It is difficult not to see this period as a time of lost opportunity: accompanying the new legislation with an intense period of in-service training about the meaning of institutional racism might have enabled staff to understand, support and then genuinely implement the new legislation. In other words, there was no co-ordinated attempt to support teachers in moving away from the colour and power evasive discourse, and old conceptualisations of racism, which was- and remains- a fundamental part of the problem.

The widespread lack of compliance with both the spirit and the letter of the law is of particular concern given that these requirements have been superseded by the single Equality Act of 2010, which draws together several so-called protected characteristics, including race, gender and disability. The justification for drawing together legislation on several aspects of inequality is that simplifying the legislation makes the law easier to understand and comply with (Equalities Office 2011) but there is a danger that, while colour and power evasiveness remains the dominant discourse in schools, if there is no positive and specific requirement to address race equality, it simply will not be addressed. Schools could now remove race from their agenda altogether, and remain compliant with the law.

Addressing race and racism in initial teacher education

Research has shown that those teachers who understand racism as more than personal prejudice often have some personal experience of disadvantage, or themselves come from non-dominant backgrounds (Ullucci 2011; Pearce 2012). This has important implications for recruitment practices, but while white middle class students constitute the majority of those applying to become teachers (Hick et al 2011), arguably the best place to address teacher awareness is during pre-service education. Several studies have documented student resistance to teacher educators who have attempted to focus explicitly on white power structures (e.g. Aveling 2002; Solomon et al 2005; Lander 2011). Other projects have focused on requiring students to rethink their attitudes by engaging with unfamiliar cultural settings, or exploring non-dominant perspectives through film and other materials (e.g. Aveling 2006; Rich and Castelan Cargile 2004; Houser 2008). Such work is important and must continue. But in most institutions, the intensive nature of the training programmes, together with a lack of confidence among some staff, make such complex and sensitive projects on race and racism unlikely to become standard practice (Hick et al 2011). In England, from September 2013, individual schools will bear most of the responsibility for student teachers' learning. It seems unlikely that such intensive work will be carried out as part of school based training.

In this context, it may be prudent to begin to look for ways to address race and racism which can be accommodated in schools. Picower (2009) has shown that there is potential in enabling beginning teachers to reflect on their experiences and to engage in discussion and reading alongside their teaching load, and Buehler (2012) argues that when talk about race is seen as acceptable among staff, it opens up possibilities for change in schools. There appear to be three factors in enabling the kind of reflectiveness that is essential for such dialogue. First, a mentor who models and promotes reflection (Turner 2012); second, the space and time to reflect; and third the opportunity for open dialogue with others. In identifying the significance of reflection, Turner draws on Schön's (1991) formula for reflective practice, which includes framing and reframing a problem, or looking at it in different ways. My suggestion that, in reflecting on racist incidents, the focus should be on the outcomes, rather than the intentions, may be seen as an example of reframing a problem. And this may enable more beginning teachers to understand how racism operates independently of individual consciousness. This may also link to mentors'

understandings of institutional racism as focusing on institutional outcomes rather than individual intentions.

Methods

The data presented here are drawn from an ongoing longitudinal study of a group of nine teachers, from their final year on a primary teacher training course in London, to what is now their sixth year in teaching. The overall aim of the project is to examine what individual and institutional factors enable or inhibit new teachers in developing an approach to teaching that addresses race inequity and ethnic diversity. The project is informed by critical whiteness studies, seeking to uncover white hegemonic practices in terms of staffing, curriculum and policy development and interpersonal relationships.

All of the participants were women, aged between their early twenties and early forties at the start of the project. They all expressed a commitment to diversity and race equality. Five of the participants described themselves as white British, two had African-Caribbean backgrounds, one was from a Somali background, and one had a mixed white British-Greek Cypriot heritage. All but one of the women had been born and brought up in London, and all but one identified themselves as being from a working class background. They were voluntary participants, drawn from a humanities course I had taught in their final year of their BA(Ed) course.

The project adopted a narrative approach to understanding the teachers' experiences, seeking to make connections between their personal biographies, their work in their own institutions, and wider social and political issues (Beattie 1995; Erben 1998). The data were collected through annual in-depth individual interviews, my questions focusing on eliciting detailed descriptions of incidents and conversations related to race and ethnicity, and the participants' extended reflections on these. Each interview was digitally recorded, and in the first and second rounds lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. I sent each individual transcript to the interviewee for verification. On one occasion a participant emailed an unsolicited narrative of an incident, and her reflection on it, to me. The data were coded using the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967), and NVivo software was used to organise the codes. The words of the participants are quoted at length to enable the reader to get as clear an understanding as possible of their perspective on the incidents. All names used are pseudonyms.

This article draws on data collected from the first two rounds of interviews: those undertaken in 2007, just after the participants' final teaching practice, and in 2008, during their first year of teaching. Over the course of those two years, participants relayed several subtle examples of racism, some of which are discussed elsewhere (Pearce 2012). But there were only four events which were formally recognised and addressed as racist incidents in the classroom. This low number could be seen as encouraging: but it must be a matter of concern that none of the incidents was handled in a way that typifies best practice, and this suggests a lack of support for race equality in these schools.

It is important to note that we only have a partial view of the incident: it is witnessed and reported by the student or new teacher. The perspectives of the children involved, and the senior manager are either unknown or are relayed only by my informant. Furthermore, there exists only an initial account of the incident itself, and some questions remain unanswered about the detail of what occurred. Despite these limitations, this data is a valuable source of evidence of the ways in which racist incidents are dealt with on the ground, which, given the sensitivity of the issue, is inevitably very difficult to acquire. More important, what is under analysis here is not the incident itself, but, first, the immediate *response* to each incident, second the impact on race equity in the school as an institution, and finally what the new teachers' reflections on the incident suggest about what they learned about how to deal with racism in schools.

Findings and analysis

Leah

The first incident was related by Leah, a teacher in her early twenties, who came from a mixed white and Greek-Cypriot background. She had grown up near the school in which she had taken up her first post. Most of the children were from Bangladeshi backgrounds. Early in the year, as Leah began her first year in teaching, one pupil had been excluded from school for bullying the only Somali girl in the class:

I suppose I had a problem with the school's way of dealing with it. Because they needed to find a child that was responsible. Rather than saying it's a broader issue, they were like, 'who's responsible?' ...And I was really shocked because I didn't think that that's what it was at all, I didn't think it was one child. But that was what was told to me, and ... I felt that was really bad practice. And I felt powerless to do anything about it.

Leah remembered the first incident as one in which the school's approach had been to identify one individual as responsible for the problem, although this did not accord with Leah's own reading of the situation. It is not known whether this incident was considered a racist one, but the strategy of highlighting the behaviour of one child for actions which may have been common to most of the class appears to have been an attempt to contain the problem. They were prepared to deal with one child, but not with a wider and deeper problem which acknowledging the involvement of most of the class would have involved. The outcome of this decision was that the bullying continued.

Leah then related the latest incident involving this girl:

'They said, 'let's follow her in the dinner line, and make sure we sit on her table. When we get to her table, we're going to take the gravy from our plates and smother it on our faces...and they did that. And then we're going to go into the playground and they were chanting round her and bullying her. It took me a long time to get to the bottom of this and find out all of this. Because at the end of lunchtime they were all crying. I asked what happened. None of this came out. It was, 'her brother said he was going to hit me,' and 'she said she's going to get guns and kill all the Bengali people.' I got seven of the children to write their version of what happened. And then it came out. And I interpreted that as a racist incident, and I told the head, and I wrote it all down in the Concerns book. And I'm really not happy with the way they dealt with it. They backed me up when I was in the office. They're like, 'oh yes this is terrible, you need to come to us if you're concerned.' And then the next day they pulled the children out. I don't know what they said to the children. Then they came back in the class, and they said, 'well, we've decided that it wasn't a racist incident. It's just children being silly. And we've decided that we mustn't do silly behaviour.' I just couldn't believe that they were getting away with it! I know that sounds terrible, but they'd manipulated the Headteacher into believing that, [adopts a meek

childish voice] ‘we were being silly; we were playing with our food.’ Which really upset me. What do you do?

Leah herself identified this incident as racist, and followed the well-established formal procedure for dealing with racist incidents in the school. The initial response of the senior management team was supportive. But the following day, the incident was redefined in deracialised terms: the children were just ‘being silly’. It is possible to see the elements of the colour and power evasive discourse in the actions of the senior management team here, who seek to remove race from the analysis. In terms of the outcomes of the incident, the girl at the centre of these events was left in the situation, with her tormentors. There was no attempt to challenge their thinking, or give a clear message that their behaviour was unacceptable and carried serious consequences: it was mere silliness. Redefining the incident in this way served the same purpose as the strategy of acknowledging only one perpetrator earlier in the year: it contained the incident so that no far-reaching action was deemed necessary. It is likely that the behaviour of the children was a reflection of tensions between some members of the Bengali and Somali communities in the local area, and that the senior management team was unwilling to get involved in these complex and controversial issues. The concept of performativity (Ball 2003) offers a way to understand why, in a tightly monitored environment, maintaining the appearance of harmony may be more important than risking the disruption and negative publicity that may come with an open engagement with the problem. In this audit culture, as long as the policy document meets the requirements, the day to day practice, being outside the reach of the auditors, need not match (Ahmed 2007). Such institutional pressures to silence race talk accord with individual teachers’ desire to avoid the personal risks associated with addressing complex and controversial issues (Dickar 2008).

What did Leah learn as a result of her involvement in this incident? Having already experienced what she considered a mishandling of an earlier incident, she felt a pattern was beginning to emerge:

I always feel that I’m undermined in my decision or my perspective on the situation. So I feel like I’m following the procedure through very clearly. I say, that’s unacceptable, fill out a behaviour sheet. It seems to me that little issues are made *really* big, and issues that are big are made really little.

Leah followed the policy in good faith, but in doing so she was not supported by her managers. This left her in a very difficult situation in her classroom. She identified the behaviour of several of the children in her class as racist, but that judgement was overturned, and she now had to continue to work closely with those children. In terms of student teacher learning, something important happened in the course of the interview. As she talked about other incidents and difficulties that she encountered over the course of her first year, Leah started to analyse her situation, and articulate her own emerging philosophy. She began to think about the new class she would be taking on that autumn:

The class coming up has got very similar issues. So what does that suggest? That suggests this is a whole school issue- I know it's a whole school problem! I can see that, and I feel disheartened because I feel as one individual how much impact can I have if we're not cohesive as a school?...I'm not in tune with their values or their educational ethos at all.

Leah felt that her values and her continuing commitment to issues of equality left her isolated in the school. She was unable to talk to her school mentor, because she was the senior manager involved in what Leah regarded as the mishandling of the racist incident. She therefore looked to me as her former tutor and mentor for support and guidance:

I think what I'm saying is there is no help in the school, there's no structure to solve these issues...So if I'm going to make a difference next year, I need a direction to go in. And I need a structure that I can take, and I don't have that at the moment. I don't know if you're able to help?

Leah's developing understanding of her situation, and her plea for help, supports the suggestion by Turner (2012) and Picower (2009) that reflection can be a positive tool for developing teachers in school, but that there is a need for reflective mentors, and for the time for dialogue to make such reflection sufficiently complex and purposeful.

Susan

Some insight into how beginning teachers may begin to develop this progressively complex understanding of their situation is offered by Susan's reflections on the second incident. This took place in a class of six and seven year olds in a school in a suburb of London, in which

around 75% of the children were of African-Caribbean heritage, the remainder from a diverse range of backgrounds. The student teacher, Susan, was white, and her class teacher mentor was black.

A black girl said she didn't like white people, and then another girl on that table said the same. And there was a white boy on the table, struggling very much within that environment. I heard it first and took it to the class teacher, because I just thought, 'I'm not quite sure what to do with this', and then she heard it again. The class teacher had a chat with them about it, and then took it to the parents, and said it wasn't acceptable. It was done very well actually, I have to say. And I said, 'well what is the formal procedure?' She'd had the class for two years and she didn't want to make it a formal thing. I mean they are only young, only six, seven. But she did want to talk, so we did a PSHE [personal, social and health education] session about it... The children knew the word racism... And the children talked about how, you know, what you look like, whether you're a girl or a boy, everyone is the same, you know. Everyone's the same but different, and that's OK, that's how it's supposed to be. And it was very much along that line of talk. And the children inputted really well, and they were clearly very aware of it. So I mean I thought it was handled very well. And very fairly. That was one of the main things I wanted to say really.

Susan started by telling the story of the incident as an example of a racist incident which was handled well. The comment was identified by the teacher as racist, and there was an open discussion with both children and parents, and a clear message was sent about the teacher's, and by extension the school's, uncompromising stance on any form of prejudice. Yet closer examination suggests that the situation was not as clear cut. In the first place it should be noted that Susan mentions the white boy on the table, suggesting that the incident was more serious because there was an immediate 'victim'. This kind of stance defines racism as limited to the overt insulting remarks or actions, not in racialised ways of thinking which permeate society. It might be pertinent to ask whether the incident would have been interpreted as racist if no white child had been present. In the second place, while it is not possible to know what discussions took place between the teacher and the girls, nor with their parents, it does not appear that there was any acknowledgement of the negative feelings of the girls, and their own experiences or

awareness of racism, which may have provoked their remarks. In terms of the broader discussion with the whole class, too, it appears that the teacher's strategy was to minimise the problem: her reference to everyone being 'the same but different and that's OK', her reference to girls and boys, and personal appearance, seem intended to move the discussion away from racism, strategies associated with the colour and power evasive discourse. Thus, in terms of outcomes, it does not appear that a strong message about racism was sent to the children as a result of this incident. Susan considered the way the teacher dealt with the incident in terms of the children's learning was a good model for her, as a beginning teacher, and one who was initially unsure of the appropriate action to take. Yet even in this first, positive, telling of the story, she was aware that the teacher did not follow up by formally recording and reporting the incident, as schools were then required to do.

Despite Susan's initial report of the story as evidence of good practice, she broke off in the middle of a discussion later in the interview and abruptly returned to the incident:

It was difficult, I mean with the girls saying that, it was difficult. I didn't feel knowledgeable enough to deal with it on my own, but I guess I would kind of discuss it with somebody. If I hadn't had my class teacher to discuss it with, because I mean, she said it was very uncharacteristic of these girls, and she knows them much better than I do, so that's fine. But also it could be a wider thing that's going on in the playground that's you know been brought into the classroom and maybe that should be something the school should know about... But I don't think that happened. And I did say to her, you know, 'is there a procedure?' And she said she didn't want to take it that far at this stage.'

There are clues here to the teacher's own stance on racism. The contrast between her proactive approach with the children and their parents, and her refusal to report the incident formally suggests that she may not support the practice of logging. Drawing on the colour and power evasive discourse, she may have viewed the process as a punitive one, which would label the girls themselves as racist. That the teacher was herself from a minoritised background does not appear to be the primary driver in her decision making here: her actions may be read as enacting institutional (i.e. white hegemonic) norms.

Susan's attitude to the incident also appears in more complexity here. Moving on from her first telling of the story as one in which she felt she had learned how to deal with a racist incident positively, she reflected on her own lack of preparedness to deal with such issues, and the importance of having someone to talk to about such sensitive matters. But her reference to the possibility of the girls' remarks being part of 'a wider thing that's going on in the playground' shows that she had an understanding of racism as best understood as a discourse, which can be drawn upon by anyone, rather than a committed stance adopted by a few malevolent individuals. She then drew on a different aspect of the race cognisant discourse, reflecting on the part her own racial location may have played in the incident:

And it did make me feel uncomfortable, because initially you kind of go through all kinds of thoughts. You know, they had this black teacher for two years and then suddenly a white teacher comes in...is it *me* they are talking about? Has it come up because it's me? Because I'm white and she's black and they are having to get used to this new person who they don't feel comfortable with. It could be that. It *could* have been that.

Susan was aware that her own racial identity might have been a significant factor in the classroom. In contrast, other studies have shown that white teachers often lack awareness (or strategically resist acknowledgement) of their own racial location, and the part it might play in influencing relationships with colleagues and pupils (Pearce 2005; Lander 2011).

What is most significant about these extracts is the way in which an initially straightforward narrative of a positive handling of a difficult situation was revisited, and a more complex and personally challenging perspective added. As with Leah, above, it may be that the interview gave Susan time, and gave issues of race status, which empowered her to reflect on her involvement with this incident in a much more analytical way. Like Leah, she did not discuss this most complex aspect of the problem with her teacher mentor.

Debbie

The third incident took place in a mainly white school in a suburb of London during Debbie's final teaching practice. Debbie, her teacher mentor, and all of the staff at the school, were white. The story involved Shakira, a six year old girl whose white mother and black father had recently separated under acrimonious circumstances.

There was one day when the teacher was off somewhere else...and [Shakira] had had an argument with one of the other girls in the class, who was also black, at playtime. [She] had said to the other girl, 'you're black and I don't like you 'cause you're black'. [Deep sigh] And I just knew...there's a real sense of sadness about this child, so I said, you know, 'now is not the time to deal with this. I'm going to have to chat with you at lunchtime. I'm not keeping you in, I'm not punishing you, I'd just really like to have a chat with you,' ... because you know you've got to get on with the lesson. And I kept them both in for five minutes and we had a short chat about it...because I made a judgement that the black girl...um...was pissed off about it but I think genuinely accepted the apology. But what I really wanted to do was talk to Shakira and find out what she was talking about...because whatever she saw herself as people would see her as black. And she's saying 'I don't like you because you're black'. I just found this difficult.

So I was talking to her, saying you know, 'what did you mean by that? Why did you say that?' And she was saying all black people do is cause misery...they just upset people, they're always fighting, you know, just absolute, negative, negative, about everything and I sort of felt totally out of my depth, I didn't know what to say, what to do, and I was really, really ...you know I thought I just don't know how to deal with this at all. And I said to her, you know, 'what are you? Are you black or are you white, what do you think you are?' And she said 'I'm black', and she just started to cry. It was really, really hard actually. So I spoke to the teacher about it and she kind of dismissed it a little bit really [breaks off, visibly upset].

In this incident, Debbie identified Shakira's comment as a racist one, and appeared to address the needs of the victim in the first instance, while taking care not to demonise Shakira. She then sought to understand what provoked her to make this remark. In doing so, she asked Shakira to identify herself in racial terms, which revealed something of the girl's underlying pain and confusion. Realising that she was out of her depth, she then went to her class teacher, who did not feel the need to act on Debbie's report: she dismissed the incident. Retaining the focus on outcomes, it appears that Shakira was left to deal with her confusion and distress about her identity without support or guidance.

Once again, drawing on the model of discourses of race, we can identify colour and power evasion in the teacher's dismissal of the issue. But her response also illustrates how discourses can overlap, and an individual can draw on more than one discourse to make sense of their situation. The teacher's reluctance to respond to Shakira's situation may have drawn on elements of the racist discourse: within the school she was identified as a problem: she was low achieving, with a family deemed hard to reach, unsupportive and needy. A deficit discourse, based on her race and social class position, appeared to work together to create a situation in which the child was seen as beyond help: she was dismissed.

In a sense the teacher also dismissed Debbie's learning: she understood that she would not be supported in her attempts to engage with the children's identity development, or to address racism proactively. She learned, then, that, in that school at least, such activities are deemed, at best, marginal to the work of teaching.

Natalie

The fourth incident took place in a very diverse class of nine and ten year olds in South East London during Natalie's first year in teaching. Natalie grew up and still lived in the local area. She was in her late twenties and from an African-Caribbean background. The story of the incident was relayed to me via email:

During lunchtime a group of children were playing truth or dare... 'Naturally' the topic reached boyfriend/girlfriend... Ania (a Polish girl) said to two other girls that Micah was 'too black', apparently in reference to whether or not she would date him... Two girls who Ania had made the comment to came to me and told me, Chelsea (white British) and Yasmin (Somali)... The school's policy is to report any racist incident immediately to the EMA [Ethnic Minority Achievement] co-ordinator. Which I did. All the children involved were emotional. I know I dealt with it in line with the school policy, which was also in line with how I felt. All children involved understood the seriousness of the words. But what now? I was told by our EMA to leave it, but that is not working for me.

The two girls interpreted Ania's comment as racist, and therefore told their teacher. Natalie shared their interpretation, and followed the school policy, which involved informing the EMA co-ordinator. Again, we only have a partial view of the incident here. Natalie reported that the

deputy Headteacher spoke to Ania, and the EMA co-ordinator then appeared to feel that the incident had been dealt with. But this was not the case for the girls, who continued to struggle with the questions and conflicts the incident had stirred up, nor for Natalie, who had to respond to them. The following day she noticed that Yasmin in particular was still upset by the incident:

She felt uncomfortable for getting someone in trouble [but] she then continued to say that she felt annoyed that Ania had judged Micah on the colour of his skin...she couldn't see why Ania had that right. ..Her feeling of guilt and irritation was obvious and looked as though it was tormenting her.

It is clear that Yasmin was struggling to deal with an encounter with racism at close quarters, and needed support. Natalie was sensitive to Yasmin's mood, and gave her that moral support, but good policies on racist incidents would include time for all those involved in the incident to work through their feelings. The incident shows how such situations affect a wider group of people than the immediate perpetrator and victim. Natalie was also left unsupported here. She had to deal with the feelings of both Yasmin, and Ania, without guidance from more experienced colleagues: she is advised to 'leave it'. Here again we see the colour and power evasive discourse at work. According to this discourse, addressing race directly creates more problems than it solves: it stirs up strong feelings and threatens good discipline (hooks, 1994). The safest course is therefore to avoid the issue all together. But the outcome of this approach is to leave everyone involved feeling insecure and confused. In the absence of colleagues at school who were willing and able to offer a more proactive approach, Natalie, like Leah, wrote to ask for support to understand what she was dealing with:

As for Ania, I would love to know where those messages come from. Adults at home? TV? School? Sarah, would that be a hidden curriculum?...I do feel once the emotions have died down I will tackle the issue, and thank you for your suggestions. But can you really change a child's attitude to race if there are stronger negative messages surrounding them beyond the classroom?

Natalie was led to reflect on how racist attitudes develop, and drew on her training to try to make sense of her experience. She also decided to do some follow up work with her class, suggesting

that she continued to adopt a race and power cognisant approach, in spite of the advice of her senior colleague.

Discussion

To what extent can these cases be considered examples of institutional racism? It will be noted that none of the incidents was formally logged, and therefore none of them would have been reported to the local authority. According to Parsons and Hepburn (2007) that omission does lay the schools open to this charge. This suggests that even a legal duty is not enough to require schools to address racism when the need for the law is neither fully understood nor accepted. Each of the senior management teams' responses to these individual incidents can be read as informed by the discourse of colour and power evasiveness, which sometimes dovetailed with the demands of performativity. This led to a response in which a proactive stance on racism was sacrificed to the minimisation and containment of the issue so that there was no disruption to school life, and no need to address sensitive and personally threatening issues on the part of individual managers. The outcome for the children involved was that, in the worst case, the perpetrators faced no consequences, and the victim was unprotected. In the other three cases, while the immediate behaviour was tackled, there was no follow-up, and no logging to ensure that any patterns of racism could be identified and addressed at a whole school level. There is no evidence to suggest that any of the children involved in these incidents received an unequivocal message about what racism is, and why it is wrong, still less that any such message built on an existing school ethos which was supportive of diversity and equality.

Reviewing the incidents in terms of what the beginning teachers learned, it seems clear that their involvement shook their confidence in dealing with incidents in the future. This was partly because it enabled them to see the complexities of what is involved for the first time. But three of the four felt abandoned by their mentors to some degree, and the fourth, Susan, did not feel able to discuss her concerns with her mentor in any depth. Similarly, three of the four saw that the incident revealed the lack of commitment to challenging racism in their schools. Susan, whose teacher perhaps reacted with the most energy to the incident in her class, was less critical, but still aware that her teacher had omitted a crucial step in not reporting the incident.

The overall picture presented supports the findings of quantitative studies on schools' lack of compliance with both the spirit and the letter of recent race equality legislation (Scheider-Ross 2003; Parsons 2009). In the context of the Equality Act, in which race is subsumed with other aspects of identity, it is unlikely that vigilance on racism will increase in schools. At the level of policy, then, there is currently little hope for improvement. Perhaps we may look to students. This research adds to the body of evidence that suggests that there are new teachers who are willing to challenge racism, and that those most likely to do so are those with some experience of disadvantage, and those who themselves come from non-dominant backgrounds (Haberman 1996; Ullucci, 2011; Pearce 2012). This has implications for the kinds of candidates we recruit onto initial teacher education courses- a point that has been made many times before (Haberman 1996; Levine-Rasky 2001; Hick et al 2011).

Conclusion

These findings also add to calls for more and better support for teachers in the early stages of their careers. As more responsibility for early teacher development falls to schools in England, that support needs to be planned in the context of school life. Providing a 'learning space' (Solomon et al 2005) in which new teachers can think, talk and thereby make sense of, their experiences beyond their initial training phase may be one effective approach (Lander 2011). It is one which universities are well placed to organise. Time to reflect, the opportunity for dialogue, and a supportive and reflective mentor are key elements of that learning space (Turner, 2012). All four teachers appeared to develop their thinking about what had happened to them in the course of their interviews. It may be that it was the discussion with someone outside the immediate school environment that supported them in drawing on the colour and power cognisant repertoire, despite the dominance of colour and power evasiveness in each of their schools. This supports the view that, 'teachers who have access to an external perspective... may have a better than usual chance of developing and sustaining practices outside current orthodoxies' (Ainscow et al 2007, 15).

It has been suggested that one reason mentoring programmes are supported by governments is that they separate teacher training from the critical gaze of universities (Hobson et al 2009). In

fact, their focus on personal reflection, evidence based practice and wider social analysis could provide new teachers with the personal and intellectual support they need to reflect on complex and potentially threatening issues like racism. But in providing this support, academics will need to work closely with school based managers and mentors, and will therefore need to find accessible explanatory theories which will support both pre-service and perhaps mentor teachers in rethinking their attitudes. It may be that Frankenberg's model of discourses of race could be one element of that theory. It makes it possible to see a degree of agency and fluidity in the stance one takes on race, to see racism as a discourse which can be drawn upon by anyone, rather than a committed stance adopted by a few malevolent individuals. A shift from the colour and power evasive focus on intentions to the power cognisant focus on outcomes in defining racism can be allied to longer-serving teachers' acquaintance with the concept of institutional racism. Each of these conceptual tools may help to move teachers' thinking away from definitions of racism as individual prejudice to an understanding of how individuals are implicated in the social mechanisms through which structural racism is perpetuated. In the current context, such pragmatic approaches may be the best hope of keeping a proactive stance on racism on the agenda in English schools.

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