Abstract

The under-representation of minority ethnic groups in teaching remains a cause for concern. This study captured both quantitative and qualitative data from minority ethnic under-graduate, post-graduate and ex-students of one university in the south-east midlands. The data captured students’ perceptions of the reasons for the persistent under-representation of minority ethnic teachers. Findings corroborate some evidence from previous studies but there are also significant differences. Despite their experience of racism as pupils, students still chose teaching as their preferred career. The attitudes of some minority ethnic parents to a career in teaching appear to be changing, particularly as a result of the motivation shown by young people. Findings from this study and others are used to draft a raft of recommendations designed to improve applications from minority ethnic students to Initial Teacher Education Courses.

Introduction

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk; Osler (1997). Although Carrington et al. (2000a: 9) found that experience of racial harassment was not replicated whilst ‘training’, there was evidence of its existence (Carrington et al (2000b). Dhingra and Dunkwu (1995) found that the paucity of Black teachers as role models; the under-valuing of Black teachers by colleagues; poor promotion prospects and low pay were deterrents to minority ethnic students choosing teaching as a career.

In contrast, Carrington et al (2000b:7) identified factors found to attract minority ethnic students to ITE courses. These included; the high profile given to ‘multicultural’ issues; placements in multi-ethnic school; proximity to home; and the reputation of the institution. The oral-tradition was found to be the most widely used means of spreading information about the effectiveness of a course. The provision of ‘taster-courses’ and support for minority ethnic students, whilst studying, were also key factors in the success of these universities. The first direct experience a student had of the university and the attitude of the admissions tutor was also seen by prospective students as a decisive factor.

This research was commissioned to consider ways in which one university might increase the number of admissions to its ITE courses from minority ethnic students.

Methodology

Using ethnographic research methods the experiences of 55 minority ethnic student teachers and graduate teachers at one university were elicited. Thirty students were interviewed, using a structured schedule, comprising both open and closed questions; graduates teachers received a slightly modified questionnaire. Questions were framed to test the findings of other studies.

Visual images in university literature and posters were analysed to evaluate the ethnic profile the university presented to the public. A total, 1,344 images of people were categorised in terms of gender and ethnicity. Size of picture, ranging from whole page images to quarter page ones.; the type of camera shot used; close-up; medium shot and long-shot; and the juxtaposition of individual subjects. Where the gender or ethnic identity of the individual was unclear, the subject was not included in the study.

Data from the 2001 Census of four towns with significant minority ethnic populations in the region, were extrapolated. The 15-29 age-group was considered to be the potential recruitment base. Minority ethnic populations in towns in the region with their own ITE providers were excluded.

Findings.

Visual Imagery
Some publicity material, including posters in the locality, had little no representation of minority ethnic students, implying the university was an all-white institution. A fuller analysis showed that white females and white males (47% and 30% respectively) dominated visual images. Asian females and males made up 12.4% of subjects; the figure for Black females and males was 7.4%. Less than 2% of images were Chinese females and males. With the exception of this last group, images of women exceeded those of men in all ethnic groups.

A semiotic analysis of visual imagery showed that minority ethnic subjects were found in the smaller pictures and tended to be located in the middle or background. In contrast, two large photographs of Black men dominated public spaces in the university. A photograph is imbued with signification having the potential for multiple interpretations informed by the viewers’ experiential, socially constructed, perceptions. As such, the image is located in the transformative relations of the social world, fused as it is with differential relations of power. The Black observer may read the image through the ‘lens’ of marginalised narratives, leading to possible claims of tokenism, rendering the use of the image counter-productive.

This suggests visual imagery in this context needs to signify inclusion and interaction of people of diverse ethnicities.

Local Demography.

The 2001 Census was used to identify minority ethnic populations in the four main conurbations regarded as ‘local’. Data for the 15-29 age group was extrapolated. The 15 -17 age group was included to allow a greater margin of ‘potentiality’ in terms of recruitment. This represented a potential recruitment base of 28,965 people. However, academic achievement is uneven across ethnic groups and is affected by variables such as social class (Gilborn and Mirza 2000). Over half the population reviewed consisted of minority groups identified as educationally and socially disadvantaged. Current ITE students reflected the distribution of academic achievement found by Gilborn and Mirza, with British Indian students exceeding the combined total of British Bangladeshi and British Pakistani students. Only 35% of students lived in the four conurbations that constituted the most local ethnic minority communities.

It was found that after graduating minority ethnic students returned to their home town where they take up teaching posts.

Why choose teaching?

Some students expressed a long term interest in teaching but had not initially pursued it as a viable career due to family influences. In one case, a student had begun a non-teaching degree course at another university but had left after a year. She explained,

‘I always wanted to be a teacher but my family wanted me to go into business and computing. In the end, I said, teaching is what I want to do.’

The influence of family was often cited as a reason for preferring other professions over teaching. This was particularly so for students from Indian backgrounds.
However, amongst this group there appears to be a growing contingent of individuals who are prepared to assert their independence, but with family approval. Another student of Indian background who made a late change to teaching did so after direct experience of the classroom;

‘Originally, I was applying to uni to do economics but I saw my cousin teach and worked with her for two weeks. It was that that made me change my mind.’

Students with family members who are teachers were able to use these connections to gain experience of the classroom. In addition, these family members not only provided a gateway into teaching, they also acted as models of influence. One student made this point explicit in her response when she said;

‘Family members are teachers. I enjoyed going into school with people I knew who were teachers and I enjoyed being with kids.’

This finding is positive but the issue remains of how to attract young people into teaching where there is no such role model within their family.

Respondents rarely gave a single reason for choosing teaching as a career, which suggests that multiple variables influenced the career choice of the sample in this study. The biggest influence centred on an interest in working with children but this was often closely tied to the satisfaction derived from seeing children succeed. Apart from these ‘child centred’ motives the next two most significant reasons for choosing teaching were the example shown by existing teachers and altruism. The following response typifies this view;

‘The main reason is because of my own school life. I know what it is like to come from a different social background, so I would now like to help children from a similar social background.’

However, some motives were driven by more negative experiences of school.

‘Because I was treated badly at school by teachers, because I was really thick, and I wanted to make a change. Obviously schools have changed now and they think more about children's self esteem.’

Passion for a particular subject and the opportunity to expand knowledge encouraged some students to enter ITE. The variety, challenge and creativity of teaching was also cited. Significantly, the majority of these latter responses were from people who had begun career paths outside teaching, which suggests the potential for recruitment from the existing workforce. Subsidiary reasons included personal choices, such as not ‘…wanting to follow a conventional Asian path,’ and lifestyle choices.

**Reasons for choosing the university in the study.**

Students’ gave multiple reasons for choosing the university in this study as their preferred institution. Course features and course reputation strongly influenced selection. The oral tradition has been found to be strong element in the recruitment of
minority ethnic students. One university admissions tutor estimated that as many as 50% of minority ethnic students entering her/his university did so after recommendation from a friend (Carrington et al. 2000b: 8).

Several students chose to apply and subsequently accept their offer of a place after visiting the university. They were impressed by such factors as the atmosphere and the friendliness and sensitivity of the staff. It might be that for some minority ethnic students, where the extended family and the tight knit of kinship is a cultural norm, the size of the campus, its atmosphere and approachability of staff replicate some of the characteristics of familial relations that are part of these students’ social and cultural expectations. Other positive factors included: the high employment rate of graduate teachers; the low pressure interview compared with some other universities; the quality and content of the presentation given by the Admissions Tutor; and the organised appearance of the campus. However, these tended to be more subsidiary reasons and were often mentioned alongside the major ones outlined above. In keeping with the findings of Carrington et al (2000a; 7) the most influential external factor for students choosing the university was its proximity to home and family. However, a minority cited the distance from home, as an opportunity for greater independence.

Experiences during the course.

A minority of students (10%) commented on how their ethnicity had been an issue whilst on school placement. One student felt a sense of irritation at having her ethnicity constantly on show;

‘It’s a predominantly white course and placements. Constantly being asked where you are from. Why do I have to justify myself? Just because of colour we are seen differently. This affects performance. Self-worth is not being recognised in this environment’

Implicit to this response is the implication that constantly being reminded of one’s colour and background, accentuates the individual’s difference from the majority, which can have a debilitating effect on personal morale, with the consequence that performance in the classroom may be adversely affected. A second student gave a specific instance of how majority ethnic teachers, lacking the kind of understanding required of a modern teaching force, can create personal discomfort for some minority ethnic students on placement.

‘Teachers seem to struggle with my name. At registration the teacher introduced me and said my name. She then asked the children if they could say my name and then said, ’could you just say where you are from’. I said I was born in Britain. The teacher looked at me and said, yes, but where does your family come from? She then said (in front of the children) my surname is a weird name.’

This was not the only occasion this student was made to feel uncomfortable in the school. During a meeting, comments were made about the Religious Education curriculum.

‘In a staff meeting teachers were talking about other religions. One said why do we have to change everything for other people?’
It is often through indirect comments such as these that minority ethnic groups are marginalised. Minority ethnic students are also sensitive to the way in which Black pupils are treated differently from white pupils by some teachers. The same student, as well as two others in the sample had witnessed this. Minority ethnic students placed in schools where there is either direct or indirect racism can feel a sense of extreme powerlessness. They often remain silent because they are conscious that passing the placement and academic progression, are at stake. In some instances, a mentor’s prejudice can cloud their professional judgement, as one student implied in her response;

‘I failed a TP and some of my friends felt it was due to the fact that I come from abroad. My friends suggested there might be a perception by the staff in the school that I might not understand how to teach in this country. The partnership coordinator informed me that my mentors thought I would go travelling around the world when I qualified. This was an opinion the staff had and it was kind of implied that this was a contributory factor in my failing the placement.’

This example demonstrates how subversive racism can be. There is no substantial evidence that there is racism, because nothing is clearly stated; it is left to implication and innuendo. Trying to prove that someone has been racist can be like trying to kick a paper bag in the wind. However, the effect on minority ethnic students of implied racism can be as damaging to their confidence and psychological security as a more blatant racist attack. We might speculate on the extent to which latent or implied racism may be a contributory factor in drop-out rates.

Sixty-nine per cent of students had had positive experiences of school as pupils. The following statements are typical of this group of students.

‘I enjoyed it. If I had not had, I would not have carried on in education as far as university.’

Less than half of respondents (44%) had not experienced racism whilst at school. However, an almost equal number had personally experienced some form of racism as pupils, with a further 16% of students reporting they had been aware of racism at school, but had not been directly subjected to it. Some minority ethnic students have favourable memories of school, despite racism, but some do not, as the following responses attest;

‘From day one and it got progressively worse through the years into upper school. Racial name calling was prevalent. The NF and BNP were recruiting in the area. Some teachers said I had a chip on my shoulder.’

‘Primary is difficult to remember. I don’t think I learnt anything in primary school. Due to a language barrier I could not communicate with others. I knew that I was different from everyone else and I felt I was not accepted by anyone, even the teachers. Secondary - I felt worse. I had to wear salwar kameez, which made me feel out of place. I really hated my secondary school experience’.
These minority ethnic students chose teaching as a career in spite of personally negative experiences of school. Racism can seriously affect social relationships, self-esteem and confidence, along with academic progress. These are matters that all students in ITE courses should be made aware of. Racism in itself is not the only cause of low levels of minority ethnic recruitment to teaching.

Racism can be pervasive and operates across social contexts, giving little, or no, room for ‘escape’. It also shows how the social character of racism not only affects the individual but simultaneously attacks family members and the whole community. For some students, the influence of racism reverberates through childhood and into adulthood, as this student shows;

‘I think that now I do not have any self confidence i.e. academically, although other people say I am confident. School is where you learn the basic skills and social skills. That is why I feel I am so lucky to be here.’

There are, perhaps, implications here for the support systems and the pastoral provision universities have in place. Schools can act as sites of social and cultural reproduction and institutionalised racism oppresses the aspirations of minority ethnic pupils, which in turn channel certain groups of pupils into narrow career options. As Gordon states, ‘...students who have been marginalised...are particularly unlikely to be prepared and socialised for the teaching profession’ (2003: 30). This point suggests that teachers need to have sufficient multicultural capital (Gardner, 2001) to challenge stereotyping and racism, which has implications for ITE and Continuing Professional Development in the profession.

Reasons for the under-representation of minority-ethnic teachers.

A matrix of causal effects on relatively poor minority ethnic recruitment to teaching and, consequently, the reason why there are relatively few minority ethnic teachers were found. One set of reasons can be located in schools themselves. Firstly, the paucity of Black and Asian teachers was perceived to be a significant cause. Twenty per cent of the sample suggested the lack of role models was a deterrent. This implies a ‘Catch-22’ situation, where the lack of role models leads to low level recruitment, which in turn feeds few role models back into the system. Furthermore, minority ethnic teachers are under represented in senior management (Ross and Hutchings 2005).

In some communities teaching is seen as a prestigious and viable career for women, even where cultural parameters restrict the work of women outside the home and family. However, Khanum (1995), suggests that gender freedom is restricted when Islamophobia is strong. Nevertheless, the following Muslim student, demonstrated the ‘Self’ as an agent of personal and social change;

‘Asian women are coming into teaching. We feel as if we are outside the circle. I need something for myself.’

Being ‘outside the circle’ and making a conscious decision to be inside it is the affirmation of the desire to be included both as a woman and as a Muslim. Examples of this kind illustrate the dangers of stereotyping the Asian or Muslim woman as passive or subservient.
Parental aspirations appear to be bound by cultural parameters, with particular professions marked as the signifiers of success. Family reputation within the community is maintained by a son or daughter going into medicine, business or law. However, there is some evidence that perceptions are changing and when parents are equipped with adequate information their view of teaching can be more favourable.

One student eloquently epitomised the pragmatic considerations migrant people have to make when settling in a new place and how career choices that were restricted to previous generations are suddenly available to subsequent ones, because economic survival is no longer an imperative.

‘I think they are persuaded to go into medicine more than teaching. Although I think people will consider it more now. I think my generation is considering careers rather than jobs, so I think we will see more ethnic minority teachers. Previous generations came and had to settle. My parents’ generation have more money now and can afford to send their children to university, so I can think about a career rather than economic survival’

Economic solvency and feelings of being established in a community are, perhaps, important prerequisites for members of minority ethnic groups to feel sufficiently empowered to take-up ‘stakeholder’ occupations in society, such as teaching. There is, however, another factor at work here. The economic status of a minority ethnic community can also be influential. Those minority ethnic groups that occupy low socio-economic positions are likely to share the occupational patterns of their majority ethnic counterparts of the same social class. Currently and historically, relatively few people from working class backgrounds have a university education. In some cases, therefore, both social class, as well as ethnicity may function as barriers to the recruitment of students from particular minority ethnic groups.

However, only 36% of British-Bangladeshi women in higher education come from middle class backgrounds, which suggests that students from lower-socio economic strata within this minority ethnic group are well represented at university level. In addition, whilst British-Pakistani and British-Bangladeshi pupils are amongst those ethnic groups with the lowest attainment at GCSE, they are well represented on entry to university (Parekh 2000:146). It is largely the new universities that are attracting the bulk of these students. Seventy percent of African Caribbean and 60% of Asian students attend new universities compared to 35% of White students. These figures make the under-representation of minority ethnic students in ITE even more significant and it should give ITE providers greater cause for concern.

The influence of family, along with parental preferences for careers other than teaching, was given as the most frequent reason why more people from minority ethnic backgrounds did not enter ITE courses. In total 15 students and ex-students (33%) said family or cultural preference for other occupations was a cause and 12 students (27%) mentioned family pressure not to enter teaching. It should be added that these responses were given by students who were almost exclusively from Asian minority ethnic groups. Poor salary was cited by 8 students (18%) as a cause and 9% (4 students) mentioned the lack of minority ethnic role models in schools. No other responses occurred with sufficient frequency to make them significant.
Many of these students’ statements are illuminating narratives on the complexity of social relationships in multicultural Britain. They demonstrate that minority ethnic cultures and families are not static entities but are dynamic ones that are engaging with the pressures, challenges and opportunities that are both internal and external to them. Out of this heterogeneous socio-cultural praxis some young people are choosing teaching as a career, even though the dominant signals indicate that it may be deleterious for them to do so. As with all people who commit to teaching as a career, these young people are motivated by a deep sense of vocation and, in many cases, the altruistic desire to make changes for the better. The fact that most students gave multiple reasons for minority ethnic students not choosing teaching as a career is both indicative of the difficulties faced by university marketing departments and the opportunities available to them. The existence of multiple causes suggests that marketing campaigns may need to be differentially targeted at different minority ethnic groups and at different groups within these. Having identified that the lack of: positive role models; perceptions of prejudice; and lack of encouragement at school, together with family influences, and perceptions of a profession that is poorly paid and of low professional status, are interacting factors that deter minority ethnic groups from entering teaching, thought can be given to the most effective semiotic strategies to challenge each of these perceptual barriers to recruitment to Initial Teacher Education. However, students warned against tokenistic campaigns. In addition, students thought targeting post-16 students was too late and that action was imperative with pupils in Year 9;

**The First Few Years in Teaching.**

The questionnaire sent to ex-students included several questions about their experiences as teachers, after graduation. Most respondents had been in the profession for up to three years. Fifty percent of respondents said they had not directly been subject to racism as a teacher, nor had they seen evidence of it in their schools. Amongst this group were positive signs that their ethnicity was perceived as a strength and asset to the learning community of their school. For children from minority ethnic backgrounds, the presence of a minority ethnic teacher, who does not necessarily share their particular ethnicity, is also viewed in a positive way.

However, some graduates reported incidents of racism in which senior management took firm and decisive action. Strong leadership was found to be a key factor in successful multi-ethnic schools (Blair and Bourne 1998). Unfortunately, not all schools are lead by such principled head teachers and so racism remains an apprehension for some students at the threshold to their careers;

‘I do know of a teacher who was called a black monkey. She reported the case to the head of department and the head of the school, who did nothing about it. There are similar stories in which pupils got away with it. As I have not taught for that long I have not had an experience like that yet and I hope I don’t.’

A young Black-British graduate explicitly reported how the circle of racial stereotyping turns incessantly, resulting in a perpetual cycle of manufactured underachievement;
‘Attitudes of teachers (White) to black students – White teachers not ensuring Black students work to their full potential, especially when CAT/SAT scores show huge academic potential…..working at my old school gives me great satisfaction in trying to give those underprivileged kids an opportunity to succeed and aim higher – that’s the least I can do, especially when I didn’t have that chance.’

This statement epitomises the spirit of students in this study, who have chosen teaching in spite of the racism they faced as pupils and may continue to face as adults. Despite numerous reports that have investigated the causes of underachievement of minority ethnic pupils (Rampton 1981, Swann 1985) and have cited the existence of institutionalised racism and the need to eradicate it (Macdonald 1989; Macpherson 1999), we continue to fail in our resolve to ‘…deal with the specific problems and complexities of racial inequalities.’ (Arora 2005:153). It

Recommendations.

Visual images should emphasise collaboration between people in a multi-ethnic team. This implies a position of strength and challenges the cycle of stereotyping and tokenism. Recruitment material may need to make reference to;

- opportunities for placements in multi-ethnic schools;
- examples of how ethnicity is positively covered in the course.
- the multi-ethnic nature of the locality
- case-studies of past students, including minority ethnic students.
- pastoral and study support structures.

Direct contact with pre-AS Level pupils might be a more effective way of encouraging more applications from minority ethnic students to ITE courses. In addition to visits to schools by lecturers and ambassador students, universities should consider ways of bringing young people from under-represented groups onto campuses.

Strategies to encourage young people into the university include;

- taster courses (this could be co-ordinated through work placements with schools and include a placement in a primary school)
- creative workshops with a multicultural theme involving local community groups;
- writing workshops for young people around the theme of multicultural Britain. Resident writers, particularly those from minority ethnic backgrounds could be involved in leading such initiatives;

These may be unconventional marketing strategies but evidence suggests innovative means of promoting teaching and is required.

Initial Teacher Education: Course Content.
Evidence suggests that all students are insufficiently prepared with the cross-cultural knowledge and anti-racist perspectives necessary for teaching in a multi-ethnic society. Courses need to be reviewed to identify the coverage of anti-racist practice and multicultural knowledge. In addition, universities need to ensure that all aspects of the student experience are positive. Favourable narratives told by minority ethnic students to friends and family is a powerful force in attracting new students.

Universities need to put in place a series of measures both to pre-empt and to deal with racism in school placements. Pre-emptive measures should include:

- A clear and prominent anti-racist statement in partnership handbooks including the university’s race equality policy.
- Mentor training around issues of minority ethnic student placements.
- A clear procedure for reporting racist incidents and/or instances.

Where racism occurs measures should be put in place to deal with the matter. These might include:

- tutorial time for the student to talk to a tutor who understands the issues and can listen to the student’s concerns and needs;
- procedures for the university to report to a head teacher the facts of the case so effective managerial action can be negotiated between the university and the school to ameliorate the situation for the student;
- transferring a student to another placement school where racism has, or is likely to, affect the learning of that student or the assessment of their teaching;
- a network of support for any student who experiences direct or indirect racism, be it intentional or unwitting;
- the immediate de-selection of schools that fail to act on racist incidents, or where racism is deemed to be widespread or pervasive in the school.

In addition to the above recommendations, it is worth noting additional recommendations suggested by Carrington et al (2000a). These were;

- partnerships with local minority ethnic communities;
- experience of a wide range of placement schools;
- peer networks and other mutual support networks;
- emphasise the importance of minority ethnic students and teachers working in all types of schools;
• emphasise the challenges and satisfaction of teaching in recruitment;

• implement measures to reduce the financial hardship experienced by some minority ethnic students;

• target recruitment at minority ethnic communities rather than ‘blanket’ advertising;

• assure students their concerns about racism will be dealt with;

• emphasise, in recruitment literature, the altruistic desire of minority ethnic students to give back to their communities;

• increase the proportion of minority ethnic academic staff.

The recommendations arising from this study, combined with those of Carrington et al, provide a substantial raft of measures that could be implemented to encourage greater representation of minority ethnic students on ITE courses.

Conclusion

This study considered how the recruitment of minority ethnic students to ITE courses at one university might be improved. Ethnographic research was undertaken with existing and past minority ethnic students in order to identify reasons for selecting the university as their place of study. An analysis of publicity material was scrutinised in order to evaluate how the university presented itself publicly and to its own student body.

In keeping with findings from previous studies and reports; racism, racial stereotyping, discrimination and general insensitivity towards students from minority ethnic backgrounds, was found to be widespread, but tended to be restricted to students’ experiences in schools; as pupils, student teachers and as practising teachers. A number of students entered teaching in spite of the racism they experienced at school. Many of these students were driven by a desire to bring about change. The evidence from this study indicates that further extensive work needs to be done in the field of race equality in education. As major centres of learning, universities should be ‘beacons’ of the prerequisite attitudes, perspectives and knowledge that form the basis of a truly multicultural society.

In certain minority ethnic groups, and particularly amongst Asian families, teaching is generally viewed as a low status occupation. However, there is evidence to suggest attitudes may be changing, particularly when the positive features of teaching are promoted. This has implications for the way in which different minority ethnic groups are informed about teaching. Young people also need to be more informed of what the profession has to offer. The best advocates for the promotion of teaching and ITE courses are minority ethnic students and graduate teachers. They are in a position to talk of their direct experience at all levels of education and to answer young people’s concerns and queries from the vantage point of informed judgement.
Teaching is a creative and exciting career, full of challenge and variety. There is much in teaching itself that is a positive ‘pull-factor’ in terms of recruitment. The positive features of teaching and inclusive universities need to be promoted in order to break the cycle of under-representation of minority ethnic teachers.

References


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**DfES/TTA Qualifying to teach: Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status and Requirements for Initial Teacher Training. London: TTA**


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