Locating black mixed-raced males in the black supplementary school movement

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ABSTRACT

This article draws upon data from semi-structured interviews conducted with black mixed-race males in the UK and the US, to argue that a revival of the black supplementary school movement could play an important role in the education of black mixed-race males. The article contends that a strong identification with blackness, and a concomitant rejection of the values of mainstream schooling, make black supplementary education a viable intervention for raising the attainment and improving the experiences of black mixed-race males. Whilst blackness was important to participants' understandings of their lived experiences, this did not engender a disregard for their mixedness. Supplementary schools must therefore find ways of recognising black mixedness within their practice.

Introduction

This article draws upon data from semi-structured interviews conducted with black mixed-race males in the UK and the US, to argue that a revival of the black supplementary school movement could play an important role in the education of black mixed-race males. This argument is based upon two inextricably linked themes from interviews with black mixed-race males; a strong identification with blackness, and a strong dissatisfaction with mainstream schooling (Joseph-Salisbury 2016). After making the case that the black supplementary schooling can serve a purpose for black mixed-race males, the article then considers the ways in which the supplementary schools can create an inclusive space that reflects black mixedness as a constitutive part of the black population. The article will first argue that despite the growing recognition of mixedness, blackness remains central to the ways in which the black mixed-race male population understand their identities. Next, the case will be made that, much like their black male peers, black mixed-race males are dissatisfied with a mainstream schooling system that fails to cater for their needs and continues to present a range of racialised barriers. This will be followed by a short overview of the role that black supplementary schools have played in educating black children, and how we see black mixed-race male students fitting into this. The article then goes on to discuss some of the participants' views on the idea of black supplementary and independent forms of education. Before offering a conclusion, the article considers ways that the supplementary education might evolve to include the black mixed-race population.

Data and methods

This article draws upon data collected as part of Joseph-Salisbury's research exploring the formation and negotiation of black mixed-race male identities in the context of UK and US secondary schools. Between late 2014 and early 2015, in depth, semi-structured, interviews were conducted with 28 males of mixed black and white parentage. Fourteen of the participants came from the US and 14 from the UK. That the two contexts have a lot to offer in terms of national comparative research has been widely noted in the literature on the African diaspora (Christian 2002; Small 1994), race and education (Byfield 2008; Gillborn and Ladson-Billings 2004), and specifically in the literature on mixedness (Christian 2000; Song 2003). Indeed, as Byfield notes (2008, 6), Despite different educational traditions and historical experiences, black people in these countries have much in common: most of their ancestors were subjected to slavery, they remain minorities in White dominated societies, their males are adversely positioned in social indicators such as crime and unemployment, they underachieve in schools and are under-represented in higher education. Given that, on both sides of the Atlantic, a de facto one-drop rule, continues to see many black mixed-race men identify and be identified as black (Aspinall and Song 2013), it is apparent that Byfield's (2008) observations are, in part, reflective of the experiences of black mixed-race males. Though some of the participants in the study were separated by thousands of miles, it was telling that their responses did not depend on nation for analysis. The themes discussed cut across nation state boundaries, demonstrating that racism is an international system that impacts black populations in different countries in similar ways (Andrews 2016a). One of the problems of academic analysis is that it is often framed by the nation state, what Martins (1974) calls methodological nationalism. Indeed, an important strength of the current research is in the ability to demonstrate the Transatlanticity of black mixed-race male experiences. All participants in the study were aged between 16 and 21, with this particular age range being chosen to ensure that participants had not long since left compulsory schooling and therefore were, in theory, better able to recall their school experiences (Byfield 2008). Whilst conducting research with informants under the age of 18 raises ethical concerns, it was felt that these were minimal and potential benefits of this research outweighed these concerns. Moreover, full ethical approval was granted by an institutional research ethics committee and signed informed consent was obtained from each participant. Participants were recruited in a range of different ways, most commonly through response to poster advertisement, through social media and through word-of-mouth. In an attempt to recruit a sample with different identifications, perspectives and positionalities, a range of different descriptors were used on the posters. These included, among others, 'black/white mixed-race', 'mixed black and white parentage' and 'white/black biracial'. Regardless of the descriptors used in recruitment, the

participants were critical and, in interview, produced identifications that went far beyond the limits of narrow identities. Participants reported a range of family backgrounds, social class positions, neighbourhood and school demographics, and sexual orientations. The centrality of blackness for black mixed-race males Despite evidence that an increasing number of those of mixed parentage are choosing to identify in ways that denote their mixedness (Morning 2012), this research finds that blackness continues to be of central importance to the experiences of this population, and to the way in which the individuals make sense of their identities. The blackness that the participants identified with was rooted in a connection to the African Diaspora. This African Diasporic blackness is based on a politics of uniting those descendants from the African continent in a shared struggle against racism. It is this blackness that lies at the heart of the work in the black supplementary school movement (Andrews 2016b). It is this shared connection that links the experiences across the Atlantic, allowing for a shared unit of analysis in the paper. Emblematic of this connection is the histories the black supplementary school movement have drawn on in constructing blackness. The focus has been on a broad collection of the African Diaspora, including the United States, the Caribbean, African, Latin American and Europe (Andrews 2013). The seamless connection made across the Diaspora in discussion of 'black history' demonstrates the interconnectedness of experiences. Participants in the study recognised the central role that blackness played in their identity, and in their educational experiences. There was a sense among the informants that they were racialised by others as black and this impacted upon their sense of identity (Khanna 2010; Root 1990; Twine 2004). For many of these participants the social world was still shaped by a black–white racial dichotomy. As Reece (UK) notes,

> Most kind of white people just see you as black. The general every day average Joe doesn't go 'his nose is a bit thin, maybe he's half white', they don't care. They just don't see it.

Much like Reece, Leon (UK) inverted the de facto one-drop rule and demonstrated a sense of collective resistance to anti-black racism (Davis 2010; Perlmann and Waters 2002). When asked why he identified as black, Leon responded,

> Say if there were any racist political parties came in, and they'd try to categorize you, you'd always say I'm black, you know, I'm not white. They'd always put me in black, if there was a political party against black people or different, you know, anyone that's not English, they'd put me in there, even though I am English.

Here, Leon demonstrates his sense of double consciousness and actively identifies as black. In resistance to the threat of the white gaze, he takes control over his interpellation. Although important, identifications with blackness were not just about the white gaze, that is, individuals

seeing themselves as they believe their white audience sees them (Yancy 2008). In discussing their identifications with blackness, rather than speaking of race, participants often spoke of sharing interests, culture and a common history with their black peers (Alexander 1996; Tate 2005). Erik (US) offered one such account,

> I feel like you can rationalise it by saying like you are of the same interests. So like obviously you'll hang out cos like you're from one type of culture. Like this is where you know, so course you're gonna hang out with people who share that type of culture. Who like laugh at the same things you laugh at, who like do the same things, I don't know. Birds of a feather flock together.

In this account, we see how the language of race is substituted for that of culture (Alexander 1996). Nevertheless, it is his black peers with whom Erik 'flocks together'. It is evident in Erik's account that he does not see his mixedness as presenting a barrier to his blackness. Erik's account was emblematic of several. Leon, a UK participant, also spoke of a common experience with black peers. Conversely, this is not something he shared with white peers,

> Being in a group of white people, I didn't feel like we all had the same things in common, you know? So I'd say when I went into year ten, probably about [age] fifteen, something like that, that's when I started to go out in different areas … so yeah when I got into year ten I started going around in the areas and I did feel like I had more in common with the boys there … there are a lot more similarities with me and black kids, I just don't know why. It's just one of them, it feels more natural, and I'm not being racist.

Perhaps, what is most striking in Leon's account is his inability to form meaningful bonds with white peers, and thus, his desire to actively seek out black peers by going to different areas (Wilson 1987). Having so many similarities with black boys – many of which he felt were intangible and indescribable – Leon felt it was 'natural' for him, through his peer group, to identify with blackness. His final remark, 'I'm not being racist', shows Leon's unwillingness, and fear of using the language of race. Nevertheless, through his reference to interests and shared cultures, Leon makes clear his strong identification with blackness.

Whilst the importance of blackness was recognised by all participants, they were also keen to assert the importance of mixedness. Despite the great similarities with their monoracial black peers, their experiences, as Devron (US) notes, were not identical; 'being a mixed-race kid, it's different. It's a lot different than being fully black'.

Whilst the multiracial movement has sought to see these differences recognised under the umbrella of mixedness, this article contends that, for the black mixed-race population, rather

than the divisive, and politically damaging fragmentation of the black population, what is needed is a more expansive, inclusive and heterogeneous definition of blackness. Where in the past the specific experiences of mixedness had been ignored for the sake of black unity, in the contemporary moment of increasing diversity, black unity can only be achieved through the recognition of difference.

The majority of participants in the study strove for a definition of blackness that was expansive enough to reflect the complexities of their black mixed-race identities. For these participants, identifying and being identified as black should not see the uniqueness of mixedness ignored. This was articulated in a range of ways. Alex (UK), for instance, described himself as 'black with white stripes' (as opposed to the inverse). The articulation of this identity allows Alex to recognise the centrality of blackness to his identity, but to simultaneously recognise his mixedness (or white stripes). For Alex his 'white stripes' do not diminish from his ability to identify as black. Trent (UK) talks about his journey to a black mixed identity

> I called myself mixed for a long time. You know, then like in year nine, I think I was like fifteen, fourteen, and I was like, no I'm black mixed and then slowly started to capitalise the black … fourteen, fifteen is when I started like openly saying I'm a black mixed person in Britain.

Trent shows that his identification is deeply considered and, in capitalising the B, he alludes to a political statement (Tharps 2014). Like Trent, another participant, Anton (UK) spoke about his identification as black and mixed race. He argues that he is racialised by society as black, but still places importance upon his mixedness, alongside his blackness,

> I would describe my identity more I'd say I'm mixed-race but I'd say I'm black also. I'd say that's due to past experiences. Erm, but I think like certain experiences, I've had racist experiences and I think just the way society views me. And my Mum told me that I was black as well. So I'd say I'm black but then mixed-race, black.

These accounts, and the participants desire to recognise their mixedness alongside their blackness, encourage us to strive for a more inclusive definition of blackness and this can, and should, be adopted by any black supplementary school movement. As Stubblefield (2005, 144–145) has argued, 'In order to achieve emancipation, black people will have to struggle as a group, which requires a strong sense of group identification'. The black supplementary school movement can contribute to the development of this sense of group identification. As Dalmage (2000, 12) argues,

> Some sense of unity, of an 'us,' is necessary when groups are struggling for greater justice. This sense of community is necessary for both countering the feelings of alienation created by oppression and building political struggles.

This unity can be achieved not through the ignorance of difference – indeed; it is perhaps this that gave rise to the multiracial movement – but through embracing the black population's growing heterogeneity (Lorde 1984).

Black mixed-race male dissatisfaction with mainstream schooling

Black mixed-race males face many of the same barriers in schooling as their peers with two black parents (Tikly et al. 2004; Williams 2011). These barriers include low teacher expectations (Joseph-Salisbury 2016), the pervasive threat of stereotypes, experiences of racial prejudice from peers and dissatisfaction with an ethnocentric and inadequate curriculum. Given the plethora of racialised barriers to achievement that the schooling system presents, much like their black male peers, black mixed-race males must show great levels of resilience in order to attain the prescribed requirements to advance in education (Rhamie 2007). To be clear, given that the schooling system perpetuates the values of white middle class society (Bourdieu 1974), black mixed-race males must go above and beyond what is expected of their white middle class peers. Given the shared barriers, and the centrality of blackness to black mixed-race males conceptions of self, peer groups are often formed with black peers (Tikly et al. 2004). Participants argued that this safe space was of great importance; 'there is certain stuff you can say to the black kids'. Trent (UK) spoke about his black male peer group,

> I was one of four black people in my year, you're not gonna stop like trying to wonder what blackness you are. You're just gonna club together, otherwise I'd be separating myself more, you know. So I didn't really think about it then.

Much like Trent, a US participant, Will spoke about being 'the mixed up black kid' in his peer group that consisted of a range of black identities. As he argued, to be of mixed parentage, was not incompatible with the group definition of blackness any more than being an 'African black kid'. Participants understood such peer group formations, not just as a necessary measure to aid the navigation through hostile and racist terrain (Mac an Ghaill 1988), but as a natural consequence of shared cultures and interests. As one participant remarked, 'birds of a feather flock together'.

The centrality of blackness to black mixed-race male identities, the common barriers to achievement and the value that was placed on the black peer group, suggest that the black supplementary school can offer a real positive intervention for black mixed-race males.

Indeed, such an intervention can help to build the aforementioned resilience required to succeed in a white supremacist school system.

The black supplementary school movement

> Only a fool would let his enemy teach his children (Malcolm X).

Ultimately, reformation of mainstream schooling cannot wholly bring about racial equality. As Bell (1992, 3) puts it, such attempts merely see a 'regeneration of the problem in a particularly perverse form'. For example, in the US the battle for desegregation of the school system was a hard fought political struggle. However, decades after Brown Vs Board of Education schools are now more racially segregated than in the late 1960s (Orfield and Lee 2007). In the UK, investment has been made in schooling and targeted programmes like Aim Higher rolled out, but there is still a significant attainment gap for African-Caribbean and black mixed-race students (Easby 2015): the expulsion rate remains three times as high for both groups (Jones 2015) even when black students make it to university they are less likely to be accepted into the Russel group, attain a good degree, or a well-paid job after graduation (Zwysen and Longhi 2016).

Racism is rooted at the foundation of mainstream schooling in both the US and the UK, in a system that is 'worse than' either a coincidence or conspiracy (Gillborn 2008, 9). Due to the endemic reproduction of racial inequality in the school system we must look for interventions that work (at least partially) outside of mainstream schooling. Hooks (2000, 110) argues that, 'in order to be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality'. The participants in the study offered damning critiques of the school systems. Whilst these critiques perhaps highlight the need for a radical dismantling of contemporary schooling (a necessary focus in itself), this article considers interventions that are, as hooks puts it, rooted in our concrete reality. Thus, the black supplementary school movement in the UK offers a potential space for this kind of response.

There are over a hundred years of history in the UK of ethnic minority communities starting religious and language schools to preserve their heritage and culture (Issa and Williams 2008). Black supplementary schools mark a departure from that general picture in that the primary reason for their emergence was to counter the racism in the mainstream schools, and therefore they focused on the teaching of mainstream subjects such as Maths and English as well as black history and culture (Stone 1981).

The movement emerged in the mid-1960s once African-Caribbean parents realised that their children were experiencing significant racism in the mainstream schools, best captured in

Bernard Coard's seminal work How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System (1971). The movement is grassroots in nature and includes a range of different types of programmes. Community groups, parents and churches have all been involved in setting up programmes, which have little formal connection to each other (Chevannes and Reeves 1989). The schools would be organised after school or typically on a Saturday when volunteers had time to come together and teach the children (Dove 1993). One of the key successes of the movement has been the black-led environment that creates a 'fraternity of colour' (Reeves and Chevannes 1983, 8). The black-led nature of the supplementary schools means that the students do not have to necessarily deal with the hidden curriculum of Whiteness, which so disadvantages black school children. If mainstream schools are defined by a discourse of underachievement in relation to black students, supplementary schools replace this by expecting overachievement (Andrews 2013). The movement creates an environment where the students are supported, nurtured and expected to succeed. The other important aspect of the 'fraternity of colour' is that it allows space for students to discuss the experiences of racism that they encounter in mainstream schools. Part of the role of the supplementary school movement has been to act as a mechanism to teach young black people how to develop the resilience necessary to navigate white supremacist mainstream schooling (Andrews 2013).

The size of the programmes ranged from a few children in a parent's front room, to over a hundred in a rented mainstream school classroom. Due to the lack of records, it is impossible to estimate the amount of children that have been taught in the movement, but the general trend saw a peak of the movement in the 80s and into the early 90s, when the state was supportive with funding, and a significant decline in size and scope in the last 20 years (Andrews 2013).

The decline in attendance in the movement is due to a number of factors but a key driver has been that the purpose of the supplementary schools was to combat the explicit racism of the mainstream schools. Stone (1981, 97) explains that 'acquiring basic educational skills was the basis of what went on in supplementary schools'. Whilst there remain significant inequalities for black students in mainstream schools, they have become much better at providing basic qualifications and have also adopted some of the techniques of the supplementary school movement, for example with the Extended schools provision (Andrews 2013). This has possibly led to a decline in the community seeing the need for alternative spaces of education, when they can be provided in the school or from the burgeoning private tutor industry. Supplementary school leaders have also complained that there is now a lot of competition for extracurricular time on the weekends with activities such as sport and dance classes, which may be more popular with the young people (Andrews 2013).

In her research on white mothers raising black mixed-race children, Twine (2004, 2010) demonstrates how the mothers help their children develop the resilience, skills and resources required in 'countering everyday racism' (2004, 882). Access to supplementary schools, we believe, can form an important aspect of this support. With Wilson (1987) arguing that spatial isolation represents are threat to the well-being of mixed-race youth, this may be particularly, although not exclusively, useful for those black mixed-race males who are spatially isolated (also see: Twine 2004).

The aspects of supplementary schools that may be most useful for black mixed-race students are those that have been central, but underplayed in the movement. Alongside the teaching of basic mainstream subjects, there has also been a focus on black history and cultural learning (Dove 1993). There has been an attempt to change the nature of the teaching that black children, diversifying the knowledge and understandings that are delivered. Some parents will still drive across cities in order to take their children to receive this kind of learning that is not present in the mainstream schools (Andrews 2013). As Chevannes and Reeves (1989, 147) explain 'it is not possible to supplement what does not exist' and the appeal of the movement may now lie more in providing an education that the mainstream system cannot, rather than offering what it already does. Twine's (2004, 2010) work makes evident that there is a real desire for this kind of learning among black mixed-race children and their parents. Indeed, one parent in that study articulated this desire,

> I sent her to [Saturday School] to educate her. I mean she gets her European culture here [at home] so I would send her to Saturday school, which provides classes which tell her the conditions around being black and black culture and being about Africa and the West Indies and all that (Twine 2004, 891).

Thus, as this parent demonstrates, there is a sense among some families of black mixed-race youth that supplementary schools offer an important space to learn about 'being black', explore history, heritage and culture. Whilst there is a popular assumption that white parents are ill-equipped to raise black mixed-race children accessing supplementary schools is one way in which these parents respond The supplementary school movement has also been celebrated for its ability to provide spaces for pupils to discuss and combat the racism they encounter in mainstream schooling. For the black mixed-race males in this research experiences of racism were seen as an inevitable part of life generally, and education specifically. Twine (2004, 2010) argues that combating racism is a real concern for parents of black mixed-race children and it is possible that the black supplementary school can play an important role in preparing black mixed-race males for navigating a social world that is shaped by race and racism.

Black mixed-race males on the black supplementary school

The advantages

A number of participants in the study spoke enthusiastically about the prospect of a black supplementary or independent school movement. Luke, a UK participant, thought black supplementary education would be of benefit,

> I'd definitely go. Just to see what it's like, you know what I mean. Erm, cos it's probably a thing that you could probably learn a thing or two from and it's not gonna, it's only gonna benefit you in some way. You are gonna learn, whether it's one thing or another thing. Know what I mean? So yeah. So, definitely. I'd definitely go. Sign me up!

Having gone to school in a predominantly white school that rarely reflected his black mixed-race identity, Luke keenly asserted the value in a black-centred supplementary school and argued that this could only be positive for his learning. This rationale is reflected by parents in France Winddance Twine's research (2004, 2010) on white mothers raising black mixed-race children in the UK. We should note that, for Luke, his mixed-race identity does not in any way impact upon his ability to attend a supplementary school. Indeed, as with many of the parents in Twine's (2004) research, a sense that black mixed-race youth are viewed primarily as black, nullifies any such notions. A US participant, Tayo, recalled having seen a promotional video for a black independent school,

> They had young African Americans just like, aw Jheez. I can't even remember like the specifics but it was like these black schools. Like all black students and like black faculty and there was a whole different environment. Basically they were just teaching these kids to love themselves. Same as I was saying but it was like in a school environment with like other kids. They're teaching them like, basically giving these young kids tools, to succeed in the world; in this world.

Tayo, a strong critic of mainstream ethnocentric schooling in the US, showed great admiration for the black independent schools he had seen. He argued that as a black mixed-race male, he was constantly presented with negative representations of black masculinity. As he asserts, blackness is 'something that's under fire constantly', and the school, in teaching 'kids to love themselves', offers respite from this (Twine 2004). Rhamie (2007) argues that black children need to demonstrate resilience in order to succeed in school and society. This resilience is aided by a range of protective factors, and we might understand the love, or positive identity conception, that this school provides as a protective factor. Tayo's comments show a clear awareness of the racialised barriers prevalent in society, thus, much of the school's merit is in its ability to help its pupils navigate 'in this world'. Another US participant, Will, also spoke of

the value in education that recognises the realities of the way race and racism have shaped and continue to shape society,

> I would love it if there was a non-Eurocentric education system here because it would help us to navigate through the actual realities of the world's past and the truth behind what people really have done; not just how the victor won his fight and became prosperous through it. Also I feel like it would greatly help expand in the creative realm of education through all sorts of options to follow African art, African wood carving, African dance and all that. Here currently its music with European descended instruments, European classical music, European ballet, European visual arts and the list goes on.

For Will then, there is a desire for a critical race lens to be introduced to schooling (Twine 2004). Evident in Will's account is his awareness that his schooling did not present him with the truth and 'actual realities' of the shaping of contemporary society. Will also argues that mainstream schooling would benefit a great deal from African artistic influences and thus shows a desire and willingness to challenge white hegemony.

Reggie, a US participant from a predominantly black area of Philadelphia, spoke about the impact a black-focused summer school had had on his childhood,

> …my Mum sent me to a summer camp to get me away from the troubles that happen in summer when no ones in school and the violence is happening. And in that summer camp I learned hundreds and hundreds of years of black history and if I wouldn't have gone to that summer camp then I would never even have known some of the things because they don't teach you that in school really. And I can honestly say that it amazes me now that I'm learning so much about African American history at college and that I learned zero percent of it actually at school, growing up. It would actually be helpful if people learn that at a young age. But learning about African American history at a young age, helped me become more comfortable at a young age, helped me become more comfortable with myself, and that's why I think certain people who don't know much about African American history, are like uneasy about being black; because they don't know the history behind it.

In Reggie's account, there is again evidence of his dissatisfaction with mainstream education. It is also apparent that he, as a black mixed-race male, found great value in black history; this is fundamental to his sense of identity (Twine 2010). He argues that this helped him become 'more comfortable' with himself, this comfort again offers the resilience needed to navigate the world without 'being uneasy about being black'. For Reggie, black supplementary education,

can offer a positive intervention. Reggie's sentiments were echoed by Trent, a UK participant introduced earlier,

> I went to the local theatre group but it was like bang in the middle of one of the poorest…black neighbourhoods, it was predominantly black kids doing theatre. Erm and that was like an amazing thing cos it meant that once a week, subconsciously I was surrounded by black people. And then when I became conscious obviously it was even better but like at the time I was making theatre and got into theatre but I was also around loads of black kids. Like activities like that really helped keep me, keep me two things at the time it kind of like kept me sane, I didn't realise that but it kept me like having fun but also as I started progressing, so started focusing on my A-levels, started doing more activism … it had mums that looked like my mum, cos my mum is dark skinned and I had mums that looked like my mum, I had people talking about things that I was talking about. I had people eating stuff, the same lunch as me, or you know, making the same jokes, or worried about the same thing. Like, it was just always different kind of, and it made me want to learn more as well cos I didn't have to worry about other things about my identity (Trent, UK).

Although Trent did not attend a traditional supplementary school, he did recall his time at a predominantly black theatre group. He argues that the positive experiences he had with this theatre group offer a strong case for black supplementary education. For Trent, because mainstream schooling perpetuates white middle class values, success can become synonymous with feelings of 'losing your blackness'. However, his attendance at a predominantly black environment where he felt a sense of shared culture and fictive kinship helped him to succeed whilst maintaining his sense of blackness. Trent also makes an important point that supplementary education is not just about supplementing mainstream education, but can also be about raising the race consciousness that is necessary for black emancipation. As history attests, and given the growth of the population, black mixed-race males can play an important role in this regard. Trent also touched on a key advantage of being in a black-led environment,

> To have a black head teacher, like to have a black head teacher would have done so much and would continue to do that. Just when I go in to schools now and do my workshops, I have no position of power, I'm not a teacher but I can see the BME student's faces kinda just light up cos they hear I'm at a university or they hear I'm doing this and I know what they're thinking even if they can't put their finger on what they're thinking then. So imagine if there was like a school centred around that? That

would be amazing. I mean even just a fucking class, just one class like, for us. Like yeah, a school, I'm all for that, all for that (Trent, UK).

Trent's characterisation of the black-led school environment is consistent with the aforementioned 'fraternity of colour'. In such an environment, there is a positive environment of overachievement in which black (and black mixed-race) students are expected and encouraged to overachieve. Such an environment is nurtured by the presence of black teachers and authority figures.

The challenges

Despite the strong support of some participants, there were concerns raised by others. The primary concern was that of divisiveness; participants worried that black supplementary education could create racial animosity and tension. Theo (UK) makes this point,

> They sound a bit weird, it's like, its saying, it's getting that kind of divide innit. We don't need a fuckin divide to say like black school, only black kids can go to this black school. I mean yeah, cool, it's interesting to know about black history and all that, but they can teach that in mainstream schools, you know? Erm, I think that's kind of putting on, that's putting black kids, saying I go to black school and then if I go to mainstream school they don't teach what they teach us at my black school, it's that, I don't really agree with that.

Black supplementary schools can offer a half-way house between the fully independent black school that Theo fears and the Eurocentric mainstream that alienates him. Black supplementary schools have typically worked alongside the mainstream, rather than in direct opposition to them. Even the more critical programmes, which have featured teachings including Marxism-Leninism have taken state funding when on offer (Andrews 2013). Programmes have also often relied on in kind support from the state in terms of premises and resources, with many being based in mainstream school classrooms (Best 1990). Prior to the community cohesion agenda, which frowned upon targeted funding to ethnic minority groups, progressive local authorities have reached out to the movement with Bernard Wiltshire, the deputy head of the Inner London Education Authority in 1987, declaring that 'supplementary school will have a permanent structured place in London's educational system' (Andrews 2013, 45). Supplementary schools therefore do not necessarily offer a challenge to mainstream schooling and the main purpose of the movement has been to support the success of black children in the school system.

Another UK participant, Anton, raised concerns about the divisiveness of black-centred education,

> …it would be very helpful but at the same time, in today's society it could be perceived as something that's divisive. I think what would be better is to integrate a black curriculum in like a European school cos I think even though I'd love that sort of thing to happen, I think a lot of people won't understand it and, yeah. I think that's, that's how it'd go down I think. It'd be considered a thing of division, in this day and age.

One of the key challenges faced by black activists and educators who have tried to transform the mainstream school system is the significant barriers that exist to change. No matter how much funding or attention is given to the issue of race equality in schooling, there is a continued reproduction of the achievement gap in relation to black students (Gillborn 2008). The emergence of the supplementary school movement was due to the failure of the schools to teach young people the basics but there is a broader question of the narrowness of the curriculum and teaching that is being provided. Even if we accept the mainstream schools are making a good faith effort to be inclusive, the long-standing existence of supplementary schools for a variety of ethnic minority groups demonstrates the need for programmes outside the mainstream. The reality is that integrating a black curriculum into the mainstream school system is unlikely to happen in little more than a piecemeal fashion. If it is agreed that an alternative black curriculum is necessary, then it will have to be developed in black led spaces such as the supplementary school movement. Where participants saw the need for a black education there was still some scepticism over whether black communities would support the endeavour. For example, Trent explained,

> There are pragmatic issues around like how it would work and how it would appear and what kind of black parents would send their kids to black schools because the problem obviously is that a lot of black parents have this internalised racism. You know, would they see a black school equating to success? Also, would you then just get the parents, maybe like my mum, who are socially aware and consciously aware and not, you wouldn't get the black mums in the council estates that haven't had university education so it's hard like that but the concept itself is like beautiful and it would be amazing.

Although he is committed to the idea, Trent questions how effective it would be due to the nature of racism and the impact this has had on the community. One of the important benefits of the grassroots nature of the supplementary school is that they emerge from and are embedded within local communities. This means that they are not seen as something outside of the communities in which they reside and parent engagement has been a key feature of the movement. Historically, many of the programmes have been run by parents and attempt to share information and resources with the parents who bring their children to the sessions

(Andrews 2013). Parent participation has also declined as the student numbers have dropped off but in terms of reshaping supplementary schools a much more active engagement with adults in the community who may not have been exposed to critical ideas of race, racism and ethnicity would be an excellent avenue to develop. Embracing a fuller understanding and exploration of education can also mean expanding the idea of supplementary education across the life course.

Reece (UK) raised the important issue of how the wider society values the black education that could be developed, 'I think an Afrocentric school would be good but I think you're not going to an Afrocentric university so is it going to be a problem afterwards?' Critiques of black education such as these have been common. Making a similar argument, Stone (1981, 246) suggested that, by not focusing on the mainstream schooling that they need for later life, 'left-wing teachers have done more harm to black children'. However, central in the argument for black education is that it helps the students to succeed within mainstream subjects by not alienating them from the school environment (Andrews 2014a). This is evident in Trent's account earlier as he talks about the value in his black theatre group. Particularly within the supplementary school movement, the focus has been on using the black history and cultural studies as a way to improve the students' performance in mainstream subjects. There is a false binary in the idea that it is either mainstream or black education, the two can coexist. Reece actually discusses the synergies between the two,

> I feel like an Afrocentric school, kind of certain subjects it would come to fruition like I guess English you might, what would be nice is you might focus on kind of African, or West Indian or African American texts, and that would be cool. History you'd do the same. I don't know citizenship, geography, all these things and they're all cool. If it came down to it like you might learn about kind of science and maths and you might use black examples, it'd be the same, it'd be the same thing.

Despite the reservations raised by participants, there were, as discussed earlier, still those who felt black supplementary education would be advantageous. Anton (UK) makes this point,

> I think they're a very good idea cos, again, not all kids are the same, even from black backgrounds. There's still like diversity and differences, some of them working class and some of them middle class and so maybe in some cases people might feel like they wouldn't attend anyway just because they wouldn't really see school or anything like that as a thing to do, they'd rather go out on the street or something. At the same time, for people like me, from my upbringing or whatever, and for the select few that will go there it's a help and then there's people like me that would have went there that didn't have the opportunity, that didn't get help. So I think it'd be a very good thing, so,

yeah. I don't think it'd be perfect cos it's not like the be all and end all but it's like, it's there and it's still a help.

The black supplementary school emerges then, not as an imperative, but as an option; an option that would be exercised by a number of the black mixed-race males in the current study. From the perspective of the black mixed-race male population however, whilst some of the values in the current model have been discussed, it is conceivable that greater recognition of mixedness would be required if the schools are to fully fulfil their roles.

Redefining blackness in the black supplementary school

As has been demonstrated, the centrality of blackness to the black mixed-race population means that the black supplementary school movement can play a role for this population. Shared barriers to achievement in mainstream schooling, a strong sense of black pride and a sense that black mixed-race men are read as black, speak to the efficacy of this intervention. Moreover, given that, by design, mainstream schooling maintains and perpetuates race and class inequalities (Leonardo 2009), positive interventions therefore are most likely to come from grassroots organisation.

Given the growth of the black mixed-race population, it is imperative that blackness is reconceptualised to recognise the growing diversity and heterogeneity of the black population. Indeed, whilst blackness was fundamental to participant's identities, mixedness was also a constitutive identity. This is evident in Twine's (2004) research when, although recognising that her black mixed-race daughter will be racialised as black, a white mother sends her daughter to a black supplementary school. Despite her mother telling her that others will see her as black, the daughter, whilst accepting this, still affirms a mixed-race identification. Blackness and mixedness, then, are not incompatible but, for many, concomitant. In order to sufficiently accommodate the black mixed-race population then, black supplementary education must adapt.

A number of participants – whilst aligning themselves with black peers and black political struggles – highlighted experiences that were particular to their mixedness. These challenges included; racism from white peers specifically predicated on their mixedness and, although less frequent and generally considered to be less serious, racial prejudice from black peers. Although the absence of blackness in the curriculum and the teaching force was cited as a challenge by the majority of participants, there were participants who argued that beyond this there remained an even greater absence of black mixedness (Joseph-Salisbury 2016; Tikly et al. 2004; Williams 2011). A general lack of awareness of what it means to be black mixed-race meant that further challenges were faced. For instance, participants reported that peers were shocked when their white parent arrived at parents evening (also see: Dalmage 2000).

Jacob, a participant in a previous research project (Joseph-Salisbury 2013), raised concerns about his inclusion in a supplementary education project targeting black Caribbean boys. Although ultimately concluding that the project was 'a good thing… because it pushed me that little bit further', he did have reservations that the project did little to recognise mixedness.

> …if my child was going to do that project, or was nominated to go through that project, I would want to know what the fundamentals of that project are, who is it targeting? If it's only targeting Afro-Caribbean children I would say to whoever is leading it 'my child is mixed-race, what would you intend to do to represent them within this project?' because that's important, they're not just Caribbean. It's important, self-identity is important.

For Jacob the problem is not with his (or his son's) inclusion in a project targeting black Caribbean boys – of course, this is something he identifies with – but with that project's failure to recognise mixed identities within blackness.

In adopting a more expansive definition of blackness, supplementary schools can play a key role in making visible the unique aspects of what it means to be black mixed-race. By providing a curriculum that recognises black mixedness within blackness, black mixed-race males can see themselves more fully represented (Tikly et al. 2004). Discussions of famous black mixed-race historical figures can create a safe space for pupils at the supplementary school to explore the commonalities and differences in their identities. Perhaps this safe space, without proscribing identities, can create a greater sense of understanding and solidarity between black monoracial and black mixed-race pupils, and this can help to reduce racial prejudice. Historical figures like Mary Seacole, Malcolm X, Bob Marley, WEB Du Bois and Huey P. Newton, can help to facilitate such discussions. One participant in the current study remarked that he felt 'push back' from his black peers due to the historical advantages attributed to the black mixed population. Again, open and frank discussions about these issues – within a curriculum that highlights the role of black mixed-race individuals in the struggle for black liberation – can help individuals move beyond these tensions, and also have the specific challenges that black males (of two black parents) face fully recognised.

It is important to note that the growth of the mixed population is not the only factor that necessitates a more expansive definition of blackness. Harris and Khanna (2010), in their comparative study of a black mixed-race sample and a black middle class sample, found that there was greater acceptance for the black mixed-race population than for the middle class blacks. This suggests that class, more than phenotype, can impact upon perceptions of authentic blackness. Moreover, Harris and Khanna (2010) argue that there is a narrowly defined mythical norm of blackness used by black populations to measure each other's racial

authenticity (also see: Tate 2005). Hill Collins (2004) concurs, arguing that the common representation of black males as those from poor urban areas has shaped the way blackness is understood. This is a type of authenticity seen in both political and cultural representations of blackness (Andrews 2014b). The realities of the heterogeneity of blackness mean that very few individuals meet the criteria.

The challenge for the supplementary school then, is not only to include the black mixed-race population, but to jettison the mythical norm of blackness and work towards a reconceptualised definition of blackness that recognises diversity in gender, class, sexuality, phenotype, ancestral heritage and other intersecting identities and influences. The importance of this was emphasised by participants in the current study who argued that, rather than their mixed heritage, it was oftentimes ancestral heritage that was salient and fragmented their black peer groups. Anton's (UK) comments are demonstrative of this; 'I was never called a mixed-race this or a hybrid that or something. The only time I've had like, a different kind of racism is when I've met Africans'. In the UK, participants reported tensions between African and Caribbean students, and in the US participants reported tensions between African and African-American students. In both contexts, mixedness was not salient. For the sake of more cohesive black unity, the supplementary school should also seek to play a role in discussing, understanding and embracing these differences.

Conclusion

This article has argued that blackness remains fundamentally important to the way that black mixed-race males understand their identities. A strong sense of double consciousness means black mixed-race males are acutely aware of the anti-blackness that shapes many of their experiences. Indeed, as far as the white gaze is concerned, many felt that their experiences were still shaped by a persistent black–white racial dichotomy that saw them identified as black. A strong sense of black pride, and a belief in a shared culture, shared history and shared interests, means that black mixed-race males align themselves closely with monoracial black male peers.

The black mixed-race males in the current study and others (Tikly et al. 2004; Williams 2011) share many of the same barriers in schooling as their black peers, and raise many similar criticisms. The article therefore makes the case that black supplementary schools can be of great benefit to black mixed-race males, this was supported by the insights of several participants. Nevertheless, there were participants who raised concerns about black supplementary schools, arguing that they may be seen to be divisive and disadvantage the students in their mainstream education. As the article argues however, such concerns belie the true nature of the supplementary school movement. The supplementary school can

support students to develop the skills needed for their success in mainstream schooling. This can be done in ways that upholds the importance of black culture and identity.

The reality remains that the school systems in the US and the UK are structurally racist. They continue to produce racial inequalities and negative experiences for black and mixed-race students we must recognise that this is not by accident but design. Whilst a strong focus should remain on challenging and transforming mainstream schooling, this article contends that supplementary education offers a grassroots and realisable intervention, and importantly, that this is extendable to the black mixed-race male population. Not all students will want to attend supplementary schools, nor should they, but as the article shows, for some this represents a very positive addition to their mainstream schooling.

The structural nature of the inequalities that are reproduced in the school system mean that black supplementary schools will not by themselves resolve the problem of racism. However, by returning to a grassroots and community-based nature they can be a source for political education and mobilisation. Black mixed-race populations have always been a part of those movements, and with changing demographics this is ever more the case. Given the way that the black mixed-race males understand their identity, it will be important for black supplementary schools to recognise mixedness in their work. This is essential to avoid the erasure of important aspects of black mixed-race male identities and experiences. However, as the article demonstrates, this would not require too much change to the approaches already in place. For the future of black political struggle, it will be important that a sense of unity is nurtured between black and black mixed-race groups, and the supplementary school can play a role in this.

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