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Resisting whiteness: Anti-racist leadership and professional learning in majority white senior leadership teams in English schools

Claire Stewart-Hall[1] | **Penny Rabiger**[2] | **Vini Lander**[1] | **Viv Grant**[2]

[1]Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

[2]Integrity Coaching Ltd, London, UK

Correspondence

Claire Stewart-Hall, Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK.
Email: c.stewart-hall2565@student.leedsbeckett.ac.uk

Abstract

Many Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) are engaging in professional development to nurture explicitly anti-racist practice. Teachers' knowledge gaps about racism, its traumatic, lasting impact and how racism is generated through schooling persist within a cloak of silence. This small-scale study explores interview data from senior leaders in English schools, questioning legacies of colour-evasion and breaking silences to understand the role 'race' plays in their schools, appearing exigent due to Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements and the inescapable reality of racism seen in George Floyd's horrific murder. Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) as theoretical tools, we explore negotiations and challenges of leading anti-racist work in systems favouring whiteness as the norm. Findings show senior leaders undertaking the Anti-Racist School Award (ARSA) and/or Race, Identity and School Leadership (RISL) programme are novice 'race' practitioners, despite their seniority, wrestling to recognise whiteness and to connect their own 'race'(d) identities to role-enactment and policy. They must negotiate and make the case for anti-racist leadership to colleagues trained not to notice, and mitigate wider external systems operationalising whiteness, blocking the development of anti-racist practice. We examine resistances to anti-racist work in English school systems that (re)centre whiteness.

KEYWORDS
anti-racism, Critical Race Theory, Critical whiteness Studies, leadership, schools, whiteness

INTRODUCTION

The backdrop of Covid-19, exposing the systemic inequitable health outcomes, together with international responses to the murder of George Floyd has encouraged some people racialised as white to witness structural racial inequity impacting on People of Colour (PoC). Several organisations have created programmes of support to explore how structural racism is enacted *within* schools, supporting leaders to recognise complicity and adapt. This paper focuses on the Anti-Racist School Award (ARSA) and the Race, Identity and School Leadership (RISL) programme, exploring responses, negotiations and challenges of undertaking these programmes whilst working in school systems in England.

Pivotal concepts such as whiteness, white supremacy and 'race' are central to discourse about racism. Rather than embrace anti-racist work, the Department for Education (DfE) actively excludes racial literacy education from Initial Teacher Education (ITE) by policing teachers with new guidance (DfE, 2022). The DfE warns against engaging with these concepts or external organisations promoting them, deemed to be 'political' and contrary to rules around teacher impartiality. This systematic downgrading as a policy concern (Gillborn et al., 2016; Smith, 2021) was reinforced in The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (2021), positioning institutional racism as a past concern in the UK despite evidence to the contrary.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CONCEPTUALISATIONS

The RISL programme is based on the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991, 1995) using theories of wholeness (Grant, 2014) and liberatory, progressive education (Freire & Ramos, 1970) that favour models of critical and creative reflection for adult learners where self-reflection leads to personal transformations. Moorosi (2021) suggests leaders are encouraged to approach school leadership as race-neutral leaders, standards emphasising 'race' as creating 'difference rather than inequality' (p. 644). The course interrupts current frames of reference through introducing theoretical material and think-pieces (on concepts such as, colour-blindness and educational policy history) whilst providing a reflective space for personal enquiry and group discourse to challenge assumptions, interpretations, and beliefs to expand points of view (Mezirow, 1991, 1995). Learning is bridged to context (Bush et al., 2007) by combining personal enquiry with participatory social learning (with peers) as key drivers to develop confidence to lead equity in individual school contexts (Poekert et al., 2020). Providing opportunities for educators to engage in structured dialogue about equity has been found to impact inclusive practice in school leadership (Jacobs et al., 2014); furthermore, Kohli (2019) and Matias and Mackey (2015) identify critical reflection as a pivotal method of increasing cognisance of race identity and developing white educators' confidence to interrupt racism through their practice.

The ARSA uses liberal and technological models of learning, culminating in a competency framework rating success at three graduating levels (bronze, silver and gold). Criteria are clearly defined and benchmarked to encourage competence, fixing a desired outcome. The criteria-based framework covers six areas but how participants meet the standards is open to interpretation and dependent on context, budget and role. The assessment framework is

shared ahead and participants are offered a diagnostic tool to self-assess their development. One to one coaching forms a facilitative, guided space for participants to reflect on their context and plan their strategy for change. Coaching, in this context, refers to Starr's (2016) definition of 'a series of influencing conversations' (p. 7) which has been found to positively impact on leadership development (Simkins et al., 2006).

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) funded and approved by schools is legitimised if it influences student achievement, professional career development or increases staff capacity (Poekert et al., 2020) thus in times of funding scarcity,[1] programmes that sit outside of the wider accountability system requirements (such as the Ofsted framework) become de-legitimised, resisted or implemented inconsistently. The current context of the wider accountability system assessing school improvement (such as the Ofsted) does not provide leaders with encouragement, evaluative markers or incentives to change with regards anything which lies outside of the criteria set by it.

CONTEXT

Hand-in-hand with long-established evidence of racial discrimination and structural racism in English schools, is government-sponsored resistance to its existence seen in ratios of Black children excluded from English schools (Demie, 2021); lack of Black and Global Majority (BGM) teacher recruitment (Worth et al., 2022); lower attainment of BGM children (Gillborn et al., 2016) and horrific safeguarding failures such as the Child Q case (Gamble & McCullum, 2022). Some teachers and leaders have sought to distance themselves from racist complicity by engaging in social justice education (Applebaum, 2013) and wanting to 'do something' to address this "racial blank spot" (Anzaldúa, 1990 in Rains, 1999, p. 157). Our project gathered data on responses to and contextual experiences of participants undertaking two different anti-racist programmes that we delivered online in English schools.

DEFINITIONS

We understand 'race' (Gilroy, 1987) as a social construction continually re-imagined, socially, politically and culturally, through and by social relations and political discourses (Du Bois, 1903/Du Bois, 2019) refracted through a 'dominant white frame' (Feagin & Elias, 2013, p.231). Despite evidence showing 'race' has no biological reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), its contribution to continued racism and racialisation necessitate exploring how constructions of 'race' continue to shape all lives (Omi & Winant, 1994). However, we also acknowledge Brah's (1996) conceptualised difference framework where identities are 'culturally constructed' (p.117), intersecting and multi-dimensional. The term 'white', therefore, is used not to refer to white individuals, rather 'whiteness' and 'white supremacy' acknowledge the structural (re)production of racism by enacted systems and processes.

CONTEXT AND ENGLISH SCHOOL WORKFORCE

Knowledge gaps and avoidance of racism, its traumatic and lasting impact on children, staff and families, and how this is generated through schooling have persisted for decades (Mirza, 2022). The role of 'race' and racism is omitted, for instance, from the Teacher Standards in England (DfE, 2021b) and limited learning time is allocated to 'race' within ITE curricula, which remains absent from National Professional Qualifications. As such, racism causes harm but still lacks validation in safeguarding training in England. An "absent presence"

of 'race' (Apple, 1999) from teacher training curricula leaves professionals ignorant of the damaging effects of racism on the lived experiences of racially 'minoritised'[2] students and staff. As a result, legacies of colour-evasion (Annamma et al., 2013) and assimilation persist in schools. Racial literacy is de-prioritised and considered solvable through racial diversity in the English school workforce. In England's state schools, 15% of teachers are categorised into ethnic minority groups (DfE, 2020). With white minority ethnicities removed, it is closer to 11%, despite ethnicity categories of 'BAME' being 22% of the working population in England in 2011 (Tereshchenko & Mills, 2020). 86% of schools in England have all-white senior teams (Worth et al., 2022). When discounting white minorities from School Workforce Statistics 2020 (DfE, 2021a), analysis shows 4% of Headteachers are Black and/or Brown, 6% of Deputies and 8% of Assistant Headteachers. There are institutional and safeguarding risks presented by majoritised teams ill-equipped and ignorant of the role 'race' plays in schooling. It is critical this workforce becomes 'race' cognisant to safeguard children and staff, and disrupt and mitigate effects of racism. The RISL and ARSA programmes provide vehicles to increase awareness of the impact 'race', racialisation and racism have in English schools.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Built on foundational understandings in African American Studies and traditions (Du Bois, 1903/Du Bois, 2019), Critical Race Theory (CRT) was developed as a framework for understanding racialised legislative structures in society. Developed in the 1960s by Black legal scholars, CRT rejects civil rights gains as proof of a post-racial society (Bell, 1980), seeking to name realities of white supremacy by prioritising voices of PoC, seeing racism as a permanent feature of how society is built and functions. Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) seminal work identifies education as a structural pillar underpinning white supremacy through curriculum, staffing and colonial bodies of knowledge. In England, CRT was developed by scholars seeking to dismantle structural racism through educational policy, as opposed to legislation, being used to interrogate patterns of disproportionate permanent exclusions of Black children; segregated educational pathways along racialised lines; inequalities in attainment; inequitable higher education access; and missing racial literacy in teacher education (Gillborn, 2005; Lander, 2011; Warmington, 2020; Youdell, 2000).

Equal opportunity measures in laws only tackle extreme forms of racism, whereas CRT identifies a socially constructed, business-as-usual racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000), visible and distressing to PoC daily yet seemingly invisible to those racialised as white (Fanon, 1967). CRT challenges neutrality, exploring how racism manifests, benefitting dominant-group interest, socially and economically.

Building on this, Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) acknowledges majoritised white racial identities as part of the racism equation, putting whiteness under scrutiny. For researchers, it ensures due attention is given to structures serving white supremacy, enabling an interrogation of systems (re)producing racism. First-wave white 'race' identity studies (1980s-2000) documented white teachers' evasion of 'race' discourse whilst second-wave studies (2000–2020) began exploring researcher reflexivity, positionality and complexities of colour-evasive identities (Jupp et al., 2016). CWS uses a social constructionist model exploring white racialisation, and aims to disrupt 'race' essentialism. Whiteness is not about the study of white-skinned people but a means of understanding macro-systems underpinning racialised power structures advantaging whites (Leonardo, 2004). Second-wave 'race' identity studies posit justice is evaded if whiteness is not brought in explicitly to the ways white people contribute to structures of power (Hunter & Westhuizen, 2022). White identities can be co-opted and operationalised to contribute to systemic power structures in education, providing a racialised infrastructure maintaining white supremacy (Picower & Kohli, 2017).

Whiteness is given agency by avoidance and innocence of its benefits (Leonardo, 2004). Interrogating whiteness helps develop anti-racist pedagogy by exploring how whiteness assists and upholds institutional and structural racism. The main goal of CWS is to "unveil the rhetorical, political, cultural, and social mechanisms through which 'whiteness' is both invented and used to mask its power and privilege" (Giroux, 1997, p. 102). Our research participants' understanding of their racial identities is therefore of central interest. White people have choices about investing in whiteness (Leonardo, 2009) and can opt to explore this third space.

Used in combination, CRT and CWS enable a critical praxis to counter racism whilst spotlighting whiteness, interrupting its invisibility, offering conceptual models to unpick the effects of whiteness in schools.

'RACE' IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Research exploring 'race' identity development work, such as Helms' (1990) and Tatum's (1997) frameworks, provides tools to build anti-racist and cognisant racial identities. People racialised as white can know themselves as an ally, which is a fixed construct (Boucher, 2016), however, they will struggle to move past embodied feelings of guilt and disgust, accept the concept of white complicity (Matias & Zembylas, 2014; Tatum, 1997) or separate culpability from liability (Applebaum, 2013). The third space requires people racialised as white to engage in non-white discourses (Leonardo, 2009, p. 186) such as CRT, including exploring motivations for reward for racial justice work (Bell, 1992). This engagement must be an iterative struggle against complicity (Utt & Tochluk, 2020, p. 128), whilst racial identity development demands a 'deep deliberative search' to understand one's racialised background (Milner, 2003, p. 207).

THE ANTI-RACISM PROGRAMMES

Race, identity and school leadership

This programme was designed and written by Viv Grant, former Headteacher and founder of Integrity Coaching, and develops race cognisance through workshops and coaching. Structured into eight 3-h sessions; an introductory session; three 'race' and pedagogy workshops, participants are asked to engage in race-identity work; three reflective inquiry sessions, and an evaluation session. It is delivered by qualified coaches and educators.

The anti-racist school award

Written by Professor Vini Lander, of the Centre for Race, Education and Decoloniality at Leeds Beckett University (LBU), the research-informed award uses a criteria-based model focusing on evidencing anti-racist practice. A diagnostic tool outlines a staged approach to meeting criteria at different levels. It includes coaching sessions with submission of evidence for the award in year two. Live webinars and an online group for discussion, support those undertaking the award. The programme is delivered by senior educators and doctoral researchers with extensive experience in developing anti-racist practice.

THE STUDY

Data was gathered from one-hour semi-structured conversations with seven school leaders undertaking the programmes (Table 1). This small-scale study deployed constructivist

TABLE 1 Research participants

Participants[a]	Gender	Identified racialisation	School phase	RISL/ ARSA	Role	Location
Sarah	Woman	White British	Primary	Both	Headteacher	SW England
Dharini	Woman	SE Asian and E Asian British	Secondary	Both	Deputy Headteacher	SW England
Luke	Man	White British	Primary	RISL	Assistant Headteacher	SW England
Sabrina	Woman	Black British	Special	ARSA	Assistant Headteacher	London
Andrea	Woman	"Any other/mixed"[b]	Primary	RISL	Assistant Headteacher	SE England
Sian	Woman	White British	Primary	ARSA	Headteacher	London
Catherine	Woman	White British	Selective Secondary	RISL	Headteacher	SW England

[a]Names of the participants are pseudonyms.

[b]Participant's own words.

principles to explore subjective experiences of participants (Bryman, 2004), echoing frameworks offered by CRT. The theoretical frameworks and methodology supported the investigation of the following research questions:

How do senior leaders:

- Position themselves with respect to 'race' and racism in education?
- Negotiate their racialised identities amidst the anti-racist transformations they seek to establish within their institutions?

And:

- What are the personal and professional changes/compromises or hegemonic tools of resistance used to maintain and/or disrupt whiteness?

Ethical consent was gained from LBU and we adhered to BERA Ethical Guidelines (2018). We acknowledge how difference is constructed relationally to specific power dynamics, never politically neutral (Gunaratnam, 2003). Our positionality as some interviewers were white researchers, leading on both programmes, meant there was an established level of rapport with participants, which facilitated a safe and insider collegiate environment to explore learning, and helped counteract feelings of surveillance (Yoon, 2012). Interviewers used opportunities to address emotional impact throughout the process and afterwards (Picower, 2009). The team was mindful of the white racialised identities of interviewers in analysis, and were able to gather data on this directly by inviting reflexive feedback from participants during interviews.

THE INTERVIEWS

Contact was made via the programmes. Consent was given for qualitative semi-structured conversations lasting 45–60 min which were used to capture how participants interpreted experiences. Participants agreed data would be anonymised. The interview schedule consisted of 11 questions exploring participants' understanding of whiteness, the programme(s), and

'race' identities. Questions were shared prior to interviews, conversations were via video calls and were recorded and transcribed.

Participants were given 48 h to withdraw following receipt of transcripts, which were sent for respondent validation and analysed to identify themes using grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), inductive and deductive analysis, and transitions between the two. We conducted three analytical read-throughs and codings. The first deployed open coding to identify emerging critical broad themes. Secondly, axial coding was used to find where interview participants may say the same things in different ways. Finally, we used selective analysis to identify the most relevant themes to the research questions.

FINDINGS

Clear what compelled them towards anti-racist practice, participants expressed their commitments through their actions which served to increase their racial literacy, and made them question wider influences of whiteness on policy. We focused on how school leaders developed cognisance of 'race' and recognised and understood whiteness; addressed gaps in learning; and managed resistance to anti-racist work.

Recognising whiteness: Positioning oneself in relation to 'race' and racism

Participants explored how they positioned themselves with respect to 'race' and racism in schools which was understood as being hidden. Several participants described the moment they experienced emotional disgust towards systemic racism, understanding of white supremacy, and feeling motivated to 'do something' which might be interpreted as a rejection or distancing from disgust (Matias & Zembylas, 2014) or from complicity (Applebaum, 2013). Conditions as a result of COVID-19, and the visual document of the brutal racist police murder of George Floyd, interrupted white ignorance (Mills, 1997) making racism undeniable and unavoidable. Sian, a white Headteacher, reflects:

> … the learning that came for me as a result of that horrible incident was that it's not okay just to be 'not racist'. And as educators, I believe … that people come into education, 'not racist', intentionally. However, that's not enough.

The personal awakening was embodied, violent and visceral (Matias & Zembylas, 2014):

> And to suddenly realise that actually I wasn't even seeing the issue properly was a massive blow to me, a massive punch in the face…

As a white woman leader, Sian was normally able to ignore racism, evading 'seeing the issue properly.' The international response acted as a catalyst 'to see' reality anew and choose to act (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxi).

Dharini described 'seeing' her own 'minoritised' racial identity from childhood, but recent experiences became both personal and professional, and involved taking a stand:

> …we felt very strongly about having a really strong response to the murder of George Floyd…I wrote a letter with one of the Assistant Headteachers, and we asked the Head if we could write a letter to the students voicing our upset, and our disappointment and our anger …And in that letter, we made commitments

> about the work that we would do. And so once we had written that down, we knew that we had to make that happen.

Both participants experienced George Floyd's murder as impetus to communicate a sense of responsibility to act in their professional capacity as educators and to move on a perceived continuum of 'racist, 'not racist', anti-racist' (Lentin, 2018). This demonstrated their desire to shift positionality from acceptance of the status quo, which came into view for Sian, whilst Dharini felt given 'permission' to act on her disgust to distance the school, and herself, from racism.

Addressing gaps: Negotiating racialised identities and anti-racist transformations

Increasing knowledge was important for participants to negotiate their racialised identities amid anti-racist transformations they sought to establish. They described journeys of 'knowing' as initiated and sought rather than already integrated by schooling or professional training.

Developing her own racial literacy and understanding white privilege helped Catherine, a white Headteacher, recognise structural racism as *being* the school structure:

> …the understanding of how institutionalised it is…racism pervades education, doesn't it?…Who's making the policies, who decides what we're going to be teaching, and it's just understanding that racism is within all of that…also understanding it's the white privilege that, for me, particularly has been a really powerful shift.

Luke, an Assistant Headteacher racialised as white, noted how damaging a lack of professional learning in racial literacy is:

> …gaps in adult education…what damage is it doing by its assumptions? And by people with good intentions…But the lack of understanding about the difference between zero-tolerance to racism and being anti-racist. So I think there's a huge void in an understanding of what anti-racist means, and whose duty is to stand up to that, or to… address that.

Dharini saw opportunity to address gaps:

> One of the things that is now part of, embedded in, our induction programme for all staff is our work on anti-racism, on unconscious bias, …and we didn't used to do that…there's quite a lot of work that new staff need to undertake to understand the ethos and our journey towards being an anti-racist organisation.

Knowledge gaps are regarded by participants as incidental rather than an integral part of an ideological, systemic and dynamic, *wilful* white ignorance (Bain, 2018; Mills, 2007). This is maintained through socialisation to see the world in ways which are validated by 'white epistemic authority' (Mills, 1997, p.18). CWS underlines the deliberate, intentional process required to combat white supremacy, assumed by Luke as omission, when, far from being accidental, racial oppression is a highly organised, strategically deployed means of possessing resources that is deliberately directed at people of colour (Feagin & Elias, 2013).

Sabrina, a Black Assistant Headteacher, reflects on her own socialisation:

> I just feel a bit embarrassed I'm learning some of these things now as an adult. Why wasn't I taught them? Why didn't I learn them before? And I suppose it's…

> 'oh…is it their role? Was it their role? Was it the school's role?' …a lot of those questions I think, but only recently.

As a Black senior leader, Sabrina mourned her race-neutral education and feels shame, hoodwinked by whiteness, and was trying to place responsibility for missing 'learning'. She showed a reliance on structures, such as her own schooling, to help her to understand racism rather than recognise its ideological aim to generate ignorance. This 'encounter' provoked a 'race' status shift as Sabrina questioned majority culture (Tatum, 1997) and her own education, thereby indicating the role of schooling in promoting race ignorance (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Now moving out of pretended race neutrality and seeing not just difference, but inequality, Sian believes everyone needs to know:

> The work that we've been engaged in is about firstly, the kind of personal journey of understanding about 'race', equity, the education system, disparity bias …we've been working on and really trying to open up as a community and then spreading that work wider.

Sian reflected on her majority-white leadership team:

> I thought, 'Oh, my God, everybody else is the same. Everybody who I'm working with is saying the same things as me. This is my job. I've got to do this now'. And so we started work on trying to put something together around an anti-racism strategy, but really recognising the fact that as this school is essentially led by white women, how would we even know if we were even on the right track?

Sian notices the impact of whiteness and the risks of a racially ignorant majoritised workforce on vision and interpretation. Accountability to the ARSA gives the opportunity for Sian to demonstrate and feel legitimised in her new knowledge 'acquisition' and a move on beyond novice by 'becoming' (Scanlan, 2010). She seeks to use her new knowledge to lead others which aids her journey to *becoming* antiracist (MacManimon & Casey, 2018). Despite questioning whether she is 'on the right track', the mechanism of formal CPD and professional learning opportunity means she was able to confidently audit, develop professionalism and create her own identity in undertaking anti-racist work (Mockler, 2013). Sian chose to notice her and others' whiteness, realising she must 'struggle against complicity' (Utt & Tochluk, 2020, p.128) and explore the 'third space' without having to call on PoC to 'unveil whiteness' (Giroux, 1997, p. 102) for her.

Anti-racist transformations involved participants' realisation that racism happens by omission, through their race neutrality, and led them to prioritise embedding anti-racism into aspects of their organisations. Such gaps were reframed as opportunities for racism to fester. Their responses demonstrated re-negotiated racialised identities within such systems, by being the bridger-of-gaps (Tatum, 1997).

(Re)encountering whiteness: Personal and professional tools of resistance

As leaders in schools, coming to terms with policy that is, by outcome, racist, creates tensions (Gillborn, 2008). Reflecting on systemic racism, participants noticed their own complicity from positions of colour-blind avoidance and ignorance. White Headteacher, Sian, identified:

> Recognising that literally every one of us is full of bias. And, we're not recognising it, and then the understanding that…our approach is the issue… I've just accepted that, for example, the disparity in the ethnicities of the pupils who

> get sent to those schools[3] and come through the behaviour system. I've just accepted that and then being somebody who has claimed myself to be here for the equity for all – or 'equality for all' as I would have called it previously – and actually I was part of that issue… I'm as much of the problem as everyone else.

Another white Headteacher, Catherine, agreed, recognising:

> My whiteness has shown up in my leadership by not questioning, really…that bit of the [RISL] course where we looked at the policies and the framework of education, and particularly thinking about the Prevent agenda[4] …in understanding whiteness, and how institutionalised all of this is …I haven't questioned – I've just taken it.

Interrupting frames of reference led to transformation for Catherine. Exploring race' identity using Helms' (1990) and Tatum's (1997) frameworks increased racial awareness of both Headteachers, racialised as white, realised there were 'many ways to be white' (Kincheloe et al., 2000, p. 8) in their roles as critical apparatus to sustain or interrupt structural racism (Ahmed, 2012). They noticed the dichotomous contradictions presented by their roles in accepting structural racism whilst claiming 'equality for all'.

Sabrina noted she embodied a 'representation of Blackness' in a majority-white system (Puwar, 2004) and through this process has 'designated visibility' (Rains, 1999, p. 153) or is 'hyper-visible' when required (Lander & Santoro, 2017, p. 1013).

> I'm very aware that I am the representation of Blackness for people. I remember…finding it quite burdensome because it was always, 'Oh watch your T's', or 'watch this', you know, 'say this'. 'Think twice about it if you…' I don't know, if I went out on the weekend, I wouldn't say that because then I'm, you know…I felt that very much at that time, in that space, more than any other time, actually. But I do feel it a little bit now. So in our school, we have a senior leadership team that is all white, except for me.

Unlike her white counterparts, Sabrina's racialised status in the whiteness of her team had already been handled and evaded. She is vigilant of rejection, aware of perceptions of the dominant white group, minimising parts of her identity to avoid disturbing whiteness. Hers is not a deliberative search as she bears a 'burden' of representation for whiteness around her (Rains, 1999). For Sabrina, the transformations in frames of reference that her majoritised white team experience may demand more negotiations around perceptions of her Blackness.

Dharini's experience as a PoC Deputy Headteacher on a majority-white leadership team echoes 'hyper-visibility' (Lander & Santoro, 2017):

> In the past, I've been accused of having a chip on my shoulder. And I worry that people might think that sometimes. I don't experience it in my current setting, but certainly in my previous settings, that has been the case…I always worry that, you know, that might happen.

Both lack of representation and leaders' assumption of race neutrality of staff racialised as white demands Black and Brown teachers assimilate and 'represent Blackness' in ways 'acceptable and palatable' through embodiment. Risking disgust of colleagues through renegade acts of naming the ontologically denied is perilous (Puwar, 2004), as they are silently expected to accommodate whiteness.

One strategy to distance oneself from structural racism involves holding onto a self-perception as 'good' or as 'different from' more explicit perpetrators of racism (Applebaum, 2013; DiAngelo, 2018). Sian uses kindness:

> I have to respect the privilege I have, and use it for good …use the fact I can do the job I'm doing…I can have responsibility for 400 little lives, to do it really well on all levels. Whatever it is, 'race' is one of them but it's not the only, all has to be done consciously. And I come back again to kindness, do it for the greater good not for self-creation.

On one hand, Sian believed she would mitigate racism with kindness and did not recognise racism as permanent and everyday (Bell, 1992; Picower, 2009). Instead the ARSA award motivated her morally towards understanding inequality and recognised her own structural advantages in the racial order. Sian deployed 'kindness' as an 'emotional tool of whiteness' (Picower, 2009, p. 208), evading conflict about realities of racism (Leonardo, 2009) as a way to 'de-racialise' situations (Puwar, 2004) and maintain a race-neutral position (Moorosi, 2021). Children's protection from racism was framed as dependent on kindness, rather than safeguarding. Sian used etiquette to deracialise her identity when enacting strategy and believed she affected change by using her new knowledge for 'good' – her role as rescuer indicated deficit-oriented actions and revealed how she viewed her own and others' agency.

Challenges to anti-racism: Negotiating racialised identities

All participants expressed a challenge in negotiating their racialised identities amid the anti-racist transformations they sought to establish, feeling a need to justify anti-racist work to a wider system that encouraged them to apporach their roles as race-neutral (Moorosi, 2021).

Andrea, a Deputy Headteacher identified as 'any other/mixed heritage', shared her feelings about justifying anti-racism work (to whites):

> And it feels as a white person looking in sometimes… 'well, yes, you're Black, but your life's fine… there's no-one being racist to you. Everything's okay'. So I think sometimes it's a case of looking back …Statistics still show us that someone who's not white, their life chances are not exactly the same. I think that will be a bit of a challenge to help people understand because you look at the children in your setting, we've been so conditioned to thinking that they're equal. We don't see them as not, possibly, because we're a primary school as well. It might not be until later on that some of those things become a little bit more apparent.

Andrea identified resistance from colleagues beyond fixing outcomes individually and indicated that schooling has a role to play in equipping children for future systemic injustice they will experience in their lifetimes, understanding the permanence of structural racism beyond school life (Bell, 1992) .

Some PoC participants noticed that majority-white senior teams expressed shock, gasps even, when racism was reported through audits. Some white senior leaders were under an illusion that because racism had not been previously reported, racism had not occurred. Sabrina shares:

> When we did our initial audit there were some statements that talked about staff, 'staff feel, staff have, on behalf of staff', you know, and I felt like, 'Okay, well, …I can't score this unless I ask the staff' and that's why we conducted an audit just

> based around those statements. And, feeding back the results of that survey, to an all-white leadership team, …as a Black female…person… that was one of the most uncomfortable things I think I've ever done in my life. …I think, it was just an enlightenment, almost of 'Gosh, I had never considered that would be interpreted that way' …and some of it was sort of explained away, which again, I didn't really agree with and…the only way I could really explain it was to say, 'Okay, my perspective of this is why' and then again, I'm kind of in that position of being the representative when …I don't want to be the voice that speaks for everybody. But I feel sometimes I have to.

Participants noticed resistance from colleagues, their assumptions were disturbed when they realised colleagues' aversion to recognise racism. Sabrina described it as 'mind-blowing':

> I just thought, I will do some training. Everyone will say 'oh yeah, you're right. This is great, now we won't say that like that'… That was mind-blowing for me that not everybody was prepared to see that side.

She continued:

> It was very much we had to try and help others to see perhaps why people were experiencing things that way, that's been the most challenging thing so far.

Sabrina was exploited as a Black woman – her school burdened her with this work and then chose to ignore some of what she tried to say and do through 'whitesplaining'[5] and used tools of whiteness to maintain power and supremacy. To Sabrina, audits presented an opportunity to challenge and understand, but white ignorance of 'race' and racism resulted in dismissal and strategic development being blocked (Ahmed, 2012). As a Black leader, initially with 'designated visibility', Sabrina was 'forced' into 'invisibility' (Rains, 1999, p. 164) when she raised racism directly.

Catherine, a white Headteacher, noted government resistance and positions it as naivety rather than intentional or power-laden:

> …so trying to change within a system that doesn't want to change, trying to change in a system which is politically-led, and is led, in my opinion by people that haven't engaged with their whiteness yet…making changes within a system, that's just, that's… so white…

Catherine noticed whiteness and showed deference to systemic authority, but assumed others are as yet unable to see whiteness rather than whiteness being actively deployed to manage schools.

Sabrina reflected on resistance to anti-racist training that was developed and planned in order to meet the criteria set out in the ARSA award:

> In our training, we have a group of staff, who are very reluctant to kind of engage…it's training… so they have to, but it's very clear from their presence, attitude and engagement … that they don't want to be…they're kind of two sort of camps. This kind of an older generation of people …like 'it was okay, in my day, I don't understand why it's now a big problem'. And there's a camp of, 'but this privilege that you speak of hasn't privileged me, therefore, I don't need to sit and listen to this', …there's a group of them, who are not British, but white, and trying to …help them get understand and see that regardless of the fact

> that perhaps you, your class has meant you haven't succeeded in a certain way, you will not have had the same experiences as somebody who was not white.

By having criteria to work towards and designing activities accordingly, Sabrina measured staff progress towards and barriers against anti-racist practice. She identified various embodied resistances of whiteness (Puwar, 2004) through opting out and silence. She noted group affiliations through other intersections of race and social class. She highlighted one response when colleagues dismissed race and re-centred class differences as the prime driver in racial inequality (Cole, 2016).

The RISL programme offered participants an opportunity to reflect on racialised patterns in race talk. One pattern identified was a tendency to look to PoC for knowledge, reassurance and permission, as though 'race' and racism belongs to or is about PoC. Andrea, a Deputy Headteacher, was able to recognise this response in her setting:

> I think I have that role to reassure people…most people still look to me for that reassurance. 'Am I doing it right?'… need to sort of almost give people permission to have those conversations to talk and to be able to say what they want to say trying to pick things up where people do say things that actually maybe, aren't quite what the message we want to be giving, but at the same time, make them feel that they're able to ask the questions or, or question things without necessarily being told they're wrong. So I think there is that responsibility.

Here white identity remained unscrutinised as a 'race'; whites claimed inexperience with 'race'-talk and evaded responsibility; permission was sought for safety through language and how to 'get it right' became 'designated' to Andrea (Rains, 1999). Andrea remained simultaneously othered and deployed to permit change within a system in which racism is a permanent (Bell, 1992) common dimension of Andrea's leadership (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). By sharing research in the RISL programme, participants were offered opportunities for race dynamics to be verbalised, exposed and understood as live patterns that can be changed and they recognised these dynamics in their school contexts.

Experiencing responsibility to make it 'safe' for white colleagues to avoid feelings of 'condemned isolation' (Miller, 1988), participants who are PoC expressed their additional burden of holding responsibility for how to act and offer solutions, scripts even, and permission on behalf of white colleagues. Reminiscent of racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2006), Andrea reflected:

> There's a defensiveness, there's that a few times, there have been people that said, 'We can't say anything these days', or, the idea of, 'but I didn't mean to say it like that'. So it's just to try to make it so natural that that defensiveness goes… that's something that I play a role in…we've got two members of teaching staff who are not white, …people find…that it's almost like a spirit level – if it's okay with them, then it's okay.

Acting as 'spirit level' script-advisor, accountability burden remained with Andrea to arbitrate 'race'-talk as constant 'representatives of their race' (Puwar, 2004, p. 64). White people are used to being 'fish in water' (Bourdieu, 2002) and having a 'feel for the game' (Puwar, 2012). They felt the rules of the game and the weight of the water differently. The emotional harm experienced by Black and Brown colleagues through this careful, nuanced and precarious service remains unacknowledged, unremunerated, and invalidated as professional learning – their cultural competence is gained through sometimes-painful lived experience.

Through the introduction of new learning, participants noted resistances of macro systems and developed an acute awareness of apparatus operating to maintain white supremacy. White Headteacher Catherine, reflected:

> Addressing whiteness is massive… this is the system that we're in. How do you go about changing something when it's the framework that you're in? So, that's quite challenging… But when Ofsted[6] came in, they asked why we were taking such a 'political' approach to our curriculum, and they were particularly referring to diversity and inclusion work. But actually, I enjoyed challenging that. But it made me aware of the system… because it was Big Brother coming in and saying we're not sure we want you to do that…

Interviews showed participants connecting racialisation to systematised whiteness. They discussed damage inflicted by inaction yet faced resistance when they began to act. They realised they were mitigating a structure far more dominant than previously conceived.

CONCLUSION

This project evidences the impact professional learning can have on school leaders who work in systems that position them as race neutral (Moorosi, 2021). It shows shared tensions and feelings of isolation when resisting whiteness for school leaders who are PoC as well as for those racialised as white; both groups were cognisant of structural racism but working in perceived post-racial realities from different standpoints. We highlighted the importance of a reflexive curriculum within ITE, and using different models of professional learning (Mezirow, 1991, 1995; Poekert et al., 2020) to support the anti-racist cognisance leaders require to adhere to their professional duty to safeguard people from racism. Far from coincidence, whiteness remains instrumentalised to protect race neutrality and colour-evasion, marginalising 'race' discourse as 'political' threat (DfE, 2022; Tikly, 2022). Leadership must manage both 'disgust' of colleagues and overcome post-racial realities to gain purchase on anti-racism work.

Educators positioned themselves to 'race' and racism by recalling how their prior knowledge failed to equip them as anti-racist educators. Given opportunity for critical reflection and interrupting existing frames of reference supported leaders to question, think deeply and transform perspectives about the 'absent-presence of race' (Apple, 1999). Racial *illiteracy as policy* intends on creating novice 'race' practitioners (Pizarro, 2017) and whilst the assumption of race neutrality is nurtured in ITE and CPD, 'race' is outlawed as a policy concern (Gillborn, 2008), the workforce remains infected with systemic whiteness. White-thinking, white ignorance and perceived innocence sustain racism in schools (Leonardo, 2009; Matias & Mackey, 2015). We posit this is more intentional than an absence and clearly written into DfE and Ofsted hostility to anti-racism work in schools (CRED, 2021; DfE, 2022; Tikly, 2022).

With current government resistance, anti-racist cognisance must be situated simultaneously outside of official channels through communities of change, and through returning informed anti-racism to schools via anti-racist-scholar-activism (Joseph-Salisbury & Connelly, 2021). Once cognisant of racial identities, educators connect themselves to wider systems of whiteness and observe how structures serve to maintain it. They must develop abilities to move away from race neutrality by understanding their own race identity and analyse situations from a 'race' lens without guilt and with conviction for the benefit of those they serve. They need to be even more courageous for the benefit of teachers and students of colour. This must be done in a way undergirded by racial literacy, knowing whose responsibility it is and who benefits – all have to negotiate and confront whiteness for anti-racist transformation.

Schooling is a critical site for creating and maintaining racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tikly, 2022). Professional learning programmes can support leaders to notice racism and whiteness, to question why there is resistance to anti-racism and learn strategies to understand the dynamic nature of racism to counter it in their schools. Anti-racist work requires many combinations of addressing workforce racial imbalances, countering racial illiteracy and (re)positioning accountability for preventing racism back with school leaders, the majority of whom are white. We explore two different models of a sustained reflexive curriculum for staff commissioned as CPD that can address socialised professional gaps, supporting staff to leverage institutional power against contextualised systemic racism. There lies enormous opportunity for school leaders to transform and unlock critical ideas to question how strategic infrastructure must better safeguard school communities from racism.

If leaders accept racism as a permanent part of social structures, interconnected across all aspects of education, the tenets of CRT offer liberatory frameworks for school leaders, shifting focus onto prevention and safeguarding. Leadership might be moved to action, posing questions, such as: *how does the curriculum foster key forms of marginalisation for children of colour in classrooms?* and *how can we design learning that prevents this?* (Lynn, 2019). Moving beyond emotionality and pretended neutrality demands a liberatory approach to problem-solving (Lynn, 2019) presenting an opportunity for leaders to integrate new knowledge and (re)organise and prioritise strategy about 'race' in order to lead schools that safeguard against the effects of majoritised whiteness and racism as a shared enemy of community, safety and belonging.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST
There were no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ETHICS STATEMENT
We followed the BERA ethical guidelines (2018) and gained ethical approval from Leeds Beckett University.

GEOLOCATION INFORMATION
Interviews took place in England and were online.

ORCID
Penny Rabiger https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4027-1828

ENDNOTES

[1] See https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/output_url_files/R204-2021-Education-Spending-Report-1.pdf.

[2] A note on the language used: language around racial identity labels is dynamic and inadequate at the same time and therefore we use the terms by which our participants self-identify, or which are used in literature cited, alongside terms such as 'People/Person of Colour' (PoC), 'Black', 'Brown', 'racially minoritised', Black & Global Majority (BGM) and 'BAME'.

[3] Here she is referring to Pupil Referral Units which are designated schools for children in England who have been excluded from mainstream education, usually due to behavioural concerns.

[4] See The Prevent Duty for schools (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance).

[5] Whitesplain "when a white person whitesplains, they explain something about race to a person of colour" https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/whitesplain.

[6] The Office for Standards in Education in England https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

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