Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

Episode 1: An introduction to racism and mental health in schools

Cyra Neave: Hello, and welcome to the Anna Freud Centre's podcast series, Talking about Racism and Mental Health in Schools with the Honourable Stuart Lawrence and BLAM UK. I'm Cyra Neave, Senior Clinician in the Schools Division at the Centre. We've developed this series to help schools get talking about racism and mental health in schools.

We'll cover four main topics. The first will be about involving the whole school community in this anti-racism work through initiatives such as cultural exchange.

The second topic is about improving self-esteem and how students can support other students. We'll be looking at strategies like peer support programmes and mentoring and how they can bolster self-esteem.

The third will be about representation, both amongst staff and on the curriculum, and what schools can do to improve this.

The fourth is about black British culture. What that means how it can be celebrated and supported in schools, and also looking at school policies and rules that may be inadvertently discriminatory towards black and minoritised students.

Here's some of what you can expect over the next four episodes:

Eve Doran: The rush, perhaps to amend the lack of representation has led in some cases to misrepresentation.

Michelle Roddy: Providing that training to staff. I think training is so key here because we need to support staff in taking these steps for when they start to look at these things.

Stuart Lawrence: Life is not so clinical all the time. And I know that on bits of paper, we ask people to put things in tick boxes so we can put them in the boxes. Then that makes us feel comfortable. But sometimes it's quite nice to have that messiness of life where we all just integrate.

Wonu Salau: Some of our black young people feel that if the certain ways that they express themselves are seen as wrong or are seen as not an appropriate way to express yourself when actually that might be the truest way for them to express themselves.

Rahi Popat: Any throw away comments, any flippant comments are being seen as banter or it is just playground talk. We can't have that. There's obviously no room for racism.

Cyra Neave: In today's episode, we'll be talking to Stuart. Introducing the context around racism and mental health in schools and explain the topics we will be talking about in the series. I'm delighted to be joined by Stuart today. Could you tell us a bit more about yourself?

Stuart Lawrence: My name's Stuart Lawrence, for this session, I'm best to say my background is mostly teaching. I was a teacher for over 20 years. 15 years in one school, which was an all-girls school based in South West London, my main subject was graphic products. Then I also taught art, ICT, a bit of food, a bit of resistant materials as well. And one of the best parts of being a teacher, I did find I was, was being a form tutor.

I really liked the pastoral side of it all and to share with young people the topics of the day, and just really trying to push them and let them understand that they would really have to play a major part in life as they get older.

Cyra Neave: Great, thank you. Let's start with the basics. We know that research shows that experiencing racism can have a negative effect on mental health. We know it's linked to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Why is experiencing racism a mental health issue?

Stuart Lawrence: It's the layering of racism and the effect it has on young people. It's almost like a traumatic experience. So it's akin to seeing someone being physically hurt or mentally hurt and how that affects and makes you feel.

If it's not part of the agenda for mental health in these young people who are going through this trauma, these experiences do not have a label or hanger to hang it on. Then it makes them feel again, that they're separate and they're different.

Cyra Neave: Can we talk about why tackling racism is a school's responsibility?

Stuart Lawrence: That would be because schools see young people more than anyone else, I believe. It's also a space place to be in an area of surroundings where you're learning and developing so many issues, I'm afraid. The government always looks to teachers to try and help them in that pathway, but schools play a part. But then I also believe that a home plays another part as well. And from my background as a secondary school teacher, it was always teacher and pupil relationships that we had. Parents only came involved when, as a teacher, you couldn't deal with an issue or if you wanted to celebrate something good. Whereas in a primary setting, that triangle approach is so key. Especially in their early years. And that then diverts right the way through to they're at 10 or 11. And then all of a sudden there's some sort of expectation that they've grown and then they go straight into secondary school.

So I'm really an advocate for secondary schools understanding that that triangle should be in place there as well. That relationship between parents, children and school. It's a triangle that should be reaffirmed in all ways as much as possible. So that through the flow of communication, for the flow of ideas that everyone's on the same page and we're not then pulling or pushing on opposite directions, so to speak.

Cyra Neave: And I guess what we know is that children unfortunately are experiencing racism throughout their education and at school and out of school. And so it kind of makes sense. Doesn't it? That it needs to be addressed in the school.

Stuart Lawrence: It's again how young people don't pick it up until they understand the nuance of what racism is. So, you know, at seven or eight, if someone just calls you a name, you quite easy just to brush it off, that someone just being horrible to you, there is no context in what that name means, the history behind it.

So as you get older and the layers of life come upon you, you then understand; 'oh my goodness, that person said that just because of the colour of my skin. They wouldn't say that to someone else with a different skin colour to me'.

Cyra Neave: And I guess helping them to understand and label it as being racist, or prejudice or discrimination helps to separate it from them as a person. Which I imagine could then help them to manage it and get their head round it, as opposed to, like you said, experience it as a personal attack. If they can understand it in a different way, that could be protective in a way for them.

Stuart Lawrence: Yeah, definitely. It's like, it gives it context. It gives it the nuance that it needs, which is: it's not you as a person, this term, this comment could be then attributed to anyone that looks like you.

Cyra Neave: What are schools is currently doing well in this area do you think?

Stuart Lawrence: It will be spoken about during PSHE, which is a lesson, especially in secondary schools, that is designated to a portion of the timetable. Some schools do it drop down hour every other week. Some schools wait for it to accomplish all the hours for it to be a whole day and focus on it that way.

Cyra Neave: And perhaps not just having it as part of their PSHE curriculum, like you said, kind of broaden it out. So that it's something that teachers feel a bit more confident to talk about, not just within that. But I guess as and when it arises most importantly, because it doesn't always fit in, does it? To a lesson, you know? A history lesson could be a wonderful place to talk about and understand kind of diversity culture and getting the young people to talk about themselves, but also learn about their own histories. But it could come into so many different lessons and not just kind of within that. And you talked about maybe having experts coming into school. It doesn't just fall on the teacher to feel that.

Stuart Lawrence: But again, that's because, you know, go to the history point, the historian teacher will be just going 'what have I got to do to get this young person to this level so that when, if they decide to access the GCSE, they have this knowledge.' So that's the driving force of most subject-based teachers. And that's why I used to love the form tutor, the pastoral role, where we had 20 to 30 minutes every morning, with our tutor groups where we could discuss issues. 'How are you today?' 'What's going on?' And have those personal conversations.

And I know that my old job I had, that time was being starting to be reduced. And it came back down to the fact sometimes that teachers didn't feel confident in those scenarios, having those conversations. So therefore, it became quite prescriptive of, we're just going to show this PowerPoint and talk about this. To attempt to make teachers feel a bit more comfortable in that scenario and in that environment.

Cyra Neave: Yeah, so we've started talking about some of the challenges haven't we? So, what are the challenges do you think there are for schools? I know you've talked about kind of lack of time and resources.

Stuart Lawrence: It's experience. I think that's the main thing. I definitely know that for my own teaching practice, maybe in the first two or three years, I didn't feel comfortable in that tutor space. And as I got more comfortable in my role and understood my craft a bit better, then I was more comfortable in holding and facilitating discussions. Because again, that's sometimes that you have to do to try and pull-out bits of information and find out different things for people. Just to facilitate and not be the orchestrator all the time and just allow them to speak and to hear the conversation and pick up the nuances of what's important. What's this juvenile chat that they're just messing around with and what needs to be maybe further followed up.

Cyra Neave: And do you think that's about confidence? By the teacher?

Stuart Lawrence: Yeah. Yeah, I do. And as I said, as I got, as I went through and I did a bit more than I understood how important it was to, just even share a bit about my own personal life.

Cyra Neave: And what are some of the benefits of taking an anti-racist approach for schools.

Stuart Lawrence: Taking an anti-racist approach means that the school is actively saying 'we are going to do something about this'. It's quite easy to say: 'I'm not a racist'. And in my mind, that's like saying 'it's got nothing to do with me, all over to you Stuart, crack on'. But by saying that they are going to put things in place. They're going to take, make strategies. They're going to talk about it. They're going to understand the nuances of being an anti-racist school and racism itself and ensure that their pupils also take an active part in being part of the problem solvers of this issue, going forward.

I say to people all the time, I can quite easily speak about race and difference and inclusion when I'm in the room. But it's when I'm not there that people are having their private conversations in their social groups, and it's in that point, then someone needs to step up and challenge. Someone needs to be the voice of the voiceless in that scenario. And say 'that's unacceptable'. 'That's not right.' 'Why are you saying that?'

I've been trying to empower young people to have something called the Power of Five Whys, which means someone can say or do something. And sometimes as well, the most popular person is usually the person that likes to push the boundaries in our social groups and sometimes tackling or talking upfront in a in the group scenario with that most popular person is quite a challenge. And I say to people sometimes that there must be a

scenario where you're on a one-to-one basis with that person. And it's in that moment, then, that you then challenge and try to unravel and find out the root source of that. And I usually say to them, if you get to three or four whys, you usually get to where it's coming from. It's usually coming from another adult or someone else saying something or they've seen something. And then they believe that this is fact and true. And it is for you then, to say to them: 'no, that's not true'. And then give the layers of the reasons why that's not true or the context of why that's not to be said again. And hopefully that person will then learn and develop and understand and have a better understanding about why we cannot say and do certain things anymore.

Cyra Neave: You know, and we know that young people are, you know, have great ideas and have so many things to give and actually making sure that they are part of the approach that the school takes and we listen to their voice and what they would find helpful. Because we know that often they come up with the best ideas. Thank you so much, Stuart, for joining me today.

I really look forward to continuing our conversation as the podcast goes through. To learn more about this topic, listen to the other episodes in this Talking Racism and Mental Health in Schools series. At the Anna Freud Centre, we're also developing a package of free resources and e-learning for education professionals on the topic of anti-racism and mental health to be launched in spring 2022.

So do keep an eye out for that. Thank you for listening to the podcast. We can't wait to get started.

Episode 2: Involving the whole school community

Cyra Neave: Hello, and welcome to the Anna Freud Centre's, podcast series, Talking about Racism and Mental Health in Schools with Stuart Lawrence and BLAM UK. I'm Cyra Neave, Senior Clinician in the Schools Division at the Centre.

Today, we're going to be looking at how to involve the whole school community in this work. Drawing on the expertise of today's guest, the Honourable Stuart Lawrence. Stuart is a former teacher, campaigner and speaker to schools who utilises his experience and expertise to support all schools, to understand and tackle racism better.

We also have Rahi Popat, Pastoral Support Officer at Keyham Lodge School, with us today. Who will share his perspective working as an education professional in a diverse school in Leicester. Thank you so much both for joining us.

Rahi Popat: Thank you very much for having me.

Stuart Lawrence: Thank you for having me.

Cyra Neave: We know that research shows that experiencing racism can have a negative effect on mental health. We know it's linked to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Rahi, so why is it important to involve the whole school community in anti-racism activities or efforts to tackle racism?

Rahi Popat: Involving the whole community looks at it from a more holistic approach that we're not just kind of having an insular approach to any anti-racism activities or what we're doing to tackle racism, having that kind of mindset.

That actually it’s not just us against them, that in the community that it is not just parents and carers or different faith leaders, however, that we are all part of one in order to tackle anti-racism or any sort of racism that may be going on. And we're not just talking in a certain part of, say, for example, Leicester we're talking geographically nationwide, regionally. However, that is, we've all got to come together. And only if we are able to come together, that people can draw on people's experiences, knowledge, and combining those things together. We stand a better chance.

We're seeing that parents and carers, want to be involved and yes, they do need educated. We all do. You know, even as educational professionals, we're learning every day on the job, even myself, I'm learning about racism almost weekly, monthly, however, that is, we see it in the media. But for us, it's how can we better equip ourselves. There are people out there in the community that can, that can help us, that can support us. And maybe we can come and deliver talks or can come do educational workshop or have that experience to just have 10 minutes of a chat with that young person or that group of students or a class or a year group. This is what we do. This is what, this is how it's happened, or this is what we could do together to tackle it.

Cyra Neave: So, is it something about giving the message that it's everybody's responsibility? You know, not just one, not just the educator or not just the parent, if it's everybody's responsibility, maybe it feels a little bit more manageable or kind of something that maybe we can kind of, like you said, learn about and work on together rather than just in silos.

Rahi Popat: Absolutely. And it singing from that same hymn sheet, isn't it? And it's that consistent approach as well that we're not just doing it in pockets of time, just because I don't know, it might be Black History Month or there's something that happened in the media. We're doing it because it's part of our DNA now in terms of learning about it and doing it.

And we want them to be educated because we're not just doing it for today. We're doing it for the people of tomorrow and the future generations. And yeah, we may not see or be alive to see it. We want to be hopeful that the future will be better in 10, 20, 30 years' time. And only by working together, will we be able to see the fruit of our labours in years to come.

Stuart Lawrence: There's two ways looking at it isn't it there? There's a bottom up approach, which we've just been talking about. The young people then the community leaders, the parents, but there's also a top-down approach as well. And in that thought process, if we come from both angles at this. Then somehow, we'll meet in the middle. And in that meet in the middle, that's when we'll have that place where we're all able to be our true, authentic selves. No matter who that is, no matter where you're from, as well as sexual orientation, you're cultural background. You can just be yourself and you'll be valued at yourself. If headteachers and senior leaders and governors are buying into this, then that would in-feed into the teachers who are the middle level. And then the students who are at the bottom.

Cyra Neave: And I like the idea of not taking a reactive approach, always because that's how it feels. Sometimes it doesn't, it feels like something happens in, you know, something awful happens in the media or something happens within a community and then kind of action feels like it comes. But, it's something about not just a reactive approach, but that it has to be our bread and butter. It has to be something that's talked about consistently.

Stuart Lawrence: Yeah. Horrible situations can be great momentum starters, but, I think that's what we're saying. Once that momentum is started, then it, isn't a thing of just turning the taps off and saying 'oh we've done that bit, now we can move on'. We need to educate and to allow people to be better understanding of how the effects of these things happen to people to therefore hopefully in the future, those scenarios won't represent themselves anymore.

Cyra Neave: And what have you seen done well in school? Can you give us some examples of some good practice?

Rahi Popat: Yeah, there's a lot of good practice, you know, being from Leicester, you know, there's a multicultural and diverse community as well. And we've seen examples of

schools collaborating with each other using the experience and almost a knowledge of the kind of teaching and pastoral team that can better support them. And it's not, I, and we, you know, you might be part of an academy, you might be part of the trust, but schools are coming together. You could have two schools on the same road, have different approaches, but it's coming together now. And actually slowly, we're seeing schools actually having joint meetings or collaborative practice, CPD. There's so many different things schools are now doing, and that's not just from a secondary school point of view. We're talking primary school as well. The younger, we're able to kind of educate our children and young people, the better chance we have to kind of equip them in the future.

You know, whether that's in PSHE lessons, whether that's a one-off event, the more we can consistently have children, not almost not buy in, but believe that this is the norm. Same as they, you know, they're taught English, maths, science is part of our curriculum. This is part of our society, not any curriculum. It's part of who we are.

Stuart Lawrence: I think student voice listening to the students is one of the best practices because as an adult, I see things from my perspective. Even though I can remember what it was like to go to school, my own school experience, which you know, I really enjoyed, that may not be the same for another young person. And I have to listen and hear and understand that.

Cyra Neave: So I'm wondering what does involving the whole community can add to the experience of students, do you think?

Rahi Popat: Involving the whole community, it adds that relatability. You know, children need to be able to see that it's real, it's honest, you know, having the whole community and them buying into the children, young person, buying into kind of what we're doing, how we're doing it.

There's an element of relatability now more than ever, having that relatability factor is so crucial because it gives them belief that actually it's possible, or it can be done. And there are people in the community. And it could just be their peer groups. It could just be someone older that they look up to that they respect. It could just be a family friend. It could just be someone in the local youth club. We sometimes, I think underestimate the value of people in the local community and what they can have to offer.

A lot of our children and young people have friendships and relationships that are born and bred from their local community. And that is, their kind of everyday life that that matters to them. It's ingrained into who they are and how they are. So, I think it would be unwise, almost, to not include our local community because it, it just gives so much depth to our children's kind of perception.

Stuart Lawrence: And we only are trying to allow these people to go into the communities afterwards, aren't we? That's what school is about isn't it, we're trying to help them to be adults. And to contribute to society and in the real world. And that's what, as I say, so the school gates is only one small part of this and they will then leave and go outside and into the community. So if that conflicting message is something definitely different from what they hear outside the school gates, then that's when we can

start to have a bit of a problem. And then the, who do we believe? Who do we, who do we trust? Is it the person that feeds me and keeps me clothed and loves me? In that sense of a world or these other adults in this institution where I go to a little bit of a time.

They would've gone to school themselves, the people in our local community in some sort of sense anyway, and their experience of that school environment can also either encourage what we're doing at school or discourage what we're doing in school. So, I think that's important to understand as well, so they can either be the one that's really supporting what we're doing, or they could be saying, don't listen to them, they don't know what they're talking about, they're not part of us. It goes back to that 'us and them' thing again. We're all in this together, then that hopefully will allow better conversations, better understanding, and those small little nuances of things where it can be confusing, that it can cause a bit of friction. Hopefully they won't be there anymore.

Cyra Neave: There's something about communication because you do sometimes see schools kind of being in their own little bubble and almost like, well, what happens inside these gates is separate to what happens outside. But these kids are all going in and out of these gates every day. And even like, there's something about language and knowing about how kids talk when they're outside school is really important. It's not different, what happens in and out of school. So something about communication and something about, again, shared responsibility throughout the community and within the school community.

Rahi Popat: Yeah, absolutely. It's that unity, isn't it? You know, and you've just alluded to that. And as Stuart just said that open lines of communication, the more we keep that open line of communication, that the better chance we have of being successful in what we're trying to achieve.

As Stuart just said, you know, you might have an us and them mentality. Yes, that might be due to their own personal experiences. Absolutely. But it's our job now, more than ever to kind of help reduce and break down those barriers. For a child or young person, because the last thing they want to see is conflict. Okay. So there's no conflict in school. Whilst I'm with my teachers and my staff, but actually when I go out those school gates, how is it so different?

You know, they might deem that as a parallel universe. Well, actually, what we're not trying to do is that. We're trying to achieve something together, common goal, you know. We might be teaching them about racism in one lesson, or it could be like English the next. That's part of your school day, you know, when they talk to their parents and carers at home, we want them to be having those conversations and parents to be educated, but also schools not to be bound by policies and procedures.

Yes. They're there. Yes. There's a governing body. Yes, schools' have got a leadership team and they've got a responsibility. Absolutely. But the responsibility doesn't just lie with getting grades and assessments. It lies with that holistic way with our child and young person to make sure they're a good human being. That's what we're trying to hopefully achieve in the future.

Cyra Neave: And what can schools do to include the wider community?

Stuart Lawrence: I think the first thing there is, is invite ex-students back. I think that's a key thing. There's so many brilliant examples of students who've gone through experiences in their own personal schools, that if they can then share that with maybe existing staff who were there when they were there, it then allows those staff members, that institution to see how it's a snapshot of how they are and how they've been received in the community.

I think that's key for me. I'm sure I'm a hundred percent sure that no school wants to give a young person a bad experience of their education, of their personal journey. School and education isn't bespoke enough to allow everyone's personal journey to be the best it can be. It isn't. And I believe that. But in learning and understanding the things that may have not gone right, or maybe things that haven't gone so well allows the school, the community, to grow and to develop and to be better.

Rahi Popat: Yeah, it's reducing. Being brave. I would say, schools can be a bit braver and I mean, in sense of, you've got parents evening, you've got open days. There are so many opportunities to invite local businesses, ex-students, as Stuart just said, just to come and have a chat.

What better opportunity when you've got primary school that have hundreds of kids or secondary school that have thousands of kids sometimes and you multiply that with parents and carers. The reach is massive. And if we can capitalise on those moments and be brave and go, actually, yes, there'll be a stand for English, maths, science, but let's, let's be brave. Let's bring this into conversation. Let's have it part of our normal school, parents evening or open days, or let's do something, let's welcome, you know, there's, PTA's across schools. There are vital cogs in this school community that kind of, you can tap into.

Cyra Neave: Opening the schools doors, really, to the community to allow that flow in between the outside and the inside.

Stuart Lawrence: Absolutely and I would say as well, sometimes those formal settings can be quite scary for some for the community as well. And one of the key things, I believe that the school I worked at for 15 years, we had cultural focus evenings. Where we look at the kids in our school and say, this year, we're going to focus on this culture and we're going to try and introduce it across the school curriculum. See what evolves in there. And then at the end of it, we're going to have a celebration of that culture. And that celebration will be through dance, music, food, and then will invite the parents in from that culture to talk to our staff and to talk to the kids. And it's in that exchange of information. It's in that exchange of those things that you think are different, but not different. That you then learn and understand and accept that: 'Wow, I never knew that it was so close to what I like or what I do in my own culture'. And it's in that pathway of that exchange that you develop and grow and be better.

Cyra Neave: And you're educating each other really, but in a really fun way, because I imagine the kids loved that.

Stuart Lawrence: Definitely, like, so it ranged from China to Nigeria, to the Caribbean, even Poland which is European. So, whatever we did it made that child and that culture and those groups feel really important 'oh we're going to focus on us this time', as my school is predominantly black. So sometimes the notion was that we're only going focus on the black cultures and, and when, when you turn the table slightly and show them another side, they go: 'wow, okay. I'm important as well. This is my time to shine'. And yeah, it really enthuses the young people to, to believe in it a bit, to have that rich cultural heritage and appreciation and celebration that they and we can really tap into.

Rahi Popat: I really like that, because that exchange that you just talked about, Stuart, around that communication, that breeds confidence. It allows the community to come together.

Stuart Lawrence: That's what it is with all of this. I think we talk about bubbles and silos and it's not so clinical, life is not so clinical all the time. And I know that on bits of paper, we ask people to put things in tick boxes so we can put them in a boxes. Then that makes us feel comfortable. But sometimes it's quite nice to have that messiness of life where we all just integrate and overflow.

Cyra Neave: And then talking about culture and diversity becomes the norm. And that, you know, especially in primary, celebrating that and talking about it and it becoming part of, of conversations that happen in celebrations. I like the idea of celebrations and kind of children educating other children, educating staff and vice versa.

Rahi Popat: It builds relationships, doesn't it? You know, and as we were talking about earlier. Why wouldn't we want to build better relationships with our students and get to know them more and have that pastoral focus as well as the academia side of it.

Cyra Neave: So how can this be an ongoing part of good practice in schools? Do we have any tips or suggestions?

Stuart Lawrence: I think it was really important that we are not calendar-based. We are not just prescriptive of going through the year going right, it's Diwali now, so we'd have to do this. If there's another incident, another event that happens in our local community. If there is another opportunity to celebrate or to talk about a subject or topic, then let's use that time then in the moment to talk about it, because then that will give everything that we speak about this rich capital that it needs and understand in context so that our young people have to give it the layers it needs to understand. So they they can be like: 'Right. Okay, cool. At the moment, this is really important that we talk about this and discuss this. And I talk about it, not only with my own friendship groups, but then also my family.' And then that again, that will breed the whole understanding that it isn't just, for the moment or for an occasion that this is part of everything that we do in our lives every day.

Rahi Popat: Let's not wait, let's be brave. Let's start that conversation, because you never know one primary school breeds another breeds a secondary school and you know what, even where I am in Leicester, catchment areas can fuel other catchment schools to

be part of it. And you know what? Why not? Because, you know, it just takes one person, one school to start that trend.

Stuart Lawrence: And I definitely would say as well, if what we've said, doesn't fit into what, where you are and who you are as a school. That's fine. Try something yourself. If it doesn't work, then try something different. Again, I definitely would like that to be understood that we're saying these are just suggestions of things.

You could adapt and take the little bits of part of all of them and try it. And it might not work. You've really have to be understanding. And I think in that open conversation and dialogue, you'll find what fits for your school. You'll find what the need is in your environment.

Cyra Neave: So, the messages there's no right or wrong. It's just give it a go and be brave.

Stuart Lawrence: Yeah. Definitely be brave and speak and be open. And if you don't know something, go in and find those little pockets of the community that you might need to tap into. And ask. Definitely. And again, no one feels like there is a magic bullet or a golden solution to this. But the more people we ask, the different communities we go into and the layers of it's a young, medium, an old life we've got to find from everyone. And in that confidence, we bring everyone together. There'll be a perfect solution for you.

Cyra Neave: And I love the idea of having those conversations with children, because we know that they will go home and have those conversations at home. And actually, the families may be again, need that, that push, in a way, and they need to be braver and they need to be challenged. And sometimes we can ask children to take it from school, into the home. And start those conversations at home as well. And then it will feed back into school. So almost like a loop.

Rahi Popat: And as Stuart said as well, it's asking those questions and being comfortable and confident to ask those questions, whether you're a teacher at a school, whatever your role is in the school, everyone plays that same role of safeguarding children wanting the best for them.

Don't be afraid to ask because you just never know, even if it's a little nugget of information you might get that can help you with your learning and teaching. Equally parents and carers, if they have that opportunity and that medium to kind of have that avenue of: 'oh, can I come and ask my teacher or can I ask a local person?' And I think we'll be all be surprised at, in our community, how well people might know each other and how close it actually is. So yeah, there are various ways that we can do this.

Cyra Neave: Thank you so much for joining me today, Stuart and Rahi, it's been great. We've talked about really opening the school doors. We've been talking about bringing the community into the school, having those conversations, being brave, challenging the existing norms and pushing boundaries a little bit by just communicating and talking with each other and using the community to help do that.

To learn more about this topic, listen to the other episodes in this Talking Racism and Mental Health in Schools series. At the Anna Freud Centre, we're also developing a package of free resources and e-learning for education professionals on the topic of anti-racism and mental health to be launched in spring 2022. So do keep an eye out for that.

Episode 3: The impact of racism on self-esteem

Cyra Neave: Hello, and welcome to the Anna Freud Centre's podcast series, talking about Racism and Mental Health in Schools with Stuart Lawrence and BLAM UK. I'm Cyra Neave, Senior Clinician in the Schools Division at the Centre. Today, we're going to be looking at how experiencing racism impacts self-esteem and what schools can do to support the self-esteem of their students.

With us today is the Honourable Stuart Lawrence, a former teacher, campaigner and speaker to schools who utilises his experience and expertise to support all schools, to understand and tackle racism better. We also have Rahi Popat, Pastoral Support Officer at Keyham Lodge School, with us today who will share his perspective working as an education professional in a diverse school in Leicester. Thank you so much both, for joining us today.

Rahi Popat: Thank you for having me.

Cyra Neave: Research has shown that black and ethnically minoritised young people who experienced racial discrimination are likely to experience low self-esteem. Having low self-esteem isn't a mental health issue in itself, but it can be a risk factor for other mental health needs such as anxiety and depression. We know that self-esteem is about how we value and perceive ourselves. There are lots of factors that can impact on self-esteem such as early life trauma, bullying, physical health conditions and experiencing prejudice and discrimination is one of the factors. If lots of things impact on self-esteem for an extended period of time, it can lead to the development of mental health difficulties. Low self-esteem can impact people in lots of ways. And it's something I see a lot in the children and young people I work with in schools. It can impact decision-making, ability to try new things, taking on new challenges, asking for help, attention, concentration, and ability to complete a task.

Stuart, can we start by thinking about how experiencing racism and discrimination can affect the self-esteem of black and minoritised ethnic children and young people?

Stuart Lawrence: For me, the effect on young people is something, again, they don't really understand until maybe later on in life. The example I can give here is I went and did a school talk in a school in South East London. This child that was in year nine, and after the presentation, after the talk, he stayed behind afterwards and said to me: 'Stuart, I realise now that I've had a racist incident happened to me. I was coming home from school one night, one evening, and someone shouted a racist comment at me as I went home'. He went home and told his parents about it, but he said he didn't realise until after I'd spoken to him that the effects that could have, or the connotations or where else he could go. And that really upset him. That someone would, would pick him out and say those things to him. And I think one of the things he wanted to be reassured about was that, was that him that they were speaking about or was that just a throwaway comment?

Cyra Neave: So, hearing you speak allowed him to separate it, separate the comment from himself to understanding it within a context of all that was, was someone who used

the term that was discriminatory or, you know, he used a racist comment. Kind of separate it from him to allow him to preserve his, I guess, self-esteem in a way and his own sense of self.

Stuart Lawrence: And to understand as well that that could happen to someone else that looked like him. It wasn't just him as a person. So, you know, if that scenario happens again, hopefully he can go: 'do you know what? They were just trying to try and to get a reaction out of me. That wasn't me. Because, they don't know me. They don't know my characteristics they don't know my personality. So therefore it can't be about me personally.'

Rahi Popat: Coming back to Stuart's example, how do we quantify someone's self-esteem almost like from a comment like that. For someone who we met made a throwaway comment, intentional or not intentional, that self-esteem has been affected in some way, shape or form. And we almost sometimes can't quantify that self-esteem. So, you know how sometimes it can be measurable. It might be really significant at this present moment in time, but then not. But then later on in life, as Stuart said, you may not see it till later on. And as you kind of build yourself and that resilient tank up, and your self esteem tank, life experience, and age, and stage, and all those various of the factors that come into play as you grow up. You want to build yourself a bank of resiliency, don't you? You want to have those tools to go right, I can deal with this. As Stuart said, I want to talk about it. I want to separate it.

Cyra Neave: I think that understanding is key what you were saying because often children don't understand what's going on at the time. I remember when I was at school, there was a teacher who never learned my name. She couldn't get my name and it wasn't important enough for her to learn it because it's not an English name. I didn't understand it as a child. And only later in life, could I grapple with understanding why that was and really that it wasn't about me, but it was about her and her understanding. I think until you get older, you don't have that level of understanding. But I think if we talk about it earlier, maybe that young child in primary can get their head round it. Like you said, Stuart, you know, they can have a frame of reference to help them to then separate it from, you know, it's not about me, it's about this.

Stuart Lawrence: And also challenge as well. So, if you went home and said, mum, this teacher just can't pronounce my name. And then if, if your parents go on and ask if they pronounce everyone else's name correctly, and you say yeah. Then, that enables another layer of conversation and some actions will be able to go forth. So therefore the long-term effect of that, then isn't seen.

I think that's again, that understanding of that we really have to allow our young people to have the tools and the language to use of understanding. I think that's key here as well. And, and the more we give to our young people, these tools, these building blocks, these scaffolding, give them that context.

Cyra Neave: Because otherwise they're just left with a feeling, right? And that feeling then can present itself in lots of ways. And then we get labeled as being disruptive or that's the, you know, that's a naughty child. But actually it's actually that you can't, like

you said, put a word to a feeling that they're feeling or experiencing, or that can be misunderstood.

Rahi Popat: Allowing them to be curious, let kids be kids sometimes. And curiosity, let that be a thing and let them sit with curiosity as well as we've talked about going home and going right: 'Why is that teacher not able to pronounce my name?' Let them be curious. Curiosity will allow questions. Questions will hopefully allow some answers.

Cyra Neave: So, what approach should schools take to address racism and discrimination of their students, which we know impacts negatively on their self-esteem?

Rahi Popat: I think schools can't normalise banter, you know, many schools, kind of any throwaway comments, any flippant comments have been seen as banter or it's just playground talk. We can't have that. There's obviously no room for racism, right. And discrimination. And we've got to be able to teach our children and young people, anything they've said that whether it, has a negative connotation or anything that they've said, they go, 'well I only said it as banter, I only said it to my mate'. We don't know the impact that I can have on a person's self-esteem we've got to stop it at the source. We've got to be able to say, actually, all schools have got to have a zero tolerance approach to this. You know, there's no ifs and buts. It has to be zero tolerance.

You know, we're not expecting schools and schools, aren't equipped with all the resources around it. And that's okay too, because it's a learning process. We're all in it together. Some schools might be better equipped due to where they are on their kind of catchment area, but other schools might not be. And, you know, so kind of working together, joined up thinking to actually go: 'actually, no, I'm not going to accept that as banter'. And if it's not going to be accepted at this school here in primary school, the child shouldn't then go transition from year 6 to 7, where it is accepted. It's got to be that smooth transition, actually. It's not accepted across the board and that's how we're going to slowly, but surely try to instil within our child or young person that those sorts of banter comments aren't acceptable whether it's before the school gates, after the school gates, on the weekends, wherever you are, as a human being, as a person that isn't acceptable.

Stuart Lawrence: Yeah, I totally agree. And one of the, the mindful things I know schools will be saying is 'well that's going to be difficult to police. How do we do this? You know, we can't be everywhere.' But it's that sort of top down bottom approach, isn't it? So if the senior leaders, the people who are running the schools, the school governors, the head teachers, they're saying we don't accept this. We are an anti-racist school. These are our policies. This is a behaviour. These are the language that we find unacceptable to be used. The words that are unacceptable to be used in this environment. Then what we're hopefully saying is that, that will then follow on to not just that environment inside the school, but then into the local communities, into the workplace.

And as these young people grow up into adults, it just becomes part of who they are. So it's going to be difficult. It's just going to be some, a bit of time, where we're going to need some allowing things to be understood. And that crossover period, it's going to be a little bit messy and a bit difficult, but it starts here and today. I do believe it's going to be a brave person that says: 'you know what, this is us. This is who we are, what we stand

for. These are our lines of acceptance and not acceptance and any form of hatred, you know, there's nine protected characteristics, but any form of hatred is not acceptable in this environment.' And then hopefully that will then feed itself into our local communities and into the workplace as well.

Cyra Neave: And you're giving the young people a very clear message then, aren't you, that you know, that you're taking it seriously, and that that's your position and that you're not going to just all let that slide or pretend you didn't hear it. Actually, we're going to take a really clear, no tolerance stance. And I think that would probably feel quite comforting to some young people who perhaps feel that in the past things haven't been taken seriously or they've been, you know, they haven't felt able to raise something in case they say 'oh you know, they didn't mean it'. So, it gives that young person the confidence to say, that the school do support me with knowing that that's not okay.

Rahi Popat: Yeah, absolutely. It's empowering them, empowering them to have that belief and sitting with it, as we just said about a school being brave and sitting with it as well. Like I said, it's not going to be an easy road as we've just said, but sitting with it and being comfortable with it.

If they sit with the fact, actually 'my school said, no, it's not acceptable'. Any, like you said, any form of hatred, then hopefully we start to have good citizens. You know, and it's planting those seeds early, whether that's in foundation in primary school all the way up to FE college, planting those seeds and our kids are taught, by what we teach them. So, if we teach them what are the right practices, hopefully with society working together, we stand a greater chance.

Cyra Neave: And how does low self-esteem manifest in the children's behaviour and performance in schools? What do you think staff should look out for?

Stuart Lawrence: This is being able to pick out those key indicators and knowing your young people that you're interacting with. And it goes back to that level of trust and that level of being able to have those conversations that are not always contextualised to your subject matter. Almost, just asking someone 'how you are?' 'How's your day been?' 'What have you been up?' 'What'd you get up to over the weekend?' Can give you great layers of understanding of a young person's experience outside of the school environment.

And it comes down to small things like, someone that used to be really putting their hand up all the time and it being really communicated that way, almost sort of retiring into themselves. Someone who's, you know, fluttering from different social groups could be another key indicator. So, it's really hard as a teacher to try and keep looking at for these key indicators. I do believe the more that you interact, the more that you allow yourself to be comfortable in those scenarios is the more that you were to pick up those little nuances of things to go: 'do you know what, you will never have done that before. Why has he done that?' And then going: 'Tom, what's wrong with you today? Are you feeling okay? What else is going on?' And in sometimes it's not even asking that question. How you feeling today? It's just saying: 'what did you do last night' and then the person just to start to speak. 'What's your favourite music band, your favourite football team? Did you

see the goals at the weekends?' And in those conversations about other things then being able to start dropping in and out asking other questions.

Cyra Neave: And I guess teachers are, are in a very good position, aren't they? To get to know their pupils so that then they can notice those changes, those moments where they, you know, something's a bit unexpected or he doesn't normally, and he's not normally late or she's normally really engaged in lessons, what's going on? And then that's the open door to be curious and to just do those check-ins really, and just see what's going on for that young person.

Rahi Popat: We're in a privileged, you know, position as teachers and educators. You see a child or young person could come in and we talked about, about form tutor. That's the first snapshot we see of them. We just talked about the year nine child that came up to Stuart. Now that child could have gone home and not spoken about it to parents, he would have been quiet, sat in his room. And had a different outcome to his evening. Well, that's what we'll see. But the underlying thing, was that something's been said, so we kind of need to uncover that and that we've talked about taking an interest, going into schools and talking to them or having the opportunity to have that relatability with someone. It gives them an opportunity, it just chips away at it. Doesn't it. And just gives you that opportunity to get to know that young person and for me, it's about seeing beyond what you see in front of you. Yes. It's tricky and fully appreciate that, you know, to have the time and support and not all schools have the pastoral impact. Some are stretched, I completely appreciate that, but it's those little things.

Cyra Neave: And what do you think schools can do to support this.

Rahi Popat: It's creating that culture and ethos, isn't it? Amongst you could be a primary school that has 150 kids there, a secondary school that has 1500, the, the issue around like racism and mental health. It will be everywhere in terms of a topic that we cover as educators. So having that culture and ethos and going: 'Actually, this is part of our school. This is what we're going to embed in.' In schools I've worked in, we've done things like chatter matters for primary school children. We have a box and you put your worries in there. Or, if something's happened where you don't want someone to just know straight away, but you know, someone's going to pick up that box and come and check in on you discreetly. Just being creative with it as well. Not only are you having that culture and ethos, yes, it might be a slow and steady, that culture and ethos works for you. It doesn't have to be same as it might be mirrored in some aspects, but if it fits for you, it works for you. And that's what you've got to do. And sometimes it's going to be trial and error. You know, it might be that actually this culture and ethos that you had originally, you might need to amend it and have a different version to it.

Stuart Lawrence: I believe that the student voice scenario here is, is key as well to understand that it doesn't always have to come from another adult, but it may come from a peer. But again, allowing them to have the space and the premise to be comfortable in that. So, schools can be really encouraging the peer mentoring scenario, where we're talking to one another. Where we have other clubs and scenarios where they can speak. So, it's not just always in the classroom scenario.

Cyra Neave: How can this be an ongoing part of good practice in schools?

Rahi Popat: I think in schools, having that time, patience and that kind of mindset of a collaborative approach, you know, not just working with the child or young person. Where we are in Leicester, at Keyham Lodge. You know, we have staff who are key workers, but that doesn't just stop at the child we liaise with the family and build that relationship up. And it allows, I suppose, trust, part of like the mentoring that we do. Not only do we provide it to the children in person, we provide it to the parents as well. At the same time, we're always thinking about the child or young person being at the centre and the heart and the beating heart of what we're doing with the school. So that is a really good practice there, you know, that not only that we do, but I know other schools do it. In terms of having their local community involved, but also having that as part of their DNA, you know, in terms of mentoring and supporting other people in their school.

Cyra Neave: I mean, what we do see is that self-esteem can look so different. I mean, first of all, there's so many reasons why a young person's self-esteem will be impacted. But also, you know, you might get a young person who actually has amazing inner confidence and strong self-esteem, but isn't necessarily the loudest and the most outspoken, but it's almost that they don't feel the need to be seen or to be heard because actually almost like they've got a level of, kind of inner peace and calm within them. So again, self-esteem can show itself in different ways.

Rahi Popat: Yeah. And I think they kind of copy and mirror what they see. Like social media plays a big part nowadays in terms of mental health. And, you know, we've seen and heard of, of various people, high profile people in the media who have struggled with their mental health and our actual young people will turn to social media and look to imitate and copy and believe that this is okay, or this is the norm. And having that authenticity and having that kind of mindset that 'actually I'm not okay today'. Or having that teacher go in and be like 'you know I struggled, I had a difficult weekend'. I know there's peer friendship groups, difficulties in relationships, and these, you know, start building from primary school in terms of different friendships, forming and you're trying to find your identity. We've got to take, and here's one of the key things we've talked about is that we've got to take the child for who they are. And it's, you know, it's not one size fits all.

Cyra Neave: Getting to know them for who they are, not who we want them to be.

Stuart Lawrence: Definitely, and opinions of others, I think that also can be great detriments to peoples' self-esteems. And someone said to me, you know, sometimes you've got to think of it like someone else's opinion of you doesn't really matter. That's not, that's none of your business. You can't change it. You can't shape it any way. But to be confident in yourself and just to know who you are', it's quite powerful thing today. So, you know as much as we are in a society of commenting on others, you don't need to listen to the noise. Just to speak, be happy with who you are as yourself. And to know that there will be people out there who appreciate you, who love you for who you are. And what you stand for, and that's where you find you centre yourself in those people, with those people.

Cyra Neave: And a very important message for schools to be giving, and educators, to be giving children. Because what we do know is developmentally, children are still developing a sense of self as they're growing. I mean, we can't expect a five, six-year-old to have a completely constructed sense of self, that's not developmentally appropriate. So, guiding them and supporting them, but acknowledging that level of development would be important because that is a process that we're still going through. We're always going through, let alone when you're a child and it's there, it's quite fragile.

And so, you know, we know the teenage years are particularly difficult because young people begin to individuate, move away from kind of so much parental influence and move towards peers. And the impact of that is huge. So, kind of schools supporting the young person to have that message of figuring out what's important to them. What matters themselves, you know, a better sense of self is massively important.

Rahi Popat: Yeah, definitely. As we've just said is that it is a process, it's a journey. You know, if it starts at primary school, we equip them with the tools and the variety of tools as well. And self-esteem, you know, I likened it earlier to like a car or a battery. And if our phone was low on battery, we put it straight on charge. We're very good at that. We wouldn't let that go. It's always going to fluctuate but what can we do to keep it the best we can and as high as possible.

Cyra Neave: Thank you so much for joining us today. Thank you to Stuart and Rahi for your insights. We've talked about the impact of racism on self-esteem in young people. How this might manifest what we might see or look out for in the classroom. But what we've also talked about, how self-esteem is different for everyone, and it looks different. And the focus is on getting to know the young person for who they are and the importance of their relationships within the school environment for getting to know that young person. And modelling, modelling talking about feelings and hopefully supporting the young person to develop the best possible self-esteem that they can.

To learn more about this topic, listen to the other episodes in this Talking Racism and Mental Health in Schools series. At the Anna Freud Centre, we're also developing a package of free resources and e-learning for education professionals on the topic of anti-racism and mental health to be launched in spring 2022. So do keep an eye out for that.

Episode 4: Why representation matters

Cyra Neave: Hello, and welcome to the Anna Freud Centre's podcast series, Talking about Racism and Mental Health in Schools with Stuart Lawrence and BLAM UK. I'm Cyra Neave, Senior Clinician in the Schools Division at the Centre. Today, we're going to be looking at why representation in the school environment and on the curriculum is so important.

We're joined by Eve Doran, a researcher with BLAM UK, Black Learning Achievement and Mental Health. BLAM are an organisation working to improve mental health outcomes and achievement for black children and young people. We are also joined by Michelle Roddy, Assistant Headteacher, Director of Wellbeing, Safety and Resilience at St Bonaventure's School in East London. Just a note to say that Michelle is joining us online. So the sound quality might not be as clear. Thank you so much both for joining us today.

Eve Doran: Thanks for having me.

Michelle Roddy: Thanks for having us.

Cyra Neave: So, to start with Michelle, what do we mean by representation? Both in terms of representation in staffing and also representation on the curriculum.

Michelle Roddy: So, in terms of staffing. I think this is something that, Nadhim Zahawi is actually really drawing attention to, since he's taken over as Secretary of State for Education, because he is he's drawing attention to the fact that the population in terms of staffing is simply not diverse. We know the 92% of headteachers in this country are white British. And we know that 85.6% of our teachers come from a white background. So, the issue is in some ways bigger than any individual school. And it's something that it appears that the government are now willing to acknowledge needs to be looked at. We know also from research done that there are specifically issues around career progression and to senior leadership for staff members who are from, say a minority ethnic background or a person of colour. So, these are the bigger issues that I think the government has to step in and look at in terms of recruitment and retention.

But, also then in terms of staffing in a school, what we are thinking in our school is do our students, our boys and girls. When they see the staff, do they see themselves? If they don't see themselves because obviously depending on where the school is based in the country. I'm thinking if it's somewhere in Cornwall, it may not be diverse, but if it's a case that the students don't see themselves in the staff, what steps are that school taking to ensure that they're still promoting a culture of inclusivity. So, I think that's what we mean around staffing.

In terms of the curriculum, I mean, it's an area that we know there's been a lot of work and a lot of focus on in the last, say, 12 to 18 months. If I took English, which is my subject as an example, we know that in 2019 of the students who sat the GCSE English literature paper, fewer than 1% of those students answered a question on a novel by a writer of colour and no more than 7% answered on a full length, novel written by a woman.

We see that in a subject like English, there's massive work that can be done to ensure that the curriculum is representing the students that are accessing it. And it's not just the responsibility of the subject like English. We see geography as a subject as well, or history where they have a huge role to play in looking at the history. And it's not necessarily about removing things from the curriculum but contextualizing them in a way that possibly we haven't done before.

Cyra Neave: So really looking across the curriculum, not just in specific subjects, but making sure that this is something that is thought about throughout the curriculum. So that children and young people can feel that they can see themselves, in for example, the historians you're talking about or the authors or the poets or whoever it is. That sense of, kind of, connecting.

Michelle Roddy: Absolutely. And it's something that can't be done overnight, and it's not something that should be looked at the start of January of 2022 unless this is something that has to become part of our ongoing process of review and reflection. So, every year the department should be evaluating those texts. Including pupil voice getting the experience of the students. What has their experience been in that subject? And then taking action based on the research and based on what the students are telling them that.

Cyra Neave: And Eve, so can I ask, what impact does the lack of representation have on children and young people in schools and the UK?

Eve Doran: I think it has a negative impact on their wellbeing. It's very draining to be engaging with a curriculum in which you don't see yourself represented. Every day students learn from the curriculum about what's professional. And what they can achieve and where they can go in the future is really impacted negatively by not seeing themselves represented in the curriculum.

They don't see themselves represented in the different writers that are used, in English say. So, you know, possibly imagine they couldn’t be a writer. They don't see themselves represented in science and maths thinking, perhaps, you know, STEM is not an area where people like them can excel. Receiving these messages all day long is really draining. And when you spend so much time in school, making people spend all day in school for such a large portion of their lives and they receive all their, like primary education and socialisation. It's going to seep out into the activities they do after school as well. They're going to be demotivated. And when that sort of negative impact affects things that they enjoy doing, it's really detrimental. So if you don't enjoy school because you feel like school is not for you, you have to wake up every single morning for such a large amount of time and know that you're going to have to do that. It's going to impact what you do after school as well. Your home life, how you interact with your friends and different activities.

Cyra Neave: And we know that a sense of belonging is incredibly important for, I mean, teenagers in particular, and I'm wondering what impact that must have, if they're not feeling particularly connected or that they belong within the school environment. I wonder, do they seek that sense of belonging elsewhere?

Eve Doran: Yeah, and there might not be another place to find that sense of belonging. And so going those like formative years without ever really feeling that sense of belonging has such a negative impact. It affects how you see, you know yourself as well. When you can see other people around you clearly showing a sense of belonging and showing that they feel like they belong. You're going to internalise that or direct at yourself and think what's wrong with me that I can't belong when other people other people can. And if you don't have anywhere to voice that, if you don't have a group of friends who maybe experienced the same thing or a situation that isn't facilitated by the school or by the environment that you're in. If you don't have a youth club or if the school has mentoring, but you know, you're not able to access that. It just, it stays bottled up. It turns into the truth that you hear rather than a doubt, your voice to someone. And talk it out and it might be dispelled, but when you hold it for so long, it starts to possibly feel like the truth even if it isn't.

Cyra Neave: And if you're not feeling understood, that also has to have a negative impact on your ability to, like you said, voice your difficulties. Because if you don't feel connected, you don't feel like you belong and you don't feel heard or understood. How can you voice any of your experience and feel like that would be received well. And from a mental health perspective, we know that the long-term impact of someone who has constant, kind of negative image, a lack of all of the factors that we've talked about that could potentially lead to depression, anxiety to name just a few. So, the impact could be really significant over a prolonged period of time.

Eve Doran: Yeah, definitely. And if you don't have a sense of belonging in the school or anyone you can turn to, it's also going to affect how you engage with the learning. And if that starts to also deteriorate, then you've got into kind of a cycle of things, you know, if you feel bad about yourself and then your grades start to be affected, it's going to reinforce those negative feelings that you have about yourself, that you can't do this, or you can't do that.

I think as well with the writer, Darren Chetty, he has a really interesting take on the sort of representation that you see as well sometimes. And it's always like black heroes. So, say Martin Luther King, you know, Nelson Mandela. So you can't just be, you know, your regular self, if you're a black person, you have to be exceptional. You have to be, you know, the first person to have done this, you know, students think that they're going to have to, or there's, perhaps the thought that they're going to have to go above and beyond to be accepted, that they're going to have to try twice as hard. And we do know that that is true. And that has been like historically true for people in the black community you have in professional spaces, you have to work twice as hard and students who have to be more conscious of their behaviour and how their behaviour is being outwardly perceived. Because of all of the negative stereotypes around black students, they feel like you can often feel quite hyper-visible in the school space. And so you have to check your behaviour twice as much.

Cyra Neave: But it sounds like also we're not, only talking about a lack of representation, but sometimes a misrepresentation maybe?

Eve Doran: Yeah, I think, yeah. The rush, perhaps, to amend the lack of representation has led in some cases to misrepresentation.

Michelle Roddy: It's so important that reflection is built into any of these changes around curriculum, for example, because the other thing that came into my mind, when we're thinking of what's the impact on the lack of representation is, I still heard the term 'colour-blindness'. I still hear people using that term almost as a defence or an explanation for how they're not maybe racist. And my worry then is if staff are saying they're colourblind, they're not actually seeing those young people in front of them either and seeing their full and rich experiences.

And it's everything that Eve was saying there around the misrepresentation, as well as the, the lack of aspirations. So, if they're not seeing themselves, but then what they are seeing are these highly idealised figures. It just becomes, I think in some ways then quite demotivating for them as well.

And something, again, from an English perspective, we have to look at, you know, the unconscious othering of students through the texts that have been chosen and how they're received. And mainly, I just think it just doesn't create their world, and their story is sometimes then not told or it's as Eve was saying is completely misrepresented. So, I think it has really profound impacts on students. When they do not feel represented. And I think it's about visibility and it's about being heard as well.

Cyra Neave: I just wonder if we could talk about the evidence or the research around the perhaps the impact that this lack of representation has on young people.

Eve Doran: Yeah. So the research that we're doing is specifically around the omissions in the national curriculum, particularly the omission of black narratives from the curriculum and the impact that this is having on racial cohesion in the UK. So, we're looking wider, we're looking at how this kind of affects students, but how in turn that then goes on and affects society thinking about the school space as well.

We're interviewing students and teachers and hearing from the points of view of black teachers teaching a curriculum in which they don't feel represented. Yet, have to teach in a way that would motivate students who don't feel represented by it either. And it's this kind of ongoing chain of, you know, an education that's not working with the students or for the students. And also with or for the teachers and the teachers are in some way trying to combat this. They're like kind of, you know, a bit of like almost bumping heads with the curriculum, the things that they want to teach. Say for instance, you know, Michelle has mentioned in English and it's, it's a good example of, because I've met so many, very passionate English teachers who love literature and can think of so many books that highlight the black experience and you know, I could think of so many, but they can't they don't have the space within the curriculum to be able to include it because it's so prescribed and it's so set out, and that's, you know, very frustrating.

Cyra Neave: It's quite limited and no room to bring your own experience into it. Like you said, as a black teacher, perhaps bringing your own kind of slant on things or things that have inspired you or things that you think might represent better.

Eve Doran: Definitely. And I did speak to a teacher who said that they believe if you're not excited about what you're teaching, it shows and the students can tell. And then

they're going to question, well, you know, why aren't you excited about it? And it's good for students to have that critical eye when it comes to the curriculum as well, but, if it's never going to change, you can be, you know, critically conscious, but then you still have to engage with it because of the exams.

Cyra Neave: So, I'm just wondering what schools, you know, what steps schools can take to start to address this lack of representation that we're talking about.

Michelle Roddy: There's so much the school can do in this area. Firstly, in terms of the curriculum, a really practical thing to do is just, if there has been no work done on the curriculum is setting up a working party with departments to actually look at where they're at right now.

Where are the areas that are not in any way, representative off their school community and on the steps that they can take. And I think it can feel very daunting for teachers who are just maybe starting to engage in this process. There can be a collegiate approach here. So setting up something like a working party where you have certain departments who may feel more experienced, feel more confident, feel more passionate to actually start that process going. And then through their experiences in the working party, they can share that out among the rest of the staff.

I think, one of the things that we did at St Bon's last year, which was really important, was when we knew that the kids wouldn't be sitting exams, but they'd be doing work that then involved teacher assessed grades. We then did some unconscious bias training with our staff around that. And what we've all really decided as a staff body, there's so much benefit to marking without knowing who the student is. So, we use numbers now rather than names. And a lot of those biases can be both, negative and positive, and they're all basically completely inaccurate. And we, you know, we're not doing right by the students. So providing that training to staff. I think training is so key here because we need to support staff in taking these, when they are starting to look at these things.

Another practical thing is, you know, schools can be very hierarchical. So look at the very top, look at your governors. How many of them are ex-students? Can you tap into your ex-student body? And can you encourage them back into your school to talk to the students about careers can talk to them about their experiences afterschool to talk to them about their experiences in school. But that they can start seeing themselves, not necessarily on a display board, but they're seeing it relicensed on to them, ex-students who have walked in their shoes.

Our chair of governors is an ex-Bon's boy. And one of our other governors on our behaviour and safety, is another ex-Bon's boy. They bring that uniqueness to us, both are men of colour. And so they absolutely are, when our boys see them in assemblies, they are seeing people who they can identify with.

I think that those are some steps that schools can take that are quite practical. Schools need to start looking outwards and looking in. So, it's about really being open to evaluating what's been happening so far. And doing it in a way that is safe and nurturing, but also really ensuring there's a critical friend there so that you can start actively

engaging with the aspects of the curriculum or aspects of staffing. Whatever it is that is, having those open and honest conversations, and then looking to other sources of support, what are other schools doing. Who's doing really good work here, that you can go visit them. No school is an island and they don't need to feel like they are.

And also even just practical things that creating reading lists for writers who were writing in this area, you mentioned Darren Chetty and Jeffrey Boakye has done a lot of work in these areas. Akala's Natives, I think, should be standard reading for any teacher in this country. And I wish I had been given it when I started teaching and I think it would have been enormously helpful to me.

So actually, creating resources for those teachers to access as well and making students aware of those books. One of the most powerful moments I've had with my classes is when we talk about microaggressions around their names. And Akala has talked about this when he visits schools and they're sort of internalisation where it manifests through their shame, or in saying certain names. And when the boys and the girls receive that information, and actually, it's explained to them what's happening in that moment. It's incredibly powerful for them. But we need to know that it's happening. It's teachers to be able to have that conversation with the students as well.

So those would be some of the things I think. Sarting the conversation, in the last 10 years, schools, you know, with cognitive science schools are really embracing research in a way that I don't think we were doing back in 2005 when I started teaching. And there is so much research out there around what this does to young people. So I think again, making that part of reading material available to staff so that they can really learn about the subject because the education isn't just for the children, we've got to start educating our staff around this as well.

Cyra Neave: And I wonder also what schools can learn from their pupils. As we know that, you know, they come with a wealth of experience and ideas and you know, knowledge. And so I'm wondering how we can learn from them as well?

Michelle Roddy: I would say the first thing we have to do in every decision that we're making is what does it mean for our students and how will we know what it means to them without starting those conversations with them? One of the things that, again, I, and I appreciate that I'm going back to English on this, but there's a creative writing aspect to most English courses. And students will often go and talk about, you know, they create a story, it might be a James Bond one or an FA cup final, but actually when you have writers and residents speak to the students, they would always say your life is the best story you can tell you are the richest storyteller. And actually allowing students the space too, it doesn't have to be writing, but creatively engage with their life experiences and celebrate them. And get them on the displays. You know, maybe it's about taking down some of the Martin Luther King and putting up the children's lives on those display boards instead and creating the space where they feel that they are valued and that people are seeking to understand what their background is like and what their heritage is and what's important about it.

Eve Doran: Michelle makes really good points speaking about training. Often as well, what we have been finding in our research too, is that when it comes to things like Black History Month or cultural holidays, it'll often fall on minority ethnic teachers from that same background to take on the responsibility of, you know, organising around it or doing an event or, you know, coming up with ways that it can be incorporated into the school. And it's a lot of extra labour and it's a lot of emotional labour to do when it's an event that's also affecting you as a black person. To then, you know, be expected to take the lead on, you know, discussions with students around it. It's a lot of work and a lot of responsibility. And often I think teachers take it on because they want it to be done and it might not get done if they don't do it. And if teachers have that training, they feel that they could share that responsibility and share that load.

Cyra Neave: It reminds me of kind of the conversations I have in school about mental health and how, you know, sometimes it's the anxiety that teachers hold about, 'oh what if I ask about that it's going open up a can of worms?', or 'I don't know how to talk about self harm' or whatever it is. Because it raises so much anxiety and it's something around training, but also helping to improve confidence so that they know that you're not always going to get it right, and that's okay. And you don't have to have all the answers and all of these kinds of messages, which will be so important for school to hear so that they can just be that bit braver to take on these and not skip over and not miss those opportunities. Because it's similar, you know, if a child comes to you, struggling, you don't miss that opportunity to talk to them because you might really be able to make a difference. And just to show that you've noticed or that you want to understand, or that you you're there to listen can be incredibly powerful for a young person who's struggling.

Thank you for joining us today. And thank you so much, Eve and Michelle, for your insights. Today, we've talked about representation in staff and in the curriculum. We've talked about the impact that this lack of representation and also misrepresentation actually has on children and young people. We've covered many practical tips and ideas for how schools might go about improving this representation, and we hope you found it helpful.

To learn more about this topic. Listen to the other episodes in this Talking Racism and Mental Health in Schools series. At the Anna Freud Centre, we're also developing a package of free resources and e-learning for education professionals on the topic of anti-racism and mental health to be launched in spring 2022. So do keep an eye out for that.

Episode 5: Black British culture and language in schools

Cyra Neave: Hello, and welcome to the Anna Freud Centre's podcast series, Talking about Racism and Mental Health in Schools with Stuart Lawrence and BLAM UK. I'm Cyra Neave, Senior Clinician in the Schools Division at the Centre. Today, we're exploring the ways that black culture and language is sometimes perceived in education settings and how this can impact the mental health of children and young people.

We're joined by Eve Doran, a researcher with BLAM UK, Black Learning Achievement and Mental Health. BLAM are an organisation working to improve mental health outcomes and achievement for black children and young people. We are also joined by Wonu Salau, Assistant Headteacher and Head of English at St. Bonaventure school in East London. Just a note to say, Wonu is joining us online, so the sound quality may not be as clear.

Thank you so much both for joining us today.

Eve Doran: Thanks for having us.

Wonu Salau: Thanks for having us.

Cyra Neave: Okay, we're going to start by talking about what do we mean when we talk about Black British culture and language. Eve, what does it mean to young people to be part of this community and culture and what are the positives?

Eve Doran: The positives are the creative expression, especially with Black, British/English. Being Black British is something that you can own. And it's something, you know, you can identify with, you know, you can see yourself represented.

Wonu Salau: Yeah, I would agree. I think sometimes one of the issues that I have of the term Black British culture is I feel like the black experience in Britain is so diverse because of the various cultures that kind of create that culture. So it's an amalgamation of so many different histories, so many different traditions. And because Black people are not a monolith, I think sometimes it's important to kind of explore the layers of Black British culture. Even if you think about different generations of Black British people or migrant communities and what their experience is like, and kind of some of the traditions they've passed down, and how that's now in the bedrock of the culture that we might see now. But I definitely, I definitely agree with Eve in terms of the vibrancy, especially when you think about how many languages there are spoken by, young people who would classify themselves as Black British, but also with, with a culture and an identity that is very far removed from Britain.

So I think it is really important to recognise that it's an amalgamation of a number of cultures. It's not as easy to pinpoint and say, oh, it's just one thing I think is so many things, which actually is kind of the beauty of it, to be honest.

Cyra Neave: So important to make sure that we don't lump everyone in the same kind of group. And that actually we get to know the individual, because actually that could look

very different across different people who might identify as Black British. Or actually it might look quite different across, depending on what their histories are and their background and their experiences are. And, can you explain the issues with expression of black culture and language in schools? Can you, can you talk a bit about what the potential conflicts are with, for example, with school rules?

Wonu Salau: If I think about our context or I guess the context of having kind of a high proportion, even a small or a minority of Black students, is that the things that make up that the things that are cultural norms for them might be very different to what are called cultural norms for kind of indigenous British people. When I say that I'm in kind of your white English people in our context of being in England. And I think sometimes because of that difference, that difference can sometimes be demonised or it's very easy for it to be othered and in quite a negative way.

So that might mean, I remember speaking to another secondary colleague on a course, and, in this area that his school is in, in Essex, they've had, kind of, over the last few years, a massive wave of West African families moving out of the inner city into this area. And he said, you know, that's changed the demographics of this school. And he noted that one day, in a lesson, he had a group of Black girls on one table and kind of, they were kind of the minority in the class and that they were doing the tasks. He'd asked them all to do kind of a think, pair, share to have a discussion on their tables. But their discussion was louder than everybody else's and he was saying that his automatic reaction was that 'they're off task, they must be off task'. But not realising that actually maybe there's a cultural difference there, and that actually they are louder. When he was telling them off, they were like, 'sorry, that's just like, how I speak at home. Like I'm, I'm not shouting. I'm not. I'm just quite passionate'. And I think even though that can be something that seems quite trivial, it can be those subtle differences in expression that might be commonplace in some cultures that because of the otherness can easily be demonised and make students, especially Black students feel like their behaviour is not exemplary just because they express themselves in another way.

So, I feel like sometimes it's those kinds of things in terms of expression, that can conflict with school. In terms of language. I think it's interesting, an interesting thing about language, because I thought that's been, for some reason, especially in mainstream media there has been kind of a synonymous grouping of inner London slang or colloquialisms and black culture. And then that being seen as kind of a wrong thing. So some of those terms being kind of finely linked to a black experience, or maybe being a Black young person in Britain. Whereas, actually, in terms of class, every single class group has slang. Every single class group has colloquialisms, codes, code switching. And I think even that, sometimes forgetting that exists in every community can sometimes be a negative thing. Maybe that some of our Black young people feel if there are certain ways that they express themselves that are seen as not seen as wrong or are seen as non-standard English, even though it is non-standard English, but kind of not an appropriate way to express yourself when actually that might be the truest way for them to express themselves.

Cyra Neave: So that must be really hard to manage if they're coming into school and they have this pressure to adjust the way they speak or the way that they are. Adjust

their norms to meet the standards of the school. But then, when they're back in the community, then it's different. And that, that must be quite confusing.

Wonu Salau: Yeah, it can be and also rather than it just being acknowledged as another way to communicate.

Eve Doran: Yeah, it's interesting, what Wonu mentions about language. That is something at BLAM that we have been organising and campaigning around and, you know, certain schools bringing in policies, that ban certain expressions. Expressions that are most commonly found in black culture and have stemmed from black culture, these expressions being banned. But then the school is saying that the policy isn't racialised in any way when you know it clearly is, and it's clearly disadvantaging Black young people more so. The effect can be that they put forth this idea that it's unprofessional and that you won't be able to get a job and that it needs to be completely eradicated. Be it like in the classroom in general or in essays and I think it doesn't give, yeah, it kind puts forward the belief that it's not professional and that you won't succeed academically or professionally if you use your natural way of expressing yourself.

Cyra Neave: And I just wonder what impact that must have on the children and young people affected by these rules and policies?

Wonu Salau: It's interesting because especially as an English teacher, we kind of really are constantly perpetuating and reinforcing this idea that, you know, you need to, and I think we say: 'communicate in a certain way'. I think the way that we approach it, particularly with our students is the reason standard English is important is because you just want to make sure that wherever you are in the world, if this is a standard way of people accessing this language, that you have the power to not only understand what another person is saying, but communicate and express yourself with as much clarity as possible. And that's what is important. That's the reason why, you know, grammar, punctuation and spelling is really important because, you know, you don't want anything to hinder the message that you're trying to get across.

And then it's almost like they need to know those rules so that they can effectively manipulate them to enhance their message or to show creativity. And I do feel like there is that tension, particularly for English teachers where you're encouraging this creativity. And I always have that question, when I set a piece of creative writing, a student will say: 'oh miss, can I practice talking slang?' And you know what I say, if it's dialogued, it's appropriate because if that's what your characters would say, then actually you're making a really authentic piece of literature. And I think that's an important conversation to have. Good writers don't shy away from that. They read really good writing from a particular period. Then there will be terms that that have been put in on purpose to effectively show that character's dialect, or to show that character's associate, to show that they belong to a certain type of group.

So, I think often we don't always have that conversation, which I think that is sometimes what hinders the creativity, but it's almost like if you don't have the conversation, then you're almost saying to that child, the way that you express yourself is not good enough. And that's quite a harmful message to send to young Black children.

Cyra Neave: And what can schools do to review their rules and policies, and to ensure that they're not discriminatory now and in the future?

Eve Doran: So, there's a lot of policies that schools perhaps, you know, it would be very obvious that they are overtly racist and they have probably since changed, since 2020. But also there's a report, Race and Racism in Secondary Schools by Dr. Remi Joseph Salisbury. And he speaks about race neutral policies. So policies that are seemingly neutral but in their neutrality negatively affect Black students more than other groups of students. And so it's having a really critical lens. One policy that we've seen of is around hair. So hair policies, a lot of those were changed because there was so much activism around it. But there's still policies in schools that they don't ban afros, they don't ban braids because they know that that is very overtly racist now. But the neutral ones like around hair colour, often they have policies that if you dye your hair, it has to be a natural colour. And we've spoken to black students who it's been dictated to them, what a natural hair colour is for a black person. So if they've gotten like blonde highlights. They've been asked to change their hair, whereas if a white student has gotten blonde highlights, nothing's been said.

Wonu Salau: Definitely agree, that's one of the one's I was thinking about, was probably policies around hair. We've kind of seen that in the media. I remember, was it last year or the year before? The case of a young man that had dreadlocks, he had locks and he was asked to cut them off that they were against school policy. Another female student who had grown her afro and had been told that because she was wearing it as an afro, kind of out that that was also against school policy.

But yes, I think sometimes it's just kind of being quite insidious, you know, it kind of still reinforces maybe the otherness. You know, you can dye your hair, but you can't dye it this colour. You can grow your hair, but you can't grow it past here. Which for some black people in terms of their hair textures and if you've got shrinkage one day, you could be really, really small and another day it could be all the way out here. So, I think sometimes it's just having that understanding of what that might mean for those students and how, even if it's not knowingly, you're covertly, ultimately discriminating against them.

Cyra Neave: So just wondering if there are any tips or suggestions about how schools can positively celebrate black culture and languages?

Wonu Salau: It's really important to start with the students. I think assessing what is, what has been their experience been. And also kind of, like I said earlier, it's Black people in that experience that they're not monolithic. So you, you have to kind of think about the cohort you have. How do they want to be affirmed? What are the things that they don't see? What other things that they've seen somewhere else that they'd really like to be a part of that the fabric of their school, part of their every day, part of school events.

And I think that's, what's going to help you make sure that it's not tokenistic because I think especially last year with the increase in the profile of the Black Lives Matter movement as a social movement. And then also the politics as well. There was this rush to ensure that schools were trying to be more inclusive, were talking about race widely. And it seemed very hopeful in terms of people really paying attention and putting it at the

top of the agenda. But I think when there's no long-term planning and understanding that, you know, one thing on one day in a week is not going to necessarily always make that lasting impact, but actually being honest with yourself in terms of the journey that you want to recognise, and that it is a journey.

And I think including staff and also including students, sorry and also including staff. I mean, it's really helpful at the same time as a staff member, giving staff the tools and competence. So, creating a space for them to still ask questions and examine the issues that are present within your community. That might be the reason why some of your black students don't feel like they're being affirmed at school. And basic things like, or I say more practical things rather. What images are you using in your lessons? When you're considering the examples that you're using, are you going the extra mile to find images that are as representative as possible?

One of our colleagues said that, you know, whenever he, he's a sociology teacher, and whenever he's, teaching about family, the first 30, 40 pictures are going to be kind of a white family with a mum and a dad. And he was saying that, you know, that's something he's had to become more conscious of that in a school like ours, which is kind of our majority is the minority. We have more minority ethnic students than white British students. He's got to be conscious of this. And in any school of how you are trying to make sure that they are seeing kind of a real reflection, something that's representative. Representative of the world, also being discerning with your text choices for us as English teachers. This is kind of a journey we're on in our department of getting rid of certain texts, arguing the value of a text. And why are we teaching this text? Is it because it's in the canon? And the canon alone? Is it more about the ideas that we're trying to teach? Is there another text that we could teach for the same ideas and that we don't feel is going to make our students feel uncomfortable and unnecessarily because of the language that's being used.

And also the times when actually, there's scope for a conversation around that with maybe some older students, you know, around why that was happening in that time. And if it's all of these things that are quite nuanced, but without a conversation, you don't see that effective change, but it's those kinds of really practical things that I think particularly, teachers can do in the classroom to make a real difference for their Black students.

Eve Doran: Listening to the students as well and not, you know, bringing in different initiatives and things that haven't been spoken about with the students, that's going to be yours as a teacher, that can be really great resource. Also encouraging is a lot of work that BLAM does in schools. And some of these are part of like an afterschool club. Other times it's time made in lessons and a different periods or form. But if you want to encourage a sense of celebration about the culture, there's different organisations that you can bring into the school to make up for, you know, if you don't have a very representative staff or, you know, staff can be so busy as well. But yeah, so kind of an afterschool clubs that teach about like black history and everyone in the school should be involved. So it shouldn't just be down to Black teachers.

Cyra Neave: I'm really interested in what you were saying about kind of bringing people in, but it almost feels like the afterschool idea, it needs to be part of the day, you know? Because it needs to be prioritised. It needs to be as important as the other lessons. And

actually if we add it on again, it feels like it's kind of extra, but it shouldn't be, it should be part of the children's learning. Because it is just as important.

Eve Doran: Oh yeah, it should be part of the national curriculum and that's what we're hoping for, to have the curriculum reformed. Because at the moment there's no, they don't make space for it. It's not naturally occurring in the national curriculum. It comes down to individual teachers and their choice. And some teachers will find the space and they will teach it throughout their lesson. But other teachers, unfortunately won't so it needs to be embedded in there.

Wonu Salau: I was just going to say, I think in terms of like, thinking about what that looks like for curriculum, it really has to start from the top actually. And it starts with a whole school approach. Having honest conversations about unconscious biases that we have. Also the fact that unconscious bias, we're moving kind of the dirt from that term, so people run away from it. And so I don't have any, or I don't want to deal with it, but actually recognising that we do and we're recognising it so that we make sure that we are providing the best experience possible for our students.

For some of our, especially our Black students school should at times, feel like the most safe and expressive place they'll be, before they enter into the big, bad world. And actually, if you can make that as much of a safe environment by making sure the curriculum is not only challenging and accessible, but also representative, you kind of should. And I think it oftentimes it does mean having those conversations as a staff body to say, you know, look at your curriculums and look at what you're teaching. Do you think that this is reflective of the wider world? Do you feel like this is reflective of your student body? Do you feel like, are there any gaps in terms of training? Do you want to contact external agencies as well to come in and support, support you as a school? Are there schools that you can support? Because I can imagine in a school where you don't have, if you're in a school that is kind of a majority white British school, you're in maybe rural Devon and you don't have the access to maybe more diverse communities as I might, for example, teaching in a school in East London. That might be really difficult to feel empowered, to make that change, or even feel like there's an need for that change or need for that point of reflection, but actually by reaching out, that can be something powerful in making sure you're transforming the experience for the students that you have, because it's still about a reflective curriculum. It's still about a curriculum that is actually representative of the wider the community and the wider the culture.

Definitely agree that sometimes it will start with kind of looking inward and making sure you can identify the needs of your staff so that you can make those effective changes and map out when they'll happen. It's never going to happen in one academic year. It might not even be two, but it's being realistic kind of about how that change will hopefully be continuous, but also gradual.

Cyra Neave: Thank you so much for joining us today. Thank you to Eve and Wonu for your insights. We've talked about Black British culture and language, and the positives of being part of this. We've talked about the importance of the individual experience and school rules and policies and the negative impact that these can have on Black children and young people. We've also spent time thinking about some ideas around good practice and how schools can positively celebrate Black culture and language.

To learn more about this topic listen to the other episodes in this Talking Racism and Mental Health in Schools podcast series. At the Anna Freud Centre, we're also developing a package of free resources and e-learning for education professionals on the topic of anti-racism and mental health to be launched in spring 2022. So do keep an eye out for that.