An Exploration of Intersectionality and School Belonging in the Permanent Exclusion of Black Caribbean Boys in Schools in England: Implications for Educational Psychologists.

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Abstract

Aims: Disproportionately high exclusion rates of Black Caribbean Boys (BCBs) in England are considered from a school belonging perspective, particularly as mediated through teacher relations. The vulnerabilities of this group are considered, with intersectionality suggested as a critical concept.

Method/Rationale: BCBs are permanently excluded from schools in England at a rate three times higher than the general population. Permanent exclusion has been linked to a range of negative personal and socio-economic consequences, highlighting the need to address this disparity. School belonging mediates negative peer and parental influences and may be linked to school exclusion for some groups. Literature is reviewed considering belonging, linking belonginess threats to both pro-social and anti-social behaviour. The multi-dimensional nature of school belonging is noted. School belonging literature is reviewed, establishing the vital importance of teacher relationships. Evidence regarding BCB's relationships with their teachers, often characterised by low expectations, differential treatment and racial bias, is considered.

Findings: It is argued that these negative relational influences constitute belonginess threats for BCBs. It is hypothesised that these, along with increased belongingness sensitivity amongst some BCBs, can drive increased anti-social behaviour, in some cases leading to school exclusion.

Limitations: This is a theoretical paper and further empirical research is needed into what constitutes school belonging for BCBs, whose lives are often impacted by various intersecting inequalities.

Conclusions: Initiatives aiming to increase school belonging amongst BCBs, by improving their relationships with teachers, are suggested as a way of decreasing exclusions. A role for Educational Psychologists in supporting schools with evidence-based approaches to enhancing school belonging for this group is suggested.

Key Words: school belonging, intersectionality, Black Caribbean Heritage pupils, school exclusion, social justice

An Exploration of Intersectionality and School Belonging in the Permanent Exclusion of Black Caribbean Boys in Schools in England: Implications for Educational Psychologists.

Introduction

Black Caribbean Boys (BCBs) experience persistently high rates of exclusion from secondary schools in England. Figures from before the pandemic revealed that overall fixed term and permanent school exclusions rose from 6,685 in 2015/16 to 7,720 in 2016/17 (Department for Education [DfE], 2018). Black Caribbean pupils were excluded at a rate nearly three times higher than the school population as a whole (0.28% compared to 0.10%; DfE, 2018). Boys are overrepresented in exclusion data generally, being three times more likely to be excluded than girls (DfE, 2018). However, amongst Black Caribbean pupils, boys are four times more likely to be excluded than their female counterparts. The current salience of this issue in society is evidenced through contemporary media reports, such as McIntyre et al.'s, in The Guardian, highlighting regional disparities that exist within exclusion rates at the local authority level (McIntyre et al., 2021). That said, this is not a new problem – instead, the education system in England has wrestled with this seemingly intractable problem since the 1970s (Grant & Brooks, 1998). The persistent disparity in exclusion figures suggests that schools are not adequately meeting the needs of BCH boys in particular and this paper will consider the role of intersectionality in their lives, exploring whether there is theoretical evidence to suggest that enhancing school belonging could facilitate a reduction in school exclusions for this group. Consideration is also given to how Educational Psychologists (EPs) could support schools to better meet the needs of these pupils.

The Department for Education define permanent exclusion as, ‘a pupil who is excluded and will not come back to that school (unless the exclusion is overturned),’ (DfE, 2022b). Persistent disruptive behaviour is consistently cited as the main reason for exclusion (DfE, 2022). Research demonstrates the individual cost of exclusion, which includes significantly lower educational attainment and a higher likelihood of unemployment at the age of 19 (DfE, 2018; Gill, 2017). Additionally, Ministry of Justice data reveals that 42% of prisoners had been permanently excluded from school (Ministry of Justice, 2012). Furthermore, there is a significant socio-economic cost associated with school exclusion, with the Institute for Public Policy Research estimating the costs to the taxpayer for each excluded pupil at £370,000 over a lifetime (Gill, 2017). There are, of course, exceptions which show that school exclusion does not automatically lead to poor life chances (Wright et al., 2005, Wright et al., 2016), but the weight of evidence regarding negative outcomes remains stark. The over-representation of BCBs in the permanent exclusion statistics, then, should be of concern to both government, society and EPs.

It has been suggested that the extent to which students feel that they belong in school may be a factor in school exclusion for some groups (Graham et al., 2019) and this paper considers whether there is evidence to suggest that increasing BCB’s sense of belonging in schools could support a reduction in exclusion rates. The term ‘Black Caribbean’ is used in this paper, reflecting the 2021 UK Census categorisation (ONS, 2021). However, it is recognised that the categorisation of people as ‘Black’ can be considered problematic, concealing, as it does, the heterogeneity of cultures amongst diverse African populations and potentially reinforcing racial stereotypes (Agyemang et al., 2005). The role of intersectionality in BCBs lives is explored, followed by consideration of the theoretical concept of belonging, exploring its impact on human behaviour, particularly the suggested link between social exclusion, negative emotions and anti-social behaviour. The concept of

belonging in schools is reviewed in more detail, with factors that are influential to it considered, alongside evidence for an interaction between belonging and ethnicity. The focus is on secondary schools as this is where the exclusion gap becomes most pronounced (Graham et al., 2019). Additionally, adolescence is a period where identify formation becomes particularly salient (Steinberg & Morris, 2001) and school belonging correlates with positive identity formation (Allen et al., 2018). One factor that is consistently found to impact on belonging in school is teacher relationships, so evidence around relationships between BCBs and teachers is considered, focusing specifically on research that points to teachers' holding lower expectations of pupils from this group (Demie, 2022). Differential treatment and the impact of racial bias are also considered (Joseph-Salsbury, 2020). This paper argues that these negative relational influences are likely to induce feelings of social exclusion amongst BCBs. Given what is known about the behavioural impact of social exclusion, this paper hypothesises that these relational factors may be a driver of disruptive behaviour amongst some in this group. This paper suggests, then, that initiatives to increase belonging for BCBs, through improved teacher-student relations, might also lead to a reduction in exclusion rates. Implications of this for school staff and ways that EPs might support them, along with directions for future research are considered.

School Exclusion and Intersectionality

School exclusion and the factors leading up to it are complex and multi-faceted, often overlapping with other vulnerabilities. Many are not unique to BCBs, such as Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, poverty, trauma and challenges in their home lives (Graham et al., 2019). To understand the unique challenges faced by BCBs, an approach informed by intersectionality is required. Crenshaw (1989) highlighted that an individual's experience is defined by the

interplay of overlapping and intersecting characteristics, such as class, gender and race, rather than one single characteristic. For example, 47% of Black Caribbean pupils were entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) at some time in the last 5 years, compared to 26% of white pupils. It is well established that an achievement gap exists for low socio-economic status (SES) groups, with only 25% of pupils receiving FSM achieving English or Maths GCSEs grades 9-5, compared to 50% of all other pupils in 2019 (DfE, 2022a). However, at both average and low SES, BCBs were the lowest achieving group (Strand, 2021). Demie and McLean (2018) consider why Black Caribbean pupils fare worse than Black African pupils, highlighting the reluctance of many Black Caribbean parents to engage with education, due to their own negative experiences. They note that many Black Caribbean children in the UK grow up in single parent families, 59% on average, which contrasts with 22% (when including all groups) and 42% for Black African families specifically (Demie & McLean, 2018). Their research, drawn from interviews with teachers and parents, suggests that this has a damaging impact on BCBs in particular, leaving an absence of role models in these boys' lives and anger around abandonment and feeling pressure to assume the role of the man of the house. It should be noted, however, that this research does not include the voices of BCBs themselves. Nonetheless, the intention in outlining these factors is not to attribute blame to the community, but to start to illustrate the complex and overlapping factors that impact on some BCBs outside school, in order to provide a context for what might be done within schools to best support them and how EPs might assist with this. Whilst recognising the importance of the social and political factors that influence school exclusion (Graham et al., 2019), this paper will focus on school-based factors in particular because schools are important sites where belonging can be fostered (Gray et al., 2020) and positive relationships with teachers can mediate negative relationships with peers and parents (Pianta et al., 2012).

Consequences of Belonging

Baumeister and Leary (1995) proposed that humans have a fundamental need to belong, that is to, 'form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships,' (p499) and that a lack of belongingness is equivalent to deprivation. To foster belonging, these relationships must be characterised by, frequent affectively positive interactions, mutual concern for the other's welfare and some degree of expected longevity. They note the overlap between their theory of belonging and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), which places love and belonging in the middle of the hierarchy, and Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1958), which highlights the role of early relationship bonds on later relationship development; but emphasise the frequent interaction and persistent caring that their hypothesis foregrounds. They review evidence against fourteen conditions to argue that belonging is a fundamental human motivation, concluding that greater belonging leads to positive emotions whilst being rejected and excluded, leads to significant negative emotions.

Whilst their highly influential paper is compelling, Gere and MacDonald (2010) critique Baumeister and Leary (1995) for providing only indirect support for the belongingness hypothesis because the studies they reviewed were not directly designed to evaluate this hypothesis. Gere and MacDonald (2010), then, review empirical research focused on the need to belong, considering its impact on cognitive, emotional and behavioural reactions. Several of their findings have relevance to school belonging. With regards to cognitive reactions, they suggest that threats to belonging have been shown to have an impact on higher level processing (Chen et al., 2008) confirming Baumeister and Leary's (1995) assumption that belongingness threats should tax cognitive resources. Whilst findings on emotional reactions are mixed, they find evidence that threats to belonging impact on emotions, with social exclusion leading to more anger and higher levels of negative affect (cf. Williams & Nida, 2014). Findings around behavioural reactions to belongingness threats are also mixed. Baumeister and Leary (1995) predicted that social exclusion would lead to

prosocial responses as individuals attempted to regain connection. However, some research suggests that social exclusion motivates individuals to seek retaliation against the person who has rejected them (Leary et al., 2006). Such behaviours could be considered counter-intuitive, as they are unlikely to assist in re-establishing social connections. However, social withdrawal may also be a protection mechanism against further rejection (Shulman & Dreikurs, 1978). That said, there is contradictory evidence to suggest that for some, rejection leads to a rise in pro-social behaviour (Zwolinski, 2008), particularly where participants are given an opportunity to re-establish social contact. Here, the opportunity to re-connect to others may help to overcome the negative feelings induced by the belonginess threat (Gere and MacDonald, 2010). When applied to BCBs, this suggests that experiences of ostracism at school may lead to cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses resulting in disruptive behaviour, unless efforts are made to re-establish social connections. For example, Gere and MacDonald (2010) suggest that when rejection elicits feelings of anger, this could lead to 'antisocial' responses, which might be particularly pertinent for those who rejection involves racial discrimination.

School Belonging

It is instructive for EPs, then, to consider school belonging in more detail. With regard to belonging in schools, a widely accepted definition of school belonging is, 'the extent to which [students] feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others – especially teachers and other adults in the school social environment,' (Goodenow & Grady, 1993, p60-61). This definition emphasises the interaction between the within-person and environmental aspects of school belonging. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model provides a useful framework for understanding belonging in schools, whereby it is understood to be impacted by a range of bi-directional influences that operate at different levels, including the microsystem (e.g., individual), mesosystem (e.g., teachers and parents)

and exosystem (e.g., school and government policy), rather than being simply an individual attribute. Nonetheless, an association has been identified between school belonging and a range of positive outcomes such as academic achievement (Neel & Fuligni, 2013), better mental health and wellbeing (Arslan, 2018) and lower absence and dropout rates (Korpershoek et al., 2020).

Differential rates of school belonging amongst ethnic and racial groups has not been widely researched in the UK context, but recent research from the US suggests that racial disparities in school belonging moderate the relationship between race and suspension. In schools where Black students felt a greater sense of belonging than white students, the within-school racial disparities in school suspensions reduced to non-significance (Fisher et al., 2020). These results suggest there may be an interaction between race and belonging that could positively impact behaviour. In addition to this, recent research conducted amongst school pupils in Northern Ireland suggested that minority ethnic groups living in mainly white regions experienced lower rates of belonging and higher rates of feelings of exclusion than their White Northern Irish peers (2013). Whilst this research did not focus on Black Caribbean pupils, it does point to an interaction between ethnicity, feelings of exclusion and belonging in the UK context, although it does not address school behaviour.

In their comprehensive meta-analysis of individual and social factors that influence school belonging, Allen and colleagues (2018) identify teacher support, characterised by caring relationships, fairness and support; and positive personal characteristics, such as conscientiousness, optimism and self-esteem, as the strongest predictors of school belonging. For the studies included in their review, the independent variable within teacher support that had the largest effect size was ‘autonomy, support and involvement’ (r = 0.78) - essentially a measure, based on Self-determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), of how well the teachers

support their pupils' autonomy, competence and relationships. The two other variables with the highest effect sizes within the teacher support category were 'caring relationships' (r = 0.68) and 'friendliness' (r = 0.63).

Interestingly, they found that race and ethnicity were not significantly related to school belonging. However, only four studies that considered race/ethnicity were included, and they demonstrated significant variability in their findings; with three studies (Bonny et al., 2000; Cook et al., 2012; Voelkl, 1995) finding a significant positive association and one finding a significant negative association (Whitlock, 2007), though all positive effect sizes were small. This compares to a mean average of eleven studies per theme. Where the total number of studies included is higher, the variability between studies will have less impact on the overall results as Allen and colleagues (2018) acknowledge. The small number of studies identified is suggestive of the extent to which ethnicity is overlooked in the school belonging literature. Additionally, Allen and colleagues (2018) review does not account for the intersectionality of race or other factors, such as considerations of whether the association between race and belonging could be moderated by how many other students and teachers there are from the same race within the specific school. They conceptualise race and ethnicity as microsystem factors rather than something impacted by variables at all levels. For BCBs, for example, mesosystem factors - such as levels of parental engagement with school; which in turn have been impacted by those parents' own negative experiences of school (Demie & McLean, 2018) as a result of various mesosystem and microsystem factors; are likely to impact on their personal characteristics in school. Where race and ethnicity are treated as independent variables, they are seen as properties of individuals rather than as reflections of inequality in macrolevel social practices (Cole, 2009), limiting a more in-depth understanding of this as a factor that might impact on school belonging.

Another interesting finding from their research was that relationships with peers, which has been thought of as a key indicator in school belonging (Wang & Eccles, 2012), was found to be significantly associated with school belonging, although less so than teacher relationships. This echoes the findings of Shaw's (2019) recent research, conducted in ethnically diverse London schools, exploring secondary aged pupils' views on school belonging. Here again, relationships with staff were identified as the most important factor in belonging. Given that teacher relationships can be a powerful force in school belonging this paper will now consider research evidence pertaining to the relationships between BCBs and their teachers, with a view to considering how EPs might support teachers to build more positive relationships with BCBs.

Teacher Aspirations

According to a YMCA (2020) report, 49% of young black people felt that the biggest barrier to their academic attainment was teachers' perceptions of them, particularly negative racist stereotyping and low expectations. These perceptions are broadly supported in the literature. For example, Strand's (2012) exploration of the White British-Black Caribbean achievement gap found that, relative to their White peers, Black Caribbean students were systematically under-represented in entry to higher tiers for Maths and Science, with the difference remaining even when controlling for prior attainment, suggesting other factors, such as teachers' low perceptions of ability, were contributing to this under-representation.

The perception that teachers have lower academic expectations for Black Caribbean pupils is also confirmed in Rudoe's (2014) qualitative study. Her research focuses on pregnant Black Caribbean young women who had either left or been excluded from school. They cited low expectations from teachers as being a key factor in the difficulties they experienced within school, with many of them going onto achieve greater success in an

Alternative Provision setting than their mainstream-school teachers predicted for them. Whilst this study focuses on female pupils, rather than male, it provides an insight into the chain of events leading Black Caribbean pupils to disengage from school: 'the pupils were not disengaged from learning; their problems were often exacerbated by being marginalised in school' (Rudoe, 2014, p. 5).

Demie (2022) attributes low expectations amongst teachers to racism, highlighting the impact this can have on BCBs performance. With regard to teacher expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies, Jussim and Harber (2005) found that, for certain stigmatised social groups, self-fulfilling prophecies can be powerful. However, they also concluded that self-fulfilling prophecies may be 'self-fulfilling' because they were accurate in the first place. Rudoe's (2014) research, demonstrates that this is by no means always the case and an alternative view, for which there is much evidence, is that stigma and discrimination impact on the achievement and self-worth of young people, leading to academic disengagement, which may be particularly the case for BCBs (Howarth & Andreouli, 2015).

Differential Treatment

Another issue cited in Rudoe's (2014) research is the perception of differential treatment from teachers, with one participant highlighting her exclusion from school after one misdemeanour and comparing this to a white student who was given multiple chances. This view is supported in the literature (Demie & McLean, 2018; Huang, 2018; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). While investigating the influence of racial stereotypes on disciplinary sanctions, Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) showed that teachers were significantly more troubled by the second behavioural infraction of a Black student than that of a White student, and as a result, felt they should be disciplined significantly more harshly. They also found that for Black students, the behaviour was much more likely to be seen as a pattern of

misbehaviour than for White students. However, as Huang's (2018) review of national, longitudinal high school data in the US demonstrates, Black students did *not* misbehave more, but *were* disciplined differentially for the same behaviour. Whilst this research was conducted in the US, the differential data with regards to school suspensions in the UK, whereby BCBs experience suspensions at a higher rate (DfE, 2018), provides circumstantial evidence, at least, for similar thinking amongst teachers in the UK.

Demie (2022) attributes such experiences to teachers' conscious and unconscious racial bias towards BCBs. Crozier (2005) interviewed parents of Black pupils in the UK and found that they repeatedly spoke of the stigmatisation their children experienced for being, 'loud, big…and therefore aggressive,' (p251). These perceptions were echoed by parents interviewed for Demie's (2021) study, where participants spoke of their children being, 'labelled and stereotyped,' (p63). Height growth trajectory studies have found Black African/Caribbean children to be considerably taller than other ethnic groups (Lu et al., 2020) and there is evidence to suggest that 'adultification' is commonly experienced by Black children, whereby they are perceived to be older and less innocent than their same age white peers (Davis & Marsh, 2020; Goff et al., 2014). Both may be factors in differential treatment. However, Hamilton (2018) argues that schools are 'White spaces,' with White, ethnocentric cultures and practices. For Wright (2010), the concept of 'Whiteness' is in direct opposition to intersectionality, whereby diverse White students are homogenised and privileged as White, whilst Black students' multiple dimensions and identities are suppressed and viewed only through the lens of 'Whiteness.' She found evidence of White middle-class teachers viewing Black children negatively, having stereotyped them in ways linked to normative Whiteness. Amongst the pupils she observed, there were two very different responses to the 'othering' they experienced. Some pupils rejected racial stereotypes and resisted them by working hard to prove them wrong. However, others responded by resisting the power of the

teacher in the form of defiant behaviour. Interestingly, these two responses mirror the two behavioural responses to a threat to belonging that are broadly identified by Gere and MacDonald (2010): pro-social or anti-social behaviour. When Black Caribbean pupils experience racial bias from teachers this equates to a belongingness threat.

For BCBs, experiencing low expectations from their teachers will have an impact on their ability to achieve autonomy, support and involvement as they are denied the support of an adult who has the highest expectations for them. Similarly, the experiences of differential treatment and racial stereotyping impact on their ability to feel that they have caring relationships with their teacher or that their teachers behave in a friendly way towards them (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Swanson et al., 2003). These experiences constitute threats to their belonging, so behavioural responses such as those outlined by Gere and MacDonald (2010) should be expected – either prosocial behaviour, in an attempt to re-establish social connections, or anti-social behaviour as a desire to get revenge for rejection. Walton and Cohen (2007) consider the way in which socially stigmatised groups can develop sensitivity to issues of belonging due to uncertainty about the quality of their social bonds, calling this 'belonging uncertainty.' The YMCA (2020) found that 95% of young Black people heard racist language or abuse in school, with 51% of young Black men saying this happened all the time, compared to only 4% of females. Whilst this is not perpetuated by teachers, one can see how it could contribute to a heightened sensitivity to belonginess cues for BCBs, particularly when combined with the social risk factors outlined earlier. In a context where BCBs may be experiencing constant low-level threats to their belonging, it is particularly important for teachers to work on building those strong bonds.

Recommendations for Schools

Given the evidence reviewed suggesting the importance of relationships with teachers on school belonging, and the problems in this regard for BCBs, this paper will now consider how such relationships might be improved, within the microsystem and mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A difficulty with making suggestions for schools is that it entails a level of responsibility for change which the authors do not have. Nonetheless, the following suggestions are made in good faith from the perspective of outsiders to the system, which we hope will be useful to some. To counter racial stereotyping, it has been suggested that teacher training should be adapted to better prepare White teachers to teach in ethnically diverse, multicultural classrooms and that all teachers should have training on unconscious bias, learning how to recognise and monitor systemic racial bias, particularly in behaviour monitoring systems (Demie, 2022; Stewart-Hall et al., 2023). Cultural competence should form a key part of teachers' inductions into their school communities, whereby they should be encouraged to reflect on their own biases, considering how these might impact on how they understand and interact with students from different cultures (Spikes, 2018). Teacher training could be extended to include citizenship education – extra sentence on understanding racism, (Dei, 2008). Improved pupil voice and engagement could support pupils to feel that they are more able to report experiences of prejudice and racism, and that when they do so, their experiences will be validated (Miller, 2024). Where incidents of racial harm are reported, it is importantthat pupils receive support to manage the impact of such experiences on their wellbeing. Increasing the diversity of teaching staff and developing a more inclusive curriculum (Demie, 2022) is essential to demonstrate to Black Caribbean pupils that they have a place within school. Whilst there are huge pressures on the curriculum at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level, there are opportunities to explore and celebrate diversity at Key Stage 3, particularly in humanities-based subjects.

At the individual level, interventions supporting BCBs at risk of exclusion can demonstrate to them that they are valued within the school community (Boyd, 2019; Grant & Brooks, 1998). There is evidence to suggest that when such interventions are run by male Black Caribbean teachers or mentors, this can be particularly helpful for BCBs (Boyd, 2019; Demie & McLean, 2018). Relatedly, Tucker's (2013) research around developing more responsive pastoral practices within school suggested that, due to performativity and budget pressures, schools were increasingly moving towards specialist approaches focusing on individual needs. Whilst this can be helpful in some cases, it can lead to a focus on within child approaches which fail to adequately account for intersectionality for BCBs. Behaviour in schools is often viewed as being a moral choice rather than being informed by a deeper understanding of child development and mental health (Gill, 2017). In the case of BCBs, a shift towards more informed behaviour support and pastoral care, which was better aware of the complex, interacting factors impacting on their lives, would create a better school environment for belonging to be fostered. It should include a recognition that pupils in this group are disproportionately impacted by stressful and traumatic events and should be supported to process racial trauma. A restorative approach to behaviour management may be appropriate here, as it focuses on responses to conflict that repair relationships (Weber & Vereenooghe, 2020). Weber and Vereenooghe (2020) detail how restorative practices can be used proactively to build emotional literacy, reducing offending behaviour, through proactive circles, whilst also discussing the value of restorative meetings and conferences that are more commonly associated with restorative approaches. This kind of integrated approach to behaviour has been found to work best when effective partnerships are developed between home and school (Tucker, 2013) and, given the negative experiences that many Black Caribbean parents have themselves had at school, efforts to facilitate their engagement will be particularly important for this group (Demie, 2019). Grant and Brooks (1998) make some

useful suggestions here around work with community groups and advocacy programmes for black parents.

Recommendations for Educational Psychologists

There is also a role for EPs, both in providing support at an individual level to BCBs at risk of exclusion, but also in supporting schools to create an enabling environment for belonging enhancement. EPs are well placed to advise schools on the establishment of relational approaches to behaviour (Ruttledge, 2022) and to support teachers to develop reflective practice with regards to behaviour management (Jones et al., 2013).

Given the importance of strong home school relationships within effective pastoral systems (Boyd, 2019; Tucker, 2013), EPs can provide advice to schools on evidence based approaches to effective home-school partnerships, mediating in instances where relationships have become difficult. Hart et al. (2022) suggest that the imbalance of power inherent in home-school relationships can lead to a prioritisation of the values that schools expect to see from students, for example around behaviour, over the values that students feel would provide them with a safe and stimulating environment in which to learn. They suggest this can be countered by open discussions about values that includes both how a school's values can be transmitted at home, but also how values from home and the local community can be transmitted at school. EPs are well placed facilitate such discussions, which, Hall et al. (2022) argue, could lead schools to develop a more holistic approach to education and wellbeing.

At present, it is common for EPs to be brought in at crisis point when decisions have already been made around exclusion for BCBs (Demie, 2021). Monitoring data around access to EP services has been suggested as a way of making inequalities more visible (Kuria & Kelly, 2023). Monitoring exclusion data would allow EPs to have informed discussions with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in schools around access to services and

to be more proactive in seeking opportunities for earlier intervention (Knight, 2024). EPs are also well placed to support schools to develop a more detailed understanding of how they might monitor their own disciplinary and achievement data. Demie's (2019) paper on good practice around raising achievement for black Caribbean pupils provides some useful examples of how this can be done in a systemic and comprehensive manner.

Finally, there is a need for EPs to improve their own knowledge and understanding of issues around diversity and race equality. Sakata (2024) suggests that the development of culturally responsive practice is both an interpersonal and intrapersonal process, involving continual reflection and exploration. She has developed a self-reflective framework to support EPs engaging in and developing culturally responsive practices. In working with Black Caribbean Boys, it has been suggested that EPs should prioritise ensuring that all students receive fair treatment (Demie, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has highlighted BCBs frequent experience of poor teacher relationships and hypothesised that, for some BCBs, this may lead to a reduction in their sense of belonging at school, which may lead to negative behavioural responses. However, it is recognised that this is not a universal experience for BCBs, and further research is needed into the factors that influence school belonging positively and negatively for this group. Whilst Allen and colleagues identified peer support as a less significant impact on school belonging than teacher relations, negative peer pressure may have a particularly strong impact on BCBs (Demie & McLean, 2018), and an improved understanding of the range of social connections in BCBs lives would help to inform policy and practice. Nonetheless, the evidence presented here suggests that increasing BCBs sense of belonging, through improved relations with their teachers, could potentially lead to a reduction in exclusions. EPs can

support schools to be proactive in creating opportunities for BCBs to feel respected and valued within their school communities, helping them to understand the impact of intersectionality on these pupils' lives and acting as a critical friend as they evaluate instructional and institutional practices.

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