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Programme

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Programme

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- | Time | Event | Duration |
|-------|--|----------|
| 09:00 | P330: Racial Identity, Belonging and Schooling | 1h30m |
| 09:00 | P331: Advocating for Access and Widening Participation | 1h30m |
| 09:00 | P332: AI, Cognition and Critical Thinking | 1h30m |
| 09:00 | P333: Systems in Motion: Power, Policy, and the Reconfiguration of Education | 1h30m |
| 10:30 | Tea & Coffee and Exhibition Viewing | 30m |

[presentation](#)

'Memory-Responsive Teaching' pedagogies as anti-racist practices in schools: learning from formative experiences of Black women teachers in England

Janet Ramdeo

Abstract

The discourse about racially minoritised pupil outcomes and underachievement remains a concern, particularly in the light of disproportionately representative teaching staff that lacks diversity (Gorard et al., 2025; Demie, 2025). Racially minoritised learners are often positioned as problematic and requiring intervention (Archer, 2008). Black women teachers experienced this very same positioning as young learners themselves. As such, they often take a trauma-informed approach to their praxis (Farinde-Wu et al., 2023), drawing on memories of educational oppression and undervalued abilities they faced in their own schooling to justify entering the teaching profession (to make...

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staff that lacks diversity (Gorard et al., 2025; Demie, 2025). Racially minoritised learners are often positioned as problematic and requiring intervention (Archer, 2008). Black women teachers experienced this very same positioning as young learners themselves. As such, they often take a trauma-informed approach to their praxis (Farinde-Wu et al., 2023), drawing on memories of educational oppression and undervalued abilities they faced in their own schooling to justify entering the teaching profession (to make changes) and to provide a more socially just form of pedagogy to racially minoritised learners. These negative memories form the basis of empowerment and resistance to structural and institutional oppressions that exist and persist in schools as a legacy of education policies that have historically and continue to marginalise racialised pupils. So, what can be learnt from Black women teachers to enhance anti-racist practices in schools?

‘Memory Responsive Teaching’ (Obaizamomwan-Hamilton et al., 2024), a concept embedded within Femmenoir Pedagogies, is a lens to illuminate how childhood learning and school experiences manifests as trauma-informed influences that underpins Black women educators’ classroom practices and pedagogies to improve racially minoritised learner experiences. This is a novel approach to understanding why Black women re-enter school spaces as qualified teachers after their own experiences of oppressive schooling practices. It is seen as necessary to name as a method of ‘rescripting and embodying roles that were structurally denied to them during their own educational experiences’ (Obaizamomwan-Hamilton et al, 2024: 13) so that Black women teachers become transformative agents that enable racially minoritised pupils to succeed in their classrooms and schools now.

Narrative inquiry interviews were conducted with 10 Black women teachers at various stages of their career across England. All participants were located in urban areas and taught in schools with high levels of pupil diversity. Ethical considerations were critical to mitigate emotional harm, form rapport and create safe environments for the participants to willingly share such sensitive memories. As such, all participants chose spaces where they felt safe to conduct interviews, including their homes, meaning that particular consideration was required to ensure that these women were not left feeling vulnerable from the interview process. Through the lens of oppressive childhood experiences that form the driver for ‘Memory Responsive Teaching’, thematic analysis identified examples of memories of their own educational oppression and how these influenced reasons to enter the teaching profession, determining ways in which their practices specifically support racially minoritised learners in school settings.

Findings demonstrate of the ways that these women were oppressed and undervalued as learners, such as teachers suggesting that specific subjects are not chosen for GCSE level of study despite previous good outcomes, careers recommendations that belittled their aims to become teachers and the damaging impact of education policy that saw peers and family being excluded from schools and sent to provisions considered for 'Educationally Subnormal' (ESN) children, a term used until 1981. Yet through their own determination, familial empowerment and resistance, these Black women teachers succeeded within the educational system when they saw how peers did not and draw on their experiences to tackle social injustices and underachievement in schools today and providing a voice for marginalised learners and their families to navigate schooling successfully. Further, these teachers share how their racially minoritised pupils express their concerns of not being cared for or understood by other teachers who do not look like them, providing a driver to champion and advocate for these specific pupils.

What can we learn from Black women teachers' trauma-informed memory responsive practices to tackle persistent racially minoritised underachievement? Despite traumatic and oppressive schooling experiences, Black women draw on their own struggles and strengths to enter the teaching profession as a form of resistance to challenge persistently oppressive policies and practices. Black women teachers have the power to uplift and protect racially minoritised pupils, which is recognised and acknowledged by pupils, as found in the research findings. They create opportunities to show care and provide healing for their racially minoritised pupils. Moreover, these Black women teachers create affirming and safe classroom spaces for racially minoritised pupils, through inclusive pedagogies, applying an 'ethic of care' (Collins, 2000), creating representative curricula and providing advocacy for these pupils, that they did not experience themselves as learners. The above listed actions create a model for teacher education in anti-racist practices that enable all practitioners to increase racially minoritised pupils' sense of belonging to the school and their outcomes.

References

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