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From Margins to Centre:

The Experiences of Black Free School Proposers

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of PhD

ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative piece of research focused on the experiences of African Caribbean education practitioners/grassroots organisations in applying to open free schools in London during the period 2010-2014. Although free schools were launched under the auspices of engaging local communities in delivering educational services, the evidence suggests that the free school landscape is dominated by already established, powerful organisations. Using a Critical Race Theory framework, the research interrogates how race and racism operate in the free school application and approval process which is largely concealed from the public. This thesis argues that in spite of the colourblind discourse surrounding free schools, both overt and covert racism are factors in the how free school applications are being assessed by the government. The research challenges the exclusion of many black grassroots practitioners/organisations from opening free schools by identifying several assets they possess which make them well placed to deliver educational services.

DECLARATION OF WORD COUNT

The exact number of words in this thesis is 75, 181. The references and appendices are excluded from the word count.

DECLARATION OF OWN WORK

I hereby declare that except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Signed: ________________

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Thank you first and foremost to all the research participants for sharing your stories with me so generously and for all that you do to positively invest in the next generation. Thanks also to my husband, Michael, for championing me on every step of the journey. I would also like to thank my supervisors, Professor Rosalyn George, Dr Sarah Pearce and Dr Kirstin Lewis, who collectively provided the perfect balance of support and challenge and my sister Jody Nyasha Warner for her support with editing the thesis.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Ivy Warner, from whom I've always imagined I inherited the fight in me and to my beautiful sons, Coltrane and Pharoah, to whom I say:

To be young, gifted and black,
Oh what a lovely precious dream
To be young, gifted and black,
Open your heart to what I mean
In the whole world you know
There are billion boys and girls
Who are young, gifted and black,
And that's a fact!
(Nina Simone)

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CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

Motivation for the Research

At the heart of this research are questions about race, racism and power in education, which are issues I have grappled with for 20 years as a black educator. (A full discussion of how race is understood and used in the thesis is the subject of the next chapter). My awareness of these issues began during my teacher training year when I qualified as a high school English teacher. I recall that although my training occurred in Toronto, Canada's, and some argue the world's, most diverse city, race was very much on the margins of our training. *Who* our students were was very much secondary to what *we* could teach *them.* Our white lecturers made passing references to the diversity we would encounter in Toronto classrooms but we never entered into any meaningful discussion about what this meant for us as teachers. Our training did not encompass any opportunities for ethnic minority students and their families to educate us about the complex and varied realities of their lives. My training year marked the beginning of my awareness of how colourblindness silences discussions about race while upholding unequal power dynamics, in this instance about who and what controlled the nature of our training. The experience also highlighted the extent to which black communities, who were not afforded any power to define or influence our training, were alienated from the institution. This absence was especially notable in the context of poor levels of achievement and high dropout rates among black children in Toronto schools (see Braithwaite and James, 1996; Dei, 1996; 2000).

After completing my training I moved to London and began working as an English teacher in a school with a large ethnic minority population. I was immediately struck by the disconnect between children's lives and the formal school curriculum and how again, in spite of the makeup of the school, there was no acknowledgement or discussion of race. I remember one parent asking during parents' evening if there was scope to make the curriculum more diverse. I recall being struck by the lack of an infrastructure to enable her to voice her concern, which was a reflection of the fact that parents were not expected to exert influence over curriculum choices.

In 2005 I took up a post as a teaching and learning consultant with a focus on raising the achievement of black students in a London borough. The focal point of my work was to coordinate

the borough's involvement in the Black Children's Achievement programme, launched by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in 2005 to raise the achievement of black primary aged children across England. In spite of the programme's promise, many of us coordinating the work across different authorities found ourselves - and by extension the programme - marginalised within school improvement teams. Notably absent from discussions about how the programme would be implemented in schools were black students and their families. Keen to address this lack of influence, I sought opportunities to engage with local black communities. In one instance, I was asked by a primary headteacher to work with a learning mentor to gather the views of black parents in their school. The black learning mentor and I held a focus group during which we asked parents questions (which had been pre-approved by the headteacher) about various aspects of schooling. The parents were very vocal in their views that many of the school's practices, especially the curriculum and hiring practices, were exclusionary. In my write up of the focus group, I deliberately softened the edges of what the parents had said in anticipation of the headteacher's poor response. Nonetheless, within 48 hours the school's Chair of Governors, together with the headteacher, filed a complaint against me on the basis that I had not conducted the focus group in a professional manner. In this way the headteacher exerted her power to censure and discount the dissenting voices of the black parents.

In another instance, I interviewed a group of high achieving black boys in a high performing school to find out more about their experiences, which were largely overshadowed by narratives about black boys and poor achievement. The boys spoke passionately about how little reward there was for opting to resist prevalent stereotypes when society was intent on applying them to you nonetheless. Although the black headteacher privately endorsed the findings of the report, she withheld permission for the report to be published on the basis that it would be too controversial and she did not want to court negative attention for her school.

Both incidents highlight the extent to which race still remains forbidden territory, and how education institutions prevent black people from speaking for themselves and defining their own problems and solutions. The incidents also demonstrate what Gillborn (2006) refers to as the hidden operations of power, which this thesis seeks to draw attention to in the context of free schools. It is partly in response to my experience working at the local authority over a period of 7 years that I want to interrogate whether free schools present an opportunity for black communities to exert power and influence over mainstream schooling.

Increasingly disenchanted with my work in mainstream schools, I began reaching out to the numerous grassroots black community education projects in the borough where I encountered a vibrant set of individuals who, despite operating from the margins, were positively impacting on black children's experiences of education. For the most part, these organisations were voluntarily running Saturday schools which had sprung up as a form of resistance to the way black pupils were treated by mainstream schools in the 1960s. In the intervening years their purpose had remained to support black students to both embrace their cultural heritage and to achieve academic success in school. What struck me was that their work was completely unacknowledged by mainstream schools or the local authority. Many of the strategies the Black Children's Achievement programme was purported to be introducing, such as having positive role models in school, working with parents and broadening the curriculum, had long been standard practice in black community schools.

Working with the community schools helped to shape my understanding of margins and the kinds of power you are afforded from this vantage point. Over time I came to understand that many supplementary school leaders had embraced their place within the margins, reclaiming it as a site of resistance. Although being located there brought with it problems associated with poor resourcing and a lack of influence over policy and mainstream practice, being beyond the gaze afforded them the power to set their own agendas. One of the questions raised by the study of black community education practitioners engagement with the free school policy is whether an agenda of resistance can be supplanted to mainstream schools.

Looking back over my 20 year entanglement with the world of education, I realise that many of my attempts to engage with black communities from within institutions, either as a classroom practitioner or local authority consultant, have been thwarted. Over time I have begun to contemplate whether the solutions to the problems facing black communities in education lie somewhere other than in tinkering with a hostile system. When free schools were launched by the Coalition government in 2010 as a new kind of schooling which would welcome the involvement of parents and local communities, I wondered whether they at last presented the opportunity for black grassroots community activists to take their place at the table. Indeed, many of the community education projects I had established links with immediately began galvanising their resources and preparing to submit applications. That following the progress of these applications has become the subject of my research seems inevitable given my long standing interest in the relationship between black communities and mainstream schooling.

Historical Context

The persistent underachievement of many African Caribbean children and young people in British schools over the last 60 years has been well documented (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Richardson, 2005; Strand, 2007; 2012). More recently research by Demie (2015) concluded that African Caribbean pupils are consistently the lowest performing group in the country and the difference between their educational performance and others is larger than for any other group. These findings were further corroborated by research published in 2016 by Gillborn et al. which examined race equality in the British education system since the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993. Their research, the most conclusive of its kind over the last two decades, confirms the continued underachievement of African Caribbean children in schools. The research concludes that against new national benchmarks used to measure academic attainment, "The odds of black success relative to white peers in 2013, 20 years after Stephen's murder, were no better than they had been back in 2007" (Gillborn et al., 2016, p. 10).

Gillborn et al.'s research (2016) also highlights the continuation of an equally persistent problem in the experiences of African Caribbean pupils which is that of disproportionate exclusions, one of the most contentious issues in the area of race inequality in education. Their findings concluded that although there was an overall reduction in the number of exclusions in the period 1993-2013, ethnic inequalities in the rate of exclusions continued. They identified, for example, that the rate of permanent exclusion for African Caribbean and mixed race (white/black Caribbean) students significantly exceeded the white rate, with African Caribbean students experiencing the highest rates of exclusion. Throughout the 20 year period which was the focus of the study, "African Caribbean students were never less than three times more likely to face permanent exclusion than their white peers" (Gillborn et al., 2016, p. 20).

The response of black parents to the poor outcomes experienced by their children in British schools has also been well documented. One of the earliest campaigns against racism in the school system was led jointly by the West Indian Standing Conference (WISC) and the North London West Indian Association who campaigned successfully in 1969-1970 against the proposed banding (or academic streaming) within Haringey Schools on the basis that African Caribbean children would be relegated to the lowest bands because of racist teacher's assumptions about their abilities (George Padmore Institute, 2000).

Andrews (2013, p. 4) notes that “resistance to racism in schooling was a significant feature of black community life from the 1970s onwards”. This resistance is symbolised by the 1971 publication of Bernard Coard’s seminal text in the struggle for race equality in education titled, *How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System*. Although the book focused primarily on the huge numbers of African Caribbean children being erroneously sent to schools catering for students with special educational needs, the text also highlighted a number of ways in which institutional racism manifested itself in the education system, including low teacher expectations and culturally biased assessment tools and curriculum practices. In the nearly 50 years since Coard’s work was published, the issues he articulated have continued to be debated by race equality activists and academics.

One of the ways that black communities sought to address poor outcomes for black students was through establishing supplementary schools which Andrews (2013, p. 7) describes as part of a “wider mobilized campaign undertaken by black communities to hold education authorities to account and to reform schools”. Supplementary schools which provide out of hours education services have been described by Reay and Mirza (2001, p. 90) as organisations “set up by and for the black community which are for the most part self-funding, grassroots and organic”. It is difficult to be definitive about the numbers of supplementary schools because they are often informally organised and do not keep records. At the time of their research Reay and Mirza (2001) identified 60 supplementary schools operating across Greater London. Although often unremarked upon, the 50 year history of supplementary schooling is a testimony to the deep seated commitment of black parents to education and contesting racism in education. Given this long standing commitment, it is unsurprising that when the government announced in 2010 that for the first time in British history, parents could apply to run mainstream schools, black parents and organisations were among those who responded favourably to the invitation.

Free Schools

The new kind of schooling launched by the Conservative led coalition government in 2010 were called free schools. A 2016 Commons Briefing Paper describes them as “state-funded schools with the same legal status as academies which are normally set up where there is thought to be parental demand by groups including parents, teachers, existing schools or academy chains/sponsors” (Bolton, 2016, p. 3). Since their launch free schools have generated intense controversy with advocates arguing that they are raising educational standards for children; providing much desired

choice for parents; injecting much needed innovation into the system; and improving cost effectiveness. Critics, on the other hand, object to the staffing of free schools with unemployed teachers and argue that free schools are diverting capital away from existing schools (Education Policy Institute, 2017; Bolton, 2016).

The number of free schools has increased substantially over the past 7 years. The first 24 free schools opened in September 2011 while 425 were scheduled to open by the start of the 2016-17 school year. This includes primary, secondary, 16-19, special and alternative provision free schools, University Technical Colleges and Studio Schools (Bolton, 2016, p. 3). Although there are free schools across the English regions, London has by far the most with 130 (Bolton, 2016). It is estimated that free schools currently educate around 83,000 pupils (Education Policy Institute, 2017). Although a growing phenomenon, it is worth noting that free schools “still represent just 2 percent of all state-funded schools and two-thirds of areas in England are not within a reasonable travel distance of either a primary or secondary free school” (Education Policy Institute, 2017, p. 8).

West and Bailey (2013) posit that it is important to locate free schools within a broader trend of marketisation in schooling in Britain which has been championed by both Labour and Conservative governments on the basis that diminishing the control of local authorities over schools increases efficiency, improves standards and provides choice and diversity for parents (see also Wright, 2012; Walford, 2014; Green et al., 2015). In particular West and Bailey (2013) cite the City Technology Colleges, launched by the Conservative government in 1986, as the introduction of marketisation in schooling, which was followed by Labour’s Academy programme in 2000 and the Coalition Government’s Academy Act in 2010, which sought to dramatically increase the number of academies. According to Hatcher (2011), the free school policy represents the most overtly market driven policy initiative to date.

The government introduced the public to the idea of free schools in their White Paper (2010): *The Importance of Teaching.* In the paper the government stated that free schools would be a vehicle for social mobility by rescuing poor parents from having to access substandard local state provision and offering them access to higher standards of education instead, which have long been taken advantage of by middle class parents. As a relatively new phenomenon there is limited research about free schools. Much of the existing research has focused on interrogating which groups and organisations are successfully navigating the application process (Craven, Miller and Tooley, 2014; Gilbert, 2011; Higham, 2014) as well as on the admissions and curriculum arrangements and

performance of Free schools (Hatcher, 2011; Bolloton, 2013). This thesis expands on the available literature by placing race at the centre of an analysis of the Free School application and approval process.

Aims of the Research

This thesis is based on the experiences of a small group of African Caribbean individuals and organisations who submitted applications to open free schools between 2010-2014. The research examines their experiences of engaging with the application and approval process, with a focus on how race and racism shaped their experiences and the outcomes of their applications.
The thesis explores how in spite of the colourblind discourse surrounding free schools, racism manifested itself in both overt and covert ways. The thesis argues, therefore, that although unacknowledged and largely absent from discussions about free schools, racism is a factor in the way the policy is being implemented.

The overall goal of the thesis is to identify the specific ways in which racism is embedded in the free School application and approval process, which has thus far been concealed from public view and is absent from the research literature. The research creates a counter narrative about the free school application process which challenges claims made by the government about a fair and open process in which applications are judged purely on merit.

The thesis also challenges the legitimacy of the exclusion many of the research participants experienced in trying to open free schools by drawing on the idea of community cultural capital (Yosso, 2006) to identify the specific assets the participants embodied, which I argue are crucial to addressing the persistent problems experienced by black children and young people in mainstream schools. Through an exploration of the participants' experiences, the thesis asks a number of challenging questions about how black organisations are perceived by the government; about whether black parents who want to address poor educational outcomes for black students can do so in the context of a system which is resolute in its refusal to acknowledge racism (Gillborn, 2008) and what the future holds for black parents' resistance to racism in education.

Research Questions

The research questions which guide this thesis are:

1. How are race and racism factors in the free School application and approval process?
2. What assets exist within African Caribbean communities which make them well placed to deliver mainstream educational services?

Importance of the Research

McInnery (2016) notes that the covert nature in which the free school policy is being implemented represents a departure from the way new schools have historically been introduced in the UK. Under the local authority system of schooling, which was introduced with the 1902 Education Act, plans for new schools were always made available to the public for scrutiny and as a result there were high levels of public accountability and engagement with new school proposals. This research, which makes a contribution to the emergent body of knowledge about free schools, is important because it seeks to broaden our understanding of which organisations are being allocated public funds to run schools and on what basis, and crucially, which organisations are being excluded from doing so. At the time of writing there is no means to obtain information about unsuccessful free school proposers. As a result, the existing literature focuses primarily on the experiences of successful proposers and their school provision. Contrastingly, this research expands the scope by including the experiences of individuals and organisations that were not able to successfully navigate the application process. The addition of their voices to the ongoing debates about free schools is important because they provide insight into the challenges and barriers individuals experience in applying to open a free School and shed light on the approval process and the reasons why some applications are rejected, which is information not presently available in the public domain. Finally, there is a paucity of research about race and free schools, which is unsurprising given the difficulty in obtaining information about the racial make-up of either free school proposers or approved applicants and the way the policy has been framed as colourblind. This research is significant, therefore, in introducing ideas about how race and racism function within the free school policy landscape and making a contribution to the wider body of knowledge about race equality and schooling in Britain.

Structure of the Thesis

The following chapter provides an overview of Critical Race Theory (CRT), the theoretical framework which guides this thesis. The chapter discusses a number of theoretical concepts and how they are used within the thesis, including race as a social construct, and white privilege/domination which are

understood as categories of power. The chapter also examines the concepts of meritocracy and colourblindness, both of which sustain white domination in the free school application and approval process, by deflecting attention away from race and concealing the different starting points and access to resources between applicants. Finally, the chapter also examines the concept of community cultural capital advanced by Yosso (2006), a concept which is used in the thesis to identify a number of strengths my participants demonstrated that were not acknowledged by the application process.

Chapter 3 locates the research within a historical context. It examines the range of education policies the government enacted in response to the changing face of the British school population following the migration of significant numbers of people from the Caribbean in the late 1950s and 1960s. Drawing on the work of Coard (1971), the chapter also examines the resistance of African Caribbean communities to many of the state educational policies which disadvantaged black students. This is important as it locates the struggle to open free schools within a historical context of black communities in Britain striving to achieve race equality in schools.

Chapter 4, the literature review, examines the modest body of literature on free schools. The chapter places the origins of the policy within the political construct of 'The Big Society'. Through an assessment of the Schools White Paper 2010, *The Importance of Teaching*, the chapter considers the government's rationale for free schools. Drawing on Gillborn's (2005) idea that in order to critically evaluate policy, one should focus on who benefits and who loses, the chapter identifies a number of contradictions in the way the policy is being implemented. The chapter also draws on Higham's work (2014; 2014a) in examining how the application and approval process is prohibitive to many smaller organisations and individuals such as my research participants; which is precisely the population the government claims it wants to engage in opening schools.

Chapter 5, the methodology chapter, outlines how this research has been conducted using a CRT methodology framework which prioritises the voices of people of colour as crucial in constructing counter narratives about the nature of race and racism in society. The chapter examines how participants were identified and the specific methods chosen to collect and analyse the data. The chapter also explores my role in the research process and ethical issues which arose during the process.

The findings of the thesis are presented in chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 6 uses the theoretical concepts of colourblindness and meritocracy to analyse a number of inbuilt inequalities within the free school application and approval process. The chapter focuses on how race and racism were operationalised in the application process and the impact of this on my research participants. Chapter 7 seeks to challenge the rejection of a number of free school applications submitted by the research participants. Specifically, the thesis identifies a range of community assets that were overlooked in the application and approval process, which, it is argued, is rooted in white middle class norms. The chapter also theorises about a range of alternative educational philosophies embraced by the research participants whose legacy can be traced back to early forms of black British campaigning for race equality in schooling.

The concluding chapter considers the significance of the research and its contribution to existing literature on free schools and race equality in schooling in the UK. The chapter also summarises the research findings and their implications and practical applications and makes recommendations for further research.

A Note on Language Used in the Thesis

In the context of a thesis which examines issues of race and power, it is important to explain the rationale for the language used to discuss race and who and what have influenced my choices. Since the 1950s the language used to describe African Caribbean people living in Britain, who are the subject of this thesis, has evolved over time, although it is impossible to be precise about exactly how and when shifts in terminology occurred. Andrews (2013, p. 25) notes the evolution of this terminology is "neither random nor coincidental but demarcates a political progression in identity for those of African ancestry".

In the 1950s and 1960s the term West Indian, linked to Europe's colonial past, was most frequently used to describe the new arrivals from Caribbean countries. This was consistent with how the new immigrants saw themselves given that black in the context of majority black countries was not a term widely in use in the Caribbean at the time of migration (Andrews, 2013).

By the 1980s there was a shift in terminology away from West Indian towards black. Archer and Francis (2007, p. 28) posit that in the 1980s black identity became widely proposed as a political identity under which non-white groups (the largest of which were new arrivals from the Caribbean

and the Indian subcontinent) could unite to challenge racism. The term was not without its critics. Andrews (2016), for example argues the idea of political blackness erodes the sense of connection to African ancestry which is a crucial factor in the history of African Caribbean people; furthermore he suggests the idea centres whiteness, by suggesting non-white communities should unite around experiences of racism. Others (Kirp, 1979) have also argued that lumping disparate groups with complex and varied identities together is not practical, which is borne out by the lack of evidence of a genuine cross cultural mobilisation against racism on a significant scale. Andrews (2016) further cites the example of education to evidence the futility of lumping disparate groups together given the very different outcomes experienced by different ethnic minority groups. Although the term black is no longer widely used as a political construct to denote all non-white groups, it is still widely in use as a short hand descriptive racial label to describe people of African and/or black Caribbean origin.

Archer and Francis (2007, p. 29) describe how the term black gradually gave way to hyphenated identities such as black-British or British-Asian, although it is unclear whether the impetus towards using these terms came from ethnic minority communities themselves or the wider society. More recently, the terms black Caribbean and African Caribbean have become widely employed and are often used interchangeably. Andrews (2013) notes, however, that at present there are more people identifying as African, rather than Caribbean and that as African immigration has increased, society is witnessing a convergence of African and African Caribbean into a black British position in terms of shared aspects of culture and experience of oppression in Britain. He further argues there is a resurgence in the use of and reclaiming of the word black symbolised by the Black Lives Matter movement, which is engaged in resisting racism across the African Diaspora. These recent developments demonstrate the ever shifting nature of the terminology.

In this thesis I use the term African Caribbean to refer to the participants and the local communities they reside in as they are people of African ancestry who immigrated to the UK from Caribbean countries or those who are the descendants of those who immigrated. I prefer the term African Caribbean over the other available terms because of the deliberate reference to Africa as a historical, cultural reference point. This is especially relevant to this thesis given that African Caribbean communities are engaged in a struggle for race equality in education which involves mainstream schools acknowledging their unique history and cultural identity.

As this thesis is about seeking to empower individuals who have been excluded from exerting influence over mainstream schooling, I want to deliberately use the terminology embraced by the research participants. Given that often (though not always) black was the term used during interviews, I also adopt the term black, which I use interchangeably with African Caribbean, both for consistency and to create a sense of dialogue between myself and the research participants. When referencing other researchers, I use the terminology used by those researchers in their published work which often encompasses a range of terms. The thesis draws, for example, on British authors as well as those from the United States and to a lesser extent Canada and this is reflected in the range of terms used to describe ethnicity and race, including, for example, people of colour and black minority ethnic (BME) which is indicative of the different lexicons around race and ethnicity which have evolved in each country. Though unfortunate, this inconsistency in the terminology used throughout the thesis reflects the reality that at any given time there are several terms used simultaneously to refer to African Caribbean communities both by different segments within the community and scholars across the African diaspora.

A final note about the language used in the thesis refers to my use of the term black communities rather than black community to signify that there is no singular, entirely unified black community. This study adopts the approach used by Dr Lorna Cork in her UK based research about black pupils and parents. Cork explains her decision to adopt the use of “communities” rather than “community” stressing that “a homogenous African Caribbean community with homogenous attitudes and values is no more likely to exist than a white homogenous one” (2005, p. 16). In the context of this research, participants were drawn from across London and were often well established in the black communities within the locality they lived and often worked in. Although black people across London have many shared interests, the black communities in each of the areas my participants hailed from also had a unique identity borne out of a particular set of local characters and circumstances which the word communities attempts to reflect.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter explores Critical Race Theory's (CRT) origins and defines and examines a number of the framework's key theoretical concepts which provide the basis for analysing my research participants' interaction with the free school application and approval process. This chapter also explores the evolution of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Britain and considers how it has been adopted and adapted by researchers to fit the British context which in turn informs the way I apply the theory in my research.

Origins of Critical Race Theory

Founded in the 1970s in America, CRT came of age during the 1980s by which point it had a significant body of work (Zamudio et al., 2011). The founding figures of the movement were lawyers and legal scholars who were frustrated with the lack of analysis of race within the critical legal studies movement, which featured the work of a small group of academics focused on examining how the law reproduced class based inequality in society (Rollock and Gillborn, 2011). It was this desire to have a sustained focus on race, racism and the distribution of power in society, which was the driving force for the birth of the CRT movement.

There is no agreed upon definition of CRT but the idea that it is a framework used to examine and transform racial inequality in society features strongly in all definitions. Delgado (2001, p. 2), for example refers to CRT as "a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power". Rollock and Gillborn (2011. p. 1) similarly define it as:

> a body of scholarship steeped in radical activism that seeks to explore and challenge the prevalence of racial inequality in society. It is based on the understanding that race and racism are the product of social thought and power relations; CRT theorists endeavour to expose the way in which racial inequality is maintained through the operation of structures and assumptions that appear normal and unremarkable.

CRT has borrowed and adapted ideas from a broad theoretical spectrum. Ladson-Bilings (2009) notes the importance of the Gramscian concept of hegemony, described by Apple (1996, p. 14) as "the process in which dominant groups in society come together to form a basic bloc and sustain leadership over subordinate groups", which is used by critical race scholars to explore racial domination. Stefancic and Delgado (2012, p. 4-5) also explain how the movement "built on feminist

ideas about the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination". In addition to these theoretical concepts CRT also borrows from a wide array of civil rights activists and scholars including Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, WEB DuBois, Cesar Chavez and Martin Luther King, as well as the Black Power and Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Delgado and Stefanic, 2001; Zamudio et al., 2011). There are a number of key theoretical ideas and assumptions which are representative of CRT (Gillborn, 2006); what follows is a discussion of some of these elements and key concepts and how they are used in this study.

Race and Racial Ideology

One of CRT's primary assumptions is that racism is deeply embedded in the fabric of society which contradicts the mainstream view that racism is no longer a feature of society. Consequently, CRT contends that racism is normal rather than aberrant in society but that because it is so deeply entrenched in the social order, it is often taken for granted and viewed as natural to persons in the culture (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, quoted in Rollock and Gillborn, 2011, p. 3). As a result, critical race scholars maintain that racism needs to be reconceived as "the normal way that society does business" (Delgado and Stefanic, 2001, p.7) which implicates everyone in racism, rather than just those who espouse overtly racist views.

Essed (1991), who has written extensively on race and racism and whose ideas overlap with critical race theorists, has coined the phrase 'everyday racism' to capture how racism is integrated into daily life. She highlights the challenge in exposing racism based on the fact that it is transmitted via routine practices that appear normal to the dominant group, and therefore go undetected and evade critique. Gillborn (2006, p. 21) further highlights the hidden nature of racism and suggests that our understanding of it needs to expand to include "the more subtle and hidden operations of power that have the effect of disadvantaging one or more minority ethnic groups. Although the operations of power are often concealed, the effects they create are neither hidden nor subtle". The idea of racism being transmitted through seemingly neutral processes and practices is critical to my examination of the free school application process. Chapter 6 for example, examines a number of processes centred around the collection of free school applicants' personal information and the allocation of headteachers and land to new free school projects, with a focus on how they negatively impacted on the research sample and reinforced racial subordination.

Given the primacy placed on analysing race and racism, it is important to establish how CRT defines these concepts and how they are used in the thesis. CRT scholars embrace a "social constructivist perspective of race and racism rather than a biological one" (Rollock and Gillborn, 2011, p. 2). A social constructivist perspective of race rejects the existence of discrete races characterised by distinct genetic profiles, asserting instead that society creates race by ascribing meaning to it. Omi and Winant emphasise the transient and complex nature of race referring to it as "a historical, fluid, and forever changing concept subject to competing viewpoints (that is, contestation), conflict and redefinition" (1994, cited in Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 4). Recognising race as a social construct, CRT scholars prioritise understanding what meanings are ascribed to different so called racial groups and by whom; as well as what the historical origins of these various meanings are; how they are sustained in contemporary contexts; and crucially what effects they create.

In spite of the assertion that races are "categories that society invents, manipulates or retires when convenient" (Stefanic and Delgado, 2012, p. 8), CRT argues nonetheless that race creates social realities which negatively impact on the daily lives of racialized communities. In particular, CRT seeks to expose how racism disadvantages communities who are categorised as non-white from fully accessing many of life's essential services including education, employment and housing (Hylton et al., 2011; Stovall, 2006).

CRT understands the process of racialization, that is "creating social divisions based on race, as a historical one" (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 3). The colonisation of the Americas, Africa, and the Asiatic world by European powers are widely cited as the foundation for contemporary racial relations and inequality (Zamudio et al., 2001; Stovall, 2006; Frankenberg, 1993). One of CRT's foundational beliefs is that the racial ideology of white supremacy, which secured the economic dominance of the West during the colonial era, was fundamental to the formation of Western societies and thus remains deeply rooted in and embedded within the fabric of society (Stefanic and Delgado, 2012). This study acknowledges the historical antecedents of racial domination and considers the ways in which this permeated the research participants' experiences. Indeed their experiences were directly related to the experiences of newly arrived black immigrants in the post war period who were negatively constructed by society as inferior in the context of Britain's imperial legacy. The study argues these initial racist constructions about black communities and their capabilities have endured by analysing the government's negative responses to, and interactions with, black free school proposers.

Although often misunderstood as referring to the activities of extreme white power groups or as an attack on white people in general, (Gillborn, 2005) white supremacy refers instead to a system which grants whites power and control in society. The pervasiveness of white supremacy is captured by Ansley (1997, quoted in Rollock and Gillborn, 2011, p. 3) who defines it as:

> ...a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.

Ansley's summation of white supremacy as the power and control whites systematically assume over institutions based on beliefs about their own superiority and reinforced through daily interactions, is adopted in this study to examine the role of race in the free school policy. Chapter 4 examines how within a policy discourse which prioritises the idea of freedom from government control over schooling, the government has nevertheless created mechanisms within the application process which grant them power and control to determine who the beneficiaries of the policy are, which ensures the free school policy serves their interests.

Although the term racism is sometimes used interchangeably with or alongside white supremacy by critical race scholars, it is important to establish how these scholars' ideas differ from widely held beliefs about racism consisting of acts of discrimination fuelled by personal belief systems (Harris, 2001; Applebaum, 2016). CRT scholars reject the notion that racism is an individual phenomenon, asserting instead that it is a systemic phenomenon which facilitates the domination of whites over blacks. (Gillborn, 2008; Zamudio et al., 2011; Harris, 2012). Essed (1991, p. 39) for example, refers to racism as the "cognitions, actions and procedures that contribute to the development and perpetuation of a system in which whites dominate blacks". Like Ansley (1997), Essed (1991, p. 39) emphasises the pervasiveness and complexity of racism asserting that it must be understood as a structure, process, and ideology. She explains that the structural aspect of racism refers to the way in which "the system reproduces racial/ethnic dominance through rules, laws, regulations and access to and the allocation of resources," which are secured through practices and processes. Both the structural elements and the practices and processes which secure them, she notes, are underpinned by an ideology of the inferiority of non-white groups, which she regards as the "binding element"(Essed, 1991, p. 41).

Bonilla-Silva's (2014) ideas about racism closely echo Essed's. He also refers to racism as a structure which he defines as "the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege,

which is upheld by whites in order to ensure they continue to be the beneficiaries of the system" (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 9). Essed (1991) and Bonilla-Silva's (2014) ideas about racism happening at the level of ideology, structure and process provide this study a framework for an analysis of race and racism in the free school policy. The structural elements of racism within the policy are examined through a focus on how the apparatus developed to facilitate the application process are reproducing inequality. The study also considers the ideological stance in which the policy is situated by highlighting how white supremacy is indirectly expressed in policy documents and permeates the unfolding social relations between government officials and research participants throughout the application process.

Given their emphasis on the structural nature of racism it is not surprising that CRT scholars foreground the importance of exposing and disrupting the systems and processes within society's major institutions which sustain racial inequality. One of the challenges in exposing racism is the widely held belief that racism is on the decline and therefore an issue which has largely been resolved (Delgado and Stefanic, 2001). This belief stems in part from the fact that Western anti-discrimination legislative frameworks, erected in response to civil rights struggles, have largely eradicated extreme, overt forms of racism associated with the past. As a result, the seriousness of current inequality is diminished through comparisons to historically overt and severe racism. Such views do not acknowledge or address what Bonilla-Silva (2014) refers to as new forms of racism. Although overt forms of racism are no longer socially acceptable, critical race scholars contend that the ideology that underpins racism is still fully entrenched in society but is expressed in newer, subtler and more covert ways, which do not, however, diminish their negative effects. Essed, (1991, p. 13) for example notes that:

> biological arguments about the inferiority of non white races have disappeared from popular culture, but have been replaced by ideas about cultural deficiency and social inadequacy, which achieve the same effect of associating the substandard position of non-whites in society to innate negative characteristics, rather than to systemic oppression.

Whiteness

One of the consequences of discussing white supremacy and racism as systems of oppression which secure white domination is the focus placed on the concept of whiteness, summarised by Frankenburg (1993, p. 6) as "a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced, and moreover are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination". The naming of

whiteness challenges the commonplace view that racism is an issue that concerns and therefore belongs to racialised communities, rather than to whites. Many scholars at the forefront of interrogating whiteness have argued instead that racism needs to be seen as a system that implicates and impacts everyone (Frankenberg, 1993; Dyer, 1997; Applebaum, 2016). Frankenberg (1993) for example, asserts that naming whiteness assigns everyone a place in the relations of racism, which is critical to unmasking and contesting the machinations of domination. One of the ways whiteness maintains its dominance is through remaining invisible which sustains it as a category of power and privilege (Applebaum, 2016). Dyer (1997, p. 2) explains this phenomenon saying:

> As long as race is something only applied to non white people, as long as white people are not racially seen and named they/we function as a human norm, we are just people. There is no more powerful position than that of being 'just human'. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity, whereas raced people can only represent their own race.

One of the critical ways whiteness asserts itself therefore is by assuming its right to determine what constitutes humanity, according to its own value system and interests, which reinforces its dominance. The norms dictated by whiteness are often referred to as invisible, because they appear to be value neutral and therefore go unrecognised by the dominant social group that benefit from them (Essed, 1991; Applebaum, 2016). Dyer (1997, p. 9) captures this notion saying, "white people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they construct the world in their image". A crucial function of these invisible norms is to "create the standards by which difference is constructed" (Applebaum, 2016, n.p.). The process of 'othering' everything which exists outside of its predefined norms is essential in securing the continued domination of whiteness; as Applebaum explains, "whiteness is dependent for its meaning on the process of negation of what is outside its borders" (2016, n.p.).

Through an analysis of the research sample's experiences, this study identifies and examines the effect of a number of invisible norms which permeate the free school application and approval process. Chapter 4 for example explores how the application success criteria, which appear neutral, in fact reflect dominant knowledges and experiences and thus perform a gatekeeping function that quietly excludes proposals and proposers who fail to conform to them. The findings also uncover how the participants felt disadvantaged by submitting applications with overt cultural references and the range of decisions they made to either foreground or conceal race in their applications in order to conform to dominant colourblind models of schooling. Chapter 6 also attempts to make

whiteness visible by examining how proposals submitted by black individuals and groups were filtered through a white gaze which was insistent on othering them on the basis of its own assumptions about their capacity, capabilities and agendas, in effect making what Dyer (1997) refers to as racial judgements. In his scholarship on whiteness Dyer (1997, p. 1) explains the pervasiveness of racial judgements:

> The myriad minute decisions that constitute the practice of the world are at every point informed by judgements about people's capacities and worth, judgements based on what they look like, where they come from and how they speak, even what they eat; that is racial judgments.

Crucially, he contends that making racial judgements is a habitual part of occupying the world as a white person, which underscores how whiteness assumes the right to judge, which secures its domination (see also Sullivan, 2006).

Microaggressions

One of the challenges in naming and exposing white domination is that it is "constantly being recreated by average, seemingly tolerant people who claim to be lovers of social justice" (Leonardo, 2004, p. 143). In order to examine how racism is transmitted through routine practices, thoughts and interactions, CRT has advanced the notion of microaggressions. The term microaggressions was first coined in 1970 by Dr. Chester Pierce, an African American psychiatrist who researched the cumulative, long term effect of racism on people of colour's psychological and physiological wellbeing over a forty year period (Sue, 2010). Sue, a psychologist who has written extensively on the topic, describes microaggressions as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership" (2010, p. xv). Sue describes the insidiousness of microaggressions as:

> the constant and continuing everyday reality of slights, insults, invalidations, and indignities visited upon marginalized groups by well-intentioned, moral, and decent family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers, students, teachers, clerks, waiters and waitresses, employers, health care professionals, and educators (2010, p. xv).

Huber and Solórzano (2015) explain that the word micro is used to reflect the fact that microaggressive acts are socially normal/acceptable, rather than to diminish the effects they cause. Whereas Sue's work has focused on the psychological impact of microaggressions on victims, CRT scholars emphasise the importance of linking everyday experiences of racism to systemic institutional racism (Huber and Solórzano, 2015; Gillborn, 2008; Essed, 1991). In her study of

everyday racism Essed (1991), for example, concludes it is a misnomer to assume institutional or systemic racism is somehow distinct from and separate to individual racism, which she argues is non-existent as a construct given that seemingly individual acts of racism involve an enactment of group power. She suggests treating them as separate is insufficient because it does not explain how racism is reproduced and sustained. She asserts instead that "definitions of racism must incorporate macro structural-cultural properties of racism as well as the micro inequalities perpetuating the system, which makes clear how racism is reproduced" (Essed, 1991, p. 39). This point is also made by Gillborn (2008, p. 198) who notes that "individual experiences no matter how intimate and apparently random cannot be understood without reference to wider structures of power and oppression that are historically rooted and racially patterned".

In keeping with Essed (1991) and Gillborn (2008), Huber and Solórzano's (2015) analytical framework for deconstructing microaggressions stresses the importance of situating everyday acts of racism within wider systemic patterns of oppression. They note that institutional racism, which they define as structural mechanisms such as policies and processes that systematically subordinate, marginalise and exclude non-dominant groups, should be regarded as "symptomatic of a wider set of beliefs and/or ideologies that justify inequalities and acts of racism" (2015, p. 303). Their framework also echoes Bonilla-Silva (2014) and Essed's (1991) ideas about racism being both structural and ideological as explored earlier in the chapter. Huber and Solórzano (2015, p. 298) describe microaggressions as "a form of systemic and everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place"(2015, p. 298). They assert that microaggressions, which take the form of verbal or nonverbal assaults directed at people of colour, are often based on multiple characteristics, for example gender, ethnicity, class and immigration status, which intersect with race. As well as taking the form of deliberate acts, microaggressions can also be inflicted through automatic or unconscious responses to situations (Huber and Solórzano, 2015); in the case of this study this was reflected in some of the casual comments the participants were subjected to throughout the application process.

The routine nature of racism is also explored by Sullivan (2006, p. 4) who explores how the enactment of white privilege and power occurs through habitual behaviours. She describes these habits as:

> The things we do and say without thinking. They are the mental and physical patterns of engagement with the world that operate without conscious attention or reflection. They fly under one's conscious radar, so to speak, and are all the more effective precisely because they tend to function unnoticed.

Sullivan (2006) acknowledges the limitations of using the word habit which can conjure up ideas of something benign or trivial. She emphasises, however, that institutions “are able to sustain white domination because individuals within them form attachments and commitments to their habitual ways of being which reinforce their power and privilege” (2006, p. 4). Sullivan’s assertion is important because it highlights the active role that bureaucrats charged with implementing the free school policy played in facilitating the exclusion of the research participants from opening free schools, which is explored in Chapter 6. Bonilla-Silva (2014, p. 37) notes that a crucial aspect of microaggressions is that they are communicated in ways which are “almost always devoid of overt racial appeals, allowing the perpetrator to maintain that they are neutral which makes it very difficult for people of colour to respond to this type of aggression”. This is especially true when, as was the case for the research participants, interactions occur with people in positions of responsibility who occupy positions of power.

A final point about the nature of microaggressions is that in addition to being communicated directly, they can also occur via omission (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Bonilla-Silva (2014) cites as an example environments that only display signs and symbols related to white culture, which communicate an affirmation of white culture and exclusion of non-whites. The idea of communicating racial messages by omission is explored in relation to how the New Schools Network, the body set up by the government to support free school applicants, was perceived by some research participants as being unsupportive of and ill equipped to mentor grassroots organisations, which negatively impacted their chances of being approved to open free schools.

The concept of microaggressions has been embraced by researchers particularly in the field of education, where it has been used to examine a number of subtle forms of racism which emerge in the context of educational institutions (Solórzano and Yosso, 2000; Rollock, 2012). As discussed earlier, in order to theorise microaggressions it is key to place occurrences of racism within a broader context so that individual experiences are regarded as part of, rather than separate from, systemic or institutional racism. This approach is used in the study to identify and deconstruct the subtle, frequent acts of racism experienced by the participants in their interactions with those responsible for vetting and assessing applications. In Chapter 6, I locate and examine the microaggressive gestures and exchanges which participants recounted within the wider context of institutional racism. The chapter also explores how the microaggressions that disrupted my participants’ attempts to open free schools were fuelled by a belief in white superiority and

entitlement. The psychological toll of being on the receiving end of a series of microaggressions is captured by one of the research participant's final reflections on the process of applying to open a free school: *"I'm one of those people who would say I've never really experienced racism but in terms of free schools I have felt it."*

Intersectionality

CRT places a strong emphasis on intersectionality which calls for an examination of the interconnectedness between race, class, gender and other axis of oppression, as mentioned in the discussion above about microaggressions. Given the centrality of social class in the historic formation and present day organisation of England, Gillborn (2015) argues there is a strong tradition in English scholarship of examining class and gender oppression, which extends to CRT scholarship. The idea of intersectionality has also been addressed variously by American CRT scholars in the field of education. Stovall (2006), for example, notes that those working to advance social justice in education are compelled to recognise and analyse the interplay between race and class. For CRT scholars, he suggests this requires acknowledging that "there may be intra-racial issues that benefit from a class analysis, while not separating them from the larger construct of white supremacy" (Stovall, 2006, p. 257). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), who also advocate for an intersectional approach, caution that "although class and gender can and do intersect with race, it is important to avoid subsuming racial analysis within a gender/class paradigm" (1995, p. 51). They note, for instance, that gender and class as stand-alone variables do not explain all of the educational achievement differences between whites and students of colour. They cite as an example the underachievement of African-Americans from middle-class backgrounds, which is often overlooked in class based analysis of educational outcomes. In the UK context, studies by Rollock et al. (2014) and Strand (2007; 2012) similarly highlight the underachievement of black Caribbean students from middle class backgrounds, this research is often left out in discussions about educational disadvantage.

This research is aligned with the broader educational stance articulated by Stovall (2006) and in keeping with the tradition of British educational scholarship, which advocates for an intersectional approach. In examining issues of power and unequal access to resources for organisations pursuing free school status, this thesis found undeniable gender and class components to the exclusion the participants experienced. These are explored in Chapter 6 through a focus on how gender stereotypes created barriers for black female proposers and how grassroots proposers in particular

experienced barriers in navigating the application process due to the privileging of middle class norms. Nonetheless, Ladson-Billing and Tate's (1995) call to be vigilant about recognising when race is subsumed by discussions about class and gender is also applied in the study through an examination of how the government have masked racial factors in the free school landscape by framing the policy as being solely about addressing class inequality, a theme which is explored in Chapter 4.

Liberal Ideology: Colourblindness and Meritocracy

Alongside analysing the practices, processes and interactions which transmit and secure racism, CRT also critiques the liberal ideology embraced by Western societies for its failure to address racial inequality (Delgado and Stefanic, 2001). This lack of genuine commitment to eradicating racial disparities in society is contradictory given liberalism claims to promote equality and freedom (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). In his research about racism, Bonilla-Silva (2014) explores how liberal societies have evolved a sophisticated lexicon, which he breaks down into four frames, that are habitually employed to rationalise racial inequality and relieve whites of any responsibility for existing inequalities. He contends the frames are used to both filter and interpret information so as to enable people to "explain racial phenomenon through a predictable route" (2014, p. 74). He further describes the frames as "an intellectual road map used by rulers to navigate the always rocky road of domination and derail the ruled from their track to freedom and equality" (2014, p. 74).

The first and foundational frame identified by Bonilla Silva (2014) is abstract liberalism which involves co-opting the ideas and language associated with liberalism, most notably, equal opportunity, freedom of choice and individualism, in order to explain racial matters. Specifically, he notes that the terminology of liberalism is applied in an abstract manner, which enables whites to appear to be reasonable, moral and fair, while simultaneously maintaining racial inequality through the avoidance of discussions about race. Chapter 4 of this study explores how the frame of abstract liberalism was employed by the government to launch free schools. The chapter highlights, for example, the government's repeated assertion that free schools would promote equality by improving the standard of education for previously overlooked poor children. The idea of providing choice to parents and stressing that any individual had the right to apply to open a school were also important components of how the policy was promoted (Wright, 2012). The chapter considers each of these claims and demonstrates how the narrative created by the government about free schools

works to conceal how the policy is in fact exacerbating inequality in schooling by excluding individuals and small organisations with fewer resources and/or alternative ideas about schooling.

One of the primary ways that liberal societies sustain inequality is by adopting colourblindness, which involves the refusal to acknowledge race. Advocates of colourblindness believe that providing equal treatment to everyone without regard to race is the most effective means to ensure race equality, and that conversely, drawing attention to race is presumed to perpetuate rather than counter racial problems (Zamudio et al., 2011; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Leonardo, 2004). One of the challenges in debunking the mythology of colourblindness is the extent to which the idea has taken hold in the imaginations of people, creating a powerful and dominant narrative (Stafancic and Delgado, 2012). This dominance is captured by Crenshaw et al., who refer to it as "the official discourse of race equality" (Crenshaw et al., 1995 quoted in Dixson and Rousseau, 2005, p. 15). In spite of how widely embraced the concept is, critical race scholars argue that colourblindness is illogical given the preoccupation with race in Western societies. This is evident in the way, as discussed earlier, that whiteness asserts itself by defending its borders from 'others,' which is contingent on sorting groups and individuals into crude categories of 'us' and 'them'. The previous discussion of microaggressions also demonstrates how racial dynamics rooted in an ideology of white superiority permeate daily interactions, which betrays the idea of being immune to race. Stefancic and Delgado (2012) further contend that embracing the concept of colourblindness involves a level of race awareness and recognition which defies the existence of the concept.

In addition to debunking the existence of colourblindness, CRT scholars assert that in fact colourblindness, which Bonilla-Silva (2014, p. 3) refers to as "the ideological armor for a covert institutionalised system of racism," perpetuates racial inequality (see also Leonardo, 2004; 2007; Zamudio et al., 2011). One of the most overt ways colourblindness works against race equality is by speaking out against any form of race-based programming (which may have been developed to address inequality) on the grounds that it is exclusionary and therefore violates the promotion of equal rights (Zamudio et al., 2011). This articulation is reflected in the free school application guidance which suggests that proposed schools must remove any cultural markers, ostensibly to promote equality and avoid alienating prospective parents, but thereby reinforcing white hegemony. Bonilla-Silva (2014) notes that it is important to recognise that that the language of equal opportunities is employed to protect the interests of whites, rather than to address the diminished position of ethnic minority citizens in society. In this way the language of equal opportunities is used as a basis for "denouncing race-based incentivising for underrepresented groups" because this

would threaten white domination (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 79). The idea of race-based programming being antithetical to an ideology of colourblindness is useful in unpacking the incompatibility between some of the proposals submitted by the research participants, which sought to address longstanding race inequality in education through African centred models of schooling, and the free school policy's colourblind stance. The research participants' experiences, which are examined in chapter 6, demonstrate how the language of equal opportunities is adopted to ensure dominant models of schooling prevail even in a policy context which purports to advance choice and freedom in education. This is consistent with Essed's (1991, p. 199) contention that "progress in the system is defined as the extent to which the value orientation of the dominant group is maintained".

Bonnilla-Silva (2014) notes that another tactic employed to reject programming designed to address racial inequality is to prioritise programming which focuses on improving individuals, rather than groups. He contends that individualism, which is a product of liberal democratic discourse, is employed as a "justification for opposing policies to ameliorate racial inequality because they are group based rather than case by case," which serves to protect white interests by derailing collective movements (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 83). This is consistent with the increasingly dominant marketised model of schooling, which emphasises the accountability of individual schools, teachers and pupils as explored in the next chapter. In contrast, many of the participants submitted proposals based on alternative educational philosophies rooted in collective rather than individual empowerment, which deviated from this prevailing model of schooling. This is further discussed in chapter 7. The exclusion of many of the research sample from opening schools, exemplifies how colourblind racism "has seized and repackaged elements of traditional liberalism, like work ethic, rewards by merit, equal opportunity and individualism, in order to achieve racially illiberal goals" (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 7).

A critical aspect of how colourblindness sustains inequality is the failure to acknowledge the different historical and current situations of individuals and communities (Stefanic and Delgado, 2012). Instead, colourblindness takes a meritocratic view of success based on the assumption that a level playing field exists whereby all individuals in society have an equal opportunity to succeed (Zamudio et al., 2011). This is consistent with the government's claim that anyone can open a free school, which contrasts with the experiences of the research sample who identified a lack of access to resources as a considerable challenge in navigating the process. Zamudio et al. (2011, p. 12) note that underlying meritocracy are "a number of related assumptions about how one's work ethic, values, drive and individual attributes such as attitude and intelligence, determine success." Wildman (1995) points out that in reality, members of the privileged group benefit in numerous

ways from their affiliation with the dominant side of the power system, a fact that is concealed and never acknowledged. As a result individuals and organisations who enjoy proximity to the power base are unfairly advantaged in competitive processes, which are nonetheless presumed to be fair and equal. This idea is examined in the findings which unmask how large, powerful organisations seeking to open new free schools benefitted from pre-existing relationships with the government. The importance of these pre-existing relationships is captured by Pauline who at the end of several failed attempts to open a free school concluded that, *'unless you are a friend of the government, you have no chance of opening a free school"*. While meritocracy attributes success within the system to hard work, conversely, those who fail to achieve, are conceptualised as having "only themselves, their families, or at best, a random fateful turn of luck to blame" (Zamudio 2011, p. 12). This is consistent with Bonilla-Silva's (2014) assertion that the ideology of colourblindness engages in blaming victims in an indirect way for their position in society.

Zamudio et al. (2011) argue that meritocracy is the predominant way people make sense of social institutions, with the assumption being that those who are at the helm of institutions are the most deserving having risen to the top through fair and competitive processes, resulting in the rightful distribution of power in society. Bonilla-Silva (2014) similarly notes that often inequality is regarded as the outcome of competition over resources which occurs naturally in capitalist societies, prompting some scholars to refer to colourblindness as 'competitive racism'. Bonilla-Silva (2014, p. 82) explains, "A central tenet of liberal democracies is that governments should intervene in economic and social matters as little as possible because the 'invisible hand of the market' eventually balances states of disequilibrium". This idea of transferring state control over education to individuals and organisations who compete to open new schools in a quasi-market context is part of the underlying rationale for the free school policy. Indeed chapter 4 highlights how policy documents position free schools as a vehicle for civic empowerment while simultaneously stressing the rigorous and competitive nature of the application process and the fact that the government approves only the best applications.

There is a strong tradition of contesting meritocracy in the area of education. Zamudio et al. (2011) for example, critique the way that meritocracy focuses narrowly on individual success which overlooks a range of institutional factors including how schools either support or deny the success of some students. Other critiques interrogate standardized testing and the ways in which success criteria are both narrow and value-laden. Stefancic and Delgado (2012) point to a range of other possible success criteria, including empathy, orientation or communication skills, which if included in

assessment, would likely produce a different set of results entirely, demonstrating how the concept of merit is highly contextual and subjective. In keeping with these critiques of meritocracy, chapter 7 focuses on exploring a number of long established assets which exist in Black communities, which I propose as an alternative, equally valid set of criteria to judge the capacity of individuals and organisations to open and operate free schools.

One of the principal problems with meritocracy is that the criteria for success is always determined by those with power in ways which align with their personal values and abilities, therefore skewing the outcomes of competitive processes. Gillborn refers to this phenomenon plainly saying, “the rules of the game are defined by and for white people” (2008, p. 182). CRT’s assertion about the value laden nature of success criteria inform my discussion of how the free school application success criteria were crafted by the government in a manner which rewarded mainstream ‘normal’ ways of working and forms of knowledge, to the exclusion of all others. This idea is further explored in the literature review which deconstructs the success criteria and how they predetermine, and therefore control, which groups are granted approval to open free schools. The chapter examines the relationship between the success criteria and the preponderance of large organisations that are largely aligned with the government’s preferred models of schooling opening free schools, thus demonstrating how the policy sustains the status quo of white domination through the failure to acknowledge and recognise skills, knowledges and experiences which exist beyond the proscriptive success criteria. This refusal to acknowledge unfamiliar skill sets is in keeping with Essed’s observation that “institutions founded on white norms do not consider the specific needs, interests and values based in the black experience to be of any importance”(1991, p. 194).

Community Cultural Capital

As part of their resistance to the dominance of the ideology of colourblindness and meritocracy, some scholars are creating alternative frameworks for researching racialized communities. Yosso (2006) argues that focusing on meritocracy creates a deficit view of communities of colour by concentrating on what it is they lack which prevents them from gaining access to power in society. Much of the conversation about meritocracy, she argues, is based on the assumption that people of colour ‘lack’ the social and cultural capital required for social mobility. Drawing on Bourdieu’s work (1977), she defines cultural capital as knowledge “which is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but is rather the accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society” (Yosso, 2006, p. 76).

Yosso (2006) posits that the belief that minoritised communities lack social and cultural capital drives much of the race equality school improvement initiatives, which are designed to help 'disadvantaged' students close the so called cultural gap. She is critical of this approach, however well intentioned, because of the deficit view it takes of students, their families and the communities they come from. Instead, she puts forth, CRT should focus on the experiences of communities of colour both to understand more about the processes which exclude them, but also to identify the different kinds of knowledges they possess that are unrecognised by narrow definitions of cultural capital. Drawing on a range of scholars she describes the potential of CRT, with its emphasis on the voices of people of colour, to:

> shift the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Colour as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and to focus instead on learning from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged (Valencia and Solórzano, 1997; 2005; quoted in Yosso, 2006, p. 82).

Yosso (2006) insists on the importance of decentring, and refraining from privileging, white middle class culture as the standard or norm against which everyone else is measured. She argues that instead of focusing on how to mould communities of colour to fit within white normative ways of being, the emphasis should be on acknowledging and utilising the strengths inherent in those communities. She refers to these strengths as community cultural wealth which she defines as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of colour to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (2006, p. 77).

The idea of identifying assets within communities has also been explored by Louis Moll et al. (1992) whose education based studies focus on working class Mexican communities in Arizona. In their research Moll et al. (1992) identify specific bodies of knowledge that exist in their participant communities and which challenge mainstream school's prevalent and rarely contested constructions of poor Mexican families as "disorganized socially and deficient intellectually" (p. 134). Moll et al. use the term 'funds of knowledge,' echoing the idea of community cultural wealth, to describe the kinds of knowledge which emerge out of the daily experiences of their communities of focus. Funds of knowledge are defined as: "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (1992, p. 138). The idea of funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth both influenced my decision to attempt to strike a balance between identifying exclusionary processes within the free school

application process and identifying and exploring the considerable assets my participants demonstrated.

While Moll et al. (1992) have developed a taxonomy of knowledge and skills which emerge out of the life worlds of working class Mexican communities in Arizona, Yosso (2006) turns her attention to communities of colour and draws on the concepts of 'outsider' knowledges (Collins, 1986), mestiza knowledges (Anzaldúa, 1987) and transgressive knowledges (hooks, 1994) to theorize about the kinds of community cultural wealth which exist within these communities. The first community cultural wealth she identifies is 'familial capital' which she refers to as "cultural knowledges nurtured among families that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (2006, p 78). This form of cultural wealth encompasses a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include extended family networks. A closely related form of cultural capital is 'social capital' which Yosso conceptualises as networks of people and community resources. Finally, Yosso identifies 'resistant capital' which she defines as "knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenge inequality" (2006, p. 81). Yosso notes that this form of cultural wealth is grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination exhibited by marginalised communities.

The Nguzo Saba

There are strong links between the different facets of community cultural wealth identified by Yosso and the principles of the Nguzo Saba, a pan-African value system created in 1965 by Maulana Karenga, an activist scholar and key figure in America's black liberation movement. Karenga argued that the key crisis in black life was a cultural crisis (Kalonji, 2014, p.197). He posited, therefore, that in order to develop a healthy self-concept it was important to appreciate one's own culture, which prompted him to create the Afrocentric festival of Kwanzaa and the associated Nguzo Saba principles. Crafted in the midst of and inspired by the Black Freedom movement of the 1960s, the Nguzo Saba draws inspiration from communitarian African culture and philosophy (Karenga, 2005). The Nguzo Saba, which incorporates ideas from a range of continental and diasporic African thinkers, is regarded as a "synthesis of African thought" (Karenga, 2005, p. 290). Karenga describes the Nguzo Saba as "the minimum set of values African Americans need to rescue and reconstruct their lives in their own image and build and sustain an Afrocentric family, community and culture" (1996, p. 543).

There has been widespread application of the Nguzo Saba in professional and community organisations by practitioners and researchers alike, particularly, though not exclusively, in America (Karenga, 2005). Johnson (2001), for example notes the Nguzo Saba has been used in the mental health/psychology field to develop alternative models of culturally relevant service provision to address a number of issues among populations of African descent. The Nguzo Saba has also had widespread application in education. Both independent and supplementary community based educational settings often cite the Nguzo Saba as foundational school values which function as the equivalent to a mission statement. The Nguzo Saba have also been used as a framework within a broad range of educational research (Harvey and Hill, 2004; Harvey, 2001; Johnson, 2001; Lee, 1992; Lomotey, 1992).

Although I had some prior knowledge of the Nguzo Saba through having organised a Kwanzaa celebration many years ago, I did not have any intention of using the Nguzo Saba as an analytical framework at the outset of the research process. As I began my discussions with research participants, however, it became apparent the extent to which they embodied the values of the Nguzo Saba, in spite of the fact that our discussions never directly referenced the principals. When looking through transcripts of interviews, the links between participants' discussions about their free school application process and the Nguzo Saba values were crystallised and I decided to adopt the principles to help structure my discussion and to build upon Yosso's (2006) notion of community assets. It is fitting that the Nguzo Saba emerged as a framework out of the interviews as it is in keeping with the methodological approach underpinning this research which prioritises the voices of participants and the use of culturally relevant research tools, as explored in Chapter 5.

Key Principles

Although there are seven Nguzo Saba principles, all expressed in Swahili, I chose to use the four principles with the most relevance to this research and which most often featured in the data to structure my analysis of the participants' cultural assets.

Umoja

The first and foundational principle is Umoja, which translated means unity. According to Karenga (1996), Umoja requires people to demonstrate their commitment to unity in the family, community, nation and race. He further explains that the principle asks people to work in solidarity on mutually

beneficial projects. The formation of the African free School Alliance, which several research participants belonged to, exemplifies the spirit of Umoja. Although the group was comprised of people from different class, education and religious backgrounds, and with diverse political beliefs, the group was committed to working together to submit robust free School applications because of a shared belief in the importance of having African led schools. The fact that the group collaborated in spite of their differences is an important aspect of the principle of Umoja, which prioritises common shared interests over acknowledged individual diversities.

Johnson (2001) suggests that the principle of Umoja implies the creation of programmes and activities that include the family and/or community. Harvey (2001) similarly argues that the Afrocentric approach regards the individual, family and community as an interconnected unit, so that any intervention must include interactions with all three. The idea of working with families and local communities was reflected in the models of service provision the participants adopted in their community based educational provision. The concept of interconnectedness between individual children, their families and the wider community was central to the vision they articulated for their proposed free schools, which focused not just on positive outcomes for individual students, but on positive outcomes for families and local communities as well. The second findings chapter explores how this integrated model of service provision can be conceptualised as a community asset and a model which could benefit schools who often struggle to reach what they deem “hard to reach parents,” which is often codified language for ethnic minority and/or low income families.

Ujima

The second principle, which overlaps considerably with the idea of Umoja, is Ujima which translated means collective work and responsibility. Karenga (1996) explains that the principle involves commitment to active and informed togetherness on matters of common interest. He posits that without collective work and struggle progress is impossible, thus reinforcing the importance of shared communal accountability. Johnson (2001) suggests the principle implies non-hierarchical power structures within groups, a concept that contradicts typical Euro American group structures which make relations of power explicit through clearly demarcated roles. The principle of Ujima was evident in the way some participants articulated their vision for a distributed school leadership in their proposed schools, which is explored in the findings. Given the strong overlap between Ujima and Umoja, I treat them as one central idea of unity and collective work in the presentation of my findings.

Nia

The third principle I use to analyse my data is the principle of Nia, which in English means purpose. Karenga (1996, p. 550) describes Nia as “making our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people”. It is important to note that this articulation diverges from mainstream conceptualisations of purpose as a personally constructed belief. Several examples of this principle in action were identified in the data. Many participants, for example, had a long track record of running community based projects which were in some way designed to improve the local black community. Often participants had devoted their lives to this work in spite of limited resources and often modest financial rewards. The idea of serving the community was also often articulated as part of the rationale for wanting to open a free school, all of which are explored in the findings.

Kujichagulia

The final principle which I consider in my data analysis is Kujichagulia, which translated means self-determination. According to Karenga, self-determination amounts to, “defining ourselves, naming ourselves, creating for ourselves and speaking for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for and spoken by others” (1996, p. 546). UK based black communities have a long history of speaking out against racial inequality in schooling, which is the focus of the next chapter. In addition to contesting racism in the education system, black communities also have a long history of providing self-funded supplementary schooling which exemplifies the value of Kujichagulia. In his study of the black British intellectual tradition, Warmington (2012; 2014) cites the importance of independent black book shops and publishing houses such as Bogle L’Ouverture and New Beacon imprints, which were founded in the 1960s by new arrivals from the Caribbean. These grassroots initiatives enabled black communities to create and control narratives about their lives, which was instrumental given the overtly racist societies they inhabited. In the context of this research, the notion of agency was a reoccurring theme in discussions with participants. One example of this documented in the findings is the choice made by some participants to opt out of partnerships with large well-resourced organisations in order to ensure they retained control over their school proposals.

Overall, there is striking overlap between the Nguzo Saba and the kinds of community cultural wealth identified by Yosso (2006). This overlap suggests communities living in white dominated societies who share legacies of historical injustices evolve specific ways of being which are often overlooked by mainstream research paradigms. The Nguzo Saba is important to this research because it provides an alternative analytical lens, rooted in an African worldview, through which to examine the participants' engagement with the free schools application process. The use of the Nguzo Saba enables a focus on community assets rather than deficits. Furthermore, this focus on assets generates important learning about how the skills and knowledge residing in ethnic minority communities can be utilised to address racial inequality in education, which is in keeping with Yosso's (2006) contention that community cultural wealth has the potential to transform the process of schooling.

Critical Race Theory in Britain

A final but important aspect of CRT that warrants discussion and informs this study is how the theory is used in the UK context. Although CRT was birthed in America, CRT's conceptual framework has been applied by researchers working across North America and Europe, including in the UK. Although application of the theory is still in its infancy (Chakrabarty et al., 2012), Warmington (2012) argues that there is a rich tradition of black intellectual scholarship in the UK which provides a solid foundation for the emerging CRT movement in Britain. While British and American critical race scholars share the same assumptions about the pervasiveness of racism in society and draw on the same tools to examine the concealed apparatus of this racism, Warmington (2012) contends there are also differences in the way the theory is applied in the UK, which Chakrabarty et al. (2012) attribute to the divergent histories of the two nations. One notable difference is in the diversity of scholars and research being generated by UK based CRT scholars. Warmington (2012) notes that much of US scholarship focuses solely on the experiences of African Americans. Other groups who apply a CRT lens to their unique contexts inhabit separate spaces aptly titled Latcrit and Queercrit, among others. In the UK context however, the emergent space is occupied by a range of scholars focusing largely, but in no way exclusively, on the black British experience. Warmington for example, cites work by Hylton (2015) who has published widely on race in sport and Housee (2010) on the experience of British Asian Muslim pupils in schools as evidence of the fluid and flexible space currently occupied by CRT in Britain. This, he points out, is consistent with the way scholarship about race equality in schooling has evolved in Britain to examine the experiences and outcomes of various non-dominant groups.

Unlike many academic disciplines, critical race theory contains an activist dimension. This is evident in the way CRT scholars recognise and embrace the work of activists and are interested not only in examining how race relations operate in society, but also in transforming them to improve the circumstances of non-dominant groups in society (Delgado and Stefanic, 2001). Warmington's (2014) study of black intellectual life in the UK from the post war period onwards documents the significance of black publishing houses, community education projects and grassroots journals as sites of both activism and scholarship; this history is explored in the next chapter. His research highlights the strong historical and contemporary overlap between scholars and activists, who are often one in the same, which is an important feature of the black British intellectual tradition. This perspective on the ties between scholars and activists has been useful in helping me to think through my position in relation to the research and in recognising and understanding the multiple positions occupied by the research sample, both of which are explored further in chapter 5.

A final distinction in the way CRT is practiced in the UK is that the majority (although not all) of the scholarship is based in the field of education, rather than in the legal field as in the US. Warmington notes that from the mid-2000s on CRT scholars in the UK "reasserted, with new inflections, the position that racial inequalities in education could only be diagnosed and addressed by placing understandings of schooling within a critical understanding of the wider social antagonisms of racialization and racism" (Warmington, 2014, p. 138). The 2013 launch of the Centre for Research in Race and Education (CREE) at Birmingham University, a significant site for the generation of CRT scholarship, is also sustaining this focus on race and education in UK scholarship.

Although US CRT scholarship is often legal in focus there is a body of work on race in the American education system which, not surprisingly, shares themes with UK CRT educational research. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) cite the influence of the work of Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Du Bois on shaping the field of CRT in education. Woodson's best known text, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, was published in 1933. The book was one of the first to hypothesise that poor educational outcomes among African American children was the result of school factors, rather than factors inherent to the students, which was the common perception at the time. He put forth that the curriculum, which privileged the values, accomplishments, and perspectives of whites, was an alienating and de-motivating factor in the schooling of African American students, a theme which remains salient within current CRT scholarship on education. Woodson's findings are echoed by Coard (1971), whose work is explored in the next chapter. Warmington (2012, p. 19) notes that since the 1950s

black British intellectuals have "long records of critiquing the education sector's reproduction of racial inequalities and the limitations of governmental approaches to address inequalities," which provides a solid foundation for CRT in Britain.

Gillborn's (2006) pioneering scholarship focuses on critiquing education policy in the UK, in much the same way US scholars critique legislation. He notes that there is a strong tradition of researching inequalities in British schooling with the intention of generating school-level solutions to existing problems and although he concedes there is value in this work, he raises concerns about to what extent school based scholarship addresses the systemic machinations of power and control. He suggests that remaining wedded to school and classroom based analysis risks, "tinkering with the system to make its outputs slightly less awful, but leaving untouched the fundamental shape, scale, and purpose of the system itself" (2006, p. 18). In order to address the system, Gillborn focuses his scholarship primarily on policy, which he regards as the principal vehicle through which the government protects and advances white interests. Gillborn (2008) embraces Michael Apple's (1996) conceptualization of policy as fundamentally a political issue, which determines how power operates in society. He stresses that "current education policy embodies strong continuities with the past while it simultaneously reshapes contemporary priorities, actions and beliefs"(2008, p. 71). He suggests a framework for analysing policy that considers the real world implications of policies, rather than the "expressed intent of policy-makers":

> First, the question of priorities: who or what is driving education policy? Second, the question of beneficiaries: who wins and who loses as a result of education policy priorities? And finally, the question of outcomes: what are the effects of policies? (2005, p. 492).

In his detailed study of British education policies from the 1950s onwards, Gillborn concludes that, despite the rhetoric of standards for all, education policy in England is actively involved in the "defence, legitimation and extension of white supremacy" (2005, p. 499). He justifies this claim by charting the outcomes of British education policies from the 1950s onwards, which he argues provides empirical evidence of the myriad of ways in which ethnic minority students are disadvantaged by education policy. He concludes that education policy in Britain, which is the focus of the next chapter, has always prioritised the interests, feelings and fears of white people and in doing so has maintained the status quo (Gillborn, 2008, p. 75). Gillborn's scholarship is important in terms of contextualising this research on free schools. His work helps locate the free school policy on a continuum of initiatives which have evolved since the 1950s to protect white interests, even when they purport to want to achieve very different outcomes. Gillborn's insistence on focusing on the

outcomes of policies rather than their intended aims is also relevant to this thesis given the considerable rhetoric surrounding the launch of free schools, which is deconstructed in the literature review. I adopt Gillborn's (2005) model in my analysis of the free school policy by considering what is driving the policy; who benefits; and what the outcomes ultimately are.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a number of the key theoretical assumptions which are used to examine race and racism within the free school policy in England. In particular, I have examined the social constructivist definition of race which I adopt to explore the government's response to black free school proposers. The chapter has also reviewed racism as a systemic phenomenon transmitted and secured through every day practices and interactions and rooted in an ideology of white supremacy, which provides a framework for analysing racism in the free school application and approval process. I have also explored how my discussion of the free school policy draws on Bonilla-Silva's (2014) research about how Western societies have developed sophisticated ways of repackaging key signifiers from political and economic liberalism, such as equality, diversity, freedom and choice, in order to create the illusion that they are working to eradicate inequality while in fact failing to confront institutional practices which uphold inequality. Additionally, I have outlined how I rely on Yosso's (2006) idea of community cultural wealth and the Nguzo Saba (Karenga, 1996) in order to identify a range of well established assets among my participants, thereby challenging the legitimacy their exclusion from opening free schools. Finally, I have examined the flexible and inclusive way critical race theory is used in the UK context to critique educational policies with an eye to transforming societal inequality, which informs my use of CRT in this study. Having explored the theoretical underpinnings of this study, the next chapter turns to the historical foundations of the research through an examination of the experiences of African Caribbean communities in schooling and the educational policy landscape in England from the post war period onwards in order to contextualise current struggles over opportunities, or the lack thereof, for opening free schools.

CHAPTER 3: THE UK CONTEXT

The purpose of this chapter is to locate the current struggle over gaining approval to open free schools within the historical struggle for race equality in education, which black communities have been engaged in since their migration to Britain in significant numbers in the 1960s. The chapter traces two parallel processes. The first of these is the evolution of UK education policy in response to the changing demographics of British schools with a focus on how these policies have consistently been dominated by a colourblind discourse, which has impacted the government's approach to addressing race in the free school policy. The second focus is on how black communities have resisted racism in education from the 1960s onwards, which provides a historical precedent for the participants' engagement with the free school policy.

Migration: The Changing Face of British Schools

At the end of World War Two, there was significant migration to Britain. Most of the migrants were from former colonial nations and arrived in the UK in response to a demand for labour following the war (Tomlinson, 2008). This mass migration led to profound changes in society, including in the realm of education. Between 1960 and the early 1970s, British primary and secondary schools became significantly multiracial. Kirp notes that, "during this period, the non-white student population - primarily composed of children of West Indian, Pakistani, African and other Asian backgrounds - grew from an unaccounted handful to 279,872, nearly 4% of the national total" (1979, p. 37). Many newly arrived immigrant children were concentrated in the London metropolitan area, while a significant number of the rest ended up in the Midlands where industrial work was available, resulting in an uneven picture of diversity in schools across the country (Kirp, 1979). In 1970, for example, "half of Britain's 146 educational authorities remained all white while in a half dozen authorities, all in or near London, one in every 5 students was non-white" (Kirp, 1979, p. 37). This legacy of migration explains why London, where this study is based, is one of the significant sites for the struggle for race equality in schooling in the UK. Tomlinson (2008) notes that it is important to contextualise the migration of significant numbers of people from Caribbean countries to the UK as having occurred during the dying days of British imperialism, which was predicated on the ideological assumption of white supremacy (2008; see also Warmington, 2014). Given this ideological standpoint, it is unsurprising that the initial policy response to mass migration was assimilation.

Assimilation

Assimilation is the "ideological assumption that immigrants need to lose their cultural markers and blend in" (Mirza, 2005, p. 109). As well as being fuelled by a belief in the cultural superiority of Britain, Gillborn (2001) notes that assimilation was also adopted to placate the fears of white racist communities and parents who wanted British society to remain unchanged. Although assimilation was the policy goal, there was little evidence that the white British community was in any way prepared to accept the new arrivals as equal (Tomlinson, 2008). Indeed the reality was that new immigrants from Caribbean countries and elsewhere were subject to profound racism. This manifested itself in a number of ways including being refused access to churches, banking institutions and, especially crucially, housing (Simon, 2005).

During the early period of post-migration, the government was slow to take any direct action in the realm of education, where racism was equally rife, resulting in a policy framework which was inconsistent and lacking in coherence (Warmington, 2014; Tomlinson, 2008). The Runneymede Trust, a race equality think tank founded in 1968, attributed this inaction to naivety on the part of the government and local education authorities who assumed assimilation would occur seamlessly and without intervention (Warmington, 2014). The most notable policy initiatives introduced during this period involved English language instruction classes and the dispersal of immigrant children to minimise their numbers in any single class or school, both of which were compatible with the overarching goal of assimilation (Gillborn, 2001). It is worth examining both policies as they highlight contradictions in the government's approach to dealing with issues of race, which overlap with the contradictions uncovered in this study in relation to free schools.

English Language Instruction

Beginning in the 1960s, the chief policy response to the increase in the proportion of non-whites in British public schools was to "define them in non-racial terms, stressing instead some other characteristic" (Kirp, 1979, p. 41). As a result, one of the government's first policy initiatives in 1966 was to make grants from the Home Office, known as Section 11 funding, available to local authorities to support English language acquisition programmes. This focus on language acquisition was retained until 1981 when the scope of the grant was expanded to include programming for all ethnic minorities (Tomlinson, 2008). Although there was confusion about the language of African Caribbean students, which was often cited as a reason for their poor performance in schools, African

Caribbean children did not benefit from this language instruction policy initiative (Kirp, 1979). According to Kirp (1979), the government embraced the idea of English language classes because it involved a clear pedagogical task which suited both the government and educators who needed to be seen to be taking deliberate action to address the needs of immigrant children in schools. In addition the classes, which focused on preparing ethnic minority students to blend into society, were compatible with the government's overarching assimilationist goals. This view was openly expressed by Roy Hattersley, the then Labour Member of Parliament, who stated that the language and customs of immigrants were holding them back and preventing them from assimilating successfully. He underscored the importance of assimilation saying, "it is essential to teach these children basic British customs, basic British habits..." (Hansard col. 1336, 1966, quoted in Tomlinson, 2008, p. 31). Hattersley's articulations can be seen as a direct precursor to the current focus on promoting British values in schools as legislated through the Prevent Duty in 2015 (DfE, 2015a).

Dispersal

In contrast to Section 11 funding, which abstained from mentioning race, the introduction of bussing or dispersal in the 1960s explicitly focused on race, which Kirp (1979) opines is an aberration in British policy. The impetus for bussing came from a group of white parents in the Southall district of London who had complained to the Minister of Education, Edward Boyle, that the educational progress of their children was being compromised by the large numbers of non-white (mainly Asian) children in local schools (Cashmore, 1996). The government responded to the parental disquiet by visiting the area, a move which Warmington (2014) argues legitimated their concerns. The education minister, Boyle, subsequently recommended to the government that the proportion of immigrant children should not exceed 30% in any one school. In 1965 Boyle's law received official backing from the Department of Education and Science and was supported by both the Labour and Conservative parties (Tomlinson, 2008). The law was a clear demonstration of how education policy in England protects and serves white interests as has been documented by Gillborn (2001; 2005; 2008).

The law was not without its opponents. Many working within education pointed out that there was a lack of evidence to support the notion that ethnic minority children dragged down standards and in spite of the law only a few local authorities responded by making preparations to facilitate bussing (Cashmore, 1996). According to Tomlinson (2008), the support for bussing was lacklustre at best and both the inner London Education Authority and Birmingham, which combined had the largest

numbers of ethnic minority children, rejected bussing children. All in all it is estimated that bussing effected 3,000 children and by the late 1970s the policy was abandoned (Kirp, 1979).

The government tried to frame bussing, or dispersal as it was referred to, in positive terms by noting that it would enable immigrant children to become familiar with British language, culture and lore, which was in keeping with it's broader assimilationist agenda (Kirp, 1979). In reality, immigrant children were seen as dragging down the achievement within a school and the idea was to spread them around under the guise of promoting integration and assimilation. This deficit view of immigrant children permeated the Department for Education and Science (DES) circular on bussing which stated that if non-whites were not bussed, "the problems within a school could well become so great that they cause a decline in the general standard of education provided" (Kirp, 1979, p. 75). Whatever the justification for bussing, the main goal of the initiative was clearly to quell the anxiety of white parents (Cashmore, 1996). Graham (2001) and Tomlinson (2008) further argue that the dispersal policy was symptomatic of governmental and societal fears about groups of black people, which were rooted in concerns over loss of power stemming from loss of majority status. This idea of fearing black collective action is explored in chapter 6 through an examination of the government's attempts to thwart majority black free school proposer teams and what they perceived to be the opening up of black schools.

There are a number of similarities between these early policy initiatives and the free school policy in spite of the fact they are separated by over 50 years. To begin with, Kirp (1979) notes that these early policy initiatives were paternalistic in that there was no consultation with immigrant communities about their needs, which he argues is consistent with the way education policy has evolved in Britain. Campbell-Stephens similarly notes that in spite of the government's insistence that free schools would give more power to parents and pupils:

> ...those who have been most disenfranchised within the British education system and have suffered the greatest levels of inequality, namely black students and their parents, do not appear to be explicitly and strategically included in either the conversation or the development of the free school model (2011, p. 34).

The early policies also demonstrate the often contradictory ways race is treated within a colourblind assimilationist discourse. The English language instruction initiative effectively enabled the government to appear to be addressing the needs of ethnic minority children without discussing race. This is consistent with the way the government has avoided any discussion of racial inequality in relation to free schools, preferring instead to discuss class based inequality, which is presumed to

subsume all other forms of equality. In implementing the short lived dispersal policy however, the government briefly contravened their commitment to colourblindness in order to exert and maintain control over the make-up of schools, which, as explored in the previous chapter, is a strategy crucial to securing domination. Although race was officially ignored as a factor in the free school policy, this study explores how the application process has been established in a manner that enables the government to indirectly monitor who is applying to open schools and which of those applications are ultimately successful.

Rampton Report

Starting in the late 1960s and into the 1970s and 1980s the government's language shifted away from assimilation and towards integration and pluralism, in part out of the need to acknowledge and address the reality of racial tensions in both the US and UK (Tomlinson, 2008). Gillborn (2001) explains that there was some progress made during this period in terms of acknowledging that inequality was a feature of British society as evidenced by the passing of the 1976 Race Relations Act, which defined racial discrimination and set out how the law would deal with it, and the establishment of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), a public body with a focus on race equality.

In spite of these positive advancements there remained no clear direction in education policy in terms of promoting race equality. Although tolerance and diversity emerged as new buzzwords, Gillborn (2001) notes that protection of the status quo remained the key driving force in educational policy. The focus, thus, remained on framing poor outcomes for ethnic minority children as attributable to problems inherent in their communities, which absolved the education system of responsibility. Kirp (1979) argues that during this period there was no display of any willingness to alter the nature of schools themselves. He posits that in spite of the shift towards integration, there was still the hope that over time language and cultural differences would diminish and ethnic minority communities would be incorporated into society, suggesting there was by no means a complete abandonment of the ideals of assimilation and the associated belief in the superiority of white British culture. (See also Warmington, 2014).

In spite of the lack of clear direction in education policy, the period between the late 1970s and the late 1980s saw progress in terms of raising the profile of race equality in education. This was largely because of the Rampton Report (1981), which was later followed by the Swann Report (1985). The

impetus for both reports was concern about the widespread poor performance of African Caribbean students in British schools (Gilliard, 1998). In 1979 the Labour Education Secretary established the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups. The committee, which was chaired by Rampton, was tasked with identifying the causal factors of the underachievement of so many African Caribbean children and coming up with workable solutions to address this achievement gap (Gilliard, 1998). Rampton's (1981) interim report, *West Indian Children in Our Schools*, made a clear departure from the status quo of attributing underachievement to problems inherent to children and their communities. Instead, for the first time the report acknowledged racism, which often manifested itself in low teacher expectations, as the primary factor influencing poor outcomes for African Caribbean children. Gillborn (2001, p. 15) refers to the Rampton Report as a "watershed moment in race equality in British education because it shifted the focus away from the deficit approach and the idea of some races being intellectually superior or inferior to others". In contrast, it placed a spotlight on to teachers and how their expectations shaped pupil outcomes.

What is equally significant to the actual findings in the report, is the way the media and government responded to it. Gillborn (2001) notes that the recommendations of the report were derided across the political spectrum and were heavily criticised in the media. He argues it was the overt focus on race and racism that the government and media objected to and which ultimately led them to reject the findings. So outraged was the government that Rampton was removed from his role as Chair of the committee. The work of the committee, however, did continue under the leadership of Lord Swann and the final report was submitted to the Education Secretary in 1985. Although it echoed some of the ideas of the earlier Rampton Report, there was a general watering down of the findings. Significantly, the report ceased to retain its original focus on African Caribbean children, focusing instead more broadly on ethnic minority children (Archer and Francis, 2007).

Of particular relevance to this research is the following statement from the Swann report: "Some of the fundamental change that is necessary is the recognition that the problem facing the education system is not how to educate children of ethnic minorities, but how to educate *all* children" (1985, p. 363, quoted in Gilliard, 1998, n.p.). This belief that the needs of ethnic minority children could be addressed by improving the universal provision of schooling for all is significant because it has become the cornerstone of successive governments' approaches to addressing racial inequality in education and is an important part of the rationale behind free schools. Crucial to the approach is the assumption that all inequality is similar and can be addressed via general school improvement.

The approach also represents a commitment to tackling racial inequality through colourblind strategies which avoid overt references to race or attributing differences in pupil outcomes to institutional factors. The government's discomfort with naming racism as a factor in black children's educational outcomes and rejection of the Rampton Report is significant because it provides precedence and context to the current government's response to some of the participants' proposals, which employed raced language and models of schooling in an attempt to redress the institutional factors which contribute to the underachievement of black children.

Although the findings of the Swann report were somewhat more palatable than those published in Rampton's Interim Report, the government's response was to continue to ignore the majority of the findings (Gillborn, 2001). Instead, the government embraced and diverted resources towards promoting multiculturalism (Gillborn, 2001). Warmington (2014, p. 73) defines multiculturalism, which reached its height in the 1980s and 1990s, as "an imprecise term which attempts to capture the idea of the challenges involved in the management of an ethnically diverse society and the policies erected to confront the challenge". He notes that the multiple aims of multiculturalism are to recognise cultural diversity while ensuring legal equality and addressing cultural pluralism. According to Gillborn (2001), schools primarily interpreted multiculturalism as the requirement to embrace and celebrate cultural differences, which they often fulfilled by inviting ethnic minority students to share aspects of their cultural heritage, like food or clothing, at specially organised school events. He argues that although these activities, offered under the banner of multiculturalism, enabled schools to appear to be addressing racial inequality, they did not in fact address fundamental issues of race and power and therefore did little to dismantle the structural racism inherent in educational institutions.

Although the government did not produce a policy response to the Rampton and Swann Reports, the period was marked nonetheless by an emergent anti-racist movement which rejected multicultural approaches in favour of genuine anti-racist policy and practice. Graham (2001, p. 64) points to the fundamentally different ideological stance of the anti-racist movement which "drew upon colonisation and imperialism as the roots of racism and the propagation of racist ideology". Much maligned in the media, the movement reached its zenith during this period, thanks largely to the work of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). Warmington (2014) describes the varied activities of activists from a variety of backgrounds who directed their efforts to confronting racism within the system including through the design of curriculum and teacher training resources; and the creation of a number of journals which provided teachers with anti-racist critiques of education

policies and reviews of literature and resources. Tomlinson (2008) also documents the important role played by local authorities who began to adopt the terminology of race equality, and publish race equality policies. In addition she notes that local authorities began to adapt teacher training courses to better prepare teachers for working in multiracial contexts. Tomlinson (2008, p. 97) sums up the 1980s as a "a high point of awareness that the education system needed radical change in order to accommodate what was manifestly a racially and culturally diverse society; albeit still not acknowledged in some political circles".

1988 Education Reform Act

The momentum gained by the anti-racist movement was quickly derailed by Margatet Thatcher's Conservative government who once elected implemented significant educational reforms via the 1988 Education Reform Act, which "virtually removed issues concerning racial and ethnic inequalities from political consideration" (Tomlinson, 2008, p. 153). Two means by which the government derailed the anti-racist movement was by removing key sources of their funding and reducing the influence of local education authorities, which had been significant sites for local expressions of anti-racist work (Tomlinson, 2008). In place of the latter, the government reasserted its own influence over curriculum, assessment and teacher training (Tomlinson, 2008 p. 80). Gillborn (2001) notes that from the outset Thatcher's government decisively signalled their rejection of the Rampton and Swann Reports' recommendation to acknowledge and address racism in education. The government chose instead to prioritise defining and upholding the ideology of Britishness (Gillborn, 2001). This manifested itself in anti-immigration policy, which was accompanied by rhetoric about the need to stop immigration in order to protect and preserve the British character from outside influences (Kirp, 1979). Gillborn notes that overall the period was marked by "asserting a strong cultural homogeneity among the British population as a basis for privileging the views, needs and assumptions of that group over minority communities" (2001, p. 17). One of the main ways the government embedded the ideology of Britishness into schooling was through the introduction of a national curriculum that privileged British culture.

This period also established the particular values and ideology of education which underpin the current marketisation of schooling, within which the free schools initiative is situated. The antecedents of marketisation implemented under Thatcher included promoting the idea of parental choice and introducing accountability measures via an inspection framework (Tomlinson, 2008),

which paved the way for competition between schools, an essential component of the privatised model of schooling as explored later in this chapter.

The Thatcher years were also marked by what Gillborn (2001, p. 18) terms “ferocious individualism,” which promoted the acquisition of individual wealth and power. In education terms, this translated into thinking about students as individuals, rather than as members of groups with particular histories and collective experiences of poverty and racism. The period introduced an unrelenting and sustained focus on measuring individual student attainment in relation to narrow success criteria, which continues to dominate educational discourse to the present day. Crucially, student achievement was also attributed to individual effort, rather than external or institutional factors. According to Gillborn (2001) this focus on individuals and individual merit diverted attention away from discussions about race and class, which was consistent with the government’s colourblind agenda. It is important to identify how British education policy embraces the concept of individualism in order to contextualise how the participants’ free school proposals, which conceptualised pupils not as individuals but as members of families and local communities situated in racist societies, were received by the government. One of the central questions raised by this research is whether or to what extent the free school policy, which is championed as the harbinger of new and innovative approaches, is in fact welcoming of forms of schooling which contravene the dominant ideology of market based education.

Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and the Race Relations Amendment Act

In 1997 there was a change in government when a Labour government led by Tony Blair was elected. Although New Labour, as the party became known under Blair’s leadership, were more willing to acknowledge ethnic inequalities, there remained a decisive lack of action taken by the government during this period to reduce gaps in educational attainment for ethnic minority children (Gillborn, 2001). Tomlinson (2008) notes that overall the government’s approach was contradictory because while they promoted a social justice agenda, they also continued implementing market based reforms, for instance through the launch of the academies programme, which reproduced inequality by excluding many working class and/or ethnic minority pupils, as well as those with special education needs, from the more desirable schools and universities.

Significant progress was made in raising the profile of race equality in education while the Labour government was in power, but this was the result of a high profile tragedy rather than

advancements in education policy. The Stephen Lawrence inquiry evolved out of the racially motivated murder of a young black man in Eltham, South London. Following revelations that evidence crucial to solving the murder of Stephen Lawrence had been mishandled by the police, a public inquiry into the case was launched in 1998, resulting in a report published in 1999. One of the most significant outcomes of the report was the introduction of the concept of institutional racism into public consciousness. The report concluded that: "There must be unequivocal acceptance of the problem of institutional racism and its nature before it can be addressed, as it needs to be, in full partnership with members of minority ethnic communities" (Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, p.31 quoted in Gillborn, 2005a, p. 97). This was a meaningful development in race equality which had implications for all public sector organisations. Gillborn (2005a) pinpoints the significance of naming institutional racism by noting that it switched the focus away from linking racism with personal intent towards understanding and emphasising the negative consequences which result from racism.

The identification of institutional racism also broadened the definition of racism to incorporate institutional processes which unwittingly advantage some groups over others. As explored in the previous chapter, this conceptualisation is in keeping with how critical race scholars understand racism. Although introducing the idea of institutional racism into the public domain was a significant development, Warmington (2014) notes the importance of recognising that black anti-racist activists and academics had long asserted, albeit in different language, the institutional nature of racism. Gillborn and Mirza (2000, p. 5) argue that although the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry raised the profile of racial equality, it did not result in schools taking concrete steps to eliminate racism. Instead, they posit, there was confusion about the best way forward for addressing racism in education. Reflecting on the impact of the inquiry, Gillborn (2001) notes that the introduction of citizenship as a subject in schools is one of the only examples of tangible action taken by the government. Although a welcome development, Tomlinson (2008) points out that the citizenship curriculum fell short of acknowledging racism, choosing instead to focus on cataloguing the differences between groups, echoing the multicultural approaches of a decade earlier. Chitty (2009, p. 241) further argues that the citizenship curriculum, which was non-statutory in primary schools, "was marginalised as schools struggled with implementing a seriously overloaded framework".

The introduction of a citizenship curriculum as the mechanism through which to address race equality is interesting because it illuminates the ways schools often deal with race equality: namely by treating it as separate from the core business of schools and marginalizing it (in this instance by housing it within a low status, non-academic subject) and/or by dealing with it in the general rather

than specific sense (i.e. race is implied within the study of citizenship, rather than overtly named). Looking back on the overall impact of the inquiry, Gillborn (2001. p. 24) notes that in spite of the introduction of the idea of institutional racism, racism itself was left “unopposed and unexamined”. Indeed he asserts that while there was a general move towards espousing values like mutual respect and understanding, these were never clearly defined and did not result in clear action. Gillborn’s observation here provides an example of how the abstract liberalism frame (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), as discussed in the previous chapter, is used to create the illusion of commitment to race equality. The other significant event during the Labour government’s tenure was Parliament’s passing of the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 (RRAA), which represented a positive step forward for race equality in education. The Act strengthened the responsibilities of schools towards race equality. In particular schools were tasked with being pro-active in trying to eradicate inequality and were instructed to monitor their activities for signs of bias, and to have a written policy on race equality (Gillborn, 2005a). Gillborn (2005a) refers to the legislation itself as radical in that it made focusing on race equality mandatory for schools. In reality, however, the gap between policy and practice often remained stubbornly in place as many schools were slow to amend their practice in order to comply with the new legislation.

The Race Relations Amendment Act (RRAA) and all other anti-discrimination legislation have since been replaced by the Equality Act 2010 which provides a legal framework for challenging discrimination based on nine protected characteristics. While the focus on protected characteristics recognises the multiple and often overlapping dimensions of discrimination, an argument can also be made that it has diluted the RRAA’s original focus on race. The next chapter explores some emergent research (Bolloten, 2013) suggesting many new free schools are contravening their legal duties under the Equality Act 2010, indicating a continued failure of anti-discrimination legislation to transform practice at the level of individual schools. Arguably, one of the factors contributing to schools’ non-compliance with equalities legislation is a weak infrastructure for monitoring adherence. In contrast, Ofsted’s Common Inspection Framework outlines very clear lines of accountability for schools in areas prioritised by the government.

While the New Labour period saw the introduction of some programmes focusing on ethnic minority achievement, Archer and Francis (2007) argue they were mournfully under resourced and marginalised. One such example is the Black Children’s Achievement Programme (2005-2010) discussed in the introduction, which was small scale, localised and crucially, optional (Archer and Francis, 2007). Archer and Francis (2007) suggest the government’s reticence to invest in targeted

programmes to address ethnic and/or social class achievement gaps, stemmed from their reluctance to anger and alienate the most powerful groups in society and those with the greatest political influence, which is in keeping with Gillborn's (2001; 2005) assertion that educational policy is crafted to address the interests of the privileged in society. This assertion is important in the context of this research because it raises questions about whether investing money in opening free schools to address the needs of urban black communities is politically viable for a government intent on pleasing their powerful constituents.

On the whole programmes targeting particular communities were the exception rather than the rule during this period. Instead, the government's approach to addressing ethnic minority achievement gaps consisted mainly of establishing programmes which benefited all students, which is consistent with Kirp's (1979, p. 49) assertion that British governments prefer "redressing broad categories of social need, instead of responding to the particular grievances of non-white groups". This approach was clearly outlined in the 1997 White Paper, *Excellence in Schools*, which "set out the underlying principle driving education reforms through the late 1990s and into the twenty first century: high standards for all" (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000, p. 7). This singular agenda resulted in the introduction of programmes like *Excellence in Cities* and *Aim Higher* that were focused on improving provision for all students, which Archer and Francis (2007) argue subsumed the race equality agenda.
Mirza (2005) sums up the New Labour period as disappointing in terms of advancement in race equality in schooling. She notes that although policy progressed, it did not translate into an improvement in pupil outcomes for groups who were lagging behind. She cites the lack of innovation in race equality practice in schools saying:

> While we like to think we have progressed in terms of sophisticated debate and progressive legislation on equality, diversity and human rights, our solutions to the problems remain limited. 'Raising Achievement' funding initiatives focus on short term policies which lead to inherently safe, conservative 'doable' practices which just keep reinventing the wheel with weak woolly institutional responses to the causes of real racism (2005, p. 114).

Marketisation

Once elected in 2010 the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government took swift action to enact legislation that paved the way for the expansion of marketised schooling. West and Bailey (2013) note that there is a global trend in the shift towards private, rather than public bodies, delivering educational services. Archer and Francis (2007) attribute this shift to the desire to

engineer a workforce to compete in the global marketplace. Academies, publicly-funded independent schools which draw on sponsors, were first introduced by the Labour Government in 2000 (Gorrard, 2009). Initially, academies were conceived of as replacements to poor performing schools located in areas of high deprivation and with falling intakes. The requirements and process for becoming an academy have become considerably less strigent since their commencement in 2000 with successive governments arguing that marketisation of schooling represents the single most efficient route to improving standards for poor children. In launching the first city academies, as they were initially called in 2000, Education Secretary David Blunkett for example, described academies as “a radical approach to promote greater diversity and break the cycle of failing schools in inner cities” (Gillard, 2011).

A decade later Gove used a similar justification in defence of the government’s plans to rapidly expand academies and introduce free schools saying, “This policy is driven, like all our education policy, by our guiding moral purpose - the need to raise attainment for all children and close the gap between the richest and poorest (Gove, 2010 quoted in Gillborn, 2013). Both examples further illustrate how governments employ the abstract liberalism frame (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), in this case to launch market reforms. One of the ideas explored in the next chapter is how the government similarly co-opts the language of social justice in order to ascribe a moral purpose to free schools, which conceals the fact that they reproduce existing inequalities. Other arguments advanced by the government in support of academies are that they inject much needed competition into the system by forcing schools to vie to be the best in order to attract high levels of enrolment, which are tied to funding, thereby driving up standards across the system. The government also argues that external sponsors provide much needed injections of innovation into failing schools (Hatcher 2006). Each of these claims has also been made by the government about free schools as explored in the next chapter.

In spite of the rhetoric around promoting equality, many have argued that academies are exacerbating the existing inequalities that are already disadvantaging black students (Tomlinson, 2008; Gillborn, 2013; Archer and Francis, 2007; Stokes and Haji, 2016). Archer and Francis (2007) echo Gillborn’s (2001) assertion that marketisation fuels the narrow focus on individual attainment which reinforces a meritocratic view of achievement that in turn deflects attention away from institutional barriers that impact on the achievement of ethnic minority children. Citing the government’s own data about the achievement of major ethnic groups in the first 63 academies which opened, Gillborn (2013, p. 484) more recently concluded that “the best available evidence

suggests that for Asian and white students the advantage of attending an academy is negligible, while for black students there appears to be a clear disadvantage". Elsewhere, recent research by Stokes and Haji (2016) about equality and inclusion in multi academy trusts, documents a number of institutional practices which are producing inequalities for black minority ethnic (BME) groups and their families. Examples of such practices include the disproportionate formal and informal exclusions of BME pupils which exceeds the already high rates in local authority schools, the lack of clear strategy to address the considerable attainment gaps for BME groups and the lack of representation from BME groups on governing bodies.

In spite of the evidence that academies are not reducing inequalities, once elected the 2010 Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government acted swiftly to expand the academies programme through the 2010 Academy Act. The Act enabled all schools to convert to academies and also provided the legal framework for the launch of free schools. West and Bailey (2013, p. 138) summarise the impact of marketisation:

> The marketisation of schooling has radically changed the school system from a national system controlled by democratically elected local education authorities, to a centrally controlled system in which the Secretary of State manages a number of contracts with varied providers.

Although the academisation of schooling is a relatively new phenomenon, the ideology which underpins it is not. Like the policies which preceded it, the academy programme is marked by the erasure of race which has been supplanted by a discourse around closing gaps in achievement for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Stokes and Haji (2016) and Gillborn's (2013) research about racial inequality within academies is important because it demonstrates how colourblind policy initiatives create negative effects for ethnic minority communities, which is explored further in the next chapter in relation to free schools.

Summary

Gillborn (2005) argues that education policy in Britain is underpinned by an enduring ideology of white supremacy, rooted in Britain's imperial legacy. As a result there has been remarkable consistency in successive government's approaches to addressing racial inequality over the past 60 years. As noted in the introduction of this study, these approaches have largely failed to disrupt patterns of underachievement and the disproportionate exclusion of African Caribbean children. Although a strong anti-discrimination legislative framework has evolved over the past 20 years and

both the Rampton Report (1981) and Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (1999) acknowledged racism as a factor in schooling and highlighted how institutions reproduce inequality, governments have been slow to respond with specific policies targeting racial inequality in schooling. Instead, governments have adopted a colourblind approach to developing policy, which as explored in the literature review, deflects attention away from racial inequality through the refusal to recognise race. Increasingly governments have also adopted the view that improving the standards of schools overall is the most efficient way to achieve equality of outcomes for different groups of students. From the 1980s onwards government reforms "have ensured that schooling has become a market community," (Tomlinson, 2008, p. 176) based on the rationale that competition between schools delivers improvements across the system, the benefits of which it presumes are distributed equally. In doing so governments have adopted a meritocratic view of success and employed the language of equal opportunities which disguises how the system (re)produces inequality. It has been important to chart the government's approach to race equality in education over the past 60 years in order to contextualise both the emergence of the free school policy and the research participants' attempts to use the policy as a vehicle to achieve genuine race equality in schooling. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the resistance of African Caribbean communities to racism in education.

African Caribbean Resistance

According to Kirp (1979) black communities in Britain have had few opportunities to impact education policy. He contends that the government's stance towards ethnic minority communities has been one of paternalism, rooted in the legacy of colonialism, a sentiment echoed by Mahamadaliie (2005), who notes that the voices of black communities are consistently absent from debates about the education of their children. In spite of this exclusion, or as Searle (2005) argues in response to it, African Caribbean communities have mobilised and led one of the most successful parental movements around education in twentieth century Britain (Myers and Grosvenor, 2011), which Tomlinson (2008) points out has not been sufficiently recognised. The following brief exploration of how African Caribbean communities mobilised around the issue of education is important because it locates current day struggles over opening free schools within longstanding struggles for race equality in schooling.

Early Campaigning

Many of the schools that large numbers of black children enrolled in on arrival in Britain were situated in white working class urban areas and characterised by neglect and substandard teaching

and equipment (Myers and Grosvenor, 2011). Rather than just accept this fate for their children, black parents engaged in consistent campaigning to address their concerns over the education their offspring were receiving (Chevannes and Reeves 1987; Meyers and Grosvenor, 2011; Andrews, 2013). According to Warmington (2014) this early campaigning and organising around schooling was critical in establishing mass consciousness around a black British identity.

Some of the earliest campaigns evolved in response to race riots which occurred in Nottingham and Notting Hill in 1958 (Warmington, 2014). Among the first, but certainly not only, black organisation that formed at the time was the West Indian Standing Conference (WISC) which engaged in monitoring racial inequalities in housing, employment, policing and schools. (Warmington, 2014). The West Indian Gazette, a monthly newspaper founded by Trinidadian Marxist feminist Claudia Jones, also launched in 1958 and was an important outlet for the emergent community, not least because it provided a platform for black political and cultural activists to share their views (Warmington, 2014). It was against this background of evolving race consciousness about the reality of life in the UK that specific education campaigns were undertaken.

One of the earliest London campaigns on record was led in 1969 by the North London West Indian association (NLWIA), an organisation founded by the activist John La Rose, who also founded New Beacon, Britain's first specialist black book shop, which opened in London in 1966 (Warmington, 2014). The campaign, which focused on protesting against Haringey Council's decision to introduce 'banding', is regarded as an important moment in the struggle for race equality in schooling because it mobilised black parents around the country to engage in protesting against school practices which disadvantaged their children (Warmington, 2014; Myers and Grosvenor, 2011).

The government argued that placing children into ability bands would engineer mixed ability intakes for school. Although ensuring a fair distribution of pupils across schools was given as the rationale for banding, many black parents suspected that the government embraced the idea because it provided them with an indirect way of dispersing black and Asian children, who were presumed to be less able than their white peers, across the borough (Myers and Grosvenor, 2011). The impetus for the campaign occurred when the NWLIA obtained a confidential document from Haringey Local Education Authority (1968) which confirmed the parents' suspicions. The document stated: "On a rough calculation half the immigrants will be West Indians at seven of the eleven schools, the significance of this being the general recognition that their IQ's work out below their English contemporaries" (Best, 119:7, quoted in Warmington, 2014, p. 7). The same document later stated

that “while this method is not a complete solution to the racial problem, it helps to meet it indirectly”, demonstrating well the hidden operations of power (Gillborn, 2006). The incident is important because it reveals how deracialised policies can be introduced to create premeditated racial outcomes. The incident also exemplifies Bonilla-Silva’s (2014) assertion that cololurblind racism employs different language in public and private spheres. In this instance the language used in policy documents was devoid of race while the conversations which occurred among policy makers behind closed doors were overtly raced, further highlighting how race consciousness operates within a colourblind discourse. This phenomenon is also explored in Chapter 6 in relation to free schools through an exploration of the differences between the language used in policy documents and a leaked document in which the government openly disparaged a Black free school proposer.

Myers and Grosvenor (2011, n.p.) explain the campaign strategy employed by the NLWIA: “The NLWIA organised a mass demonstration, pamphlets were printed, parents’ committees formed and petitions signed” and were eventually successful in overturning banding. Alongside their anti-banding campaign, the NLWIA made a series of proposals in 1968-1969 to advance race equality in schooling, including “the employment of teacher-social workers to improve home-school relations and courses to be provided for parents to learn about their children’s schooling” (Warmington, 2014, p. 48). These proposals are significant because they embody a holistic view of education which situates students in the context of their families and communities. The participants’ free school proposals also emphasised the collective bonds between students, families and communities as a valuable asset for securing race equality in schooling. An exploration of these approaches, which reflect the principles of Umoja (unity) and Ujima (collective work and responsibility) and how they contrast with dominant models of schooling features in Chapter 7.

The next notable campaign that occurred was led jointly by the NLWIA and the Caribbean Education and Community Workers Association (CECWA) who were formed in 1969. The focus of the campaign was on protesting the nation-wide practice of categorising black children as slow learners, which resulted in disproportionate numbers of them being placed in educationally subnormal (ESN) schools (Myers and Grosvenor, 2011). In 1967, the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), noted that “28.4% of children in ESN schools were immigrant, mainly of West Indian origin” (Tomlinson, 1982, p. 161), giving credence to the parents’ concerns. In 1970, two significant moments in the campaign occurred. The first was that the NLWIA lodged a complaint of racial discrimination with the Race Relations Board against Haringey LEA regarding the disproportionate numbers of their children in

ESN schools. Although the Board did not concede any unlawful act they did acknowledge that the IQ tests being used to assess black children were problematic (Tomlinson, 1982). In 1970, a three day seminar was also held at which two significant papers were presented. One was by John La Rose (a prominent figure in the black parents' movement as noted above) on banding and the other was by Bernard Coard on ESN schools (Myers and Grosvenor, 2011). After the conference, Coard re-drafted his paper and the CECWA published it in 1971 as *How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System.*

The book, which sold more than 10,000 copies, was based on the campaigning work done by the community and the direct experiences of Coard, an academic and educator who at the time worked in ESN schools and youth clubs (Ouseley, 2005). Coard's (1971) central argument was that large numbers of African Caribbean children were being erroneously placed in ESN schools which had been created to accommodate students who could not cope with the academic rigour of mainstream school. Although focused on ESN schools, the text also presented a searing critique of racism throughout the school system. The text is significant because it offered one of the earliest articulations of institutional racism as the predominant factor in African Caribbean students' poor levels of achievement, which was echoed, albeit it in more muted tones, by the Rampton Report a decade later.

The assessment of a student's suitability for an ESN school was based on a combination of teacher assessment and an IQ test, both of which Coard (1971) criticized. In particular, he turned a spotlight on the IQ tests which he regarded as flawed on the basis that they were based on white middle-class norms which disadvantaged African Caribbean students who were unfamiliar with the cultural context the tests were set in, and with IQ tests in general. He argued IQ testing was not a valid measure of African Caribbean children's intelligence and as a result many of average and above average intelligence were wrongly sent to ESN schools. He further argued that in some cases newly arrived immigrant children were admitted directly to ESN schools without any form of assessment. He highlighted ILEA's own estimation that "20 percent of all the immigrant children in six of their secondary ESN schools had been admitted to the Special school without even being given a trial in an ordinary school first" (Coard, 1971, p. 15).

Coard (1971) also highlighted the shortcomings of teacher assessment. He posited that the behaviour patterns and way African Caribbean students related to each other, and to their teachers, were misunderstood by white teachers and they were consequently misjudged as being

intellectually inferior. In addition to this cultural bias, he also identified a class conflict between the overwhelmingly white middle class teaching force and the largely working class African Caribbean student population. As a result of the clash in both culture and class, Coard (1971) concluded that African Caribbean children whose history, language and culture were misunderstood were unfairly perceived of and treated as inferior.

Coard (1971) outlined the multiple short and longer term effects of wrongly placing African Caribbean children in ESN schools. He cited, for example, how languishing in ESN schools depressed students' aspirations and reinforced the low expectation that many white teachers had of African Caribbean children at the time, which was in keeping with wider societal beliefs about the inferiority of blacks. He also identified the negative emotional impact of discrimination in schools, zeroing in on the damaging effects of the curriculum which associated everything negative with black and everything positive with white. Coard (1971) forcefully argued that schools were involved in the erosion of black students' self-esteem noting that "through the belittling, ignoring or denial of a person's identity, one can destroy perhaps the most important aspect of a person's personality- his sense of identity, of who he is. Without this, he will get nowhere" (1971, p. 31).

As well as these immediate consequences, Coard (1971) also highlighted the pernicious long term ramifications of large numbers of African Caribbean students attending ESN schools. Chief among them was that students in ESN schools were condemned to graduating without qualifications which effectively shoehorned them into the least well paid jobs in society, setting in motion cycles of poverty. Coard (1971) suggested the formation of this black underclass was deliberate in that it generated a workforce of immigrants who could take up the lowest paid, menial jobs, which fulfilled the dual purpose of ensuring a cheap supply of labour while sustaining the racial hierarchy.

More than forty years after it was published, Coard's (1971) book is still regarded as an important moment in the history of the struggle for race equality in schooling for the African Caribbean community (Andrews, 2013). Crucially, Coard (1971) articulated that it was the social construction of the African Caribbean child as inferior, which was at the root of the problems experienced by African Caribbean students, rather than any deficiency within the students themselves. The book is widely embraced because it so clearly lays out the issues impacting on the poor achievement of African Caribbean students, a topic which continues to be debated today. Ouseley (2005. p. 13) summarises the issues as: "racism, race prejudice and social inequalities, all of which are crucial factors in the

perpetuation of educational policies and practices which cause the system to fail the African Caribbean community".

Coard's text epitomises the strong emphasis on countering racist narratives that characterises black led resistance to racism in schooling. This is evident in the number of grassroots journals, like the Gazette cited earlier, which emerged and played an important role in campaigning for race equality. Also front and centre were a network of black independent bookshops and publishing houses that made educational materials available for parents and schools and which challenged Eurocentric and sometimes racist materials used in schools (Warmington, 2014). There was also significant overlap between the black arts scene and educational initiatives. Warmington (2014) notes that educators often worked in tandem with young writers, musicians, and film-makers who sought to explore the experiences of young blacks in Britain, in order to create organic and wholistic narratives of black life in the nation. This desire to control and narrate their own stories exemplifies well the principle of Kujichagulia (self-determination) which was also highly prized among the participants who sought to exert influence over schooling by opening free schools.

Supplementary Schools

Alongside challenging discriminatory practices within mainstream schools, black parents also supplemented the system by providing alternative educational services in the form of supplementary schools, which are an important part of the community's history of resistance to racism in schooling. Reay and Mirza (2001, p. 90) describe supplementary schools as "organisations set up by and for the black community which are for the most part self-funding, grassroots and organic". The earliest supplementary schools opened between 1965-1969 and took place in people's homes. Today they are more likely to occur in local halls, church rooms (whose networks have always fed into the supplementary school movement) and schools (Simon, 2001). Given that these schools often sprang up beyond the gaze of local authorities and funders, it is difficult to be precise about the number which exist today and how many children attend these schools (Reay and Mirza, 2001). Reay and Mirza's 2001 research revealed the existence of 60 supplementary schools in the inner London and greater London area where approximately 300,000 African Caribbeans live. They suggest 30 could be considered an average number of children within a school although some may have many fewer and others as many as 90. As of 2013, The National Association of black Supplementary Schools had 60 listings in their schools directory (Andrews, 2013).
Simon (2005, p. 68) frames the establishment of supplementary schools as:

> a form of protest and immediate community response to the fact that African Caribbean students were failing in school, their language was being blamed, and that schools were involved in the indoctrination of white middle class values, which parents regarded as detrimental to black children.

One of the crucial elements of black supplementary schools is that they provided spaces for activists to exert power and control over their children's education in ways which were not possible in the mainstream school setting (Andrews, 2013; Graham, 2001). Chevannes and Reeves (1987) argue the fact that supplementary schools were black led was a key feature in their appeal to parents who wanted their children educated by someone who understood what it was like to be a Black person in a white dominated society. This theme is also explored in Chapter 7 in relation to the high levels of enrolment enjoyed by the two free schools who were approved among the research sample.

A distinguishing feature of African Caribbean supplementary schools is that they do not focus on language or religion as is the case with supplementary schools run by other ethnic minority communities (Andrews, 2013). Instead, many black supplementary schools place a strong emphasis on promoting and preserving African and African Caribbean culture and history alongside supporting academic success (Simon, 2005). According to Graham, (2001, p. 71) the majority of African Caribbean supplementary schools take a holistic approach to their provision and are often engaged in: "enhancing and improving children's academic performance while exposing young people to an African-centred orientation knowledge; providing character building and facilitating intergenerational unity". Each of these objectives are regarded as equally important, integrated and interdependent. Typically supplementary schools offer classes on Saturday in English and Mathematics and Culture, which may be taught discretely or interwoven within literacy and numeracy instruction. Simon (2005) notes that this engagement of culture in the child's learning is at the core of the philosophy of the supplementary school movement. Graham concurs that this focus on cultural heritage is crucial to supplementary schools who "reject the valorisation of European history, culture and values in mainstream schools" (2001, p. 71). Across settings there is commitment to the ethos of promoting and preserving African Caribbean culture alongside high academic attainment, although there is flexibility in the way individual schools express their commitment to these goals, with each setting placing a high value on their own autonomy. Warmington (2014, p. 53) describes the eclectic and varied nature of the early post-war supplementary schools, suggesting they:

> encompassed a complicated spread of aims and arrangements in terms of the type of provision offered; their longevity and stability; the degree

> of formality and official recognition accorded by local authorities; and the balance of control between parents, teachers, and other stakeholders.

This diversity is consistent with the number and variety of grassroots individuals and organisations who have engaged in campaigning against racism in education from the 1960s onwards, a fact often overlooked by the mainstream who conceptualise the black community as a singular, homogenous entity. The diversity of early campaigners is also reflected in the range of individuals and organisations who came forward to submit proposals to open new free schools as explored in Chapter 5, which summarises the different political, religious and cultural orientations among the research sample.

Although supplementary schools do not propose new pedagogical approaches, they are distinct nonetheless because of the philosophy of education they embrace which is rooted in a communal African value system that prioritises collectivism and community wellbeing (Andrews, 2013). Given this focus, supplementary schools are often well embedded in and reliant on the strong social networks which exist in black communities to provide staffing, students and resources (Chevannes and Reeves, 1987). Chevannes and Reeves (1987, p. 152) explain that supplementary schools were regarded as "vehicles to improve the social standing of the black community as a whole via raising black children's educational levels and therefore future job opportunities". This focus on enhancing the social standing of the community as a whole, rather than just a few black pupils, is notable because of the way it conflicts with dominant models of schooling which prioritise tracking the progress of individual students. This notion is captured by Andrews (2013) who notes that the African value systems which supplementary schools embrace to varying degrees run "contrary to the goals of most educational systems in the Western culture, which are essentially selfish and materialistic" (p. 81). The idea of working together to improve the circumstances of the wider community, encapsulated by the principles of Ujima (unity) and Umoja (collective work and responsibility), was also foregrounded in the proposals submitted by the research sample, which is explored in Chapter 7.

Given their alternative philosophy it is unsurprising that since the outset supplementary schools have at best been ignored and at worst been regarded with suspicion by the government and mainstream schools. In the early days of supplementary school provision in Birmingham, for example, local education officers expressed concern over the capacity of teachers and the teaching of what they perceived to be revolutionary black power (Simon, 2005; Andrews, 2013). Archer and Francis (2007) attribute the lack of interest from the mainstream in part to the fact that many

supplementary schools do not have systems in place to measure their success, which is a priority within mainstream schools. In reality, supplementary and mainstream schools, as has been discussed, define success differently. Whereas mainstream schools measure success narrowly in terms of pupil achievement, supplementary schools focus on character development and imparting history and culture alongside academic achievement, the former of which are on the whole less quantifiable. Other criticisms often lobbied by mainstream schools towards supplementary schools concern the qualifications of teaching staff which stems from the fact that most supplementary schools have a combination of qualified and unqualified staff, whereas mainstream schools place a high premium on professional qualifications (Tomlinson, 1986).

Although the disapproval of supplementary schools is often couched around these more neutral issues of staffing and systems, an unacknowledged source of tension is the overt references to race and racism made by black supplementary schools which, as has been discussed earlier in the chapter, conflict with the colourblind approaches to race equality preferred by mainstream schools. Archer and Francis (2007) summarise this schism noting that supplementary schools approach addressing ethnic minority underachievement in ways which don't fit within dominant discourses of raising achievement and are therefore tactfully ignored by the mainstream. As explored in the literature review, the use of neutral de-raced language to reject race-based provision is a key strategy of colourblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). This is further examined in Chapter 6 through a focus on the ambiguous language used by the government to reject the participants' proposals, which concealed the role of race in their assessment of applications.

A final reason supplementary schools are not widely embraced by the mainstream is because they are perceived to advocate for separate instruction for African Caribbean children, an idea the government has consistently rejected based on the belief that "everything can be catered for in the mainstream" (Kirp, 1979, p. 68). Gillborn (2001) notes that this anti-separate stance is well established dating back at least as far as the Swann Report (1985) which stated: "The establishment of 'separate' schools would fail to tackle many of the underlying concerns of the communities and might exacerbate the very feelings of rejection which we are seeking to overcome". The Report decisively concluded that "a situation in which groups of children are taught exclusively by teachers of the same ethnic group is undesirable for the children, the minority community and society as a whole" (Swann Report, 1985, p. 519, quoted in Gillborn, 2001, p. 21). More recently in 2005 when Trevor Phillips, who at the time was the head of the Commission for Racial Equality, suggested the

creation of black schools to address the needs of black boys, he was met with widespread media outrage and accused of supporting educational apartheid (Archer and Francis, 2007, p. 21). This anti-separatist standpoint is contradictory in that within the mainstream school system, separatism thrives both officially in terms of single sex schools and unofficially in state schools located in homogenous communities. Tomlinson (1986) also notes that the government's forceful and outright rejection of black schools contrasts with their overt approval of the largely white independent school system, which it upholds as an exemplar. Reay and Mirza (2001, p. 97) position the anti-separate stance as part of a "specific and endemic fear of blackness which lurks deep within the white psyche". This fear, they suggest, is rooted in apprehension about the oppressed minority rising up, which is threatening to the white majority. Reay and Mirza (2001, p. 97) further argue that black supplementary schools engender this fear because of their "powerful evocations of difference and 'otherness' that challenge white dominant hegemonic values".

This extended focus on supplementary schools is warranted because it illuminates several key themes which overlap with the research. The philosophy of education embraced by black supplementary schools, for example, based on ideals of community empowerment and cultural pride combined with academic rigour, also underpinned, to varying degrees, the provision proposed by the research sample, suggesting the continuity of a specific black British philosophy of education, informed by cultural norms and experiences of racism in Britain. The historic and ongoing strained relationship between black grassroots organisations and mainstream schools and local authorities over how best to address racial inequality in schooling is also important to consider because it contextualises the tensions which emerged between some of my participants, who submitted applications rooted in an African value system, and the government. Finally, the idea of fearing expressions of black collective organising, epitomised by the government's consistent rejection of separate black schooling, is also significant in that it further contextualises the government's response to black free school proposal teams, which is explored in Chapters 6 and 7.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the early educational advocacy undertaken by the African Caribbean community in order to place the research participants' struggles over opening free schools on a historical continuum. The early campaigns around banding and ESN schools demonstrate how right from the outset newly formed black communities were determined to protest against discriminatory practices and refused to accept inferior education for their children. Warmington's (2014) research

reveals the diversity of individuals and organisations which sprung up alongside publishers, bookshops, journals and arts initiatives in order to challenge racism and craft new narratives about black British identities. One seminal example of this is the work of Coard (1971) whose publication challenged the colourblind discourse surrounding education by naming precisely the institutional factors which contributed to the disproportionate number of black students being placed in ESN schools. Alongside critiquing the system, communities also engaged in providing solutions to racism in mainstream schools by opening supplementary schools that embraced communal approaches to educating black children, an approach echoed in the proposals submitted by the research participants of this study. The work of Warmington (2014) and Tomlinson (2008) is important in highlighting the scale of organised resistance to racism undertaken by Britain's black communities, a history which is too often overlooked. As explored in the first part of the chapter, in contrast to the proactive stance taken by black communities, government approaches to addressing racism in schooling from the 1960s onwards have been lacklustre, in part because education policy is situated within a colourblind discourse that does not acknowledge race. Since the Education Reform Act 1988, the race equality agenda has largely been subsumed by a marketised policy agenda which attempts to improve the quality of schooling by stimulating competition across the sector through the creation of a quasi-market. The focus of the next chapter is on the free school policy, one of the latest examples of the government's attempt to deliver its marketised schooling agenda.

CHAPTER 4: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines the available literature on free schools in order to contextualise my participants' interactions with the policy. The chapter begins by defining free schools and considering some of their unique characteristics. The chapter proceeds to explore the way free schools were rationalised in the Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010), which was largely dedicated to launching and promoting this new form of schooling. Through an analysis of who is opening free schools and an evaluation of their performance to date, the chapter explores the extent to which free schools are reducing class based inequality through innovative practice and high levels of local civic engagement, as envisioned by the government.

Free Schools

Free schools were introduced into the education landscape in 2010. A government factsheet defines free schools as "all ability schools funded by the government that aren't run by the local council" (DfE, 2014, n.p.). The factsheet proceeds to outline some of the freedoms these schools enjoy including: setting up their own pay and conditions for staff; changing the length of school terms and the school day; and not having to follow the national curriculum, all of which provide the rationale for their name. Higham (2014) notes that free schools are differentiated from other kinds of schooling in that for the first time in the country's history, local groups can apply directly to central government to set up a school. Still modest in numbers, there is evidence that more and more free schools are opening every year. The first 24 were opened in 2011, followed by a further 55 in 2012, and a further 93 in 2013 (Walford, 2014). A further 102 were approved to open in 2014 (Stokes et al., 2014). Recently, the government has pledged to open 500 new free schools by September 2020, demonstrating their strong commitment to the idea (Pells, 2017).

From the outset the idea of free schools has provoked support and controversy with some regarding them as the key to creating fair access to good schools for all children, whatever their background, and others insisting they create division and further disadvantage those already most vulnerable to academic failure (Craven, Miller and Tooley, 2014; Hatcher, 2011). In addition there has been considerable interest in which individuals and organisations are being selected, and on what grounds, to open a free school and which ones are excluded from doing so, which is the focus of this chapter.

Free Schools and Neoliberal Discourse

According to Wright (2012) the launch of the free school policy is firmly rooted within a neoliberal discourse of education, which has a long and complex history in Britain (see also Farrell et al., 2017; Walford, 2014a). Neoliberalism advocates for the introduction of quasi-markets in public services in order to reduce bureaucracy and improve efficiency (Farrell et al., 2017). As explored in the previous chapter, since the 1988 Education Reform Act successive governments in England have initiated a series of policies and legislation that have enabled the introduction of a range of non-state actors (Higham, 2014a) into the education sector. The government's rationale for increasingly transferring power and control over schools from local authorities to private and voluntary sector organisations has been that these new providers energise the system by stimulating competition between schools, thus driving up standards for all (Wright, 2012). Wright (2012, p. 282) argues this induced competition has affected the ethos and style of schooling, which has "shifted away from the social-democratic discourse of schooling based on 'comprehensive values' to a more managerial style of schooling based on market values" (see also Ball, 1994).

Free schools were launched as part of the English government's Big Society agenda which is rooted in neoliberalism. The concept of the Big Society was founded on a belief that "the state had become too big and was crowding out private sector interests" (Higham, 2014, p. 122). As a result, the government advocated for communities taking more responsibility for delivering local services with the support of state funding, which it referred to as the Big Society (Wei, 2010, cited in Higham, 2014). Although the idea of the Big Society has quietly receded into the background, free schools remain rooted in the neoliberal ideals of competition and choice and thus represent a continuity in education policy, rather than a change of policy direction (Wright, 2012).

The government's rationale for free schools was outlined in the Schools White Paper 2010. In the Paper, the then newly elected Liberal-Democratic and Conservative government, stressed the importance of education reform which it referred to as "the great progressive cause of our times" (DfE, 2010, p. 6). In particular, the Paper zeroed in on how education was the key to ensuring social mobility for all citizens, not just those from privileged backgrounds, which echoed the rationale used by the Labour government to launch the Academies Programme a decade earlier. Lamenting that the current school system was not closing gaps sufficiently for poor children, the government positioned free schools as a new kind of school which would dramatically address the class divide in educational outcomes for children, marking the policy as an integral part of their anti-poverty

strategy (Green, Allen and Jenkins, 2015). From the outset then, free schools were positioned as being both progressive and radical and the vehicle through which the government would engineer social mobility (DfE, 2010). Throughout the White Paper, this narrow focus on class as a homogenous entity was retained. The victims of the class divide were conceptualised as individuals, rather than as groups of people or communities who had collective experiences of systemic exclusion. Also of significance to this research was the lack of recognition throughout the White Paper of the ways in which race and racism are also factors in determining educational outcomes for young people, which, as has been discussed, is consistent with the way educational policy in England refrains from directly addressing issues of race.

The government argued that free schools were different from existing kinds of schools because parental demand would be the key driver for their opening, although there was no clarity around specifically which parents would influence the opening up of new schools. Another distinguishing feature of free schools is that the government pledged to focus on opening them in areas of deprivation where they felt parents often only had access to substandard schools. Opening exceptional schools in previously neglected areas would, they argued, provide the impetus to drive up standards across the system by forcing existing schools to improve in order to compete with new free schools (DfE, 2010). There is now emergent data which raises questions about the extent to which free schools are opening in areas of high deprivation, a critical aspect of fulfilling the government's aim of increasing social mobility for poor children. A 2013 report on free schools published by the National Audit Office (NAO) concluded, for example, that there has not "been a clear pattern in the percentage of schools that have opened in the most deprived areas" (2013, p. 20). The report further explained that, "Forty-six per cent of schools opening in 2011 were in these (high deprivation) areas, 54 per cent of 2012/13 openers, and 40 per cent of September 2013 openers" demonstrating a schism between the aims of the policy and the way the policy is actually being implemented. More recently, research by Andrews and Johnes (2017) published by the Education Policy Institute confirmed that the picture was mixed, concluding that although free schools are often located in disadvantaged areas, that does not preclude them also opening in affluent areas. They cite, for example, that while 15 per cent of primary free school places are in the most disadvantaged tenth of areas, 8 per cent are in the least disadvantaged areas (Andrews and Johnes, 2017, p. 9).

The government rationalised free schools by citing the success of similar schools internationally, but especially in America, where they claimed the schools had had a "galvanising effect on the whole

system" (DfE, 2010, p. 57). Considerable space in the White Paper was given over to evidencing the success of Charter Schools in America, emphasising the range of innovative provision and high quality teaching they provide as critical factors in the high levels of academic attainment achieved by their students. It should be noted, however, that there is a considerable amount of research which contradicts the government's assertion that free school equivalents abroad improve achievement. A summary of international research on marketisation in schools, for example, published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2009 concluded that:

> It is far from clear that quasi-market forces such as increased autonomy, competition and choice have led to improved outcomes. Evidence of improved academic outcomes is mixed, and improvements in academic performance may result from factors other than quasi-market incentives (Lubienski, 2009, p. 27–8).

A subsequent OECD study also came to a similar conclusion: "marketisation brings, at best, very modest gains" (Waslander, Pater, and van der Weide 2010, quoted in Hatcher, 2011, p. 490). Closer to home, Gillborn notes the results of a five year independent review of the Academy programme which concluded: "There is insufficient evidence to make a definitive judgement about the Academies as a model for school improvement" (PWC, 2008, p. 19 quoted in Gillborn, 2011). Taken together it is fair to say there is a lack of definitive evidence to conclude that marketisation is a guarantee of school improvement.

As such a new phenomenon, it is also difficult to be definitive about the extent to which free schools are providing a better standard of education. A 2016 House of Commons briefing paper notes that the overall performance of free schools is largely unknown because of the small number of schools which have been inspected to date (Bolton, 2016). Data from the DfE, shows that 62 schools which opened in 2011 and 2012 have been inspected by Ofsted. Of these: 14 have been rated outstanding, 30 as good, 15 as requires improvement and 4 as inadequate (DfE, 2014). By the end of the 2016/17 academic year, 216 free schools had received at least one Ofsted inspection (Andrews and Johnes, 2017). Based on their evaluation of Ofsted outcomes and pupil attainment and progress, Andrews and Johnes (2017) similarly concluded that the emergent picture is mixed noting that primary and secondary free schools have the same propensity to be good or outstanding as other schools. Their evaluation also identified three primary and three secondary free schools that were closed post-inspection, all of which had been rated as inadequate or requires improvement. Both this latest research and the DfE's (2014) own research appear to be consistent with the OECD report, suggesting that as with every kind of schooling free schools have variable success.

Who is Opening Free Schools?

One of the most contested aspects of the free school policy is who is opening free schools. In the Schools White paper the government championed the opening up of the school system saying, “We want to support - not turn away - teachers, charities, parent groups and others who have the vision and drive to open free schools in response to parental demand” (DfE, 2010, p. 52). They went on to highlight a few of the first round successful applicants saying:

> The projects range from an outstanding young teacher, Saji Hussein, who has plans to open King Science Academy in a poor area of Bradford, to the Stour Valley Community School Suffolk, which is an example of a community coming together to open the secondary school it wants, and Cuckoo Hall, an outstanding primary school in Enfield, proposing to open a new school (DfE, 2010, p. 58).

Arguably, these examples were carefully selected because they were consistent with the government’s vision of committed charities, teachers and parents engaging in delivering education. Evidence suggests, however, that right from the outset, and increasingly so as the application process became more complex, parents and charities were not involved in the majority of successful free schools applications. An article by Francis Gilbert (2011) in the New Statesman was among the first to raise important questions about how many free schools were being run by the stakeholders identified by the government and crucially whether the government’s flagship education policy was addressing the needs of poor children. Gilbert (2011) highlights the fact that of the first 40 approved schools, six were formerly private schools, eleven were faith schools (research from the Campaign for State Education suggests that faith schools tend to attract children from more prosperous backgrounds) and nearly a third were run by private companies. He comments that “only four of the approved schools met Gove’s initial criteria for free schools: local parents setting up schools to help poor children” (Gilbert, 2011, n.p.). Similarly, Adams (2013) reported in the Guardian that of the 102 new schools approved to open in 2014, 70 were set up by teachers, existing schools, and educational organisations, compared to 32 set up by parents, community, and other groups suggesting that as free schools become embedded in the educational landscape, those the government originally intended to engage in setting up schools are being increasingly squeezed out of the process by well-established education companies.

In addition to making direct applications to run schools, numerous high profile companies including Pearson, Serco and Tribal also offer to project manage the process of applying to open and set up a free school on behalf of parents and organisations. Hatcher (2011, p. 495) notes that “at present some 70 companies advertise their services on the New Schools Network website, the advisory body

for free schools" (Hatcher, 2011, p. 495). Alongside managing the financial and administrative tasks associated with running a school, these companys' services also extend to the recruitment of teachers and development of curriculum. One of the implications of education companies project managing the free school application process on behalf of individuals, and parents in particular, is that it conceals the fact that the free school application process is inaccessible to the ordinary citizens the government said they wanted to engage in opening schools. Higham's (2014a) research, which examined the origins of 91 approved applications between 2010-2013, also identified the prevalence of sponsoring organisations (either charitable education organisations or academy chains) submitting applications on behalf of parents and community groups. Higham (2014a, p. 411) explains the extent of the sponsoring organisations' influence over proposed schools:

> Where a local civil society group is willing to allow another organization to govern and hence control the proposed free school, they can consider appointing a sponsor – the second main proposer category. In keeping with academy sponsorship more generally, the sponsoring organization creates the academy trust, puts in the proposal to the DfE and is responsible for the governance of the resulting school.

One of the hidden consequences of partnerships between parents and sponsoring and/or managing organisations is that they remove parents from decision making about the provision in new schools while sustaining the illusion that parents are at the heart of the free school policy. This phenomenon is explored in Chapter 6 which examines the power dynamics in partnerships that developed between some of the research participants and large educational trusts.

Researchers argue that the fact the process is dominated by already established and well-resourced organisations, financial and otherwise, is pre-determined by the demanding application process (Farrell et al., 2017; Higham, 2014). Since the first wave of free school applications in 2010, the application process has evolved. In 2011 for example, applicants had to submit a form to the Department for Education explaining why they wanted to set up the school, what its aims and objectives would be and what evidence they had of local demand (Hatcher, 2011). Hatcher notes that in this initial phase of the free school policy very limited information was required. For example, the section in the application form stating the free school's aims, objectives, teaching methods, and curriculum, and how it would improve pupil learning and ensure strong discipline, allowed a maximum of 2000 words. The evidence of parental demand had a maximum of 200 words (Hatcher, 2011). The lack of requirement to provide robust evidence of parental demand as part of the application process contradicts the government's assertion that parental demand is a key driver in the opening up of free schools.

In late 2011 the application process was revamped and free school proposers were required to submit a considerably more detailed proposal. Instead of submitting a broad plan, applicants had to present a detailed business case before they became eligible for grants of up to £200,000 to help with further planning (Hatcher, 2011). Craven, Miller and Tooley (2014, p. 353) note that in 2015 the process evolved even further to include "three staggered application rounds and two different 'routes', including a stripped down process for current free schools setting up further, similar schools," suggesting an acknowledgement of the role of powerful players with the potential to dominate the landscape.

Given the already poor success rates of parents and charities in the initial round, Hatcher (2011) notes that the tightening up of the application process in late 2011 further reduced their chances of setting up free schools. Toby Young, the journalist and founder of the West London Free school in Hammersmith, has been quoted as saying that the amended application process has made it almost impossible for groups of parents to open free schools. In an article he penned on the subject, he notes that "from now on, any group of parents and teachers wanting to set up a free school will almost certainly have to align themselves with one of the multi-Academy sponsors like ARK, Harris or E-ACT (Young, 2011). This assertion fits well with the latest data by the NAO (2013) demonstrating the decline in approvals among parent groups, which may well correspond to the increasingly challenging application process. The NAO report concludes that "parents and community groups make up 29 per cent of open free Schools and teacher-led groups 18 per cent. However, these two groups combined only make up 22 per cent of schools due to open from September 2014 onwards" (NAO, 2013, p. 26). It is worth noting that there may also be a decline in the number of parents and community groups applying to open free schools in response to the poor approval ratings since the launch of the policy, but these figures are not available. Whether or not this is the case, the fact remains that parents and community groups are increasingly marginalised in the free school landscape, which is significant given the way the policy was framed as being a gateway for local civic engagement.

As a relatively new phenomenon there is little research into the application and approval process. Higham's (2014) recently published work about the experiences of 50 free school proposers is useful as it provides insight into the people and organisations doing the proposing and their interactions with the approval process. His research reveals that successful proposers' core teams, were overwhelmingly comprised of well qualified people whose professions were classed as managers,

directors, and senior officials. In addition to their own expertise, the research also highlights the extent to which proposer teams relied on their pre-existing networks to draw in further specialist professional expertise in support of their projects. For example, he notes that several teacher proposers described the importance of their Oxbridge networks in bringing professional expertise into the team. One teacher proposer in his research sample reflected on:

> The map you can draw of the different people we've been able to engage in this project and the different advice we've been able to get because of who we are and where we're from and the kind of jobs we've had… (Higham, 2014, p. 132).

The idea of capitalising on powerful professional networks also extends to faith groups involved in applying to run free schools, which Higham (2014, p. 130) categorises as "commonly well-established mainstream organisations working in partnership with local professionals". Similarly, he reports on charities and social enterprises leveraging their networks in the Westminster policy-making process which advantaged their applications. Overall Higham (2014a, p. 417) concludes that:

> professional parents and established faith and charitable organizations had most success in gaining DfE acceptance for free school proposals while in contrast, parents and smaller charities located in highly disadvantaged areas often struggled in their attempts to recruit the non-educational professional expertise demanded in the application process and had thus been rejected.

Higham's research highlights how the application process exacerbates existing inequalities by advantaging those in positions of power with extensive powerful networks. He refers to this as the "prioritisation of an unequal distribution of capitals in determining access to state approval for free school proposals" (2014, p. 135). Farrell et al. (2017, p. 353) similarly note that a common theme in literature about marketised schooling, both in the context of US Charter schools and free schools in England and Sweden, is that they "fail to fully redistribute opportunity because the communities that would stand to benefit most lack the agency and resources to exercise the consumer choice neoliberal education policy claims to mobilise".

Hodgson (2012) notes there is an inbuilt tension in the Big Society agenda between openness and responsibility. On the one hand, the government has framed the free school policy as a progressive one which involves the opening up of the education system to create access for individuals. On the other hand, individuals seeking access to state resources are required to have significant and pre-existing levels of "expertise and entrepreneurialism" (Hodgson, 2012, p. 543). Higham (2014) argues that for individuals wishing to set up a free school the application process, which requires proposers to set out an educational vision, detail their curriculum and staffing plans and provide evidence of

both parental demand and their own capacity and capability as proposers, is potentially prohibitive for many of the individuals/organisations the government says it wants to welcome into the process. One consequence of the unacknowledged complexity of the application process is that organisations whose applications are rejected are regarded as simply not meeting the stated criteria, which deflects attention away from the unequal starting points and access to resources which exist among applicants (Thompson, 2005). Wright (2012, p. 291) argues this is consistent with the neoliberal view of citizens embedded within the concept of the Big Society that presumes individuals within society are "rational, responsible and of high-esteem, and able to, as an individual make a social contribution," which does not account for vast differences in resources and capacity which exist between individuals. As explored in Chapter 2, meritocracy, which attributes success or failure to individual effort, is an important aspect of neoliberal discourse which sustains racial subordination by failing to acknowledge how societal inequality is reproduced in competitive processes. The relationship between access to resources and being able to participate in the free school policy is explored in Chapter 6 through an examination of the personal sacrifices and investment of time made by the research sample in order to be able to submit their applications.

The Experience of BME School Proposers

Research commissioned by Race on the Agenda (ROTA) corroborates much of Higham's (2014) findings but extends them further by focusing on the experiences of ethnic minority proposers, thereby adding a racial dimension, which is otherwise absent from literature on free schools. Another unique feature of the ROTA research is that it engaged with both successful and unsuccessful free school proposers, adding the perspective and voices of those excluded from the process, which is also absent in the majority of research about free schools. One of the factors undoubtedly contributing to the lack of focus on unsuccessful projects is that information about free schools only becomes available in the public domain once a project has been approved, which presents a serious obstacle to researching free schools. The research team identified the difficulty it had in accessing information about unsuccessful free schools proposals and their reliance, therefore, on the internet and personal contacts for generating potential research participants. Similarly, statistics on the ethnic backgrounds of proposers are not available in the public domain, if indeed they exist at all. As a result, the researchers were again reliant on a combination of personal contacts and the internet to identify ethnic minority proposers (Stokes et al., 2012), which is consistent with the way the research sample featured in this thesis was assembled as discussed in Chapter 5. One of the significant consequences of the lack of available ethnicity data and information about rejected

applicants is that it makes it impossible to quantify the approval ratings for ethnic minority proposers in relation to overall approval ratings, which would strengthen the argument that ethnic minority communities are being excluded from opening free schools. In light of this, one of the recommendations that arises out of this research, as explored in the conclusion, relates to the critical importance of lobbying for greater access to data about free schools in order to further evidence and disrupt the racism uncovered in this study.

In spite of the barriers to data collection, Stokes et al. (2012) did complete a survey of both successful and unsuccessful proposers. In their modest sample, they analysed the ethnic backgrounds of all survey respondents and concluded that white British proposers made up 56.6% of free school proposers overall, yet among proposers that were approved, 79.5% were white British. 16.8% of Free school proposers in their sample were black. Among proposers that were approved, however, only 3.8% were black (Stokes et al., 2012, p. 30). Although based on a small sample size, these findings are important in raising awareness of the disparity in how people from different ethnic backgrounds are experiencing the free school policy. One of the foci of the ROTA research (2012; 2014) relevant to this research was identifying some of the specific barriers experienced by ethnic minority individuals and organisations in applying to open free schools. Interview respondents in the research concluded that the process seemed to have been set up with large, already established education outfits in mind. As one proposer put it, *'I find the process difficult for community groups. The entire process and application seems skewed towards professional educational practitioners"* (Stokes et al., 2014, p. 59).

An analysis of the 'How to Apply' document published by the government in May 2014 supports this assertion. The document states that in order to ensure high quality free schools are established, the government places a great emphasis on the capacity and capability of the proposer group. The guidance continues by highlighting the skills and experiences they are looking for amongst proposers which include "relevant education and financial expertise" and "track record of proposers who run existing education provision" (DfE,2014a).

This published success criteria appears to contradict the idea that any involved citizen can engage with the free school application process. The requirement to have an existing track record in providing educational services and relevant education and financial expertise for example, potentially eliminates the majority of small, community run organisations who often lack formal qualifications or financial expertise. Instead, as has been explored in my discussion of Yosso's (2006)

concept of community cultural wealth in Chapter 2, they often have other kinds of expertise related to understanding the needs of and being able to mobilise local communities, which is not an asset prioritised by the government. Higham (2014, p. 136) also notes the mismatch between the skill set among proposers in disadvantaged areas and the government criteria observing that, "The majority of proposers located in highly disadvantaged areas have aims and expertise that do not fit well with what the government is willing to accept". One question the free school application process raises is the extent to which the knowledge and experience gained from running supplementary schools is acknowledged and recognised as valid educational experience, given that, as has been explored in Chapter 3, supplementary schools are often either invisible to or derided by the mainstream. Given what we know about which projects the government is approving, it appears they are employing a narrow interpretation of the term 'relevant education expertise' by prioritising expertise acquired through traditional means and applied in mainstream institutions and discounting expertise gained through running supplementary schools.

The lack of financial expertise and resources was highlighted as a significant barrier for black and Minority Ethnic school proposers in the ROTA research. Indeed a number of their research respondents identified lack of financial expertise as a key obstacle to submitting applications (Stokes et al., 2014). Several ROTA research respondents offered anecdotal evidence outlining the personal sacrifice involved in applying to set up a free schools including one who reflected: "*Funding is what is needed!!! Proposers like myself have stopped working to dedicate the time that is needed to project manage, risking career development, financial security and quality time with one's own family"* (Stokes et al., 2012, p. 35). Some of the participants in this study also reported making financial sacrifices in order to submit applications, which is explored in the findings, suggesting the existence of a hidden financial barrier embedded in the process, that Stokes et al. (2012; 2014) argue may be disproportionately disadvantaging BME communities in their efforts to establish free schools.

The financial burden involved in applying to open a free school is closely related to the issue of access to extensive professional networks as having such a network of skilled people working behind the scenes on a pro bono basis, effectively distributes the workload and relieves the core proposal team of some of the financial pressure. Research by Runneymede (2011), a race equality think tank, corroborates Higham's (2014) findings that leveraging powerful networks is an important factor in determining the success of free school applications. Their research, however, extends the idea by focusing on how this impacts specifically on ethnic minority proposers. The Runneymede report suggests that BME communities are disproportionately disadvantaged by their lack of influential

networks. The research concluded that BME communities, particularly those who are newly arrived in the UK, are less likely to have the type of social capital that is essential for engaging in the free schools project (Gill and Sveinsson, 2011).

Local Community Involvement in Free Schools

One of the questions raised by this research is the extent to which people living in and connected to the high deprivation areas targeted by the free school policy have any influence over the decisions made about schools opening in their neighbourhoods. Although parental demand is emphasised in the White Paper 2010 as a critical factor in the opening up of free schools in deprived areas, there is no conflation of the two ideas in that parental demand is not envisioned as necessarily coming from within deprived areas. Evidence suggests that quite to the contrary, the free school movement is dominated by middle class parents with middle class interests. Stokes et al. (2012, p. 12), for example, conclude that:

> There is a perceived negative correlation between socio-economic disadvantage and participation in the free schools programme. We know from the earliest rounds of applications that middle class parents, particularly those with 'social capital' and social mores of the political classes were amongst the highest group of participants in the early waves of free school proposers.

Walford (2014) further explains the dominance of middle class parents in the free schools landscape. He suggests that following the 2008 economic down turn, many parents who would normally have been able to pay school fees, could no longer afford to. As a result, these parents turned to free schools in order to open schools modelled on private institutions with state funds, thereby eliminating the financial hardship involved in accessing private education for their children. This provides a clear example of how the free school policy is being used by various parties to fulfil a number of agendas, which are inconsistent with the government's aims of increasing social mobility by providing access to good quality schools to students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Within the application guidance there is no specific advice given on what, if any role, local communities should play in the free school initiative. In the early rounds of the application process, the guidance did not specify the requirement to consult with local communities. Instead, it advised that applicants were required to "consult such persons as you think appropriate" (Hatcher, 2011). There were no rules regarding who was to be consulted, or the precise structure or content of consultation. Anecdotal research by Stokes et al. (2012) suggests that some free school proposers report to tokenistic means to garner support for their proposed school by collecting signatures of

support, for example, at shopping centres in exchange for balloons. Although many prospective schools hold public consultations, there is no evidence to suggest that they are attended overwhelmingly by local people. All in all it is possible that a free school application can gain government approval without any meaningful consultation with the local community (Hatcher, 2011).

The approval of many Multi-Academy Trusts' (MAT) free school applications is further evidence of the lack of emphasis placed on local community involvement in proposals, given that the government's own research concluded that an overall area of weakness for MATs is their inability to engage effectively with local communities (House of Commons, 2017). The Commons Education Committee Report on MATs published in February 2017 concluded that "MATs were not sufficiently accountable to local communities and parents" (House of Commons, 2017). Overall, the Commons' Report acknowledged that there were a lack of structures in place enabling parents to hold MATs to account, and as a result parents reported feeling powerless. As discussed previously, research by Stokes and Haji (2016) also revealed the poor track record of MATs with regards to inclusion, which further exposes the contradiction in the government's approval of so many MATs run free schools given that free schools were championed in the White Paper 2010 as both harbingers of equality and vehicles of parental empowerment (Wright, 2012).

Higham (2014a) notes that even when what he terms local civil society groups set out to engage with poor urban communities, they often struggled to do so because poorer communities were absent from their social networks. He argues that as a result free schools raise the prospect of "unrepresentative local groups neglecting, overlooking or not being well placed to conceive of the needs of disadvantaged communities" (Higham, 2014a, p. 417). This phenomenon is explored in Chapter 6 which examines how free school applications submitted by participants who resided in and had long histories of engaging with their local community were overlooked in favour of proposals submitted by organisations with no ties to the neighbourhood.

Higham (2014a, p. 417) notes that among the small number of groups in his research sample who tried to genuinely engage with poor urban communities, some cited the challenge involved saying, *"We have really struggled on getting those people [from poorer communities] to come forward and to be a part of our group and that is a weakness. I don't think that they have the confidence to do it"*. This research is important in order to challenge the perception that BME and/or working class communities (indirectly referenced through the marker 'urban') are not engaging with the free

school policy and/or lack confidence to do so. Chapter 7, which explores the high premium participants placed on having autonomy over every aspect of their applications, reframes this apparent non-engagement as a communal expression of agency and protest over external organisations exerting influence over local schools.

A final example of how local communities are denied influence over free schools opening in their areas despite a policy discourse of empowerment (Wright 2012) concerns their lack of involvement in assessing proposals. This is consistent with the general approach to delivering social services in Britain, predicated on the idea that those with all the advantages in society are best placed to develop and deliver services on behalf of, rather than alongside or in partnership with, so called disadvantaged communities (Kirp, 1979). In the application process, groups that are shortlisted based on their written proposal are interviewed by a panel made up of DfE officials, financial experts, education advisers, head teachers and organisations with a track record of setting up and running schools (BBC, 2011). This set up is striking because of the clear lack of local community representation on the decision making panel, which effectively denies local people any influence over deciding which new schools move into their area. One of the implications of the exclusion of local people from the decision making process (explored in the findings) is that without representatives who can recognise and respond favourably to community based knowledges and experiences, the pattern of rejection of grassroots free school proposals is likely to continue.

Free Schools and Equality

An issue closely related to which individuals and organisations are being approved to set up free schools is what kind of educational provision they offer. Given the government's framing of the free school project as a progressive one created to address the class divide in educational outcomes, it is important to investigate the extent to which existing free schools are fulfilling this moral objective. ROTA research teams surveyed free school proposers in 2012 and again in 2014 about their motives for wanting to open a school and reported a shift in emphasis away from seeking to address educational disadvantage in low income areas over the two year period. Their survey results revealed that in 2012 almost 50% of respondents identified wanting to open a free school to improve education in deprived sub/urban areas as a primary motive for submitting an application. They note that in 2014, however, although 90% of survey respondents identified themselves as working within areas that are inner city, low income, deprived, socially diverse/mixed, ethnically diverse/mixed or ethnically segregated, less than 10% identified improving education in deprived

areas as an overarching objective of their school, suggesting that as the policy takes hold its original aims are being compromised (Stokes et al., 2014, p. 27). Higham (2014, p. 135) also notes that addressing and improving the education of disadvantaged children was not the focus of many of those involved in his sample. He found that within his research sample, “those most able to fulfil the government’s access requirements were on average not those most willing to locate in and serve disadvantaged communities”. Instead, he concludes that “the civil society actors best able to gain access to state resources bring a range of private and self-interested motivations into the public sector” (Higham, 2014, p. 137).

As a corollary to the above Higham (2014a) notes that engaging poor urban communities was a defining characteristic among rejected groups in his research sample, which is consistent with the findings of this study. The fact that many of my research participants’ proposals to open free schools were rejected in spite of long term commitment to working to improve education in deprived areas corroborates the idea that the moral drive to eliminate educational inequality which was central to the launch of free schools has diminished as a priority for the government over time. Overall it is possible to conclude that there is a mismatch between having the narrowly prescribed skills, experience and resources demanded by the application process and the commitment to addressing educational disadvantage in deprived areas. One of the questions raised by this mismatch is whether and how combining the knowledge, skills and experience of those within and external to disadvantaged communities through genuine, equal partnerships might best serve the free schools agenda.

Although framed by the government as bastions of equality, research by Bolloten (2013) highlights the disappointing track record of free schools with regards to promoting equality and diversity. Bolloten’s research revealed that of the 78 free schools that opened in 2011 and 2012, the vast majority (87%) were non-compliant with the public sector Equality Duty, enshrined in law under The Equality Act 2010, which represents “a poorer level of compliance than maintained schools and academies” (Bolloton, 2013, p. 4). The research also revealed that most schools were not aware of the Equality Act or their duty to advance equality of opportunity. Summarising his findings, Bolloten (2013) concluded that most free schools are not taking issues related to equality and diversity seriously enough and that their governing bodies and directors are failing to ensure that statutory duties are met. This lack of compliance raises questions about whether equality is truly at the heart of the free schools agenda and why public money is being granted to organisations which breach existing equalities legislation.

Policy and Practice

Gilbert (2011) raises questions over how well suited private providers are to be working with disadvantaged children. He notes that whilst working with inner-city academies under New Labour, some companies employed methods such as excluding undesirable students, cherry-picking the brightest pupils and relying on vocational qualifications to boost results, all of which have further disadvantaged vulnerable students. Although it is too soon to say whether these practices will be adopted across free schools, there are some early indications that some free schools are implementing policies and practices which disadvantage poor children and their families, in spite of the government's claims that free schools improve education for poor children.

Hatcher (2011) suggests that the curriculum set by a school, acts as a form of social selection. He cites the example of The West London Free school, initiated by journalist Toby Young. Young describes the school as a "comprehensive grammar school" specialising in music, humanities, and classical civilisation, with every student learning Latin up to age 14 (Hatcher, 2011, p. 494). Hatcher argues that that "although the school is formally non-selective, in reality it is likely to attract mainly children from professional middle class families, for whom the school offers the kind of cultural capital which is the passport to Oxbridge and high-ranking professional careers" (Hatcher, 2011, p. 494). Stokes et al. (2012) also identified a strong focus on 'traditional' subjects such as Latin and classics among many of the first 40 approved free schools. They argue that "when taken together with other factors such as limited strategic consideration of equality, there are risks of free schools exacerbating social, cultural and ethnic segregation within education" (2012, p. 6). The focus on Latin and the classics seems to contradict guidance from the government which states free schools must not operate in ways that alienate the local community or would prevent local parents from applying for a place (DfE, 2014a). The approval of so many schools with a traditional curriculum suggests that the government is prepared to contravene their own guidance if the curriculum choices in question reflect their own values and preferences.

There is emergent data that free schools are not attracting large numbers of parents local to the area they are situated in. Andrews and Johne's (2017, p. 9) research concluded that "in general, free schools have not yet established themselves as the preferred local school. Nationally, half of pupils attend their nearest school. Where the nearest school is a free school, just 22 per cent of pupils at both primary and secondary level attend that school". These latest findings suggest a further

contradiction in terms of free schools being promoted as means to meet the needs of parents as consumers in a demand led process (Wright, 2012) and the actual overall lacklustre response of parents to newly opened free schools. The issue of parental response to newly opened free schools is addressed in Chapter 7 which explores why and how, contrary to the challenge many free schools have securing enrolment (NAO, 2013; Bolton, 2016), the two approved schools in the research sample were oversubscribed.

Admissions is another contested area within the free school terrain which some argue may be further disadvantaging vulnerable students. There is a strongly worded statement about admissions in the application guidance document which states that all mainstream free schools must, “adopt fair practices and arrangements that are in accordance with the School Admissions Code, the School Admission Appeals Code and the law on admissions as it applies to maintained schools” (DfE, 2014a, p. 7). In reality however, in spite of the obligation to comply with the Admissions code, free schools can be more flexible about admissions. This is because the DfE allows exemptions to the code as is the case with academies. The NAO (2013, p. 43) report notes that “by August 2013, the DfE had agreed derogations for 35 free schools of which over three-quarters (27) gave priority to the children of the schools’ founders”. Wolfe (2013) notes that some schools are choosing to define a founder loosely as anyone having made a substantial contribution to the opening up of the school. He points out that given that core proposal teams are often comprised of 7-8 members, this represents a significant number of potential pupils gaining priority entry, especially in the context of single form entry primary schools.

Another practice impacting on free schools admissions that has attracted criticism is the prioritising of sibling places in the growing number of private schools converting to free school status, which protects and perpetuates the existing middle class intake (Hatcher, 2011). Hatcher (2011) also notes that newly established secondary free schools are often selective about which local primary schools to establish links with, indirectly engineering their intake. According to Higham (2014), the combination of these practices is contributing to a free school stratification effect, for which there is emerging evidence.

There is also a growing body of research focused on analysing the extent to which free schools are admitting students from disadvantaged backgrounds as envisioned by the government. Higham’s (2014) research reveals that there is evidence of an emerging trend towards lower than average admission of free school meal eligible children among free schools. He notes that the majority of the first 24 free schools which opened in September 2011 were located in areas of high deprivation. The

first year intake data, however, shows that the first free schools admitted “a significantly lower proportion of disadvantaged students than is locally representative”(Higham, 2014, p. 136). Drawing on data from the DfE, Higham concludes that “while 60% of the 24 free schools are located in the 50% most deprived areas, 19 admit fewer pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) than equivalent schools in the same local authority (Higham, 2014, p. 136). Stokes et al.’s research (2012) offers similar findings. They highlight specific examples of schools to illustrate the extent of the problem. For example, they note that at St. Luke's primary school in the London borough of Camden, the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is zero while the average proportion of children claiming the benefit in state primary schools across Camden is 38.8%. Similarly, they cite, Nishkam free school, a primary school in Birmingham, where just 6.4% of children are eligible for free lunches compared to 33.2% across the city (Stokes et al., 2012, p. 28). The research team concede that there are limitations with this data as a more precise comparison would be between percentages of pupils eligible for subsidised school meals in a particular free school with other schools in the neighbourhood, rather than the borough. As more information about free schools is now available researchers have begun to undertake a more thorough examination of the intake of free schools as advocated for by Stokes et al.(2012). Green, Allen and Jenkins (2015, p. 921) for example, have completed a comparative analysis between the pupil demographics of free schools and their nine nearest schools. Their research concluded that “there is a substantive degree of social selection” among free schools based on the lower proportions of free school meal students being admitted to free schools when compared to neighbouring schools. Andrews and Johnes (2017, p. 56) similarly conclude that free schools are not necessarily attracting disadvantaged pupils in the proportions that might be expected and that “more needs to be done to understand the drivers for this and ensure that free schools do not lead to increased social segregation in the system”.

The NAO report (2013, p.42) also addresses the demographic of students attending free schools with a specific focus on catchment areas. The report states:

> Our analysis of available data on 81 open free schools shows that they have so far drawn their pupils from wider catchment areas than their neighbouring schools. The distance free school pupils travel to school is on average more than twice that of pupils in neighbouring maintained schools and over one and a half times more than that travelled by pupils in neighbouring Academies. On the whole, these free schools’ pupils are less likely to be entitled to free school meals than pupils in neighbouring schools and are less likely to have English as an additional language than pupils in neighbouring schools.

The fact that students are making significantly longer journeys to attend free schools is significant because the policy alleges to prioritise providing good local schools to communities who have

previously been denied access to quality provision. One of the implications of more affluent and less linguistically diverse students travelling greater than average distances to attend schools is that well informed parents may be accessing free school places at the expense of local families. The government frequently cites the fact that many free schools are located in deprived areas as evidence of the fact that the policy is working to reverse inequality in schooling. Higham (2014, p. 137) suggests however that "the government's use of 'participation' and 'localism' in free schools discourse is misleading because it presupposes that if action is 'local,' it will be cohesive and inclusive". The existing data demonstrates how location in a high deprivation area does not guarantee a school is serving its local community. Whatever the reasons for the skewed intake of free schools, which are likely complex and varied, Green, Allen and Jenkins (2015, p. 908) rationalise the import of continued speculation over free school intakes saying, "the extent and pattern of social selectivity of free schools matter because, if they do achieve the educational performance gains that are the main stated reason for their foundation, it will be important that these are at least shared equally across social groups".

The Role of the State in the Free School Movement

As discussed earlier, the idea of empowering parents and teachers by freeing them from the control and interference of the state is an important part of the rationale for free schools. Wright (2012, p. 289) argues, however, that any semblance of empowerment in free schools is "built on a fantasy constructed within the policy discourse and not on a tangible shift in the balance of power in education initiated by the policies themselves". An examination of the processes and procedures developed to facilitate the application process reveal there are several mechanisms in place which ensure state interests and priorities, rather than those of parents, are addressed in free school projects.

One of the ways the government exerts its influence is by controlling and limiting the flow of information about free schools, which is contradictory within a policy context that champions freedom. Hatcher (2011, p. 5) notes that "the existence of an application is concealed until the Secretary of State announces that its business case has been approved and the free school can be set up. Various researchers' requests to the DfE for information about free schools under the Freedom of Information Act have elicited little information" (see also McInnery, 2015). This paucity of information is compounded by the fact that the New Schools Network (NSN), the organisation set up by the government with £500, 000 in funding to promote free schools, is a charity and therefore

exempt from the Freedom of Information Act, which further limits the information available to the public about free schools (Murray 2011, quoted in Hatcher, 2011).

The New Schools Network (NSN) itself has been subject to criticism for failing to be independent of the government. Critics have pointed out that the organisation was granted substantial funding to launch its services without a competitive process, which seems to contradict the government's claims that competition improves standards. In particular, Rachel Wolf's involvement as head of the Network between 2009-2013 has been criticised given her close ties with Michael Gove, the Conservative Secretary of State at the time (Syal, 2010). Indeed the organisation has a long history of affiliation with the Conservative government as reported in the Guardian in 2016. Wolf's successor to the New Schools Network, Natalie Evans, for example, left the role after being appointed a Conservative Peer in the House of Lords by Cameron. She was briefly succeeded by Nick Timothy, who was a Special Adviser to Theresa May at the Home Office before taking up his current role as May's Joint Chief of Staff (The Guardian, 2016). Currently, the director is the journalist Toby Young who has had political aspirations within the Conservative party.

In addition, the original trustees and advisers of the NSN had strong allegiances to a market based school system given that six of the 13 were involved in running chains of academies (Hatcher, 2011). The fact that the NSN is dominated by representatives of large, powerful organisations raises questions about their willingness to support proposals from small, grassroots organisations which encompass philosophies of education that challenge the model of schooling they are affiliated with. Stokes et al. (2014, p. 34) highlight the influence of the organisation noting that "the New Schools Network has provided support of some kind to 70% of the free schools which are currently open". Of significance is the fact that the BME proposal teams who participated in their research were less likely to access support from the NSN, which may be a factor in low approval rates among this group. Many BME organisations in their sample reported that they had not engaged with the NSN because they were unaware of the services they provided, suggesting grassroots communities are not being targeted by the organisation's marketing strategy (Stokes et al., 2014). The NSN was briefly mentioned by three participants in this study. The idea of the organisation lacking the capacity to engage effectively with grassroots practitioners and having a preference for dominant models of schooling was reflected in Afua's account of her interaction with the NSN:

> *We had a few meetings with the New Schools Network but it just felt like they didn't really want to hear your ideas. They just wanted another run of the mill school. I didn't get the feeling there was any genuine interest in new creative ideas or in working with communities. You just felt like you put something forward*

> *to them and their advice was always well you would have to change, this and that. It just seemed like they wanted a regular state school in which case I thought why are we going through all of this?*

In addition to the government's alliance with the NSN, who share and protect their interests, the application guidance features decisive statements outlining how the government will respond to what it perceives to be subversive ideas. The 2010 Schools White Paper notes: "We will reject any proposals put forward by organisations or individuals who advocate violence or other illegal activity, or those whose ideology runs counter to the United Kingdom's traditions of tolerance and our shared democratic values" (DfE, 2010, p. 59). The positioning of alternative ideologies, alongside criminality and violence, suggests they are regarded by the government as inherently dangerous and raises serious questions about the notion of freedom, which is purported to be central to the initiative. The implication is that freedoms over curriculum, hiring and firing are only extended to free schools provided their vision of education is aligned with the state's. Gunter and McGuinty (2013) argue this point noting that while on the face of it the marketisation agenda welcomes new players, the government is selective about which new players, and which new ideas it embraces:

> The privatisation agenda is fuelled by a drive for security through reliance on established notions of knowledge production within elite groups: how business people have know-how about teaching, learning and welfare, and how faith organisations know-how to discipline potential (2013, p. 1).

Their observation is significant because it highlights the tension between welcoming new players with new ideas onto the school landscape, which is at the heart of the free school policy, and a desire to protect the status quo by reinforcing traditional ideas about knowledge production through the approval of proposals which embrace dominant models of schooling, thereby narrowing rather than expanding parental choice in schooling as advocated for by the policy.

Given the tendency of the press to extend significant coverage to schools with unique characteristics, it is possible to get a skewed perspective about the extent to which new players are exerting influence over free schools. Media discussions about the 2014 schools approved for opening for example, highlighted the presence of a Spanish bilingual school and a military school, which are new entries on the educational landscape (Adams, 2013). Another school which has courted a lot of press is the Maharishi secondary school in Lancashire which engages students in transcendental meditation. Schools like the Maharishi, which on the face of it appear to represent a radical departure from the ethos of mainstream education, have, on closer inspection, been initiated by well-connected education trusts rather than parents' groups, or have been transferred from the

private to the state sector (Harris, 2013), which substantiates Higham's (2014) findings that having the right cultural currency is key in introducing new ideas into the educational system. The presence of schools like the Maharishi demonstrate how social and professional standing appear to validate alternative approaches, suggesting that who is doing the proposing is at least, if not more important, than what is being proposed. This idea is explored further in Chapter 6, which examines how possessing alternative forms of cultural capital, unknown to and therefore unrecognised by the government, presented a barrier to the approval of the research participants' applications.

Although the philosophy of schools like Maharishi are considered alternative, they are privileged by the considerable resources they have access to in the application process, in the same way schools with more traditional approaches are. Their presence on the school landscape must not, therefore, be viewed as evidence of either an open and fair process or an opening up of the school system to radical ideas. In many ways, they uphold the status quo of the policy rewarding powerful, established organisations rather than smaller, grassroots organisations with limited resources. Although the presence of schools like the Maharishi create the sense that radical innovation is the norm in free schools, the reality is that the majority of schools scheduled to open in 2014 bear the names of Ark, Harris, or Oasis, well established organisations already running a number of schools. In this way the free school policy represents a continuation of the existing academies programme, rather than a significant new development (Wright, 2012). Gunter and McGuinty (2014) note that when academies were launched the government employed the same language around the need to inject new ideas into the system and to urgently trial new solutions to existing problems. They note, however, that academies have largely changed the actors involved in delivering education (from local authorities to private companies) rather than altering their provision, which sets a precedent for the emergent domination of multi academy trusts who are likewise reproducing well established models of education in the free school landscape.

In spite of the government's emphasis on ushering in new and innovative ideas, the free schools application guidance appears to address the idea of innovation in a punitive way under the heading 'Faith free schools and free schools with a distinctive educational philosophy or worldview (including Steiner, Montessori and Maharishi)' (DfE , 2014a). It is plausible to assume that the three schools referenced in the heading are recognised by the government as acceptable forms of alternative provision. The emphasis on these schools is significant because they are all well established fee paying schools engaging in conversion to free schools, which again raises questions about the role, or lack thereof, for small, grassroots organisations like the ones featured in this research.

What follows under the heading is largely a description of the measures put in place to protect the public against the encroachment of alternative ideas into the education system. The guidance states that, "Your school must be designed to appeal to a wide range of parents and pupils" (DfE, 2014a, p. 12). This is an interesting assertion given that as discussed earlier the first wave of free schools arguably had curriculum practices which did not appeal to all parents. The dominance of Latin and other traditional subjects among the inaugural schools suggests the state is prepared to approve schooling practices that alienate local communities, provided the government perceives them to be the right ideas, which raises questions about which parents they want to ensure are not alienated and which parents' interests they are prepared to protect.

The guidance, which employs the same colourblind language used throughout free school policy documents, continues saying:

> We will consider whether or not there are elements of your application that might deter parents of children of other faiths or none, or those that do not specifically espouse your distinctive educational philosophy from applying, or could prevent their children from playing a full part in the life of the school. This could include lessons taught in community languages, large proportions of curriculum time devoted to faith-related studies, restrictive dietary requirements or the mandatory wearing of symbols or clothing associated with your faith or worldview (DfE, 2014a, p. 12).

This portion of the guidance is notable because it upholds the hegemony of whiteness in schooling by suggesting that anything outwardly associated with otherness will be looked upon unfavourably, which is in keeping with Applebaum's (2016) assertion explored in the second chapter that whiteness actively paroles its borders from intrusive others. The guidance also illustrates well both Dyer (1997) and Essed's (1991) ideas about how whiteness secures its domination by operating as an invisible norm. In this instance whiteness, which does not presume itself to be representative of a particular faith, language or worldview, is socially constructed by the government as normal and superior. This dominance of whiteness, which as explored in Chapter 2, is tied up in notions of Britain's imperial past, is upheld and protected in spite of the fact that many free schools in the London context are opening in areas where a white majority student population does not exist.

This part of the guidance also stresses the responsibility of free schools under current equalities legislation stating that the public sector duty requires "you and your trustees, both in planning and running your school, to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between communities"

(DfE, 2014a, p. 12). The reference to equalities legislation in this section of the guidance is interesting because it suggests that free schools with alternative education approaches and philosophies have an enhanced obligation to demonstrate their commitment to equality. In this way the government has subverted the goal of the equalities legislation by invoking it to protect the sanctity of the education system from the intrusion of unwanted, other ideas, rather than to protect the rights of individuals and organisations to freely express themselves without fear of discrimination. The idea of excluding unwanted ideas is, according to Wright (2012, p. 291), consistent with the fact that the government is willing to empower individuals provided they "conform to the image of citizenship laid out in the free school policy discourse". He notes however that those unwilling to conform, "are cast as part of the problem and are consequently penalised and excluded" (p. 291), which provides an explanation for the punitive nature of the guidance for schools posing alternative worldviews. This observation is important because it provides context for my discussion in Chapter 6 about how the government employed seemingly neutral processes to exclude the participants' proposals which challenged and indirectly critiqued dominant models of schooling.

Another and perhaps ultimate sign of state control in the free school movement is clause 2.33 of the application guidance which states the Secretary of State is the final authority on whether a person or organisation is deemed suitable to open a school. The clause explains that once the decision has been made about a prospective free school application it is final and there is no appeal process, which cements the government's power. One of the questions raised by this research is whether black supplementary schools, who have sustained their critique of racism in the school system over many years, are perceived by the government as suitable actors in the free school movement.

The final authoritative statement in the guidance states that:

> In order to be approved, applications will need to demonstrate that those individuals who will act as members and trustees, and the school itself, will ensure that principles are promoted which support fundamental British values, including: respect for the basis on which the law is made and applied in the United Kingdom; respect for democracy and support for participation in the democratic processes; support for equality of opportunity for all; support and respect for the liberties of all within the law; and respect for and tolerance of different faiths and religious and other beliefs (DfE, 2014a, p. 23).

The repeated reference to British values in the free schools application guidance similarly suggests a harkening back to Britain's imperial past, which is at odds with notions of shaking up the school

system through a new and radical form of schooling. The idea of innovation in free schools is mentioned fleetingly in the NAO report (2013, p. 43) and then only to lament the lack of information about the extent to which free schools have delivered innovation in schooling. The report notes that, "The Department has not yet collected or assessed how free schools' use of broader freedoms are meeting its goal of innovation," which calls into doubt the extent to which innovation remains one of the policy's priorities. This apparent lack of priority towards innovation is significant given that the participants' proposals offered creative solutions to the endemic underachievement of black students. Crucially, however, as discussed in Chapter 7, their solutions were based on models of collective accountability and empowerment which contravene the dominant model of individual accountability. Tracking the outcomes of the participants' proposals is important because it reveals how the policy responds to innovations that do not advance the goals of marketised schooling.

Conclusion

This chapter has located free schools within a neoliberal discourse which underpins ongoing market based reform of schooling in England. Although free schools are still an emergent phenomenon in the UK schooling system, there is a growing body of research contributing to the knowledge base about free schools. One theme present in this literature is the series of existing contradictions between the way free schools were packaged and sold by the government and how they exist in practice. Among these contradictions are the government's assurances that free schools will drive up standards for poor children against the evidence of a series of admission and curriculum practices among some free schools that result in the exclusion of families of poor children. In addition, the government's framing of the free school policy as a vehicle through which to empower parents and local communities to take social responsibility for problems in education, is also fraught with problems. Evidence suggests that smaller local organisations or groups of parents, which are represented in this research, are often excluded from opening up free schools because of a prohibitive application process. Instead, the beneficiaries of the free school policy appear to be already successful education organisations or groups of parents with powerful networks who are extending their influence over the education system and protecting their interests in the process. In this way free schools, operating under the banner of freedom, in fact reproduce existing inequalities.

The notion of free schools as hubs of innovation is not borne out by the research. Instead, the application guidance seems to warn pre-emptively against innovation, signalling the government's strong preference for a traditional approach to education, symbolised by the rhetoric about the

importance of British values. Where alternative forms of schooling are being introduced, it is being done by powerful actors with sufficient resources to navigate the application process. Finally, there is a tension between the purported opening up of the school system by removing the influence of the state in schooling and the number of mechanisms in place to ensure free schools serve state interests. Among these are the establishment of the only free schools advisory body with government handpicked officials; the government's unwillingness to publish information about free school applications and the role of the Secretary of State as the final arbitrator over the application process.

One of the glaring omissions in the literature is a focus on the experiences of unsuccessful free school proposers. The lack of publicly available information means there is no empirical evidence about who unsuccessful proposers are and what ideas are being rejected and on what scale. Another omission that this research addresses is the lack of available literature about the relationship between free schools and BME communities. Stokes et al. (2014) summarise the scope of the problem by highlighting that the free school programme is not engaging sufficiently with ethnic minority communities and that the voices of people from BME communities in particular are underrepresented in the debate around free schools. In their effort to complete a literature review on free schools in conjunction with race, ethnicity, BME engagement and equality, they concluded there is a noticeable shortage of research concerning these topics. This thesis, which focuses on the experiences of black free school proposers in London, is important, therefore, in broadening our understanding of how race is operationalised in the implementation of the free school policy. In the following chapter I turn my attention to how I conducted the research in the context of some of the challenges mentioned above around accessing information about free school applicants.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

This chapter examines the methodological approach adopted in the study and the epistemological assumptions underpinning the research, namely that the everyday experiences of ethnic minority communities provide the best possible vantage point from which to generate knowledge about white domination. The chapter also summarises how the research sample was assembled; provides contextual information about the research participants; and explains the processes involved in collecting and analysing the data.

Critical Race Methodology

The research uses a critical race methodological approach which is characterised by its insistence on "placing race at the centre of the research process, including in the design of research questions as well as in how data is collected, analysed and presented" (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 36). Whereas race, gender and other forms of oppression often fall outside the scope of much traditional scholarship (Collins 1990; Essed, 1991), CRT focuses specifically on the racialized, gendered experiences of research subjects (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). It is explicit, therefore, in its aims, which are to expand the existing body of knowledge about how constructs like racism and sexism are sustained and perpetuated.

Rather than attempt to understand the experiences of ethnic minority communities from a Eurocentric perspective, CRT has advanced an emancipatory research process which aspires to produce holistic knowledge about ethnic minority communities (Huber, 2008; Tyson, 2003). The approach sits alongside other emancipatory research paradigms that prioritise the voices of marginalised communities often absent from scholarly research. This idea of looking to the bottom (Matsuda, 1995) borrows from feminist research which elevates the position of ordinary women's voices in research. Frankenberg (1993, p. 7) explains that "since the late 1960s feminists have transformed accounts of personal experience into politicized and theorised terrain". She notes that feminist researchers embrace:

> The private, the daily and the apparently trivial in women's activities, which are conceptualised as shared rather than individual experiences and as socially and politically constructed. As a result the ordinary in women's daily lives are used by feminist researchers as a resource for analysing gendered oppression in society (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 7).

In a similar vein, critical race scholars draw on the personal experiences of ethnic minority communities in order to analyse how racism functions in society. Indeed the fundamental assumption on which the approach hinges is the centrality of experiential knowledge (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso, (2002) explain:

> CRT recognises that the experiential knowledge of people of colour is legitimate, appropriate and critical to understanding, analysing, and teaching about racial subordination. CRT views this knowledge as a strength and draws explicitly on the lived experiences of people of colour (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 26).

By focusing on the experiences of ethnic minority communities, scholars generate new knowledge which challenges mainstream explanations of racism, sexism and other forms of oppression. Vargas (2003, p. 9) defines this knowledge as “outsider centred knowledge”. This is echoed by Bernal (2002, p. 113) who notes that “by focusing on experiences which are not visible from a European epistemological orientation, a new kind of knowledge is generated which simultaneously interrupts and challenges the flow of distorted stories about people of colour and their capabilities”.

The stories generated in critical race research are defined as counterstories because they directly counter mainstream denials about the existence of racism. Solórzano and Yosso explain, “We define the counterstory as a method of telling the stories of people whose experiences are not often told, those at the margins of society” (2002, p. 32). In education based research this often focuses on giving individuals or groups of students an opportunity to talk about their experiences of struggling with low teacher expectations and a narrow curriculum, which provides a counter narrative to deficit based explanations for poor student achievement (Dixson and Rousseau 2005). In the context of this study, enabling the participants to talk about their experiences of applying to open free schools has unearthed counternarratives which challenge the government’s assertion that free school proposals are assessed via a fair and neutral process that affords all applicants the same opportunity to succeed.

A critical epistemological claim which underpins CRT research is that ethnic minority researchers and research participants are in a unique position to speak about race and racism and are presumed to have the competence to do so. Matstuda for example argues that “those who have experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen” (Matsuda, 1995, p. 63). Tyson (2003, p. 21) further theorizes that the perspective that people of colour bring to research is a unique one, which traditional research methods often fail to recognise and record. She notes this unique perspective comes from what she terms “the specificity of oppression” which “moves the

oppressed other into a paradigm of survival" and creates a view of the world that is not shared by those in the dominant culture.

Just as feminism asserts that there is a link between where one is positioned in society and what one perceives, (Frankenberg, 1993) Leonardo (2004, p. 141) points out that "numerous authors from Friere to Fanon have suggested that racial oppression is best understood from the experiences of and vantage point of the oppressed", given their unique view of society. Essed (1991) explains her rationale for focusing on the experiences of racially marginalised groups in society arguing that as a result of their constant exposure to the dominant culture, they develop a profound knowledge about how racism is reproduced, which makes them well qualified to unravel racism's complex web. She notes that this knowledge extends to decoding the covert operations of racism, which as explored in Chapter 2, are central to the perpetuation and sustenance of racism. This point is echoed by Zamudio et al. (2011, p. 5) who note that "focusing on voices which are oppositional to the dominant narrative is an effective tool in making visible the structures, processes and practices that contribute to continued racial inequality". This is well illustrated by the participant narratives in this study which expose a number of discriminatory processes and practices within the free school application process that are concealed from mainstream discourse about free schools. Given the potential for accounts of racism to provide insight into the structural properties of racism, Essed (1991) argues they must be conceived of as more than just merely personal stories.

In contrast to the knowledge about racism ethnic minorities accrue over time, Essed (1991) argues dominant groups are not accustomed to thinking critically about race and do not therefore develop the same level of expertise at recognising racism, which renders them by comparison, less effective sources in research about racism. Furthermore, she argues it is not in the dominant group's best interest to identify systems and processes they directly benefit from as this would disrupt their privilege and expose the contradictions between the liberal values they embrace and the reality they are engaged in perpetuating (see also Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Critique of CRT Methodology

CRT's epistemological stance has been subject to debate and criticism. The main thrust of the criticisms focus on discrediting the reliability of research participants and therefore the validity of the findings generated by critical race scholarship. The assumption that people from a racialized background possess, by way of their experiences, a unique perspective on racial discrimination has

particularly been challenged. Farber and Sherry (2009), for example, reject the idea of a unique person of colour perspective on the basis that there is no empirical evidence that it exists. They further argue that CRT scholars have failed to define the unique voice and what it consists of. Similarly, Litowitz (2009) contests that an insider perspective brings with it any additional value. Duncan (2005) suggests that at the heart of Farber and Sherry's critique is an objection to ethnic minority communities narrating their own stories, which threatens the idea of a universal white worldview that can be generalised to other communities. He cites a significant international body of literature which shows that people of colour experience and perceive aspects of the education system differently than the white majority population as evidence of the existence of a unique subjective position. Similarly, although based on an admittedly small number of studies, the findings of the ROTA (2012; 2014) research about BME communities' interactions with the free school policy suggest that BME communities are experiencing and perceive the free school application process differently than their white counterparts.

Farber and Sherry's (2009) primary argument is that research participants' stories are not objective and there is no mechanism which can be employed to prove their validity. Litowitz (2009) similarly cautions that there is danger in viewing issues from one (insider) perspective and champions instead looking at issues from different points of view in order to arrive at the fullest, most dynamic perspective on an issue. CRT, however, rejects the idea that research should strive for objectivity and starts instead from the premise that that "all stories are subjective and the production of knowledge is situated" (Bernal, 2002, p. 120). Duncan (2005) further argues that rather than failing to acknowledge an implicit worldview, as is the case with much of mainstream research, CRT is explicit in choosing to see the world from the point of view of socially subjugated groups. He stresses however, that this choice does not involve excluding other points of view as claimed by Litowitz (2009). In fact, he argues CRT researchers are rigorous in their analysis of "dominant explanations for social problems" (2005, p. 106). In this way readers of CRT research are exposed to wider literature on a subject, which empowers them to accept or reject a scholar's perspective (see also Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). This is well reflected in this study as the literature review carefully considers the government's rationale for free schools alongside the available literature from a variety of sources with differing viewpoints, thus introducing multiple perspectives about free schools into the research. Vargas (2003, p. 10) also asserts that CRT findings do not need to be viewed in isolation. She notes that "narratives which are linked to the individual experience in all its subjectivity can also be quantitatively measured in order to establish wider patterns of individually reported experiences". As discussed in the previous chapter, a lack of ethnicity data about free school

proposers prevents robust statistical analysis of the overall numbers of Black free school proposers and their rates of approval, compared to overall approval rates. Following a number of Freedom of Information requests, the government has begun making more information about free schools available, however ethnicity data remains non-existent. From 2015 onwards the government has published approved applications on their website. All personal details about individual applicants are redacted, however so it remains impossible to draw any conclusions about the racial make-up of approved applicants. Even if ethnicity data about individual applicants were available, it would not necessarily reveal the distribution of power among proposer groups which, as this research and research by Higham (2014a) highlight, sometimes operate in the context of concealed partnerships, which disadvantage parent or community based proposers. Available information about rejected proposals remains currently limited to the name and location of the proposed school and does not extend to information about individual proposers. Although admittedly insufficient to establish the extent of either the participation of or approval rates of the African Caribbean community, I have included a list of schools approved to open between 2011-2014, (Appendix 4), the period in which the research participants submitted applications, to help contextualise the climate in which the participants were operating. The list corroborates research by Gilbert (2011) and Higham (2014), highlighting that well-resourced academy chains appear to have been among the early beneficiaries of the free school policy. One of the recommendations arising out of this research, which is explored in the conclusion, concerns making ethnicity data more readily available in order to facilitate quantitative studies about the outcomes of BME free school proposals, which would complement the existing qualitative studies as advocated for by Vargas (2003).

The importance of marrying individually reported experiences to wider patterns of exclusion is also made by Essed (1991, p. 54) who argues that: “although real life experiences are a rich source of information and provide insights into everyday racism that cannot be obtained other ways, it is essential that individual accounts are checked for consistency with the structural properties of racism in the system”. Rather than view individual accounts in isolation therefore, Essed (1991) advocates for linking the micro experiences narrated by research participants to macro structures, in order to ensure and increase the validity of findings. In order to achieve this, this study situates the participants’ accounts of racism within the wider context of the historical and ongoing exclusion black communities experience in trying to influence educational institutions, as well as within the disenfranchisement of parents more generally in marketised schooling systems. While it is of course important to think through issues of validity and reliability, Delgado notes the importance of not pandering to critics, especially given that “dominant narratives about merit, causation and blame

are seldom subjected to validity measures because they are embraced as universal truths" (2009, p. 340, see also Zamudio et al., 2011).

A final criticism levied against CRT methodology is that researchers essentialise racialised communities in the process of conducting their research by sacrificing the individual perspectives of research subjects in order to make ideological based knowledge claims, which minimise the diversity of opinions among research samples (Duncan, 2005). Darder and Torres (2004, p. 104) for example, advance this argument by saying that the "CRT approach to storytelling results in dichotomizing and over homogenizing both white people and people of colour which results in a kind of unintended essentialism."

CRT scholars have been vocal in rejecting claims of essentialism. Stefancic and Delgado, for example, acknowledge the complexity of individual identity noting that "no person has a single, easily stated unitary identity, which is meant to be representative of the collective experience" (2012, p. 10). Many UK based scholars have also written about the need to proactively guard against essentialism, which as discussed in Chapter 2, is in keeping with scholarship about race in Britain. Gunartnam, (2003) for instance notes that the very act of categorizing social identities, in relation to gender, class, race and sexuality is by default an essentialising process. She posits that it is important to recognise that wanting to put race under the spotlight for examination, in order to uncover oppressive relations of power, always runs the risk of reproducing 'race' and ethnicity as essentialised categories. She identifies that working with the category of race, which she defines as "slippery", throws up certain contradictions for researchers given that "on the one hand, researchers want to avoid essentialising race but at the same time have a very real desire to capture it and concretize it"(2003, p. 32). Gunartnam (2003, p. 6) suggests that the only way to counteract essentialism is to maintain a commitment to anti-essentialism by allowing for and reporting the "ambivalent complexity of lived experiences" in research. Hylton (2012, p. 28) also advocates for intersectionality as a tool to ensure anti-essentialist depictions of people of colour saying :

> Intersectionality is one of the mechanisms used in CRT to emphasise that though the starting point for CRT is 'race' and racism there is no intention to lose sight of the complexities of the intersection of 'race' with the constructed and identity related nature of other forms of oppression.

Stanfield (2016) further argues that CRT researchers who minimise differences between subjects in order to strengthen their argument, in fact achieve the opposite effect. He stresses that recognising

that people of colour have a range of identities acknowledges their humanity and is therefore threatening to the status quo because it “disturbs the social, political, and economic arrangements of the dominant group” (p. 52). In this way Stanfield (2016) reframes reporting on the diversity within research samples as an act of defiance which advances, rather than threatens, CRT’s overall goal of redressing unfair distributions of power, while educating the public about the lives of ethnic minority people living in white dominated societies. As explored earlier, in my study I have adopted an intersectional stance and as a result include an analysis of how the variables of gender and class impacted on the participants’ experiences of attempting to open free schools, alongside my analysis of the impact of race. In addition, the findings also include the sometimes contradictory views expressed by participants, which as Gunartnam (2003) suggests is important in terms of guarding against essentialism.

Whatever the merits of the epistemological stance of critical race scholars, Essed (1991, p. 54) argues that ultimately the quality, validity and usefulness of the data collected in research about race and racism “depend on the way the accounts were gathered, the social backgrounds of the interviewees, the interview context and the method of interviewing”, which are the focus of the reminder of this chapter.

My Relationship to the Research

Much of the criticism about the reliability of participants in crafting their own narratives, and the capacity of researchers to analyse and present their findings about those narratives, are generalisable to qualitative research. In order to address the potential pitfalls cited by critics, critical race scholars prioritise operating in a self-revelatory way by exploring explicitly their role in the research and providing background information about research participants. Stanfield (1994, p. 176) stresses the importance of the researcher’s personal story saying “autobiographies, cultures and historical contexts of researchers matter; these determine what researchers see and do not see, as well as their ability to analyse data and disseminate knowledge effectively” (1994, p. 176). Ladson-Billings notes that the researcher’s involvement may well involve double (or multiple) consciousnesses in which she or he is operating (2000, p. 272). This is well demonstrated by Carter who addresses the impossibility of defining oneself wholly as a researcher saying, “If I assume a singular identity as researcher rather than embrace my multiple identities as researcher and African American and woman and working class– then I reinforce the legitimacy of the often fictive relationship between the researcher and the researched” (2003, p. 30). Tuhiwai Smith (2012) notes

that terms like insider and outsider, often used to describe the role of the qualitative researcher, are both insufficient and one dimensional in capturing the role of researchers in race-based research. Instead she suggests Collin's (1986) concept of insider/outsider, which enables researchers to acknowledge how they are both similar to and different from their research participants, comes closest to expressing the complexity of engaging in research about a community you identify with.

The concept of insider/outsider has been useful in helping me to think through my position in the research process. There are several aspects of my experience which render me an insider, most notably, as outlined in the introduction, my interest in and experience working to advance race equality in education over a number of years, which was a shared interest with the research participants. The project briefing letter (Appendix 1) distributed to participants at the outset of the research, clearly outlined my position as someone with an interest in the research based on my professional areas of interest and experience, which for individuals who were previously unknown to me may have been a factor in their decision to participate in the study. As a parent to young black boys in the schooling system, I also have a personal interest and therefore emotional entanglement with the issues raised in the thesis. This was a further area of common interest given that for many of the sample their engagement with educational advocacy grew out of their dissatisfaction with aspects of how their own children were being educated in schools. Both these common areas of interest were important in helping to facilitate a positive relationship with participants and often featured in the dialogue that emerged between us during the interview process, which is explored later in the chapter. It is worthwhile noting the nature of the relationships which emerged during the research process given that according to Carter (2003) the researcher's relationship with participants is a significant factor in being able to understand and interpret participant stories.

Another aspect of my insider status stemmed from my own first hand encounters with racism in educational institutions, which provided me with an important awareness of how racism manifests itself in the context of education. In particular, having experienced race-based microaggressions I was attuned to recognising them and the subtlety by which they often prevail. Essed (1991) notes that within her own study being an insider "provided a rich basis for tentative probing" (p. 61). This is reflected in this study in the intuitive nature to some of the follow up questions I was able to ask when the participants' accounts touched on what I recognised from my own experience to be microaggressive attitudes and behaviours. The insight I brought to the interview process, which emerged out of my insider knowledge about racism, gives credence to the idea of a perspective

advantage which Ladson Billings (2000) argues scholars who have experienced racism and ethnic discrimination are equipped with.

In spite of my insider status in some ways I also occupied the position of an outsider. For example I was not immersed in the local communities the participants emerged from and was therefore outside of their strong and often extensive social networks, which in some instances were affiliated to Christian churches. Another point of distance was the fact that much of my advocacy around race equality had taken place within institutions, either in the context of my jobs within various education institutions, or in an academic context through speaking out in higher education classes and conducting research about race equality in schooling. In contrast the resistance to racism some of the participants, who were entrepreneurs or grassroots activists, were engaged in occurred outside of institutions. This is explored in the next section, which provides background information about the sample. As a result, it is possible that participants may have perceived me as primarily an academic and/or external to their local community, rather than as an activist, although as discussed in Chapter 3 the black intellectual tradition in the UK has always featured a strong overlap and cooperation between activists and academics (Warmington, 2014). It is also worth highlighting that the common assumption that scholars' academic credentials create power imbalances within the research process are contested by some critical race scholars who argue that the social construction of the researcher as powerful is essentialising and does not take into account how researchers of colour who engage in research about race are often alienated within their institutions, or how their experiences as racialized individuals living in white dominated societies inform their role (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Pillow, 2003).

Snowball Sample

In addition to establishing my role in the research, it also important to provide contextual information about the research sample in order to establish their credibility in offering accounts of their experiences in applying to open free schools. One of the biggest challenges in conducting this research was in identifying research participants. This was primarily because at the time of this research there was no way to access information about either the number or nature of free school applications submitted to the DfE, or the ethnic backgrounds of those applicant groups. To begin with therefore, I approached someone who was active in the black supplementary school movement who I had knowledge of through shared membership in an online forum about race equality in education. As well as being involved in the submission of a free school application, this individual

also had good oversight over other black organisations who had submitted applications and was generous in sharing information about people who I could approach to participate in my study. This initial contact enabled me to locate further research participants, which allowed me to begin to assemble a snowball sample.

In its simplest formulation, snowball sampling consists of identifying respondents who are then used to refer researchers on to other respondents (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). According to Atkinson and Flint (2001), the technique is often used to access hidden populations who are obscured from the view of social researchers and policy makers. One of the benefits of the approach, therefore, is that it allows studies to take place that might otherwise be impossible to conduct because of a lack of participants.

This study was entirely dependent on word of mouth referrals to identify research participants and there was no other formal means of advertising the research. At the end of each interview, I asked participants if there was anyone else they could recommend who may wish to take part in the research. Everybody I interviewed was forthcoming in sharing contact details of potential research participants and the majority of people I then contacted were willing to participate in the research. This was likely because people felt they were being referred to the research by people already known to them and who they trusted. Atkinson and Flint (2001, p. 2) point out that this is one of the benefits of snowball sampling as “trust may be developed as referrals are made by acquaintances or peers rather than other more formal methods of identification”. Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) maintain that the element of trust is crucial when dealing with marginalised populations and/or sensitive issues, both of which pertain to this research.

Another factor which may also have impacted on my ability to assemble a sample stems from my personal experience of engaging in race equality activism within education. CRT challenges the idea that marginalised communities who engage in research are powerless, suggesting instead that they maintain their own internal logics of power. Collins (1990) posits that in black communities experience is valued above knowledge. She denotes a distinction between knowledge and wisdom (acquired from experience) suggesting that as a member of a subordinated group wisdom is more important than knowledge in the pursuit of survival. In this way, far from being passive and disempowered, the community has power to judge the credibility of the researcher based on their own “criteria of experience” (Collins, 1990, p. 209). This was reflected in this study in that it was my history of addressing racial inequality in education personally and professionally that potential

research subjects most often probed during initial conversations in order to determine whether they would like to participate. When assembling the research sample, potential participants sometimes requested to speak to (or had already spoken to) other research participants who I had completed interviews with, which demonstrates participant agency in employing internal mechanisms for validating the research process and establishing the credibility of the researcher. Throughout this research I have chosen to refer to those involved in my research as participants, rather than subjects, to reflect their agency in choosing to be involved and their active role in telling their stories.

In spite of the many advantages to snowball sampling, there are also some perceived drawbacks. Snowball sampling is reliant on the social networks that exist between members of a target population to build a sample. One of the criticisms of this form of data collection is that it can lead to a narrow and/or biased sample. Biernacki and Waldorf, for example, suggest it is important to ask, "will the exclusive use of the method yield a biased sample by revealing only those cases discovered through existing social networks?" (1981, p. 161; see also Fargarieru and Sargent, 1997). I was initially concerned that given the personal connections among the research sample, participants may have a singular, wholly unified viewpoint which would limit the findings. This concern was not borne out by the data as participants revealed a diversity of opinions about their experiences of attempting to open free schools, which may be a result of the diversity among the sample and the different kinds of connections which existed among the sample. In some cases, for example, the connections between research participants were firmly established and long standing while in other cases they were merely acquaintances who knew of each other. It is also worth noting that some of the connections between participants were newly established and had evolved out of the mutual experience of submitting free school proposals.

Another potential problem with using a snowball sample concerns the fact that personal network size can influence the chances a person will be included in the sample. It is feasible that members of the population with the largest networks and highest social visibility are more likely to be referred and have their views represented in the research. Conversely, those who are isolated or with minimal networks can be overlooked because they are less likely to be referred to the researcher (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981; Faugier and Sargeant, 1997). This factor was possibly at play in my research as all of the sample were relatively high profile individuals who were actively engaged in their local community. It is also possible however, that the high profile nature of the participants stems from the fact that on the whole individuals with pre-existing records of civic engagement were

more inclined to respond to the government's call to get involved in delivering educational services, rather than from the way they were identified.

As explored earlier, it is important to provide biographical information about the participants in order to contextualise their accounts and establish their capacity to understand and recount experiences of racism. Understanding their histories is also important in order to highlight the pre-existing range of skills and experiences they brought to the free school application process. Essed (1991) argues that over time people become expert at understanding and dealing with racism. Knowledge about racism, she suggests can be acquired in many ways including "through socialisation in the family, community involvement in the civil rights movement, media reports on anti-racism movements, black studies in college and practical experience" (p 285).
Essed (1991) further argues that comprehension about racism is a cumulative process such that:

> the more experience one has in dealing with racism, the more elaborate and organized one's knowledge becomes about the nature of racism in the system and the more efficiently one can use general knowledge of racism to understand its specific manifestations in everyday life (p. 8).

Overall, she concludes that individuals who are accustomed to critiquing the apparatus of racism develop a more complex understanding of racism. This is an important point because the majority of participants in this study had long histories of challenging racism from a range of vantage points both within and outside the mainstream schooling system. Their activist histories are important therefore because they demonstrate the enhanced capacity of the research sample to offer sophisticated critiques of how racism was transmitted in the free school application process.

Sample Description

The sample consists of nine people of African Caribbean heritage based across several London boroughs. I had previous awareness of three of the participants through a former role focused on race equality in education. The remaining participants were unknown to me prior to the research. With the exception of one participant, all of the sample were directly involved with the submission of free school applications to the DfE. The one research participant who did not submit an application had a 20-year history of delivering supplementary education in London. The individual considered making a free school application but opted on reflection not to. Our conversation focused on their rationale for deciding not to apply to open a free school and a general discussion about the free school policy. I made the decision to include data gathered from this interview in the research because I judged it to be valid and to enrich the data set as a whole.

The sample represents seven different applications which were made to the DfE, although it should be noted that all but one of the seven initial applications were submitted multiple times. The research, therefore, represents the submission of 13 different free school applications between the period 2010-2014.

All of the research participants fall into one of three categories. The first category involves those who had been working in middle and senior management positions in state maintained primary and secondary schools in London when they embarked on the free school application process. Participants in this category had worked in schools for in excess of 20 years. They were well educated and articulate and based on their professional experiences had a good understanding of the school system in general, as well as institutionalised forms of racism which occur within it.

The second category was comprised of educational entrepreneurs. All of these participants, bar one, had previous experience working as teachers in both the state and the independent sector. They were no longer working in mainstream schools, partly because of a critique of the school system and a desire to apply their skills and experience working in education more creatively. At the time of the interviews, these participants were involved in running businesses which provided educational instruction and pastoral care within black communities. The majority of these participants were also well educated and had been running their businesses successfully over a number of years. Given their active choice to work outside of the mainstream schooling system, these participants were unsurprisingly often the most vocal in their critique of racism in the schooling system.

The final and smallest category of participants was comprised of grassroots activists. These participants had the least formal qualifications and the qualifications they possessed were not in education. Nonetheless, they had been advocating for race equality in schooling in their local context over many years, fighting against disproportionate exclusions and poor quality provision in schools adversely impacting black children. The impetus for their activism was borne initially out of their dissatisfaction as parents with the provision on offer for their children. The majority of participants in this group were also involved in providing supplementary educational services on a smaller, often adhoc and voluntary basis. These participants had strong social networks, and a good understanding of community based anti-racist initiatives in the local context they were operating in.

The categories described above are intended to give a broad indication of the research sample. They are by no means fixed and there is some overlap between categories evidenced, for example by the

fact that some participants with mainstream school leadership experience also maintained close ties with their local communities and considered themselves to be community activists, demonstrating the multiple positions participants occupied.

Although the exact age of participants was not collected as part of this research, their ages are estimated as being between 40-60, based on the length of their involvement in education advocacy as discussed during their interviews. This experience is noteworthy because as explored earlier, knowledge about racism is accumulated over time. Essed (1991) further explains the significance of experience in verbal accounts of racism, noting that comprehension and analysis of new encounters with racism involves a process of filtering them through previous personal experience and amassed knowledge of racism in society.

There is an almost even gender split among the sample which consists of four males and five females. Although this research did not directly probe the religious beliefs of participants, some participants had strong ties to Christian churches and mentioned the importance of religion in their lives and in the applications they submitted, while others made no mention of religion, suggesting religious diversity among the sample. It is difficult to categorize definitively the class backgrounds of the research sample. Essed (1991) suggests indirect markers can be used to assess class, although this is admittedly a blunt instrument. Based on what I gleaned about the educational backgrounds, professional status and home ownership of participants through the interview process, rather than through any direct questioning, my presumption is that the sample is predominately middle class although a small number of participants appear to be working class.

The Research Participants

Pseudonym	**Summary**
Paul	Paul had had a long time involvement in the supplementary school movement. He is now an Education entrepreneur, and author. Paul briefly considered applying to open a free school, but did not proceed with his application.
Trevor	Trevor has been successfully delivering educational services through a social enterprise for many years. He was a member of a core team which proposed a free school.

Pauline	Pauline was previously an assistant head in a secondary school. She has taught in London schools for 33 years. She was the lead proposer of a free school.
Afua	Afua is a grassroots community activist, active in the fight for race equality in schools in her borough. She was a member of a core team which proposed a free school.
Kwame	Kwame is a grassroots community activist with a long involvement in supplementary education. He was a core member of a team which proposed a free school.
Susan	Susan is a teacher with 20 years' experience working in primary schools in London. She was the lead proposer of a free School.
Samantha	Samantha is a parent and community activist. She was the lead proposer of a free school.
Glenroy	Glenroy has run a small alternative school in the independent sector for many years. He was a member of the core team which proposed a free school under Samantha's leadership.
Viola	Viola has worked as a senior school leader in the state and independent sector. She is also a long-time community activist. She was the lead proposer of a free School.

The Method: Non-Directive Interviews

Much, although not all, critical race scholarship in education utilizes qualitative methods to capture the complex ways systems of oppression impact on ethnic minority communities (Huber, 2008). The specific method most often used is a form of interviewing which enables research participants to tell their stories. Stanfield argues the use of oral interviews is appropriate in research conducted with ethnic minority communities given the longstanding prevalence of storytelling across non-Western cultures. He specifically suggests "a generalizable qualitative methods epistemology for people of colour structured around verbal communication" (1994, p. 185).

Scholars argue there is a long and rich tradition of weaving counterstories within marginalised communities in order to resist and challenge oppression (Stefanic and Delgado, 2012; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Stanfield, 1994). Stefancic and Delgado (2012, p. 44) for example, point to the slave narratives and tales written by black captives which described their conditions and in the process

"unmasked the gentility that the white plantation society performed" as a powerful illustration of the legacy of storytelling. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995, p. 64) further emphasise the significance of storytelling noting that "historically storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression".

Delgado contends that subordinate, or what he terms outgroups, have always created their own stories that "circulate within the group as a kind of counter reality which subverts the dominant in-group reality (1989, p. 229). Collins similarly asserts that "subordinate groups have long had to use alternative ways to create independent self-definitions and self-valuations and to rearticulate them through our own specialists" (1990, p. 202). Stanfield (1994) references social historians like Zora Neale Hurston among others who used literature as a tool to advance counterstories. He also cites art and dance as forms which have been embraced both historically and in contemporary contexts to tell stories that contest mainstream narratives and depictions of ethnic minority communities. This drive to counter racist narratives is also symbolised by the emergence of black owned bookshops and publishing houses during the early days of mass migration to the UK who played an important role in the resistance to racism in the post-war period, as documented in Chapter 3.

In addition to the cultural and historical relevance of using narrative tools to research the lives of ethnic minority communities, Essed (1991) argues there are also practical reasons why using narrative, or what she terms verbal reconstruction of experience, is an effective way of conducting research about racism. She notes that "racism is a social process. This implies that structures and ideologies of racism are recurrently reinforced and reproduced through a complex of attitudes (prejudice) and actions (discrimination)" (1991, p. 46). Verbal reconstructions of experience, she goes on, provide the best basis for uncovering and analysing these social relations which reproduce racism. This is well demonstrated by the fact that the ongoing interactions between government officials and participants during the application process were a key site for the reproduction of racism and therefore an important data source which could only be accessed via the participants' verbal descriptions of these interactions.

The study comprises nine interviews conducted between 2015-2016. All participants were interviewed individually and on average interviews lasted between 1.5-2 hours. Participants were interviewed in a variety of places including their home, businesses premises or in public places, which was at the discretion of each participant. Initially I planned to stage the interviews in much the same way I had done in previous school based research projects. As a result I began by developing a

series of questions (see Appendix 2) to help guide the interview process. Although my perception was that the interviews would be semi-structured, the numerous questions I initially planned to ask were narrowly focused, which created the feeling of a more formal, structured interview than I had envisioned. Early on in the initial interview it became apparent that sticking to the narrow script of my questions would deny participants agency in telling their stories and would likely yield sanitised and partial accounts of their narratives. As a result early on in the first interview I opted to abandon the structured questionnaire in favour of a non-directive approach to conducting the interviews, which involved enabling the participants to tell their stories with a minimum of direct questioning. Instead of asking a rigid set of questions, I invited the initial and all subsequent participants to discuss the following broad themes:

- Their involvement in education
- Their motivation to apply to open a free school and the provision they wanted to offer
- How they experienced the application process

There were several consequences of this decision to be less directive during interviews. Unburdened by questions, I observed that participants touched on all the areas identified in the original questionnaire but in greater depth and detail than likely would have been the case if they were responding to focused questions. The lack of interruption enabled participants to discuss their thoughts and feelings in a more free and detailed way. Overall, refraining from asking several focused questions enabled participant narratives to emerge in a way which was more expansive, reflexive and holistic. Essed (1991, p. 62) notes the importance of providing time for participants to express themselves observing that "when a delicate and serious problem is involved, such as experiences with racism, it is important to give interviewees enough space to quantify their statements and to elaborate their explanations", which, as I discovered, a series of structured questions asked in quick succession does not facilitate.

Another important consequence of abandoning the questionnaire is that it provided participants with autonomy and agency in recounting their stories, which is in keeping with emancipatory research approaches that strive to ensure participants play an active rather than passive role in the research process (Stanfield, 1994; Pillow, 2003). By allowing the participants to weave their own narrative, my unit of analysis expanded from the free school application process to wider educational and societal issues as participants made connections between current events and prior experiences, which enriched and expanded the data set. Although the participants' stories exist against the backdrop of the free school policy, their reach extends to illustrating wider processes of

exclusion in education. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), this is typical of CRT research in that the stories it generates often cover matters beyond the phenomenon of the research question and make links to relevant historical and contemporary issues.

Essed (1991) argues that locating narrators and their experiences in the social context of their everyday lives is an important feature of accounts of racism as this results data that is specific and detailed. For many participants, deciding to apply to open a free school was not an isolated experience. In general, it was part of a larger and often longstanding career focused on improving educational outcomes for black students. By providing space for participants to talk about their journey to deciding to apply to open a free school, I gained insight into their values and vision of education, which prompted me to begin to theorise about community assets (Yosso, 2000), which is the focus of Chapter 7. Often participants had moved on from applying to open a free school. By finding out more about what they had been doing in the aftermath of the application process, I was able to gather rich data about forms of resistance as the projects they were engaged with articulated their vision of education, embedded in a particular worldview, which prompted me to begin to think in terms of community assets, rather than just racism in the free school application process. Arguably this focus on forms of resistance introduced an important redemptive element into the research by enabling participants to narrate how they were responding to the racism they experienced, rather than limiting them to recounting painful experiences of racism, which may have been the case had I continued to use the original questionnaire. This is consistent with feedback received by some of the participants in this study who contacted me after being interviewed and reported that although they had not looked forward to rehashing painful memories, talking through the challenges of engaging with the free school policy had been a cathartic exercise. Overall, a holistic view of the participants emerged as a result of the change in my approach to conducting interviews, which is consistent with CRT's goal of challenging the skewed representations of ethnic minority communities that are often produced in research (Stanfield, 1994; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

A final consequence of taking a non-directive approach to conducting interviews is that it altered my role in the research process and the power dynamics between myself and the participants. Feminist scholars have long advocated for non-hierarchical relationships in the research process (Essed, 1991; Frankenberg, 1993). Collins (1990), for example, refers to a shared power that emerges between the researcher and the subject in emancipatory research, which is an accurate description of the dynamics which evolved as my research progressed. The shared power, she argues, emerges out of dialogue which is at the heart of the research process. Collins (1990) cites the work of hooks who has

theorized about the power of dialogue saying, “dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination” (hooks, 1989, p. 131 quoted in Collins, 1990). Ladson-Billings (2000) further suggests that constructing knowledge together has deep roots in African oral tradition and in African American culture. Ladson-Billings explains further that the central premise upon which European (and Euro-American) worldviews and epistemology rest is that the individual mind is the source of knowledge and existence. In contrast, she notes that the African epistemological stance is that I am because we are, and as a result individual existence (and knowledge) is contingent upon relationships with others (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 257). She suggests that within critical race research an interdependence emerges in the process whereby the researcher and the research participants both bring data (reflections on their experiences) to the table and through dialogue about their experiences, they create new knowledge. In this way the boundaries between researcher and researched are minimised and the researcher is situated firmly within the research as both a participant and researcher. As a result what emerges in the research process is “an anti-hierarchical relationship that deconstructs the power dynamics of the researcher-subject relationship present in traditional paradigms” (Stanfield, 1994, p. 178).

Although initially I assumed I would play the traditional role of an interviewer and planned to restrict myself to asking questions and listening to participant responses, once I relinquished the use of the questionnaire, the interviews became increasingly conversational. As participants recounted experiences of racism for example, I sometimes shared my own experiences, especially where I recognised the mechanisms used to secure racial domination, which had the effect of clarifying points for both myself and the participants about the nature of racism. According to Dixson and Rousseau (2005), scholars offering up their personal experiences for analysis is common within CRT research as these experiences are viewed as valid and valuable sources of knowledge which provide useful evidence in documenting and understanding inequity. My dialogue with research participants featured most strongly in the latter part of our discussions in which we shared experiences of confronting the persistent problems of race inequality in schooling and ideas about what if any role there was for black independent schooling in addressing patterns of underachievement. In these discussions many participants both challenged and altered my own thinking, which is reflective of the anti-hierarchical relationship that emerged. The discussion about black independent schools, which features in Chapter 7, emerged out of these dialogues and is an example of how they shaped the direction of the findings.

Other examples of dialogue included the sharing and discussing of aspects of the participants' stories across the research sample, which is consistent with Essed's (1991, p. 57) claim that often the "evaluation of experiences of racism includes not only events experienced, but also witnessed and reported events". Often participants had pre-existing partial knowledge of each other's stories which they sometimes referenced in their accounts. I also sometimes brought in aspects from previous interviews where there was a similarity of experience. This enabled me to examine with research participants the similarities and differences among stories within the research sample. Although in the presentation of the findings I have only referenced the participants' evaluation of their own experiences, rather than each other's, the dialogue nonetheless was important in helping to identify and analyse the significance of patterns of experiences and enhanced our mutual understandings of the complexity of racism in the free school application process. Although I offered up my experiences during discussions, I have refrained from including them within my analysis of the data, preferring instead to summarise how my personal experiences have shaped my understanding of race-based educational inequality and exclusion in the introductory chapter.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process my understanding of the importance of ethics and the ethical implications of the study grew. At the beginning of my research process, I had a narrow, somewhat clinical view of ethics. I regarded ethics as something which, though important, was essentially a paper based exercise which established the parameters of the research in a self-interested way. Tuwhani Smith (2012) argues for a more holistic definition of ethics that encompasses the spirit in which the research is conducted. The idea of research being guided by an overarching ethical standpoint was useful in terms of addressing challenges that presented themselves during the research process and thinking through the implications of the research for participants.
My participants occupied a range of positions, some were fiercely independent of the mainstream education system, particularly those working on self-funded projects who could be conceptualised as having the least to lose. Others had various degrees of entanglement with the system on which they were dependent for funding and/or accountable to in terms of inspection outcomes. Arguably, there was an additional layer of vulnerability for these research participants in speaking out about racism in the system given this complex entanglement, which illustrates Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) point that research is not an abstract academic activity, it has political and social implications (see also Bonilla-Silva, 2014). This is especially true for marginalized groups who often find themselves outside power structures within institutions.

Given the range of positions occupied by the participants, I have opted to provide anonymity for participants in the reporting of the findings by removing any details from stories which might contribute to the identification of a participant including place names and markers. In addition all participants have been given a pseudonym in the recording of the findings. I have also opted not to include excerpts from transcripts as part of my submission in a bid to further protect the identify of participants.

One of the challenges which arose during the course of conducting the research surrounded managing disclosures. During the process of collecting data, research participants often made disclosures which strengthened my emergent argument about the exclusion of black community practitioners/organisations from the free school application process. Quite often, however, at critical points in their stories, some participants asked for a portion of their story to be off the record, or indicated that they would like the recording device turned off. Often the 'off the record' parts contained information which would have advanced and strengthened my arguments. These incidents demonstrate the importance of researchers being flexible and responsive as sometimes research participants decide in the moment what their parameters are. Tyson notes that "if we are to engage in emancipatory research, we must stop trying to benefit ourselves, and engage in the process of researching for the greater good of our communities" (2003, p 23). In this sense, I had to be clear about prioritising the individual rights of participants over and above advancing the goals of this research, which is especially important in the context of a research paradigm which promotes agency. As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons I have chosen throughout the research to use the word participant, rather than the more commonly used interviewee or subject, is to reflect the agency of the individuals involved, which extends to letting them determine which aspects of their stories they want to offer up for publication.

One of the things I became increasingly aware of throughout the process was the vulnerability involved in recounting experiences of racism and therefore researchers' duty of care towards participants involved in race-based research. This is especially important in the context of an emancipatory framework which seeks to challenge historical abuses of power that have occurred in the name of research involving marginalised communities (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). During the research process participants shared a range of difficult emotions while recalling their involvement with the free school application process, which in most cases spanned a fraught two to three year period. Vargas (2003) argues that emotion is an important feature of CRT stories and renders them

powerful, memorable and potentially transformative, which challenges the common prioritisation of reason over emotion in traditional research frameworks. Stanfield (1994) also notes that emotion, which is inherent in personal accounts, is crucial in enabling research to produce holistic representations of ethnic minority communities. He notes:

> As so many non-Westerners view the social, emotional and the spiritual as integral parts of a whole person linked to a physical environment it would also be crucial for such a qualitative methods epistemology to be grounded in holistic rather than fragmented and dichotomized notions of human beings. Operationally this would be done through the collection of oral histories that allow people of colour to articulate holistic views of their life (1994, p. 185).

As part of my commitment to presenting holistic rather than sanitised representations of the participants, I have included the emotional utterances and gestures which informed their verbal accounts of their experiences in the presentation of my findings. Stanfield (1993) also raises the issue of the potential for overly academic language to diminish the emotional impact of narrative accounts citing the tendency of professional jargon to “stifle if not outright destroy the passion that is an important element of understanding the complex depths of race, racism, ethnicity and ethnocentrism” (1993, p. 11). In this study I have strived to use simple, clear language in the hopes of creating an authentic representation of the participant accounts and increasing the accessibility of the study, although working within the conventions of a thesis is undoubtedly a limiting factor in my choices.

As well as thinking about the language used to present research findings, Tuhaiwai Smith (2012) also argues that where and how findings are disseminated also has ethical implications, which are often overlooked. She suggests that although research has become institutionalised, communities of colour have always researched their own lived experiences in many forms outside the academy as discussed at the outset of the chapter. There is scope, therefore, for scholars to continue this tradition by sharing research findings in a range of formats and settings, including community based ones. At the time of this writing, I have begun to contact participants to discuss how best to present the findings in community based contexts. Regardless, however, of what attempts researchers make to subvert the narrow options available for disseminating findings, Stanfield reminds us of the uncomfortable truth that “career rewards of authorship more than likely, extend exclusively to the researcher” (1994, p. 176). This idea is echoed by Frankenberg (1993, p. 29) who notes that in spite of the claims made about developing anti-hegemonic relationships between researchers and subjects, a power imbalance remains nonetheless based on the fact that the researcher “sets the

agenda and edits the material, analyzes, it publishes it, and thereby takes both credit and blame for the overall results".

Data Analysis

Throughout the research process, a number of my own rigid assumptions about what constitutes data and how data is analysed were challenged. In particular, I had always assumed data was something collected by the researcher and then taken away and mulled over afterwards privately. Conducting this research has challenged this narrow conceptualisation of what it means to analyse data and who can engage in analysing data. In particular, I realise that through conversations with participants, I was engaging in analysis throughout the process and was constantly recalibrating my thinking and achieving new layers of understanding as a result of dialoguing with participants. My analysis of the data was therefore in part integrated into the data collection process, rather than occurring discretely, which challenged my assumption that the research process was comprised of separate elements unfolding in a fixed sequence. Throughout the research I was struck by how fluid the process was rather than segmented into separate elements, which is reflected in Carter's observation that "by co-constructing meaning, the researcher is no longer dependent upon processes that dictate how to analyse and interpret data" (2003, p. 31). One of the things which has made writing this chapter challenging is that it has been difficult to dissect the research process and present it in neatly ordered and organised sections. What follows, nonetheless, is an attempted summary of how I analysed the data.

All of the interviews I conducted were audio taped and then transcribed by hand. As mentioned above, a verbatim account of the interview was created to include non-verbal features of communication, which provided important emotional context for the verbal accounts. Through the process of transcribing interviews, reoccurring patterns of experience became apparent which were identified as overarching themes for further exploration. Essed (1991, p. 59) notes that the identification of patterns is important because consistency between data provided by different informants is important in establishing the reliability of the data. She further notes the likelihood of identifying patterns based on the fact that "everyday racism is a process of (relative) uniformity of practice in everyday situations which therefore makes it good to research" (1991, p. 188). This is echoed by Collins' (1997) assertion that it is "plausible to generate arguments about working class and/or black culture that emerge from long standing shared experiences" (1997, p. 378; see also Delgado, 1990).

Once my overarching themes were identified, the data was then collated by theme. Once collated, each theme was further examined and sub themes were identified and these ultimately provided a structure for the analysis and reporting of findings. Data which did not fit into a theme, or which was in some way contradictory or deviated from other accounts, was also collated under the heading miscellaneous. Data from this category has been included in the findings to demonstrate where there were contrary accounts or perceptions among the sample, which is important in guarding against essentialising the participants and their experiences, as explored earlier. Examples of contrasting views which emerged through interviews mainly concerned the role of the New Schools Network (NSN), the organisation established by the government to assist applicants with the process of applying. Although several participants were critical of what they perceived to be the lack of support received from the NSN, one participant spoke favourably of her interactions with them. Participants also varied in their opinions about the scale of racism encountered, which is explored in the next chapter.

Once my sub-themes were identified, I continued to analyse my data by reviewing transcripts of interviews and my notes taken both during and after interviews. I also continued to engage with literature about free schools which continued to be published throughout the period of the study. This process enabled me to formalise the ideas which emerged out of my conversations with participants and begin to theorise about the significance of the patterns of experience identified in the data. In the presentation of my findings I have attempted to strike a balance between the existing literature, the data and my analysis of the data. As part of my commitment to enabling participants to speak for themselves, often large, unedited chunks of their verbal accounts feature in the findings, which both describe events and often extend to including their own analysis of those events. For the sake of clarity, italics have been used to indicate the participants' speech and to distinguish it from my own analysis, or the work of other scholars who also appear in the reporting of the findings.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the methodological approach used in the study which rests on the assumption that focusing on the experiences of ethnic minority communities provides the best route to exposing the social relations, processes and practices which reproduce racism. In order to establish the credibility of the study, the chapter has examined my personal and professional stance

in relation to the research and the activist histories of the participants, which make them well placed to identify racism. The chapter has also examined how emancipatory methodologies challenge traditional research paradigms by reimagining a number of aspects of the research process. In particular, the chapter has drawn on Collins' (1990) idea of a shared power which emerges between the researcher and the researched and the role of dialogue in the construction of knowledge, used in my case to help shape both the data collection and analysis process. Having provided an overview of the research process, the following two chapters focus on presenting the findings which emerged out of the participants' verbal accounts of their engagement with the free school application process.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS - RACISM AND FREE SCHOOLS

This chapter interrogates the role of race in the free school application and approval process by examining a number of hidden barriers experienced by participants throughout the process of applying to open a free school. Some of these barriers were the result of the process which was established to assess applications, while others emerged out of the way the policy is being implemented by DfE officials. The chapter also explores how race permeated the participants' experiences in the post-approval, pre-opening phase, a largely unremarked upon and therefore concealed aspect of the application process.

Free School Application and Approval Process

As explored in Chapter 4, Higham's (2014) research revealed that one of the hidden inequalities within the free school application process is the differing levels of access to resources applicants draw on which predetermines application outcomes. This assertion is evidenced by the fact that the current free school landscape is dominated by large established academy chains who have extensive capital and resources to draw on in support of their applications. In contrast, many of the participants referenced the incredible personal sacrifice involved in working as part of small proposal teams to repeatedly submit applications over a two to four year period. Kwame, for example, cited the volume of work involved saying, "*There was loads and loads of paper work. We had loads and loads of meetings. We worked on it for 18 months from the idea to submission*". Others in the sample also referenced regular weekend meetings and late nights working and trying to fit the research and preparatory work around family and work commitments. Pauline exemplifies the level of personal sacrifice involved in the process saying, "*I remember the 3rd application we sent was 114 pages. It was incredibly detailed. I had to stop work. Leave work to be able to do it. I found coming in from work and then having to deal with that too tiring so I just packed in work and concentrated on that*". By demonstrating how demanding the process was, the participants' experiences challenge the claims that anyone can open a free school or that the process rewards hard work equally among applicants. Their experiences highlight how the seemingly neutral application process facilitates the exclusion of individuals and organisations with less access to resources. This exclusion is well masked, however, by the meritocratic discourse surrounding the process which contends that the best applications naturally reveal themselves via a competitive process, which erroneously shifts attention away from the inequality embedded in the process and onto the implied inadequacy of the rejected applicants.

In addition to highlighting the unequal access to resources among free school proposers, the participants' experiences build on Higham's (2014) research by introducing race as an additional factor in the inequality embedded within the free school application process. Many participants were motivated to apply to open a school because of a desire to address the chronic underachievement of black children in the education system. Participants revealed however, that they felt compelled to conceal this agenda on the basis that overt references to race would not be palatable to the government, which is in keeping with the way race is largely ignored in British education policy as explored in Chapter 3. Samantha, the parent proposer whose bid to open a secondary free school was unsuccessful, shared the conscious decision she made to minimise anything which could be construed as being part of a larger black agenda in her proposal. She notes, *"there was an optional after school club to learn African languages, which was the only overt feature of the school you could claim was black*". Susan, who led a predominately black proposal team, similarly describes the proactive stance she took against being perceived as a black organisation. She notes*, "We were very careful in our marketing to make sure we included white children to show we were open to everyone"*. Afua, a long-time community activist, describes the compromises involved in framing her proposed free school. In regards to her application she notes,

> *It was going to be a Christian school which was open to everyone and what we said was that we would take into account that because of where we were based the majority of the children were going to be African Caribbean and that we would take their needs into account. Some people said we shouldn't do that because if you say that on the application you are going to automatically lose it and some people say why should we have to hide? We should just say this is what we want because we have a right to do that because there are Jewish schools and Chinese schools so why do we have to pretend?*

The participants' comments demonstrate the range of strategies some free school proposers took to minimise the perception of a black agenda, including omitting aspects of their application which could be perceived as black, centring whiteness in the optics of the school and finding indirect ways (geographic location) to rationalise catering to blacks students, in order to fit within governmental expectations and increase the likelihood of their school opening. Their experiences highlight the additional burden they faced in having to mediate how their free school application would be perceived through what they presumed would be a white gaze, suggesting Du Bois' notion of double consciousness remains a salient ones (1903). Afua, Samantha and Susan's attempts to downplay a black agenda reveal their shared assumption that the government perceives blackness negatively, and consequently being overtly associated with blackness would minimise their chances of being

approved to open a free school. Their shared construction of the powerful white government who is disapproving of all things black demonstrates the ideological component of racism which permeates society as discussed by Essed (1991) and Bonilla-Silva (2014). The participants' experiences also highlight the impossibility of divorcing policy from deep-rooted racial dynamics in society and illustrate how these dynamics are always in operation despite colourblind policy discourses.

For some participants it was important not to conceal their desire to influence the education of black children in a positive way. Viola, whose application was unsuccessful, explained that "*We said our school was based on an African philosophy. We weren't saying we would be exclusively African but it would be based on an African philosophy"*. Although the philosophy was not cited as the reason the application was rejected, which is in keeping with the covert nature of 'new racism' (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), it is certainly possible the African philosophy was nonetheless a contributing factor in the rejection of the application. This is especially likely given that as has been discussed, the UK government has had a longstanding aversion to race-based educational programming. As Chapter 3 discussed, this aversion is reflected in the way successive governments have sought to address ethnic minority achievement gaps by improving standards throughout the school system, rather than through targeted programming that addresses systemic barriers impacting on ethnic minority pupils. Zamudio et al. (2011) note that one of the ways colourblindness functions is by actively denouncing any programming that addresses race or racial inequality overtly in order to stifle conversations about race, which are threatening to its existence. Although difficult to prove, within a colourblind policy context, Viola's decision to speak overtly about race by naming the African philosophy of her school, may have been a contributing factor in her exclusion from opening a school. It is important to highlight the exclusion of proposals which deviate from dominant ideas about schooling because it disrupts the idea of openness and freedom, which are the supposed rationale for the free school policy and highlights instead how the government is using the policy to reproduce schools which affirm their ideology of schooling. This is consistent with Essed's (1991, p. 199) assertion that "the dominant group defines progress in the system by the extent to which their value orientation is maintained". In this instance, Viola's African-centred school directly challenges the dominant marketised model of education and is therefore thwarted. The fact that her exclusion is facilitated through seemingly benign procedures and processes, demonstrates the covertness of racism in the free school application and approval process, which makes it very difficult to contest.

Some participants observed that regardless of whether or not you positioned yourself as having a black agenda, you were ascribed one by the media who was complicit in conflating black free school proposers with race related agendas. Pauline for example explains,

> *I used to find it really irritating that people would look at us and assume it was a black school, they were always asking us is it a black school? We were asked by one newspaper, your borough has a big problem with gangs, how are you going to combat that? I remember answering we hope to give our children a different set of aspirations. The next thing you know it was printed in the newspaper that our school was going to be a school where we were going to reform gangsters.*

On another occasion Pauline recounts a white media personality inviting her to participate in a radio show to discuss her proposed school. Pauline recalls, *"she introduced the school as a school for reformed gangsters and I was sitting there seething. One of the people who called in was a reformed gangster who was saying the school was a really good idea. He was called D and the host was like, oh Pauline do you know D?"*

The exchange suggests some black free school proposers were subject to an additional layer of scrutiny by the media. In this instance the host made a number of racist assumptions which contributed to the construction of Pauline's proposed school as one focused on criminal rehabilitation. Although her proposal referenced wanting to reach boys from disadvantaged backgrounds, which is in keeping with the non-raced language favoured by the government and widely used in education for the past decade, the host conflates disadvantage with being black, which in turn is conflated with gang membership. The radio host's casual comment is clearly microaggressive as she assumes the right to speak over and on behalf of Pauline, thereby enacting the power and privilege she enjoys which are derived from both her professional status and racial background. Arguably, by erroneously imposing a gang reform agenda onto Pauline's school, the host may have disadvantaged her application by appealing to stereotypes which engender fear and hatred in society, which is significant in a demand led process.

The participants' proposals were in fact informed by diverse educational philosophies, which is explored in the next chapter. The media's inability or unwillingness to recognise and engage with the nuances of Pauline's application, embody a key feature of racism which is the insistence on dealing in group stereotypes. This phenomenon was also experienced by Susan, whose religious beliefs played an important role in her life, which was reflected in the Christian ethos at the heart of her proposed provision. In her dealings with the DfE, which are explored later in this chapter, she was

subjected to low expectations of her capacity as a result of her racial identity, which obscured her religious identity and the overall goal of her proposed provision. The government and media's refusal to recognise the individual context of the proposers is contradictory given that the policy was founded on the basis of securing the rights and freedoms of individuals, which is a key feature of the neoliberal ideology in which the policy is situated. This contradiction provides another illustration of how the ideals of liberalism are applied both self-interestedly and selectively in free school policy discourse, which exemplifies the concept of abstract liberalism advanced by Bonilla-Silva (2014). In this instance the government and media assume the right to decide who is deserving of being judged as an individual and who is subjected to group based stereotypes, which serves white domination. Dyer (1997) explains this phenomenon clearly saying, "the privilege of being white, in white culture is not to be subjected to stereotyping in relation to one's whiteness" (p. 11). As a result, he contends that "white people in their whiteness are imaged as individual and/or endlessly diverse, complex and changing" (p. 12). He further notes that in contrast to this, stereotypes are routinely applied to subordinated social groups and are "one of the means by which they are categorised and kept in their place "(p. 12).

The use of photographic identification during the application process is one of several examples of the contradictory way in which colourblindness functioned in the free school application process. On the one hand the government demonstrated their refusal to acknowledge race either through direct mention of it in policy documents, or through the creation of systems to collect contextual information about applicants. On the other hand, by insisting that participants present their passports at the outset of the application process, they established a process which indirectly enabled them to unofficially monitor race. The requirement to present your passport was a contentious one that was mentioned often during the interviews. For example Viola, who was part of a loose alliance of a number of black community groups working together to submit applications, noted that,

> *Actually, at one point we were going to mount a legal challenge. I was writing on behalf of a group of us to say well we find it somehow not correct that to set up a free school, the people who are the founders have to set up a company and you had to send through to confirm who you are a passport picture, your national insurance number, your bank account details. Now when you set up a business you don't usually need your passport picture, your national insurance number and your bank account details. There was some feeling which was voiced that perhaps having a picture- because you can't tell our background from our name- there was the feeling there was a hidden agenda and because the evidence bears this out.*

Viola rightly questions why, from the very outset of the process, the government needed to know the background of participants. This is especially curious given that proposers who progress through the initial application screening process are invited to interview at which point their identity is revealed, and scrutiny into applicant backgrounds would be more pertinent as a condition of advancing to the final stage. The issue of passports undermines the idea of the application process being an objective one in which everyone is given a fair chance by introducing information into the process which participants felt disadvantaged by. The issue also further highlights how the seemingly neutral processes established as part of the application procedures produce racial outcomes.

Trevor also expressed his frustration with being asked repeatedly for passport evidence. He reported, "*I don't know what the experience of other schools has been but we have been asked for our birth certificate and passport at least six times, at least six times!* [Bangs table for emphasis]. *The issue is they don't trust us. I'm sure they look into your background, inside out and every which way*". Like Viola, Trevor's comments reveal his belief that the issue of photographic evidence unfairly disadvantaged him. His reflection also reveals his belief that the government were hyper vigilant about scrutinising the backgrounds of black applicants as a result of their preconceived negative ideas about blackness.

Although it is not possible to prove that Black applicants were disproportionately subjected to more stringent identity checks, there is emergent evidence of inconsistency in the way applications were assessed during the first few years of the policy, rendering it a possibility . McInerney published an article in the Guardian in March 2016 in which she described a three year legal battle she endured with the government in order to gain access to the rejection letters issued to free school applicants between 2010-2012. She eventually gained access to more than 600 rejection letters which she scrutinised. Her examination of the rejection letters identified contradictions in the reasons why some schools were rejected and others not. She concluded that, "It is difficult to come to any conclusion from the letters other than that the decision-making process was chaotic and inconsistently applied between 2010 and 2012" (2016, n.p.), which overlaps with the period my research participants applied to open schools. McInerney's (2016) findings are corroborated by research carried out earlier by the National Audit Office in 2013 which also identified a number of contradictions in the application and approval process. They cited, for example, that 23% of applications that scored highly on independent evaluations were rejected, while 17% of low-scoring ones were accepted, evidencing inconsistency in the evaluation of free school applications (2013, p. 8).

Neither McInerney (2016) nor the National Audit Office (2013) make any reference to race in their findings, which is consistent with research about free schools and likely stems in part from the lack of available ethnicity data about free school proposers. Nonetheless, the research is helpful in contextualising the participants' experiences of rejections within a wider pattern of experience.

Among the sample one of the starkest examples of discrepancy in the assessesment of applications concerns Pauline, who submitted a total of four unsuccessful applications in as many years. After the submission of her first application in early 2010 Pauline notes, *"I received an email from the DfE saying my application would not be progressed because I had neglected to consult with local businesses but when I visited the How to Apply guidance, there was no mention of consulting with local businesses.*" Pauline's experience highlights the government's lack of accountability to its own published guidance, which was enabled by the covert nature of the approval process they engineered. In her fourth and final application, Pauline decided to outsource a portion of her application to a large, well-established education company, who had already been involved in supporting a number of successful applications, in the hopes of increasing her chances of approval. She notes,

> *This company did the financial plans. They had a lot of applications they were working on at the same time and they all submitted the same financial plans, with the same benchmarks. Just before Christmas I got an email from the DfE saying your financial plan is of limited quality. I thought hang on this wasn't done by me like the last three, this was done by the professionals. So I got in touch with the company and found out that the other three organisations with identical plans had all been successful, but ours was of limited quality. At this point, I thought this is a different agenda, I'm going to walk away.*

The incident gives credence to the idea that who was doing the proposing, rather than what was being proposed, was a significant factor in the way applications were assessed. Pauline's experience of being discriminated against in her bid to open a free school exemplifies Leonarado's (2009, p. 261) assertion that "in order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions and policies that white subjects perpetuate on people of colour". In this instance the government's use of the concealed approval process to issue contrary feedback to black and white applicants about identical financial plans can be viewed as a deliberate act designed to secure domination.

Other participants also identified the feedback they received on their applications as a site for the reproduction of inequality. Many participants expressed their frustration about being given

ambiguous reasons for the rejection of their applications and minimal constructive feedback, which they felt stymied their chances of having resubmitted applications approved. Viola, for example, expressed her frustration with the process saying:

> *We felt the reasons given for not putting us through were not substantial and when we looked at the other (black) organisations; they were also not given substantial reasons. I suspected there was unfairness in terms of how they were judged because it felt like whatever you fixed to get right, the next time it was something else they found wrong and so on.*

Viola's observation reveals her perception of the constantly shifting and often contradictory nature of the feedback received. Although the feedback given was often seemingly innocuous and was always couched in professional jargon, exemplifying the neutral language of colourblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), it is important to focus on the effects of the feedback and how it created a pattern of exclusion.

Given the lack of data about the racial backgrounds of proposers, there is no way to evidence whether and to what extent black applicants were disproportionately rejected. The participant accounts of differential treatment in the application and approval process, however, begin to establish a body of evidence about the additional barriers they experienced in the application process.

One of the key themes that emerged in the data concerned the government's responses to and interactions with black proposal teams. Trevor, for example, described the burden of having to engage with the government's perception of his predominately black proposer group. He explained that when he became involved with the core proposal group, they were initially proposing to open a large secondary school. Early on in the process however, the group amended their plans and decided instead to submit an application to open a primary school. Trevor explains the rationale to scale back their plans saying, "*The issue is they are not going to trust us with a budget of 30 or 50 million running an all through school"*. The comment provides another example of how black proposers were disadvantaged by having to find ways to pre-empt and circumnavigate the limits imposed on them by racism, which reinforces racial hierarchies.

Trevor shared his perception that the initial stumbling block in getting the application for a primary school approved was not any aspect of the application itself, but rather the make-up of the proposal team. He explains:

> *When the core team leader went in with the team which was all black, that's what they didn't like. They wanted more diversity on the*

> *board, I mean how you can get more diverse? There were Asians, there were blacks so in the next round we added several white people to the core team and were approved with the same application.*

The incident gives credence to the idea that all-black leadership teams were perceived by the government, either consciously or unconsciously, as posing a threat to white domination and were therefore excluded from opening free schools.

The incident also reveals the contradictory way the term diversity is often employed. In the government's construction the requisite components of diversity include a white body who provides the benchmark, or norm, against which non-white people are judged as diverse, which as explored in Chapter 2 is crucial to the sustenance of white domination. The differences between the non-white members are both devalued and rendered invisible in this definition of diversity, which centres and affirms whiteness. One of the effects of this construction of diversity is that it maintains the status quo by insisting that white people occupy positions of power in organisations in the name of facilitating diversity. Arguably another more subtle by-product of this construction of diversity is that it situates white people in positions that enable them to monitor 'otherness' within organisations and institutions thereby cementing their power and control.

Viola also commented on contradictions within the government's approach to diversity. She explained that her proposal team deliberately framed celebrating diversity as a key component of their school, which mirrored the popular discourse surrounding the London Olympics which was occurring at the time. Reflecting on the rejection of her application, she noted that *"When Britain wants to bid, for example for the Olympics, they will push on that idea of how diverse London is, the idea that it attracts the world to it's shores, as the capital city but suddenly when it actually comes to educating children, it's pushed to the side"*. Her comments illustrate how the government embraces diversity in a tokenistic and self-interested way when it is perceived to be to their benefit but that in the context of free schools it exercises its power to determine which kinds of diversity are acceptable and when they are permissible, which sustains white hegemony. This is consistent with Bonilla-Silva's (2014, p. 7) assertion that "colourblind racism rearticulates elements of traditional liberalism for racially illiberal goals".

Kwame, who was part of an all-black proposal team, also cited the government's inability to embrace black proposal teams as a factor in the negative outcome of his group's application. He cited in particular the fact that someone very senior in international banking had oversight of their financial blueprint and yet the government rejected their application on the basis of having an

insufficient financial plan. Kwame notes that when they compared their application to others which had been approved in their area there was little discernible difference in their financial plans, which raises questions about the authenticity of the feedback received and the possibility of racism as a contributing factor in their repeated rejections. When I asked Kwame why he felt his application was rejected by the DfE, he offered, "*Officially, they said it was because our finance application wasn't up to date or something like that but the real reason is that they don't want black schools even though we didn't call it a black school".* By highlighting the group's failure to meet the application success criteria, the government employs a meritocratic rationale to frame the rejection which achieves the desired goal of filtering out an unwanted application. Crucially, the government manufactures the exclusion without reference to race, which is consistent with the increasingly covert nature of racism (Essed, 1991; Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

The issue of all-black proposal teams became a flash point that was widely reported in the press when a parent won the right to appeal the government's decision to reject an application submitted by a black proposal team on the grounds that the proposed school was essential for her children to attend. In briefing documents erroneously leaked by the DfE during the judicial review, the following was written under the heading 'Reason for Rejection', "I recommend that this school not be approved. This is not a school for the local community. It is for the black community. The proposers are Afro Caribbean and all their mentors are black" (Garner, 2014). The statement corroborates the participants' beliefs that they were discriminated against in the application process because of the government's disdain for all-black proposal teams. The incident also further demonstrates the fallacy of colourblindness. Although race was visibly absent from free school policy documents and the participants' rejections were always couched in non-racial language, the leaked document revealed how race, nonetheless, was a topic of conversation among government officials behind closed doors. The incident gives credence to Bonilla-Silva's (2014) contention that in public spaces colourblind racism employs polite, de-raced language which contrasts with the short hand raced language it defaults to in private spaces.

The government's remarks also further demonstrate their aversion to race-based provision, which as has been discussed in Chapter 3, has long been the stance of successive British governments on the basis that they decentre and threaten white domination. The problematising of a school 'for the black community' demonstrates how black free school proposers were disadvantaged by the government ascribing to them agendas incompatible with the free school policy, despite the fact that in many cases, they submitted applications with little if any direct reference to race. The comment gives credence to the participants' assumption that their applications would be filtered

through a white gaze, further exposing the fallacy of an objective process. In this instance the white gaze dismisses the application in question on the basis that it is situated within a community that does not centre whiteness, which implies that whiteness is an essential legitimising component of a 'local community'. The naming of black proposers and mentors can also be interpreted as the rejection of black agency, which poses a threat to white domination. The idea that the black community is somehow separate (other) from the local community is curious given that in many instances the neighbourhoods where black free school proposers sought to open schools were ones where the black community was synonymous with the local community. Dyer (1997) explains that while whiteness claims for itself the right to represent and speak for a common universal experience, it presumes that raced people can only represent their own race, which is consistent with the government's assumption that the proposers are only capable of and interested in addressing the needs of black communities.

Both Glenroy and Viola briefly addressed the irrational nature of the government's negative views of black communities. Glenroy notes that:

> *This community is a conservative one. We don't want anything different from what they want, i.e. the establishment. We actually buy into this meritocracy thing far more than they do. Hard work as an ethic is engrained in us. We have to try twice as hard, three times as hard as European people. That's accepted by us. You just get on with it. That's part of our culture...The idea of having to try three times as hard is normalised. That's quite consistent with what they want. We have no intention of bringing down the system. Quite to the contrary, we reinforce the system.*

At the outset of his examination of Britain's post war black education movements, Warmington (2014, ix) similarly ascribes conservative aspirations to black communities saying, "At root what black educators, parents and students want in terms of education, is much the same as what any of their neighbours want". Viola also framed the community as conservative in terms of its values (rather than in the political sense), musing:

> *I think, if you can generalise, the black community, like the rest of this country is actually quite conservative, in the sense we want our children to have discipline at school, we want them to do homework, we want them to be challenged, we don't want them to be running up and down doing whatever they want, we want them to get a good job in the traditional professions.*

As has been discussed both in the introduction and in Chapter 5's examination of essentialism, it is not possible to speak of a singular, unified black community, a point well illustrated by the diversity within the small sample assembled in this research. Nonetheless, Glenroy and Viola's

characterisation of black communities is important because it challenges the enduring and entrenched stereotypes of black communities as necessarily oppositional to white interests and therefore inherently dangerous.

In response to the controversy over the leaked document, a DfE spokesperson stated, “Ministers approve only applications which have the best chance of success and meet our strict criteria. Our judgment was this application did not meet this high bar" (Garner, 2014). The spokesperson’s comments further demonstrate how the concept of meritocracy is used to facilitate and justify discrimination. In this instance meritocracy is employed as a gatekeeper to justify the exclusion of unwanted ideas from the free school landscape under the pretence of upholding high standards. By placing the emphasis on the fact that the school did not meet the prescribed standards, the government deflects attention away from their own biases in judging applications, while reaffirming their power to make decisions about applications.

The participants’ experiences uncover a number of ways they were disadvantaged by and discriminated against in the process of applying to open free schools, all of which were concealed from public view. The specific strategies employed to facilitate their exclusion identified in this research include: the use of misleading feedback; judging identical applications or elements within applications differently depending on the racial background of the applicants; thwarting proposed provision which was, or was perceived to be in any way, race-based; and regarding black led and exclusively black proposal teams with suspicion. The identification of these strategies and their effects is important because it provides an essential counter narrative to the rhetoric about the fair, meritocratic approval process boasted about by the government.

Unequal Partnerships

As discussed in Chapter 4, between 2010 and 2013 the application process underwent several revisions and became increasingly complex and demanding. Some participants who were working in small organisations responded by establishing partnerships with larger organisations in order to increase their access to resources in support of their application. The participants’ experiences demonstrate how the partnerships which emerged were often both uneasy and unequal as clear power dynamics emerged which disadvantaged small black community organisations.
Often black organisations were approached by larger organisations who sought partnership arrangements in running a school. Pauline, for example, explained:

Two years ago I got an email from an organisation and they asked to see us because they were interested in running the school so I went to meet them in their office. They said we would like to run your school and I asked them why and they said we share the same ethos, targeting children from disadvantaged backgrounds. They said just give me your education plan, we have an experienced team, we have a bank of principals. I said with all due respect I intend to run my own school. They said, well why would you want to do that but if you insist you could interview among our principals and see how you get on. They had no intention of including me or anyone in my team. When I got there they actually had a contract for me to sign saying everything would be their intellectual property within ten months and of course we refused to sign it.

The exchange further evidences the wealth of resources large companies dominating the free school landscape draw on including access to offices, legal advice and personnel. The interaction also demonstrates how relations of domination were constantly in motion throughout the application process. In this case the Trust makes a clear presumption about their supreme and superior ability to run the school. In contrast Pauline is invited to interview to work in the school she has birthed, illustrating the default assumption that she isn't capable and therefore needs to be subjected to a rigorous selection process to prove her worth. The demand for the education plan, which Pauline and her team devoted themselves to developing over a period of several years, is evidence of an unequal and paternalistic relationship reminiscent of one between a colonial power and one of its territories. In this instance the company exerts its rights to extract resources from the smaller, lesser organisation (Pauline) in order to increase its already substantial wealth in a clear example of the operationalisation of power. The interaction further exemplifies the covert nature of contemporary racism as polite, non-raced language is used by the Trust to engineer Pauline's exclusion.

Glenroy recounts a similar experience surrounding some initial negotiations which took place regarding the possibility of teaming up with a powerful academy chain to run a school together:

We put in a proposal and x Academy apparently put in a similar proposal at roughly the same time although our proposal preceded theirs. When x Academy's proposal was given favour they invited us on board. I have no idea what their motive was but I suspect it provided legitimacy to them in providing education in an all African area. We withdrew from that process because we recognised that our input into the process was going to be minimal and selective and we fully appreciated that there may well be a political motive for inviting us to take part i.e. to act as an endorsement for the Academy and again that wasn't something acceptable. It was misleading towards the people we intended to serve. So we stopped it.

In this example Glenroy and the core proposal team decided on moral grounds to opt out of a relationship with the organisation, in effect refusing to occupy the position assigned to them in the relations of domination. In doing so, however, they effectively opted out of the free school process altogether which highlights the lack of choice available to small community organisations in a process that is lauded as being free and open. Glenroy's comments also demonstrate how larger organisations sought to exploit smaller black organisations by using them to give legitimacy to schools opening in predominately black areas, which betrays a superficial and tokenistic approach to community engagement and empowerment. Although large academy chains engaged in opening free schools in ethnically diverse areas sought to engineer favourable optics about working with local communities through strategic partnerships, Glenroy and Pauline's experience suggests that behind closed doors they were committed to maintaining the status quo of self-serving power dynamics which sustained their domination.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Wildman (1995) argues that members of the privileged group benefit in numerous ways from their affiliation with the dominant side of the power system, although this is never acknowledged. One of the questions the domination of academy chains in the free school landscape raises is whether their pre-existing relationships with the DfE privileged their applications. One example of how large academy chains may have been advantaged by their access to the government is illustrated by Pauline who explained:

> *We got involved with a well-known educational consultant company. I gave them my application and the first thing they said was you shouldn't have to re-apply, your application is strong. The contact I was working with gave me the Secretary of Education's personal email address as well as the email address of the Director of free schools and she said, write to them and set up a meeting.*

Although this was mentioned as an aside in a much larger story, I was struck by the privileged access the company had to the most senior officials with oversight of education policy in England. The casual way in which the education company advised Pauline to seek an off the record conversation with top officials in order to improve her chances of approval, suggests they were accustomed to these kinds of conversations occurring. The exchange implies that running parallel to the official paper based application process, was an unofficial, concealed process that involved a select group of already powerful individuals in conversation with the government, which undoubtedly advantaged their applications. Reflecting on her entanglement with the free school application process, Pauline echoes Higham's (2014) findings about the role of cultural capital in contributing to successful applications. Specifically, she shares her conviction that the government extended preferential treatment in the judging of applications to groups already known to them, which disadvantaged

groups of black parents who were less likely to have personal connections with DfE officals. She concludes, "You *have no chance of opening a free school unless you are part of an academy chain or you come under sponsor of an academy or an educational trust. This whole thing about any parent group was a complete myth. It was an absolute myth. None of them got through or unless you had friends in the government like Toby Young and stuff like that*".

The pairing of large academy chains that were already affiliated with the DfE with small grassroots black organisations also raises questions about whether these pairings fulfilled an additional aim of diluting/diminishing the sphere of influence of black organisations, while providing the government with a mechanism for the surveillance and control of black organisations about whom they were inherently distrustful. The interplay between the government, large academy chains and small grassroots black organisations, which occurred beyond the public's view, provide further evidence of how the implementation of the free school policy reinforced white domination and racial subordination.

Although many potential partnerships between large academy chains and small grassroots organisations broke down, one of the research participants, who submitted a joint application with a well-established education company, had their application approved. In her description of the working relationship which developed between herself as the lead person representing the initial predominately black proposal group and the representative from the education Trust they partnered with, a distinctive power dynamic is apparent. Susan notes, "*It became a case of the Trust delegating and saying this needs doing, that needs doing and I would go away and do it. It was a whirlwind. We applied in April and were approved in August"*. Although Susan was not critical of the relationship which evolved, her comments reveal relations of domination in which Susan ceases to be the one driving the school forward and making decisions about the direction of the school. Instead, she fulfils the wishes of the education Trust by completing the tasks she is delegated, suggesting a shift in the balance of power. It is also worth noticing the speed at which the application was approved, which is in contrast to the drawn out process described by other participants who submitted applications independently, suggesting the government was more willing to embrace applications submitted by organisations already running schools, which conflicts with the idea of welcoming new providers and new ways of working onto the school landscape.

The partnership which emerged also had implications for the initial core proposal group who had previously been involved in decision making about the future direction of the school. Susan explains

that once the partnership was established, "*It really became a me and her (the representative from the Trust) show. Where the team came in was the walking the streets, handing out leaflets, stopping and talking to people to share the vision of the school, that's where the team came* in". Susan's comments reveal how the partnership with the Trust effectively sidelined the initial core group of multi skilled black professionals drawn from a church congregation and relegated them to frontline promotion of the school through their networks in the local community. This dynamic demonstrates how black participants were asked to 'be the face' of the school in order to lend it credibility as a community initiative, while their association with and influence over the direction of the school was minimised.

Throughout the process, Susan retained a sense of admiration for the Trust representative she worked with. She described her as, *"A clever lady. Privately educated, has a master's degree. She taught in an inner city area, but I got the feeling she did it just to say she had taught but I don't think she could hack it really. She was a very clever lady. She's gone on to open a string of free schools. She's the Director of something or other*". As explored earlier, Higham's (2014) research revealed that proposers with powerful professional networks and a specific form of cultural capital associated with white middle class professionals, were disproportionately successful in getting their free school applications approved. Susan's description of the woman suggests she possesses exactly the cultural capital identified by Higham (2014) in his research. In contrast, Susan who had 20 years' experience working as a teacher in schools in her local area, possessed different, equally valuable kinds of cultural capital. She was an active member of her church and had a high profile in her local community, having won a number of awards in recognition of her community work. Wildman (1995, p. 577) notes that in order to understand how privilege functions it is crucial to recognise that "the characteristics of the privileged group define the societal norm, which benefits the privileged group". In the case of this research, as noted in Chapter 4, the skills and knowledge required to open a free school are narrowly defined by the government and reflect their experiences and interests, which gives the representative from the Trust a privileged position over Susan who possesses different kinds of cultural capital, rooted in her knowledge of teaching and of the local community. The devaluing of Susan's skill set is ironic given that Susan embodies exactly the description of the local parent, educator and concerned citizen the government invited to get involved in running free schools in their 2010 White Paper. In practice however, she is overshadowed by someone who lacks knowledge of and involvement with the local community, but instead has an official kind of credentialised knowledge which gives her legitimacy in the eyes of the government. Susan's experience highlights well the contradictions between the public discourse of empowerment and

freedom surrounding free schools and the reality that such freedom and empowerment are only extended to a select group who reinforce the government's values (Wright, 2012).

Overall, Gilroy, Susan and Pauline's experiences reveal how a prohibitive application process shoehorned smaller organisations into unnatural and unequal partnerships with larger organisations, which effectively disenfranchised them. While these kinds of partnerships were beneficial for the large organisations because they enabled them to be seen to be engaging with local people, which is important in a demand led initiative, it is unclear to what extent smaller black organisations benefitted as their influence and often clear agendas around improving outcomes for black children were compromised.

Racism in the Post-Approval Pre-Opening Phase

The research uncovered a range of microaggressions centred around exchanges between government officials or members of education trusts and participants during the application process. Some participants, for example, described how their interactions with the DfE were characterised by the government's low expectations of their capabilities, which were reminiscent of the often reported interplay between white teachers and black students (Coard, 1971; Woodson; 1998; Osler, 1997; Strand, 2012). Pauline, for example, whose all through school was intended to target inner city boys, submitted an education plan based on rigorous academic training, which included input from lecturers from one of the country's most prestigious universities. The application was rejected by the government on the basis that the plans it submitted were unrealistic. She explains how she received an email from the government saying, "your education plan is far too ambitious for boys from disadvantaged backgrounds". As Chapter 2 discussed, microaggressions are underpinned by ideological beliefs (Huber and Solórzano, 2015). In this case the government's comment betrays their lack of belief in the capacity of both the black female led proposer team to deliver the education plan and the BME male students to handle the academic rigour in the proposed school. The comment also undermines the government's application guidance which states they will place an emphasis on "the academic rigour and aspiration of the education offer" (DfE, 2014, p. 4). The comment also completely contradicts the call to improve social mobility for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, a goal which was repeated throughout the 2010 White Paper, illustrating a divergence between publicly declared agendas and privately held beliefs. The incident further challenges the notion of free school applications being assessed objectively by evidencing

how the white gaze, or what Applebaum (2016) refers to as a standpoint from which white people look at society, directly influences the outcomes of applications.

Pauline recounts a frustrating meeting at the DfE where she sought clarification about the feedback she received. She explains:

> As *we sat down, I said, what are boys from disadvantaged backgrounds supposed to aspire to? They sat there looking at each other. No answer. I said, let me simplify it. Is it because we have a University connection? No answer. Is it because it's an all through? And they said, well why all boys, all through? I said well Eton is an all boys, Dulwich College is an all boys, Eltham College is all boys, so when they are paying 30,000 a year for it you have no problem with it, but when it's ordinary children, then you have a problem with it. No answer. And then one of them said, well we have to do what the ministers want, and we said, so what do the ministers want? And everybody clammed up...*

In this exchange between Pauline and the DfE, the officials' subtle questioning of why Pauline wants to open a boys all through school suggests that her proposal doesn't fit within their pre-conceived ideas about who manages and attends all through boys schools in England. This pre-existing association in their mind, or habitual way of thinking, which Huber and Solórzano (2015) say typify microaggressions, disadvantages Pauline by becoming a stumbling block to the approval of her application. The exchange illustrates well how policy, which is allegedly designed to promote equality, can be stalled by the unconscious (or conscious) habits of people within institutions who are tasked with implementing them (Sullivan, 2006). Disappointed by the non-committal responses from the DfE, Pauline recalls leaving the meeting feeling frustrated. She explains the final microaggressive comment made by a representative of the DfE : "*One said, 'Why don't you just open a little primary school somewhere. This all through thing is too big for you?' I said, 'really* [laughs] *that's nice of you'. You know they were extremely patronizing".* As discussed earlier, microaggressions are often based on multiple characteristics (Huber and Solórzano, 2015). In this example both Pauline's racial identity and gender were likely factors in the government official's perception of her as incapable of leading a large school effectively.

Susan, whose application was approved, also discussed the myriad of ways she continued to be subjected to racism during the pre-opening phase. In describing the makeup of the initial core proposal team she founded, Susan notes they were all-black (likely a reflection of the fact that the group evolved out of a predominately black church congregation), with the exception of one white woman who wanted to get involved in the school because of her dissatisfaction with the schooling in

the local area. The proposal team was made up of a range of professionals including project managers, an architect, an accountant and teachers. The sole white woman was described by Susan as *“a single stay at home mom with four kids. It was all new to her. She could barely string a sentence together”*. Having passed the initial paper based phase of the application process, the group were invited to the DfE to discuss their application in further detail. Susan explains that the Trust consultant who was (by now) steering the committee suggested that the delegation to the DfE should consist of: *“Me, the Trust person and the English lady – the grassroots woman, they felt it would be good to have a grassroots person there. She was nervous as anything, as you can you imagine”*. The incident demonstrates how the partnership with the Trust diminishes Susan’s ownership over the project. Susan’s conceptualisation of the free school, which was nurtured by members of her congregation, is not reflected in the membership chosen to represent the group at the DfE.

Arguably, the delegation handpicked by the Trust’s representative dilutes the blackness, which was an essential and defining characteristic of the initial core group. The implication is that the presence of the white woman brings credibility to the proposal team while guarding against too much blackness. The incident demonstrates the existence of an unspoken racial hierarchy in which the white woman, in spite of her lack of experience and qualifications, is elevated over and above the skilled black proposal team members. The implicit message is that all-black teams are problematic in a way which does not extend to all-white teams, which are accepted as normal, and therefore unnotable. The elevation of the white single mother under the category of grassroots is also interesting, given the contrasting way single black female single parents are widely problematised in society by schools and the media. While black grassroots organisations are often stigmatised, here a different, more positive meaning is superimposed onto the grassrootedness of the white single parent who is packaged as a positive role model for the purposes of the meeting. Overall, the incident demonstrates the extent to which ideas about the superiority of whites and the inferiority of blacks are, as Delgado and Stefanic (2012) argue, so much a part of the fabric of our society and which manifest in daily interactions.

The issue of who would be appointed to headship in newly opening free schools was often a highly contentious one, which featured heavily in my discussions with participants. The struggles which ensued around headships, reflect a wider pattern of exclusion of black teaching professionals from leadership positions in schools in England (Osler, 1997; Callender, 1997). More recent research reveals that based on an analysis of government figures, “there are only 24 female and 15 male

black and black/white mixed-race heads in more than 3,000 secondary schools across the country" (Vaughan, 2015, n.p.). Pauline, who had worked as an assistant head for many years, recounted her struggles in advancing further into senior management in the mainstream school system: *"I have taught in schools in London for 33 years. Before I left I applied for three senior level positions and every time they had their own internal candidates who they fully intended on appointing and just wasted everybody else's time. When I left I said that's it, I want to work for myself".* McNamara et al.'s (2010) research identified a number of institutional factors which obstructed the progression of BME teachers to senior positions including everyday racism in schools and colleges, discrimination, harassment and ostracism. Pauline's comments reveal that she initially regarded the free school application process as an alternate route to headship. Although Pauline never had any of her applications approved, the experiences of the participants whose proposals were approved suggest the barriers to headship which exist in the mainstream sector are being replicated in free schools, and that free schools therefore have not provided a route for aspirational black teachers to circumnavigate the lack of career advancement in mainstream schools. Susan, for example, notes that once the application she jointly submitted with the Education Trust was approved, the issue of headship was raised. She recalls,

> *It became problematic as to who was going to become headteacher. The group wanted me, I was the visionary who had the idea but I knew I would be taking a big leap in my career. It was a big leap to being a headteacher. Ideally what I wanted was to learn very swiftly from an experienced person who could take me under their wing and then I would take over the school. That's what I wanted, to be a deputy.*

The fact that Susan considers herself, in spite of 20 plus years of working in schools, not ready to take on a leadership role is interesting. McNamara et al.'s (2010) research into barriers to headship noted that a lack of self-confidence was the second most commonly cited barrier identified by female BME teachers who aspired to headship, which contrasted with BME male teachers who identified discrimination as the most pressing barrier. One possible explanation for the differences between the perceived barriers to headship among BME men and women is that the combined racialised and gendered oppression BME women experience within institutions undermines their confidence. In their reluctance to promote BME women, schools therefore perpetuate this internal erosion of confidence, which produces the underrepresentation of BME teachers in headship positions. The confidence of the considerably younger and less experienced representative from the Trust who has (according to Susan) gone on to open a string of free schools is in stark contrast to Susan's lack of confidence. Susan explains how the decision making about the headteacher occurred saying,

> *There were many meetings about who would lead the school. We had a meeting at the Department for Education which was to decide my capability to lead the school and I was asked to leave the room. It was horrible, they were obviously talking about me and the fact that they didn't want me to lead the school and didn't think I was capable. The Trust in their desperation now, decided to second their deputy director of education. I wasn't even going to work there. I think they thought you've done your bit there, it's a Trust school now, and so what exactly are you going to do. You're the visionary but we're getting in a head teacher.*

That Susan is excluded from the leadership discussion contributes to the emergent picture of powerful organisations allied to the government with a shared interest in excluding their grassroots partners. The exchange highlights the Trust's sense of entitlement to make a decision about the headteacher in a clear enactment of relations of domination. The incident suggests that the partnership which emerged between the multi academy Trust and Susan's original proposal group was disingenuous and unequal as the Trust's interests subsumed Susan's and ultimately dominated. Susan's exclusion from important discussions highlights the lack of genuine interest in or commitment to working with local people. Instead, the presence of local people appears to have been tolerated during the application phase in order to evidence their involvement in a tokenistic way, which again reveals the dissonance between the rhetoric about empowering and harnessing the energy of local people to transform schools in poor areas and the reality of exclusionary practices.

The appointment of headteachers behind closed doors is a further example of the hidden operations of power (Gillborn, 2006) within the free school application process, which sustain white domination. Susan explains the negotiations which ensued in finalising her role within the school:

> *They tried to point me in the direction of Chair of Governors. We got together as a steering group and wrote a letter. We said that we value the head teacher's experience and that whereas she understood the private sector, I understood the community and we needed to work together for the good of the school and that there needed to be an exit plan and a succession plan. They wrote back to us and said here's what's going to happen. She [the headteacher] will be seconded to the school for 2-3 years at which point she will be seconded back to the Trust or the job may become available to her or to someone else who may want to apply. I wasn't happy so I went further to the head of the Trust. He was a lovely man and he loved everything about me and he said Susan your main role should be engaging those parents.*

The exchange further reveals the ongoing power dynamics in how the large organisation assumes their right to dominate by dictating the roadmap ahead for the school, which does not include any guarantees about a leadership role for Susan in the school. Susan's interaction with the most senior member of the Trust reveals how organisations become entrenched in an unacknowledged culture of racism. Her experience exemplifies the difficulty of addressing racism in the workplace when those in the highest positions of power within organisations consciously or otherwise, draw on habitual frames of reference, which reinforce racism (Sullivan, 2006). In this case the senior leader typecasts Susan into the symbolic role of 'engaging those parents', which does not result in power to make decisions over the day to day running over the school. In doing so, he subtly devalues Susan's professional skills by shoehorning her into a position which limits her future leadership opportunities. It is also worth considering Susan's response to the head of the Trust. Her description of him as *"a lovely man"* demonstrates the challenge in naming and connecting individual expressions of racism to the structural properties of racism. In this case Susan does not appear critical of his judgement of her as being best placed to focus on parental engagement, which secures her exclusion from running the school. The incident highlights well how racism is embedded in seemingly benign, everyday interactions, (Delgado and Stefanic, 2001) and furthermore how positive personal interactions obfuscate the naming and contestation of racism.

Jones, one of a handful of black headteachers featured in recent research about the paucity of BME school leaders in the UK, cites "the pigeonholing of black teachers into pastoral roles as a critical barrier in obtaining headships in that these roles do not enable teachers to acquire the requisite experience and skills to advance" (Vaughan, 2015).

The overrepresentation of black women in pastoral roles (such as home school liaison officers) either officially, or unofficially as in the case of Susan being assigned the role, and the fact these roles are often without financial reward or status, calls to mind and is reminiscent of the historical construction of the mammy figure. In *Ain't I a Woman,* hooks (1981) describes the mammy figure as one of a few extreme and opposing versions of black femalehood which were created in the white imagination. She defines the mammy archetype as "the embodiment of woman as a passive nurturer, a mother figure who gave all without expectation of return" (1981, p. 81). In this instance, Susan who has given her all in recruiting and working with the core proposal team to submit an application, is expected to accept nothing in return for her efforts, drawing fulfilment instead from a junior, pastoral role within the school.

Determined to obtain a leadership role in the school, and unable to reach any agreement about what that position might be, Susan found herself in the position of having to face a formal recruitment process. She explains:

> *I had to go through a very formal interview process. They came to my school and watched me teach for an hour and a half. It was the Trust woman (with very limited teaching experience) and the incoming headteacher. I had to go and be interviewed in a private Trust school. I went through the mill like everyone else. There were three or four shortlisted. I was offered the job of senior teacher at my own conceived school.*

Susan's experience demonstrates how power is enacted in order to protect white hegemony. In this case, the Trust Susan partnered with assumed a dominant position in the relationship, which enabled them to control recruitment procedures. Both Gillborn (2008) and Bonilla-Silva (2014), cite maintaining control as a key enabler of white domination. Here we see how the Trust decides who is subjected to an interview and who is not in establishing the school leadership team, which exemplifies how processes that appear neutral can be used to both secure and justify white domination. The fact that Susan is subjected to having her teaching judged by someone much younger and with considerably less teaching experience and knowledge of the local community where the school was scheduled to open, provides another example of how white supremacy asserted itself. In this case the Trust representative's whiteness gives her a level of credibility and power that is not synonymous with her experience. In contrast Susan is defined by her blackness, which negates her substantial experience.

Susan contrasts her own gruelling recruitment process with the appointment of the head teacher. "*The DfE were very happy for her to be appointed on her credentials as a senior person in the Trust with NPQH* [the professional qualification for head teachers]". Whereas the credentials of the incumbent head teacher are used to assess her capabilities, the same is not true for Susan who in spite of her credentials and experience is subjected to an additional layer of scrutiny, a protocol which serves a gate keeping function. During her interview Susan also made a passing reference to the ease with which the headteacher's husband took up employment at the school: "*Well its funny her husband became our peripatetic music teacher without any interview. There was no discussion about her husband coming to teach",* which further evidences how Susan was unfairly subjected to, and arguably disadvantaged by, the recruitment process.

Following the recruitment process, Susan explains that she was granted the role of Senior teacher.

> *I hated it, it's part of the private school model which she wanted to replicate...I saw myself as a deputy but they didn't like that title. What the chief executive said which was minuted was that they would develop me to leadership but there were no signs of development…Very soon I realised this was going to be her school.*

Susan's comments demonstrate how she was left powerless to challenge her diminished power and position in the school, or indeed the direction of the school, which no longer reflected her original vision.

During her account Susan reflected on the full extent of her exclusion from the decision making about the school both during the pre-opening phase and once the school was opened.
She notes:

> *All the meetings regarding how the building would look I had no say whatsoever. It was just the headteacher making decisions. All the meetings I sat at, it was like I didn't exist. When I think back on all the meetings I went to in all the Costa coffees and at the Department for Education it was like I was the face to show we were doing it right but you could tell I wasn't part of it. They have to have the face that they trust and that's a white face and grey hair, they couldn't trust me, it was all about trust.*

One of the features of white supremacy identified by Ansley (1997, p. 592 quoted in Rollock and Gillborn, 2011) is the way in which conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are actioned to produce relations of white dominance and non-white subordination. Gillborn (2008) describes these patterns of relations as historical ones which are locked in. The fact that Susan was either outright excluded, or included but silenced, from discussions about the school exemplifies how the Trust acted on their own sense of superiority and entitlement, which resulted in Susan's subordination. Susan's conclusion that the government is intent on sharing power with people who reflect them and can be trusted to protect their interests is a poignant summation of the covert nature of contemporary racism, which quietly safeguards white domination through seemingly run of the mill bureaucratic procedures.

Reflecting on the diversity of her experience from the initial heady days working in close collaboration with her core group recruited from her local church through to the partnership with the Trust and the reality of the school, at which she worked for only a short time, Susan muses that, "*I'm one of those rare people who would say I haven't really grown up with racism or experienced it but in terms of this experience, I have felt it."* Overall, it is ironic that the free school application

process is the thing which has increased Susan's awareness of racism, given that free schools were conceived of as a vehicle to promote social mobility and civic engagement.

In describing the process of selecting a head teacher for their newly approved free school, Trevor recounts a selection process which echoes many of the same themes described by Susan. Trevor explains that the initial black proposer was the logical choice for head teacher given than she was already a successful and experienced head teacher with a proven track record of securing good outcomes for students. He notes, however, that like Susan, she was subjected to a formal process at the behest of the Chair of Governors and the DfE. Trevor describes the events leading up to the appointment of head teacher: "*Initially there were only a few applicants but they wanted more candidates so they re-advertised. In the end she (the original proposer) got the job but the Chair was not happy"*. What is striking about Trevor's description of events is the fact that the government and Chair seem to be actively working in tandem against the appointment of the experienced black head teacher. By re-advertising the post in the name of widening the field and improving the rigour of the process, the government employed the language of meritocracy to conceal their attempt to derail the appointment of a black leader and engineer an outcome which reflected their interests. The incident further evidences how seemingly neutral processes are used to secure domination. Reflecting on the experience, Trevor shares his perspective that "*they begrudged her having power and making financial gains as a black woman", w*hich echoes Susan's observation that behind the veil of politeness, power is fiercely guarded.

The battles which ensued behind closed doors about who would lead schools once applications were approved are not in the public eye. Highlighting the participants' experiences is important, therefore, in order to raise awareness about how well qualified black leaders were subjected to additional layers of scrutiny in recruitment processes designed to select head teachers for newly opened free schools. Their experiences also further underscore how amidst the public discourse of freedom and reduced state control, the government in fact exerted considerable power and control over important decisions concerning approved free schools. Although only based on the experiences of the two proposers in the sample whose schools were approved, the findings are important nonetheless because they raise awareness of the possibility that free schools will reproduce the underrepresentation of black head teachers, which as discussed earlier, currently plagues the mainstream school system.

In addition to battles for headships, one participant described the behind the scenes power struggles involved in securing a site for their school. Trevor explained that there was another group in the borough whose application to open a school was approved at roughly the same time as his group's. At the outset, both groups had an interest in opening their schools at the same site. Although Trevor's group was further along in the pre-opening phase and on course to open with a full cohort of students, the DfE granted the other predominately white group access to the land. Trevor explains that when his group pressed the DfE for an explanation as to why the other group was allocated the land in question, they were told the application of the other group was much stronger. The incident provides another example of how the language of meritocracy is employed by the government to justify inequality and silence any debate.

The incident also highlights the lack of transparency surrounding decision making about free schools, much of which happened away from public scrutiny, thereby diminishing public accountability. McInerney (2016), who challenged the government to make more data about free schools available to the public, notes that in the past information about new schools was easily obtainable by the public, which is in stark contrast to the way free school openings are shrouded in secrecy. The DfE's response to Trevor's inquiry illustrates the shifting landscape of success criteria as the original application guidance does not reference the fact that land will be allocated on the basis of school rankings. In a letter published in 2015, however, the DfE clarified their position on allocating plots of land identified by more than one organisation as a potential site for their free school. Sticking with a meritocratic rationale, they state:

> In such cases, where it is clear that the site is suitable and affordable but cannot accommodate all the schools proposed, we will decide which application should take priority based on a range of factors including: the strength of the respective applications; local demand; the need for local school places; and the impact on existing provision (DfE, 2015).

Outlining their jurisdiction to allocate desirable plots of land to the strongest applications is another example of how the government maintains control over critical aspects of free schools. This control contradicts the government's claim to want to reduce state involvement in education, which as Chapter 4 noted was a prominent part of the logic provided for establishing free schools.

Trevor explains what he believes was the determining factor in the allocation of the desired land to the other group saying,

> *It transpires, that they had a conservative counsellor on their board with connections to the Secretary of Education - so they gave them that site and moved us to the outer Hebrides which was way outside our demographic and catchment area. We had by that time amassed a lot of support for our school and parents wanted to send their kids to our school.*

The incident provides another example of Wildman's (2005) observation that privilege radiates outwards from the power base. In this case, Trevor's group, although powerful within their local community, are not aligned with the machinations of the government and are therefore disadvantaged in obtaining their preferred site, further evidencing the hidden inequality in the free school process. Although Trevor's group verbalised their discontent with the decision, there were no systems in place to appeal the government's decision making. Trevor explains how his group responded by going back to the drawing board in search of a new site and managed to locate one which was in fact superior to the original land they had earmarked:

> *We then found another site and went back to the DfE and said, ok we will take this site. It was huge, green with open fields. And they said, no we are going to give that to the other group. I mean you sent us away to go and look for a site, we did that and then came back to tell you about it and you tell us no, you can have the first site, we are giving this to the other school. The DfE dug in their heels and said, you guys are going back to that original site. That was it, there was no discussion. It's a moral issue really, we found the site and you are giving it to the group with* [gestures air quotes] *'the stronger application'.*

The exchange provides further evidence of the paternalistic relationship between the DfE and local communities during the post-approval, pre-opening stage, in spite of the claims voiced in the Schools White paper to want to "support – not turn away – teachers, charities, parent groups and others who have the vision and drive to open free Schools" (DfE, 2010, p. 52). In this case it is clear that the government retains uncontested power to make decisions, without being required to provide a rationale for those decisions. There also appears to be an assumption that the other group is entitled to the superior site, which reinforces the racial hierarchy. The incident demonstrates that not all groups were equally valued and given fair access to resources to make their schools a success. While the school Trevor was involved in proposing has opened and is fully subscribed, the group who was allocated the most desirable plot of land has repeatedly delayed opening and at the time of this publication had yet to open, in part because of an inability to recruit a suitable number of students. This raises questions about why land is being reserved for schools which may or may not open and the extent to which addressing shortages in school places is in fact a priority as stated in the 2010

School White paper. At the time of publication, the free school with which Trevor is affiliated, although in operation, has yet to secure a permanent site.

Although the issue of land was not a central part of my discussion with Susan, she also made a passing reference to a similar pattern of experience in the borough she was based in. She notes for example, that while they were operating in less than ideal conditions in temporary accommodation in a busy city centre, another school which opened in the same area was allocated a desirable plot of land. She notes, "X *school was opened by a friend of Gove and they were given premium land for their school. It's in a very deprived area but they are all white, whereas our steering group was all black"*. Susan's observations echo those of Trevor's that premium land was allocated to those with pre-existing relationships and connections to the government, again demonstrating how proximity to the power base yields favourable outcomes in terms of access to highly sought after land. These findings are further evidence of the phenomenon identified by Higham's (2014) research which identified social capital as a determining factor in the success of applications.

Conclusion

The chapter has examined how race is enacted in the free school policy, which is situated within a colourblind discourse. By exploring a range of overt and covert barriers participants experienced, the chapter demonstrates how they were unfairly disadvantaged by the application process. Some of the overt barriers, like the collection of passport photographic evidence and the requirement to have a narrowly defined form of cultural capital, are embedded into the application process. The participants were also disadvantaged by the process in more covert ways, stemming from the government's negative construction of blackness. The chapter has explored how this negative construction of blackness produced a range of negative effects for participants. Among them were the need to configure their proposal teams and proposals in order to fit within acceptable parameters of blackness; being subjected to low expectations by government officials; and having their applications judged unfairly. Identifying these effects is important because it enables theorisation about the additional and specific burdens black free school applicants are subjected to as a result of their racial identity. The chapter has also explored the hidden machinations of power during the post-approval phase which demonstrate that even once schools are approved, black applicants continued to experience discrimination. By exposing the processes surrounding the appointment of head teachers and allocation of land, the chapter demonstrates the government's uncontested power and control over important decisions about new free schools, which secure

white domination. The chapter has focused largely on the participants' interactions with the processes and procedures which make up the application and approval process, as well as how the participants were constructed by the gatekeepers charged with assessing their applications. In the next chapter I take a more holistic view of the participants in order to capture the skills and experiences they brought to the free school application process, which were disregarded in the assessment of proposals.

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS - COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH

This chapter addresses the second research question about the assets which exist in African Caribbean communities that make them well placed to open free schools. The chapter challenges the exclusion of many of the research participants from opening free schools by examining the skills and experience they possess, which were overlooked by the application and approval process. The chapter draws on Yosso's (2006) concept of community cultural wealth, summarised as the specific forms of knowledge rooted in history and culture that reside in ethnic minority communities. As explored in Chapter 2, the term was advanced by Yosso (2006) to challenge deficit constructions of non-dominant groups embodied in scholarship rooted in white worldviews. In keeping with Yosso's (2006) assertion that analytical frameworks rooted in the cultures of racialised communities yield more holistic representations (see also Stanfield, 1993; 1994), the chapter uses the Nguzo Saba, a pan-African set of values created by Mualana Karenga in 1966, to categorize and explore the experiences and skills which exist among the sample.

Nia - Purpose

The first community asset explored is Nia, which translated means purpose. Karenga (1996) defines purpose as working collectively to build and develop the African community, which diverges from Western conceptualisations of purpose as an individual endeavour. As documented in Chapter 3, in addition to a long tradition of campaigning against racism in the schooling system, since the 1950s black communities in Britain have provided alternative, community led education services in order to uplift, empower and raise the standing of black communities, which exemplifies the idea of Nia (Tomlinson, 1986; Andrews, 2013; Cork, 2005; Warmington, 2014; Mirza and Reay, 2000).

Among the sample there was also evidence of strong commitment to working to improve the circumstances of local people. The data revealed that prior to submitting free school applications, six of the nine participants had been providing longstanding educational services within the areas they resided in. Afua, a member of a proposal team comprised of grassroots activists, had a long history of educational activism. She traced her involvement in education back to her own experiences of racism within a predominately white middle class school, which fuelled her desire to challenge systemic racism in schooling. As a result she became active in contesting the exclusion of black children from schools in her local area. Operating purely through word of mouth, Afua estimates that the organisation she founded has averted the wrongful exclusion of a few hundred black

children over a 20 year period. When questioned about how she funded the advocacy work she noted,

> *We just ask parents for a contribution. They come and bring all the paperwork* [gestures to a large pile] *and we used to charge £25 pounds. Usually what you found out is that there are lots of different incidents on record which parents have not challenged which is what they will try to use against you so it takes time to go through each incident and interview people, so we started charging £100 for that*. *Some parents are very willing to pay and say whatever you need, but some parents do duck and dive. We generally win the cases because we find out schools haven't followed the correct procedure.*

Afua's flexible fee structure suggests that being involved in the advocacy work is akin to a vocation, which does not translate into personal financial gain as parents are asked to pay what is in essence a nominal fee for work, which if undertaken through formal legal channels would cost considerably more. In this sense her Nia (purpose) of wanting to challenge racism and protect the futures of black children by challenging wrongful exclusions, overrides her personal needs, demonstrating a commitment to the wellbeing of her local community.

Glenroy also described the flexible approach to fees at the independent school he founded, which contrasts with the mainstream independent school model. He notes, "*We've made our fee structure quite open. I've subsidised it for a number of years... We make it open. Our parents are teachers and lawyers but also social workers and factory workers but the main thing is that they share the same aspirations for their children, it's the value of education which unites the"*. Glenroy's comments demonstrate his enduring commitment to education that encompasses a willingness to make personal financial sacrifices in order to ensure the sustainability of the service. Both Glenroy and Afua's experiences are consistent with Dove's (1993, p. 444) research into black supplementary schooling in the UK which identified that "the interests of supplementary school teachers and parents are not related to making a living. The primary concern is with serving the needs of their communities and gaining credibility on those grounds". Mirza and Reay, (2000) similarly contend that women, who they argue have been at the forefront of the black education movement, prioritise making a positive contribution to the community above personal advancement. This alternative community based construction of status as something derived from involvement in community improvement activities, is one of the reasons many participants enjoyed a high profile within their local neighbourhoods, which translated into significant levels of community support for their proposed schools.

After several failed attempts at opening a free school, Pauline proceeded to open a small independent school, indicative of her determination to realise the (albeit scaled back) vision of the school she birthed as part of her lengthy entanglement with the free school process**.** Outlining her Nia (purpose) for persevering to realise her goal of opening a school she notes, "*There's absolutely no way I'm going to accept mediocre standards for these kids. It's just not going to happen. I drive past the job centre and I think I don't want any of our kids to even know where it is"*. Here Pauline expresses the importance of having high expectations of and aspirations for students, which has been a consistent theme in the black education movement from as early as 1971 as noted in Coard's seminal text (1971). Throughout our conversations, Pauline used the pronoun 'our' whenever referencing black young people, enacting what Collins (1994) has described as 'community mothering'. Reynolds (2003), who has completed research into what she terms black welfare based organisations in the UK, contends that the "term community mothering and in a broader sense 'community parenting', is particularly useful in understanding these women's language of ownership and the way it represents a moral or cultural obligation to provide care for non-kinship community members" (p. 38).

When asked how she has managed to fund her school Pauline explained:

> *I've done it all myself. All the set up costs, curriculum materials. All the sports stuff. The fees were a real sticking point because I wanted to deliver education that was free for everyone. For myself I'm not bothered. I have learnt to live on virtually nothing. I have a roof over my head, so I'm not bothered about myself, but I have to pay my staff*.

Here again we see that providing a service is embraced as a vocation which supersedes her own personal needs. Her comments also remind of us the contrast in access to resources between large academy chains and local citizens, which further contests the idea of a fair and level playing field in the education sector in general and the free schools application process in particular.

Overall, the research participants demonstrated an enduring commitment to education which far exceeded the kind of commitment associated with fulfilling a job role. Their commitment often translated into financial sacrifice and long hours of work, often on a voluntary basis. It is important that the participants' educational activism is highlighted in order to challenge popular mainstream constructions of black communities as disengaged from civic duty. One of the things which fuels this perception is the way in which (as discussed in Chapter 3), community based education provision is often either invisible to or derided by the mainstream, which labels it counter cultural and/or

ignores it. The participants' exclusion from opening free schools highlights an inherent contradiction within the policy between the claim to want to encourage and support local communities to play an active role in society, and the inability to recognise and/or refusal to acknowledge community based knowledges/experiences. The exclusion of many of the participants suggests the operation of a hidden hierarchy of knowledge within the assessment of free school applications that rejects community based bodies of knowledge and experience in favour of those which are rooted in mainstream norms, thereby reinforcing and securing white domination.

Umoja/Ujima - Unity and Collective Organising

Umoja and Ujima are the next assets which I identified in the data. Umoja, the foundational principle of the Nguzo Saba, translates into unity. Karenga (1996) notes that the principle involves working collaboratively on mutually beneficial projects in order to develop and promote unity within the wider community. The concept of unity also overlaps with the principle of Ujima, which translated into English means collective work and responsibility.

One obvious example of this commitment to unity and collectivism was the way several participants resolved to work together across different ideological perspectives in support of opening black led free schools reflecting what Mirza and Reay (2000, p. 527) identify as a "collective, rather than individual agency which evolves out of communal responses to the mainstream educational system". Viola, one of the main instigators of The African free School Alliance, explains the rationale for starting the group:

> *Our approach was different in the fact that I recognised from the beginning that we needed to help each other to put these Free schools in so from the beginning we called together individuals who we knew were putting free school applications in and met on a regular basis to say let's try to help one another with the idea that if any one got through we would pull together to make sure that they succeeded.*

Mirza and Reay (2000) note that although the idea of collectivism conjures up ideas of a singular identity, the community education organisations which were the subject of their research displayed a capacity to simultaneously embrace unity and difference as advocated for by Karenga (1996). Glenroy also articulated this commitment to shared goals in spite of different educational philosophies saying, "*We are not going to prevent another school or application because it has a different ethos. As long as it's African owned, that's considered by us all to be a step in the right*

direction". His comments suggest that the collective desire to see African people occupy leadership positions in institutions, which they have been historically excluded from, superseded differences in individual educational philosophies. His comments challenge the often cited criticism that race-based organising is by default an exercise in essentialism. Glenroy further explained the complexities of the range of provision within the supplementary school movement saying: *"Some schools are directly political, others are less political and even within that there are different shades, some are religious and some are religious and political",* which also aptly describes the range of free school proposals submitted across the sample. In their willingness to focus on shared interests, rather than difference, the participants embody the idea of Ujima and further underscore the depth of their commitment to education which resides in black communities.

Both the idea of Umoja and Ujima are also embodied by the black education movement which is underpinned by the strong and extended social networks which exist within communities. This is evident in the way community education projects have sustained enrolment even in the absence of advertising, which Tomlinson (1986) references as an example of African and Caribbean communities exerting community agency in relation to education. Several of the participants who had run longstanding education projects also maintained consistent uptake of their services which they attributed to word of mouth. Reflecting on a career spanning 30 years in the supplementary education sector, Paul recalled: "*I think the parents are very unified. The black churches too. They are the ones who drive this. We do very little advertising, there hasn't really been a need to advertise"*. The idea of community agency was also present in the high levels of enrolment participants were able to secure for their free schools. Reflecting on the failure to open a free school, Pauline for example, noted that *"the sad thing is in the free school we were oversubscribed in the primary phase and this borough has such a shortage of reception places in primary"*.

Both Trevor and Susan were also able to secure high levels of enrolment for their schools which were the only two approved free school applications. Trevor, for example, noted that the proposer group he was a member of quickly built up their cohort and had 60 students enrolled. In contrast, he explained that the other white led group in his borough (discussed earlier) had difficulty enrolling students. He described: *"It turns out they couldn't get the enrolment; How many people did they really genuinely engage with? I think they had something like ten or twelve enrolled. They couldn't engage with the community"*. Trevor's observation is interesting because it demonstrates the contradiction between the rhetoric around free schools being opened in response to local parental demand and the approval of groups who did not have the capacity to engage with local

communities. Trevor contrasts his own standing in the community based on many years living and working within it saying, “*The power of local knowledge, local relationships and people knowing you is huge. So these guys have come from wherever, they don’t look like the community they are looking to serve, and now they are canvassing in the community for their school”*. Trevor identifies a form of social capital he enjoys based on his involvement in local initiatives, acquired over a number of years. The pre-existing social capital many black free school proposer groups possessed is another example of an asset which was unacknowledged and undervalued in the application process in spite of the fact that it contributed to high enrolment figures, thereby fulfilling the dual free school agendas of addressing school place shortages and being responsive to local parental demand.

The issue of free schools attracting enrolment has been a contentious one with the press repeatedly reporting on free school closures because of an inability to recruit viable numbers of pupils. The Guardian, for example, reported that “two free schools, Newham Free Academy and the 'One in a Million' secondary school in Bradford, closed before they even opened because they received so few applications for places”. They further reported that “figures showed that at least £2.3m had been spent on schools which had either failed to open or lacked local support” (Guardian, 2012, quoted in Gillard, 2016). The challenge of securing enrolment was also addressed in the National Audit Office report which stated that “some free schools have not attracted as many pupils as they planned in their first year” (2013, p. 10). The report concluded that overall free Schools have opened with three-quarters of planned admissions in their first year, but there have been significant variations between years and between schools in each year (2013, p. 10). The House of Commons briefing paper on free schools (Bolton, 2016) posits that it should be no surprise that many free schools start off relatively small and identify some of the challenges they experience in attracting enrolment, including the absence of an established school population or feeder schools, and in some instances temporary premises. The fact that Trevor and Susan’s schools were fully recruited, in spite of the fact that both schools experienced all the above barriers, further highlights the strength of social networks and commitment to working collaboratively on shared ventures, as a legitimate, but undervalued asset.

Like Trevor, Susan had been a long time resident of the community she wanted to open a school in. She also enjoyed a high profile based on her long term commitment to and involvement in her local community. In her interview she described herself saying, “*I’m a real community person. Everyone knows me”*. She noted that at the outset when the newly opened free school was still perceived as being a local community initiative it was oversubscribed but that over time, as the large sponsor

increasingly became the face of the school, the local community withdrew their support for it. She explains, *"Parents loved our school. We were oversubscribed four times over but since they've taken over they only have two people on the waiting list. It became the run of the mill school, lost the things which made it unique"*. Arguably one of the most unique things about the school is that it originated out of a church within a local community, embodying the spirit of Ujima. Parents clearly responded favourably to the community influence over the school by choosing to enrol their children. Both Susan and Trevor's experiences demonstrate how black parents exerted agency by choosing to support or withdraw support from newly opening free schools depending on their leadership. This agency was further exhibited by the parent who undertook legal proceedings to protest against the rejection of a free school proposal she wanted her son to attend, as discussed in the previous chapter. It is important to expose this black parental agency around free schools in order to challenge the perception that black communities are not engaging with the policy and/or are disengaged from civic duty more generally.

Susan, who was embroiled in a power struggle about who would assume leadership of the newly approved free school she proposed, demonstrates how having the support of the community acted as a form of leverage in her negotiations to secure a position for herself in the school. She notes*: "The Trust got worried that we might rock the boat, no-one wanted this in the media. We were still quite powerful"*. Like Trevor, she refers to a power which emerges both from her high profile and the unity within the original proposal team and their local supporters. Susan references an unspoken fear among the Trust's representatives of being accused of racism within a public form. Examining whiteness through a psychological lens, Levine-Rasky (2012) observes that it is imperative that whiteness knows itself as just and that as a result it stridently denies any participation in racism. Writing about the advent of black led Africentric schools in Toronto, Canada, Revine-Lasky's (2012) analysis of the white fear which dominated public debate and discourse about Africentric schooling further strengthens the argument advanced in the previous chapter that black proposer groups were negatively perceived by the government. Revine-Lasky argues that the emergence of Africentric schools was:

> linked in the white imagination to the creation of a new human agency: the self-determining black subject... It is not fear of blackness as an abstract, but as a particularity: the educated and politicized black subject who is imagined to have suddenly gained insight into racism and who has cultivated the collective political power to act against it... (2012, p. 13).

In the same way the Trust's fear, which Susan names, is rooted in the idea of an oppositional and unified black community. One of the ways the Trust's fear of Susan manifested itself was in how they

sought to control her interactions with the local community. On the one hand the Trust, especially in the early phase of the school opening, used Susan's standing in the community and the interest she had already generated through her local church, to attract enrolment. On the other hand, however, they sought to curtail her influence over the school by choosing not to assign her a position of power, preferring to continue to use her unofficially, and without remuneration, to liaise with parents. Her experience demonstrates how the asset of her knowledge, understanding and connection with the local community, is closely monitored and controlled by the Trust. When the school later changed hands however, Susan's proximity to the parents was regarded as threatening. She notes: "*The new organisation didn't want me because they believed that I was turning the parents against them. They don't understand the kind of parents we had. We had vocal parents, who have questions and aren't afraid to ask them"*. The accusation of turning parents against them suggests a fear based construction of Susan's connection to the parents that positions her as threatening to the wellbeing of the school. The power, which Susan amassed in the school based on her positive relationships with parents, is problematised as dangerous because it threatens the white hegemony of the school which persists in spite of the overwhelmingly ethnic minority student population.

Reflecting on the experience and the way in which she was unable to find a role for herself in the school under the new leadership, Susan again cited her proximity to the parents as the primary, unacknowledged reason for her exclusion, in another manifestation of hidden racism. She notes, *"I think there is a degree of fear because I get the community. I've lived here for a long time. I grew up on a council estate. I understand their experience. I get them. I get them"*. In spite of the rhetoric about free schools wanting to promote an engaged local citizenry, Susan's experiences suggest that black citizens rooted in black communities are perceived as threatening to the status quo, which produces an additional invisible barrier for black free school proposers. As well as highlighting the additional barriers black teachers face in securing leadership positions in schools, the example of Susan raises interesting questions about whether schools, especially those with majority BME cohorts who push narratives of hard to reach parents, deliberately avoid utilising the social capital prevalent in black communities because it is perceived as a threat to the dominance of white middle class power in schools.

Alternative Educational Philosophy

Throughout my discussions with participants it became clear that many of the participants embraced a philosophy of education which deviated from dominant models of schooling, which as discussed in

Chapter 3, are increasingly focused on a market based philosophy of schooling that stresses individual accountability and competition among providers. Instead, the models of schooling participants were involved in delivering through their independent/community based provision and/or proposed in their free school applications, regarded schooling as a vehicle to improve the lives not just of students, but also of their families and local communities. This philosophy, which underpinned the participants proposed free school proposals, embodied the principles of Umoja and Ujima and arguably fit well within the social mobility agenda originally ascribed to free schools by the government.

Trevor, for example, described his long standing community based education provision saying:

> *The issues go beyond the classroom. The majority of the issues are in the community, in the home and that's where we spend most of our time. And on top of that we were also working with the parents which was just as important as working with the child, it's what we call the educational trinity, the parent, teacher and child and you can't learn if they are not all working together.*

Trevor's comments demonstrate a different conceptualisation of the role of the teacher, which he suggests extends to working with families and communities in order to secure positive outcomes for children. This is consistent with Dove's (1993) assertion that, "to analyze what is happening to African children in British schools, we need to understand what is also happening to them outside school as well as what is happening to their parents and Africans generally. We should not isolate classroom activity from social organisation" (p. 434). Writing some 80 years ago Du Bois similarly argued that in order to be effective, teachers need to have a deeply contextualised understanding of their students:

> The proper education of any people includes the sympathetic touch between teacher and pupil; knowledge on the part of the teacher, not simply of the individual taught, but of his surroundings and background, and the history of his class and group (1935, p. 328).

Paul also explained how the supplementary school he founded became a hub for parents to access support and how the provision grew to accommodate the needs of parents. He notes:

> *When parents brought their children, we used to enrol the children and then spend a lot of time speaking to them and they would ask us lots of questions about dealing with dyslexia, or a child struggling in maths ...After that we started to provide 1: 1 sessions with parents about things which were affecting their child's learning, could be things like bullying in school, racism in school, could be family break ups you see...*

Like Trevor, Paul's approach to service provision is conceptualised in terms of meeting the needs of the family, rather than solely the child. The provision is holistic in that the social and emotional development of students is interwoven with and given the same level of priority as academic support. Crucially, the provision starts from the premise that working with families is critical to the success of children. Being able to address the realities of race and racism in the context of inhabiting a white dominated society with students and their families is also an important element of Paul's provision, which as explored in Chapter 3, contravenes the colourblindness which permeates education policy and schooling. In Paul's flexible model, the needs of both children and their families determine the curriculum, which contrasts with the pre-determined proscriptive nature of the national curriculum. The model is consistent with what Delgado-Gaitan (1994, quoted in Auerbach, 2007, p. 254) refers to as an "empowerment model of family-school relations in which power is shared, influence is two-way between home and school, and parties are mutually accommodating", which contrasts with the conventional one-way, top down model found in mainstream schools.

Pauline's proposed free school also featured a family empowerment model of schooling. She described the provision she wanted to offer in the borough she lived in:

> *We have an enrichment programme for parents and older siblings to engage with because I've seen schools struggle to get parents on board, so I thought from day one, older siblings who are out of work they can have access to the same mentors, life skills coaches, get them into work, and for the parents the same each one teach one kind of thing, so that the parents can tap into academics, vocational things, sports, aesthetics, whatever is on the menu.*

Crozier (2011) argues that parental involvement in schools is characterised by power struggles and tensions between different constituents. She notes that in traditional models of schooling, schools dictate the parameters of parental involvement and prioritise certain school based activities which meet the needs of the school. Auerbach (2007, p. 252) argues that although it may appear neutral, "parental involvement in education has been socially constructed to privilege white, middle-class norms and the expectations of educators" and this often disadvantages ethnic minority and working class parents. What ensues, therefore, is often paternalistic home-school relationships in which acceptable forms of engagement are prescribed by the school, affording very little autonomy or alternative means of engagement for parents. In contrast, in both their community based provision and proposed free schools, the participants offer alternative non-hierarchical models of parental engagement which de-centre the authority of the school. Rather than conceptualising parental

engagement in terms of what parents can offer schools, the participants suggest the opening up of schools to provide parents with access to valuable school resources.

Another central element of Pauline's proposed school for inner city boys was a scheme pairing students with long term mentors who would support them throughout their schooling and be on hand to provide crucial work experience upon graduation. She describes her mentors saying:

> *We went out and recruited 50 mentors from all walks of life because I wanted these mentors to be the next parent in these children's life. I didn't want mentors who would just come in give a half an hour motivational talk and get everyone fired up and disappear.*

Her reference to the mentors as surrogate parents suggests a recognition of the additional layer of vulnerability ethnic minority boys growing up in racist societies are subject to and the belief in the collective responsibility of the community to make a positive contribution to their lives. According to Dei (1996), notions of community and social responsibility are a critical feature of African-centred schools (see also Giddings, 2001). In their research about supplementary schools in England, Mirza and Reay (2000, p. 533) also identified the importance placed on caring interactions noting that often these alternative spaces create "important spaces of belonging which transgress traditional notions of school, creating instead spaces which recreate aspects of both home and school".

In addition to different models of curriculum and home school relationships, some participants also proposed non-hierarchical leadership models within their schools, which Johnson (2001) denotes a characteristic of the principle of Ujima. Pauline described, for example, a distributed leadership model that was operational in the independent school she later opened based on her proposed free school. She notes, "*Oh yes I'm the head teacher. No-one is running my school other than me. I know exactly how I want it to run. I don't want a hierarchical structure, it's going to be lateral. We are all leaders and that includes the children, everyone is a leader in whatever your strength is"*. Pauline's model of communal leadership in which power is shared contrasts with the hierarchical nature of mainstream schooling in which power officially resides within the senior leadership team and school governing body.

Susan also explained how part of her impetus for wanting to engage with the free school policy was to create a different kind of leadership within schools: "*And when the free school got to my ears, I thought to myself, well Susan if you are going to lead a school, you are going to lead a school with your vision because I'd seen things I didn't like. I didn't like the corporate feel in terms of how schools were becoming and I'd seen a lot of dishonesty-I don't want to go further with that one"*. Susan's use

of the word vision suggests a model of schooling that encompasses a moral purpose. She rejects the corporate feeling of schools which is a by-product of the marketisation of schooling. Her critique of the dishonesty she has witnessed across various school settings suggests her desire to build a school with high levels of integrity.

The participants' proposals fit well within the long and well established tradition of innovation within community based schooling to address a number of problems which have plagued mainstream schools over a number of years including poor home-school relationships; disproportionate exclusions and the underachievement of black pupils (Gillborn, 2016; Strand, 2007; 2012). It is important to highlight this innovation because it demonstrates how black community groups were well positioned to meet the call for innovation in schooling outlined in the White Paper 2010. Their subsequent exclusion suggests that the government's claims of welcoming innovation was contradictory, if not misleading, especially given (as explored in Chapter 2) the high rates of approval of free school proposals which recreated dominant models of schooling. This preference for proposals based on dominant models of schooling suggests innovation was only palatable to the government within an approved ideological framework. In contrast to the preferred model, many participants proposed contextualised, non-hierarchical, family-centred models of schooling designed to address social inequality by empowering local communities. Their approaches, which sought to address the specific needs of black children, families and communities, challenged the colourblind model of schooling, which as has been discussed, favours addressing achievement gaps through universal programming and generalised whole school improvement. The participants' experiences demonstrate how despite a discourse of freedom and diversity, alternative education frameworks which de-centred white power and control were rejected.

Kujichagulia – Self-Determination

The free school policy was framed by the government as an attempt to bring about a reduction in state control over schooling. As Chapter 4 detailed, one of the key selling points of free schools was that they offered interested parties high levels of autonomy to make decisions about staffing, curriculum and to a lesser extent location (DfE, 2010). It is unsurprising that many black community led proposer groups submitted applications given that the idea of Kujichagulia, which translates broadly into self-determination and autonomy (Karenga, 1996), has long been embraced by Britain's black communities in their 60 plus year struggles against racism in schooling. The idea of prizing independence often featured in my discussions with participants. Paul, who was a long standing

provider of a variety of community based education programming, had a clear vision of the need for autonomy:

> *Out of 28 years, I would say for about six of them we've had funding. It's good when you can get some help but there is a downside to it and the downside is as soon as people fund you they want an element of control ... It stops you developing wealth creation strategies and that's absolutely critical for your independence. If you go for funding it can really hold you back. You have monitoring forms to complete which can take you two weeks and then you have to go to a meeting and they don't really know about education or grassroots organisations. When you get the money you think, wow, but really it's what I call dead money, whereas when you generate money with your own means, you plant seeds and watch it grow. I wouldn't tell anyone not to go for tenders but I would advise people to become self-sufficient first in your business so that you can walk away from tenders.*

Paul, who decided not to submit a free school application on the basis of the lack of available autonomy within the programme, offers a clear critique of being reliant on short-term funding which necessitates relinquishing control over projects and creates additional administrative burdens. He also highlights how funders' lack of understanding about grassroots programming creates a barrier to accessing funds. Implicit in his reflections is a critique of how funding criteria are often rooted in mainstream organisational frames of references and norms which disadvantage grassroots programming. Paul's observations about how the combination of gate keeping bureaucrats and biased assessment tools facilitate the exclusion of grassroots organisations also aptly describe the processes of exclusion explored in this study in relation to free schools.

Like Paul, Glenroy who ran an independent school modelled after fee paying schools, valued having autonomy and control over all aspects of his service provision. He notes,*"This school is independent in more ways than one and it always has been and I've never looked for government sources of funding or any other sources of funding mainly because I know it always comes with strings attached"*. Glenroy, who was part of a proposal team that opted out of a potential partnership with a large and powerful organisation, had reservations from the outset about the extent to which proposers would steer the direction of free schools. He described some of his early concerns saying: "*Although the schools were called free schools, first impressions were that was not the case. You became an employee of the government, the children and the choices of subjects you teach are dictated to you. I knew that I would struggle to shape things in the way that suits me"*.
After several rejections of her free school applications, Pauline opened a small independent school within her target borough. Reflecting on the experience she notes, "*I feel incredibly free that I'm out*

of the free school thing, because I have full autonomy to put the curriculum that I want into place", again exemplifying the high value placed on self-determination.

Although the participants' educational provision was varied, all of them expressed a desire for control over the conceptualisation of and implementation of their proposed school, which is in keeping with the public discourse of autonomy surrounding free schools. Highlighting their desire for autonomy and the subsequent rejection of so many of their applications is valuable both for challenging mainstream depictions of black communities as lazy and over reliant on the welfare state and exposing how the free school policy rejects black agency.

The Black Education Movement: What's Next?

One of the clearest ways the principle of Kujichagulia revealed itself in the data was in the participants' discussions about black independent schools. Many participants discussed how at the outset of the application process they regarded free schools as an opportunity to transfer their ideas, which had been generated in the context of community based educational provision over a number of years, to mainstream schooling. Based on the repeated rejections of their applications however, many participants concluded that free schools did not provide an avenue to assert influence over the school system and that opening black run independent schools was therefore a critical next phase in the ongoing evolution of the black education movement. Kwame, for example, advocated for *"a two pronged attack. We can campaign and march for Free schools but in the meantime let's do our own*" which, as explored in the third chapter is consistent with the history of the black education movement which has always simultaneously challenged and supplemented the system. Viola similarly declared, "*We have to set up our own institutions and treat them with the same respect we hold other institutions with".* Glenroy also offered:

> *It started with the supplementary schools and what has now developed out of supplementary schools is a desire to have our own independent schools. There have been schools which have come and gone but just because they have gone, it doesn't mean the actual philosophy has died with it. Far from it. Inevitably, yes I do think independent school are the way forward.*

According to Andrews (2014) there is a long and well established tradition of black radicalism spanning the African Diaspora that regards mainstream institutions in the West as structurally racist. They argue it is pointless to try to infiltrate and change mainstream institutions and that black

organisations should focus their energies instead on the creation of black institutions. This perspective was espoused as early as 1935 by Du Bois' in his article *Should the Negro have separate schools*? in which he argued that the entrenched racism prevalent in the school system necessitated separate black schools:

> I know that race prejudice in the United States today is such that most Negroes cannot receive proper education....There is no room for argument as to whether the Negro needs separate schools or not. The plain fact faces us, that either he will have separate schools or he will not be educated (p. 329).

Du Bois' stance has more recently been argued by Asante (1991), who is credited with formalising the theory of Afrocentricity, a movement which seeks to mobilize people of African descent across the African Diaspora around the unifying factor of race (Binder, 2002; Howe, 1998). In *The Afrocentric Idea in Education*, Asante (1991) articulated the need for separate schooling in order to redress the systemic failure of mainstream schools to acknowledge the culture of black students, which inevitably alienated them from said institutions. Instead Asante advocated for schools that would provide students with the opportunity to study the world and its people, concepts and history from an African worldview which would enable African American students to see themselves "not merely as seekers of knowledge but as integral participants in it" (1991, p. 170-171). The African Canadian academic George Dei has also been a strong advocate of the newly established black focused schools in Toronto, Canada. Like Asante, Dei (1996) argues the schools are a necessary intervention given the state of crisis facing black students in mainstream schools, reflected in pervasively high dropout rates.

Paul, in his rejection of both free schools and mainstream schooling, also articulates the futility of engaging with the mainstream: *"We are all trying to get to the destination, high quality education for black children that's going to really empower them so we can self-determine our futures. I think the free school is not an effective way to achieve this. They might have a different name but it's all about control. White supremacy does not give power to any other group"*. Later in the conversation he continues saying, *"We have to go for independent schools. There's too much racism in the system. The problem is if you devise a curriculum and you create text books and say ok, this is what we are going to teach, they will always have the last say on it".* His comments encapsulate the power struggle over agency which has been central to the black education movement. Paul's reflections also reveal his belief that the school system is permeated with a deeply entrenched and ultimately insurmountable racism. This research, which exposes the racism concealed from public view within the free school apparatus, gives credence to the notion that racism within the educational system is

irremediable, not least because of the way it is embedded in seemingly benign institutional systems and processes, which both conceal and distract from the startlingly unfair outcomes they produce.

According to Tomlinson (1986), there have always been various calls for independent schooling by Britain's black communities. She notes that as early as 1977 the West Indian Standing Organisation, which represented the interests of a number of black organisations, proposed a centrally funded black led school, managed by a black staff team. Tomlinson (1986, p. 70) notes, however, that any notion of segregated schooling in Britain has always been vehemently rejected by "government and educationists in Britain as well as unions so we have a de facto segregation instead" (see also Andrews, 2014). Dove (1993, p. 443) cites the example of the John Loughborough School, a small independent school rooted in the Seventh Day Adventist faith, which was started by a group of parents in order to meet the specific needs of black pupils. In spite of levels of academic achievement which were among the highest in London, the school had its application to become a state grant aided school turned down in 1990 by the Conservative government. The example of the John Loughborough School helps illustrates the specific hostility with which separate black schooling is viewed. Tomlinson (1986) contrasts this hostility with the positive view taken of 'separatist' private independent white schools, which are embraced as examples of good practice. Although the free school application guidance does not overtly reject race-based programming, which is in keeping with its non-raced standpoint, it is implicit, nonetheless, in the strongly worded statement outlining the government's intention to reject any applications perceived to embrace an "ideology which runs counter to the United Kingdom's traditions of tolerance and shared democratic values" , DfE, 2010, p. 59) as explored in Chapter 4.

This concern of being perceived as promoting race-based schooling was often cited by participants as a barrier in the application process as reported in the previous chapter. Regardless of the myriad of ways in which they met the published success criteria and could demonstrate high levels of enrolment, the participants were nonetheless prevented from penetrating the free school landscape in significant numbers. Their experiences demonstrate how the free school policy is entrenched in white hegemony, which protects against the intrusion of other, unwanted ideas. Andrews (2014) argues that the notion of separate black schooling is often misunderstood as being driven by a hatred of whites, when in fact the impetus for separate schooling is the disdain for an oppressive system which has consistently disadvantaged black students. Dei (1996) similarly argues that Africentric schooling is driven by a particular worldview rather than the desire to be separate and that racial homogeneity is not a given. He contends that, "African-centred schools are defined

more by certain principles than by who goes there or who teaches there. It is important that these schools be open to all those who share the same underlying cultural, ideological and philosophical principles and assumptions" (1996, p. 299). This perspective is also advanced by Merry and New (2008) who state that:

> Even though African-centred schools are, in practice, primarily peopled by black people and undeniably preoccupied with "Blackness," there is nothing in the curriculum or the underlying philosophy to suggest that separatism per se, or segregation outside the school, is its aim (p. 53).

Critics of black independent schools argue they are unnecessary given the existence of so many segregated schools which are a by-product of the segregated neighbourhoods that feature in some of the UK's large cities (Andrews, 2014). Andrews argues, however, that this does not constitute legitimate black independent schooling given that black communities exert very little influence over schools situated in black neighbourhoods. Furthermore, he notes that quite often schools situated in urban black communities are insufficiently resourced which perpetuates cycles of underachievement.

Paul similarly described the current situation of predominately black schools in inner city areas where standards and resourcing remain problematic. He notes:

> *Somebody set an agenda and we are following their agenda you see. Well somebody said let's start free schools. And I'm saying there are all these schools in the borough that are predominately African Caribbean children, some with black headteachers and deputy head teachers. Why spend all your efforts achieving that when those children in those schools don't have the resources, the teachers don't have the teacher training and the community doesn't have the parent- teacher programmes*?

Paul's comments reveal his conviction that in spite of predominately black cohorts and in some instances black leadership teams, inner city mainstream schools fail to empower local communities or address the underachievement of black children. Writing some 80 years ago about the American context, Du Bois, himself a firm advocate of separate schooling for black children, also cited control over resourcing as a critical feature of separate black schooling:

> When our schools are separate, the control of the teaching force, the expenditure of money, the choice of textbooks, the discipline and other administrative matters of this sort ought, also, to come into our hands, and be incessantly demanded and guarded (1935, p. 335).

Andrews (2014) argues that black schools should be called independent, rather than separate, to reflect the importance of black leadership exerting agency over all aspects of schooling, which is a critical characteristic of the model. This idea of exerting influence over the education of black children is also reflected in Viola's observation that *"Who develops and therefore controls the minds of young African children is key"*.

The participants' engagement with the free school policy reflects the continuity of what Mirza and Reay (2000, p. 521) term a "consuming passion" to engage in the education of their children. For many participants free schools were initially perceived as the vehicle through which to achieve more agency in the school system in order to address the needs of black students. In this regard they are, as Viola refers to them, largely *"a failed experiment"*. Across the Diaspora, various models of African centred schooling have been launched. In America, the black independent school movement emerged amidst the civil right movement in the late 1960s and 1970s (Rickford, 2016). By 1970, at least 60 pan-African nationalist schools existed across the United States (Rickford, 2016). Although the exact number of such schools is unknown, Howe (1998, p. 3) notes that as of 1991 it was reported that there were roughly 350 private schools or Afrocentric academies educating more than 50,000 children in America. In Toronto, the state funded Africentric Alternative School, which uses the Nguzo Saba as its guiding principles, began operating in September 2009 in response to a community request for such a school to address a high dropout rate and achievement gap affecting students of African descent (Toronto District School Board, 2014). In this small sample, Pauline successfully converted her blueprint for a free school into a small independent school, while Viola also revealed her plans to open an independent school following the rejection of her application. One of several questions raised by this research is how and whether black free school proposers can combine and apply their pre-existing knowledge and experience of delivering education services with the experience gained through the application process in order to launch full time independent schools.

Conclusion

This chapter has used principles drawn from the Nguzo Saba to identify and examine a number of assets embodied by the participants during the free school application and approval process. Focusing on these assets is important because it disrupts deficit based constructions of the participants centred around how they failed to meet the application criteria. Instead, the chapter has focused on the range of pre-existing skills and knowledges the participants' possessed and

examined their potential to make a positive contribution to the free schools agenda. Focusing on the rejection of the participants' community cultural assets (Yosso, 2006), underscores how the application success criteria foregrounds specific forms of knowledge which reflect the government's preferences. This is evident, for example, in the prioritisation of (and narrow interpretation of) relevant educational and financial expertise as outlined in the application guidance (DfE, 2014), rather than the ability to engage with local communities, a strength demonstrated by the participants. The chapter has also explored the holistic educational philosophy rooted in collectivism embraced by participants and considered whether and how it can be transplanted to full time independent schooling, given that free schools have failed to provide participants with the agency over the schooling of black children which they sought.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

The goal of this research has been to use a CRT framework to learn more about the experiences of a small group of black free school proposers between the period 2010-2014. The study has prioritised locating the research participants' experiences of interacting with the free school policy within the larger history of the black education movement which is characterised by campaigning against poor outcomes of black pupils in schools and supplementing the system with community based schooling. The study has also applied a historical lens to the free school policy through an examination of British education policy in England from the 1950s onwards. Drawing on Gillborn's work (2005; 2008), the study has examined how education policy serves and protects the interests of the majority white population. The overarching conclusion of this research is that the free school policy, which is situated within dominant discourses of colourblindness and marketised schooling, is implicated in sustaining white domination in education.

Significance of the Research

Seven years after they launched amidst intense media scrutiny, free schools have quietly assumed their place on the landscape of British schooling. One possible explanation for the absence of a sustained media focus on free schools is the lack of available information about applicants and application outcomes. This research is significant because it provides insight into an otherwise concealed application process which results in the allocation of significant sums of public money. By exposing the inner workings of the application process from the perspective of those who are largely excluded from opening schools, the research challenges the government's claim to want to work with, not turn away, local people. The research is unique because it examines free schools from a raced perspective, an outlook which is largely absent from literature about free schools. By naming the specific processes that are excluding black free school applicants, the research contributes to our knowledge about how institutional racism functions within the free school policy and how best to contest it. One of the recommendations which arises out of this research is to demand that more data is collected and made available to the public about the racial make-up of all free school applicants. Access to such data is imperative in order to unveil and counter institutional racism and develop a clearer picture of which individuals and organisation are benefitting from the policy, and conversely, which ones are being excluded from opening free schools.

Summary of Findings

The first research question sought to explore how race and racism were factors in the free school application and approval process. The findings reveal that the participants encountered both covert and overt racism in the process of submitting proposals to open free schools. Many of their experiences of racism were enabled by and embedded within the systems which were put in place to facilitate the application process. Although these systems often appeared benign and neutral, the participants were disadvantaged and disempowered by them nonetheless.

One example of an inbuilt inequality concerns free school proposers' unequal starting points linked to the kinds of resources they have access to in support of their applications, which predetermines application outcomes. This research corroborates Highams' (2014) work based on an examination of successful free school proposers. Higham (2014) concluded that organisations with access to the most resources via powerful and extensive professional social networks were more likely to have their proposals approved. The participants in this study identified that the time, money and expertise required by the application process created significant barriers. One of the conclusions drawn from this research is that the application process is exacerbating existing inequalities by securing and expanding the influence of powerful individuals and organisations over schooling at the expense of smaller, less resourced ones. The unequal starting points among applicants highlighted by this study is a hidden aspect of the application process which is unremarked upon in the public discourse surrounding free schools. Focusing on the inequality in access to resources among applicants is important in order to challenge the government's claim to have established a fair process that is open to all.

Some participants responded to the challenges posed by the demanding application process by forging partnerships with larger established organisations who were, crucially, well resourced. This research uncovered a clear pattern of disadvantageous power dynamics between participants and their partner organisations. Overall, the partnerships featured in the study were paternalistic and diminished the influence and agency of black free school proposers who were expected to play a submissive role in the relationship. As a result, the study concludes that the partnerships, which evolved out of necessity, had the effect of reasserting white domination and racial subordination. This point is well illustrated by Susan, the experienced teacher who worked collaboratively with members of her church to develop a free school application. As a result of entering into a partnership with a powerful Trust, Susan went from being the lead proposer of a free school to being

sidelined and excluded from important decision making about the joint school. Although the Trust utilised Susan in order to create favourable optics of high levels of engagement with the local community, they exhibited a lack of commitment to genuinely sharing power with Susan. As these findings are based on the examination of only a handful of partnerships, further research charting the outcomes of free school applications submitted jointly by grassroots black practitioners and large, established organisations is warranted to establish the extent of these practices.

In addition to the barriers posed by the application process that may be impacting more broadly on small, independent and local free school proposers, the participants also experienced a number of additional barriers as a result of their racial identity. The research uncovered, for example, a number of microaggressions, which often took the form of throw away comments made by civil servants. Examples of microaggressions which this research exposed include suggesting participants' proposals were overly ambitious, shoehorning prospective black school leaders into pastoral roles and suggesting black applicants were better suited to running small primary schools rather than sizeable secondary ones, each of which are indicative of depressed expectations about the capacity of black applicants.

It is difficult to contest these casual examples of racism because there are no public records of the conversations during which they occurred. The research exemplifies how giving voice to those who are often excluded from institutions is important in order to identify specific discriminatory practices and relations that are often concealed by a rhetoric of inclusion, but which nonetheless sustain white domination. The microaggressions uncovered in the study raise questions about the extent to which those charged with assessing applications are performing a gate-keeping function by acting on pre-existing internal biases which shape their assessment of black applicants. As explored in Chapter 2, Sullivan (2006) argues that unconscious habits of mind produce automatic patterns of engagement with the world which sustain white supremacy (see also Dyer, 1997). The participants' experiences highlight the strategic importance of having people of colour in positions of power within institutions in order to disrupt mental habits that sustain inequality. One of the recommendations arising out of the study, therefore, is the need to campaign for more local community representation on panels involved in assessing free school proposals in order to contest microaggressive attitudes and behaviour.

Another more overt form of racism the participants encountered relates to the government's rejection of all-black proposer teams which created additional barriers to opening free schools for

some participants. The data from this thesis suggests that all-black proposer teams were consciously and/or unconsciously negatively perceived by the government as threatening to white hegemony and were, therefore, less likely to have their applications approved. One striking piece of evidence which supports this assertion was the inadvertently leaked government document submitted as part of a judicial review of the way free school applications were being assessed. As discussed in Chapter 6, under reasons for rejection, the document stated, *"I recommend that this school not be approved. This is not a school for the local community. It is for the black community. The proposers are Afro Caribbean and all their mentors are black"* (Garner, 2014). The incident demonstrates the lack of transparency in the decision making process surrounding free schools and supports this study's conclusion that race was an ever present, though unacknowledged, feature of the free school application process.

The study also uncovered inconsistencies in the way applications were judged, which as explored in Chapter 6, is consistent with McInnery's (2016) findings based on her analysis of rejection letters issued by the government to free school applicants between 2010-2012. One of the starkest examples of inconsistency related to Pauline, an experienced middle school leader who submitted a total of four free school applications, none of which were successful. Although Pauline's final application was rejected on the basis of a substandard financial plan, the identical financial plan was accepted as part of another free school proposal. This thesis argues that ambiguous feedback was used by the government to conceal their disapproval of the philosophy of education embraced by my participants, which is explored later in this chapter.

Charting the government's response to black proposal teams is important because it reveals the different meanings ascribed to different communities in the free school application process, a consideration which has not featured in the literature to date. The findings demonstrate that in the context of wanting to promote local parental engagement, the government championed and welcomed some civic engagement, however black collective civic engagement was viewed with suspicion and therefore thwarted. Reay and Mirza's (2001) observations about the supplementary school movement engendering fear of collective racial uprising are useful in placing the government's fear based response to all-black proposer teams on a historical continuum. One of the conclusions drawn from the findings is that black free school proposal teams arouse fear because they seek to exert agency in ways that challenge white domination in schooling and the entrenched unequal distribution of power in society, which are, as Gillborn (2008) reminds us, rooted in historical relations and locked in.

As well as identifying systems and processes which are excluding many black applicants from having their free school applications approved, the research identified that black free school proposers continued to be subjected to additional barriers during the post-approval phase. One example explored in this research is the discriminatory practices surrounding the appointment of headteachers to newly approved schools. This is well illustrated by the example of Susan who was subjected to a gruelling formal interview process in order to secure a position in the school she had conceived, while a white headteacher was appointed to the same school without interview on the basis of her credentials. The research also uncovered examples of inequality related to the allocation of land to schools. Control over land is important in the context of this thesis but also more broadly because of the role it has played historically in the oppression of people of colour. One of the questions raised by the research which requires further scrutiny is whether more favourable plots of land are being assigned by the government to organisations who they are politically aligned with and/or have pre-existing relationships with. Unveiling the unjust practices related to the appointment of headteachers and allocation of land is important because they happen entirely beyond the view of the public and are unreported on in literature about free schools. The examples cited in Chapter 6 provide insight into the hidden operations of power in the free school post-approval phase which secure white domination.

A holistic examination of the participants' experiences has revealed a clear pattern of racism in the free school application and approval process, borne out of a number of institutionally racist practices which are excluding black Free school proposers. By making explicit the specific practices that are excluding black applicants, the study provides insight into how best to contest these practices. The research points to the need to campaign for more transparency around the approval process and the outcomes of applications in order to disrupt the hidden mechanisms of power and increase accountability to the public, which is fitting for a policy initiative launched under the auspices of opening up the school system.

This research has also revealed how the colourblind discourse surrounding free schools is a significant factor in enabling racism to thrive in the application and approval process. Overt discussions about race and free schools are therefore required to challenge this status quo. In order to sustain any focus on race and free schools it is critical that statistics about the racial backgrounds of successful and unsuccessful applicants, as well as those assessing applications, are collected and

made available in order to clearly establish whether the discrimination experienced by the small number of participants in this study is being replicated on a larger scale.

The second research question focused on identifying specific assets embodied by the participants, which make them well placed to deliver mainstream educational services. The research has deliberately attempted to avoid producing a deficit view of the participants by focusing solely on their failure to meet the free school application success criteria. Instead, the study challenges the rejection of so many of the participants by identifying the range of skills and knowledge they brought to the application possess, which the narrowly interpreted success criteria failed to acknowledge. In order to understand more about these skills and knowledges, the study employed the Nguzo Saba, a pan-African value system, to assess the participants' capacity to open successful free schools. An evaluation of the participants' personal histories and current involvement in education revealed them to be highly skilled, motivated and experienced in delivering educational services, which contrasts with mainstream conceptualisations of black communities. Using the Nguzo Saba as an analytical framework unveiled the participants' specific ways of being rooted in historical and cultural norms and values, which speaks to the importance of using culturally relevant research tools in order to arrive at deeper understandings of ethnic minority communities, as explored in the methodology chapter.

Alternative Philosophy of Education

This thesis argues the distinct educational philosophy evident in the schooling proposed by the participants was at odds with the dominant model of schooling in England, which is underpinned by market values. Carby succinctly summarises the goal of the black education movement saying, "The black community has been engaged in a struggle to redefine what constitutes education" (Carby, 1983, quoted in Andrews, 2013, p. 82). These findings suggest that nearly 30 years after Carby's observation, this struggle to re-imagine education remains a focus of the black education movement. Among the participants there was a clear vision about the role of the school and the teacher, which together comprised a view of education which is diametrically opposed to the increasingly marketised model of schooling in England. To begin with, the model of education proposed by my participants was deeply contextualised in that it started from the premise of asking what black students need in order to navigate their way through and achieve success in a racist society, which contrasts with the colourblind standpoint from which mainstream schools operate. One of the challenges my participants reported was feeling obliged to suppress their desire to

address racial inequality in schooling in order to increase their chances of being approved to open a free school, given the incompatibility between race consciousness and the dominant colourblind discourse.

Participants also revealed that they perceived student needs holistically which was reflected in the way academic development was intertwined and had parity with social and emotional development in their school proposals. The participants' approach in this regard contrasts with mainstream schooling which prioritises measuring students' academic achievements against national benchmarks above all else. The research participants also deviated from mainstream education in their ideas about the purpose of education, which they conceptualised as improving the circumstances of children, their families and the local communities they reside in, in order to transform societal power relations. In the concept of education embraced by the participants, students were perceived as being part of a larger collective whole, which contrasts with the mainstream school system's focus on helping individual children reach academic milestones.

The participants' proposals also conceptualised the role of the teacher differently. In addition to engaging with students, the participants also envisioned teachers as actively involved with the families of students and the local community, the latter of which the teacher was presumed to be an already active member in. Indeed the school was regarded as being in service to families and the wider neighbourhood. In this way teachers were tasked with fulfilling a vital role in achieving continuity between school and home life, which contrasts with the separation between home and school, and teachers and local communities, which is commonplace in the more hierarchical mainstream school system.

The research illuminates the clash in ideology between community based education and mainstream education over the purpose of schooling and who is best placed to design and deliver education. Ultimately, the thesis argues that the models of schooling proposed by the participants were unpalatable to the government because they de-centre white power by proposing that the solutions to the challenges facing black students reside in black communities. The thesis further argues that in spite of claims to want to empower local people, the free school policy in fact further secures the government's power and control over schooling, resulting in a narrowing, rather than increase in the diversity of schooling as free school applications are filtered through an approved ideological lens.

Participant Assets

The research identified a number of specific assets among the research participants, rooted in African and African diasporic cultural practices, which I argue render them well placed to open free schools. The first of these is Nia, one of seven key principles drawn from the Nguzo Saba, which translates as vocation or purpose. Many of my participants had pre-existing and long standing involvement in delivering community based educational services, alongside their full time jobs. Their commitment to education was a vocation of sorts, rooted in a strong sense of duty to nurturing the next generation of community members, which is at odds with the drive to secure best value for money that dominates marketised schooling. One of the conclusions drawn from the findings is that the participants' active involvement in their local communities was a form of social capital, which translated into high enrolment numbers for their proposed schools. Both Susan and Trevor's schools which were approved to open, for example, were oversubscribed which contrasts with the struggles many new free schools experience in recruiting students as reported by the National Audit Office (2013) and Bolton (2016). One area which warrants further research is the impact of high profile local proposers on the enrolment figures of newly approved schools, which is important given that free schools were rationalised in part as a solution to a shortage of school places in local communities.

In the absence of the extensive resources required to effectively complete the application process, some participants turned to their social networks by opting to work together and share resources and expertise in order to increase the likelihood of black free school proposals being approved. In doing so they exemplified the second asset Ujima, which signifies a commitment to collectivism. As Chapter 3 documented, collectivism has been an important feature of the black education movement over the past 60 years. Although the research conceptualises this commitment to collectivism as an asset which would benefit schools, it also proposes that it was regarded by the government as subversive in their assessment of applications given that it challenges white domination and the concept of individualism, which is an important component of the neoliberal discourse underpinning free schools (Wright, 2012).

The pooling of community resources and willingness to work collaboratively is indicative of the desire to be and work autonomously, which is a summation of the final asset, Kujichagulia. As

explored in Chapter 3, the struggle to exert agency over the schooling of black children has been the driving force of the supplementary school movement. As a result, it is possible to conceptualise the presence of so many black free school proposers in the early rounds of the application process as a continuation of the well-established desire to influence schooling.

One of the arguments advanced in the thesis is that the free school application success criteria established by the government is based on a narrow middle class definition of skills and knowledge, which predetermined the exclusion of many grassroots free school proposers. The findings, therefore, call into question the efficacy of the application criteria and the processes which have been established to assess applications. In particular, the thesis argues that the skills and knowledge of grassroots applicants are being overlooked by the free school policy because they are often misunderstood and therefore discredited by the gatekeepers who assess applications. In this way the policy is perpetuating the exclusion of black (and potentially other marginalised) communities despite a discourse about local empowerment and engaging with local communities. One of the recommendations arising out of this research is further evaluation of the relationship between the increasingly strident application process (which is continuously being updated, without consultation) and the exclusion of grassroots applicants.

Distribution of Power in Free Schools

In spite of the discourse of freedom surrounding free schools, the literature review summarised a range of mechanisms within the application and approval process which disempower grassroots free school proposers. Although the government suggested that free schools sought to empower local communities, the research concludes that the application processes engineered by the government instead cemented their own power in tangible ways. The first of these concerns is the distinct lack of consultation with local communities over the application and assessment process, which was cited as early as 2011 by Campbell–Stephens in an insightful piece on her initial impressions of the policy. In effect, when the free school policy was launched the process of applying to open a school was already established, the implication being that applicants must mould themselves to fit the assessment criteria, rather than the assessment criteria being chosen to reflect the skills and knowledges which resided in the local communities the government purported to want to engage. Another manifestation of the government's control over the application process concerns the lack of local community involvement in assessing applications, which is arguably fitting in a policy which seeks to increase local civic engagement in schooling. As discussed earlier, the presence of local

people on assessment panels is important because it has the potential to mitigate against the devaluing of community based knowledges.

One of the more startling examples of governmental power over the free school application process is that proposers are denied the right to appeal decisions made about their applications, thus preventing scrutiny over decisions made. An equally striking illustration of power concerns the lack of information the government makes available to the public about the number and nature of rejected applicants, which presents a major barrier in researching free schools, as explored in the methodology chapter. A final example of state domination identified in the research concerns the considerable power the government wields over the allocation of land and staffing arrangements in the post-approval phase, which occur entirely beyond the public gaze and therefore remain uncontested.

Black Led Independent Schools

One of the unexpected outcomes of this thesis is my advocacy for black independent schools. As discussed in Chapter 3 which places the research into historical context, separate race-based schooling has historically been rejected by British governments who have attempted to address racial inequality in schooling through universal, rather than targeted programming. Although separate race-based schooling can conjure up visions of extremism that conflict with and threaten British society, Andrews (2013) argues that separate, black community schooling is not entirely counter cultural by default. He argues that they occupy what he calls a contradictory space:

> To succeed it is necessary to engage in mainstream society even when institutions are racially biased. This reality has shaped the accommodative resistance of black supplementary and black organisations in general, which is at once a subversive challenge to the mainstream while simultaneously supporting the system by promoting success within it (2013, p. 88).

This desire to achieve success in mainstream society was also echoed by Gareth, a long serving headteacher of a small independent school, who commented that:

> We *want to succeed; you are not helping us so we will find our own way to succeed. We buy into the same meritocratic philosophy that these people push, we just want a chance and if you don't provide it we intend to find one way or another to take the opportunity.*

Andrews' (2013) scholarship and Gareth's observations help to reframe black independent schooling as a compelling tool to both challenge and resist racism in schooling and secure the economic success of future generations. Arguably, community schooling seeks to foster black people's inclusion as equal members of society, rather than advocate for their separation from wider society. In contrast white domination, which is endemic in British institutions, has a clear mandate of excluding 'others' and therefore represents an unacknowledged form of separatism with produces damaging effects.

Several factors have shifted my thinking about the necessity of separate black led schools. Chevannes and Reeves (1987, p. 159) note that "the most salient demand of the black school movement has been to obtain some influence over the process of educating black children". As discussed in Chapter 3, the government has consistently refused to concede power to, and agency over, schooling to black communities which secures white domination in schooling. This research highlights that although the free school policy was initially perceived as providing an avenue through which black communities could influence schooling, this has not been the case on a significant scale. Given the government's refusal to embrace their alternative community based approaches to delivering educational services, it seems futile to continue to attempt to penetrate mainstream schools, given the challenges posed over the past 50 years in doing so. The combined failure of strong anti-discrimination legislation and considerable academic research to shift racial inequality in schooling has shaped my belief that the solution to chronic problems of underachievement and disproportionate exclusions explored in the introduction of the thesis lie in embracing the community based assets highlighted in this research, rather than in state generated solutions. There are several practical reasons why black independent schools are worth considering. One of the important things full time black independent schools would provide is an opportunity to explore how the removal of systemic barriers impacts on black students' experience of schooling and educational outcomes. Furthermore, the distinctive philosophy of education rooted in African and African diasporic culture, which emerged out of resistance to racism in schooling, has been extensively piloted in the supplementary school movement over the past 50 years as explored in the third chapter. Transplanting community based schooling onto a larger stage would therefore involve the extension of a well-established model, rendering it arguably a low risk venture.

As has been discussed Andrews (2013) notes that black communities have always had a duality of approach between contesting racism in mainstream schooling and providing an alternative to it through community based provision. Although I argue for the creation of black led independent

schooling, it is important that this duality of approach is sustained. Even if pockets of black independent schools were established, the likelihood is that the vast majority of black children would continue to be educated in mainstream schools. It would be imperative, therefore, that the educational advocacy work which is an important part of the legacy of the black education movement, continues.

Although I advocate for black led independent schooling, it is worth noting some of the imperfections and challenges posed by the model. It is not a foregone conclusion that black run independent institutions will remove systemic barriers and thus secure better outcomes for black children. Nonetheless, in the present climate of choice fuelled by the marketisation agenda, I contend they have as much entitlement to be explored as other less traditional kinds of schools currently being approved under the banner of the free school policy. A significant question posed by the model is how black independent schools can survive financially in the absence of state funding without transferring substantial costs to parents, thereby rendering themselves inaccessible. One as yet unexplored possibility is the potential for collective movements like Black Lives Matter to fund initiatives based on a shared value system, which is in keeping with the strong drive towards self-sufficiency that already characterises the black education movement. A final practical question worthy of consideration is whether the distinctive educational philosophy and practice of community based schooling can transition effectively to larger, more regulated settings.

In spite of these undeniable challenges, I argue the substantial experience of delivering community based educational services rooted in a distinct philosophy, combined with the knowledge and skills gained from applying to open free schools, make black free school proposers well placed to engage in opening full time independent schools. In this sense it is possible to reframe failed attempts at opening free schools as a stepping stone on the journey to opening full time schools with the potential to transform black pupils' experiences of schooling.

Recommendations

In addition to the recommendations made earlier in the chapter about the need for more access to data about free schools and the need to give local communities more decision making power about new schools opening up in their area, a number of additional recommendations arise out of this study. The first of these regards the use of race-based research methodologies like CRT in order to contribute to knowledge about the impact of systemic racism. By sharing their experiences of the

free school application process, the participants generated counter stories which provide valuable insight into the barriers some applicants are experiencing, thereby contesting the government's assertion that anyone can open a free school. Focusing on the policy from the perspective of those who are being excluded has provided a unique vantage point from which to analyse the policy. Through enabling participants to tell their own stories, this thesis has provided an alternative construction of black communities as passionate about and fully engaged with the process of education. This contrasts with mainstream narratives about hard to reach groups and provides evidence of how critical race theory's methodological approaches can generate new knowledge. This research demonstrates the necessity of de-stigmatising race-based methodologies. A practical step towards achieving this would be to ensure emergent scholars receive instruction about methodological approaches like CRT in order to orient them to research paradigms which can be used to study ethnic minority communities effectively and with integrity. More generally, a greater focus on critiquing how research paradigms that masquerade as neutral can produce distorted representations of ethnic minority communities would also support new scholars in making informed choices about collecting and analysing data (Stanfield, 1993; 1994; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012).

A further recommendation relates to the study of the black education movement. The struggle for race equality in schooling is an important piece of British history, which is well documented in local archives and the subject of considerable scholarship. One of the recommendations of this thesis is that this body of research be included as part of education studies and teacher training courses. Studying, for example, the work of Coard (1971), would develop the capacity of teacher trainees to understand systemic racism and its effects, as well as the role teachers play in perpetuating it. A study of the black education movement also has the potential to enhance teachers' understanding of community assets which would increase their capacity to work effectively with black students, their families and community based education providers.

More research is also required about the distinct philosophy which underpins community based schooling. There are pockets of black run independent schools who quietly secure positive outcomes for black students. We need to learn more about them in order to develop a holistic picture of how they impact on black students, families and communities in both the short and long term. As explored earlier, one of the implications of this research is the importance of using culturally appropriate research frameworks in assessing community based education settings in order to capture a range of their effects, including those which exceed the narrow focus on student attainment that dominates the evaluation of mainstream schools. Although supplementary schools

have been studied (Chevannes and Reeves, 1987; Dove, 1993; Mirza and Reay 2000, 2001; Myers and Grosvenor, 2011; Andrews, 2013), further research focused on how settings translate their distinct educational philosophy into practice is required in order to establish a blueprint for the expansion of community based schooling into full time independent schools.

Finally, although free schools are becoming more firmly established, they remain under researched and further studies are required to understand how they are impacting on students, as well as on the education sector more broadly. In particular we need research to ascertain the extent to which free schools are fulfilling the aims as set out by the government of engaging local people in narrowing gaps for children from disadvantaged backgrounds through outstanding innovative provision. Although this thesis has uncovered patterns of experience among the participants which evidence how racism is a factor in the free school application and approval process, further research is required to assess whether the experiences reported among the small sample who feature in this study are occurring on a larger scale and also impacting on other non-dominant group's attempts to open free schools. Other important considerations for further research concern whether black free school proposers' experiences are varied in different geographical areas and if so how local circumstances intersect with applicants' experiences of applying to open free schools. Crucially, ongoing research is needed to monitor which applications are being approved and which applications are being rejected, which, as has been discussed, is challenging because of the current lack of access to information about free school applicants. The findings of such research could well reveal and be useful in strengthening my argument that the beneficiaries of the free school policy are well established large organisations whose provision fits within dominant models of schooling, rather than community organisations with alternative conceptualisations of education.

Finally, the extent to which free schools are complying with the legal requirement to promote equality and diversity as set out in the Equality Act 2010 also requires further exploration. Bolloten's 2013 research on this topic concluded that many free schools are failing to fulfil the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty 2010. Further research is required to establish whether this is still the case and if so to what extent. The failure of some free schools to effectively promote equality and diversity is significant because the government has made strong claims about the capacity of free schools to address inequality in education.

Overall, the participants' engagement with the free school policy is well summed up by Susan, who reflected on the disappointment and challenges involved in applying to open a free school.

Contemplating her ultimate lack of involvement in the free school she founded alongside members of her congregation, she notes, *"It's so hard. I drive by the school every day and obviously I see the kids at church and they run up to me and I'm still putting my stuff into them"*. Her comment encapsulates the injustice of her exclusion, which as has been explored in this study, was facilitated through a number of systemic processes. The fact that she is still "*putting her stuff into them*", however, is a testimony to the enduring commitment to education which resides in black communities and the strength of the communal bonds and sense of collective responsibility to ensuring the wellbeing of future generations that persists in the face of unyielding racism.

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APPENDIX 1

RESEARCH PROJECT BRIEFING

April 2015

About the Researcher

I am a PhD student in the department of educational studies at Goldsmiths University. Over the past 15 years I have had a variety of roles both in schools, and as a local authority teaching and learning consultant with a focus on Black children's achievement. I currently teach part time in a large FE college in London whilst I complete this research.

About the Research

This research focuses on the experiences of Black community education practitioners and organisations in London and their attempts to become Free Schools which are largely undocumented.

The Purpose of this Study is to:

- understand how the Free Schools application process is experienced by local organisations or individuals
- to raise the profile of the potential for Black community educators to deliver mainstream educational services
- to raise questions about who is being included and excluded from the Free Schools movement and how Free Schools are impacting on the broader educational landscape.

Data Collection

Data will be collected in the period between May 2015 and October 2015. There are 2 methods which will be used to collect data:

1) Interviews with individuals who participated in developing an application to become a free school.

2) Document analysis: Where possible, the researcher would like to analyse submitted Free School applications and any written feedback received from the DfE on the proposal which will be returned at the completion of the research.

I am available to answer any questions you may have about the research process and or to provide any other additional information you should require. My contact details are: edp01cw@gold.ac.uk.

Regards,

Clare Warner

PhD Student, Goldsmiths, UCL

APPENDIX 2

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study, which will take place between May 2015 and October 2017

Information and Purpose: The interview which you are being asked to participate in is part of a research study that is focused on examining the experiences of Black community education projects and practitioners in becoming a Free School.

Your Participation: Your participation in this study will consist of an interview lasting approximately one hour. A follow up 1 hour interview may be arranged if required. You will be asked a series of questions about your experiences of applying to become a Free School. You are not required to answer the questions. You may pass on any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. At any time you may notify the researcher that you would like to stop the interview and your participation in the study. There is no penalty for discontinuing participation.

Participating organisations and individuals who wish to can also submit to the researcher for analysis one copy of their Free School application and any written feedback received from the DfE. All documentation will be kept in a secure place at all times and will only be read by the researcher. If individuals/organisations prefer not to submit their application, they can still participate in the research process by being interviewed.

Confidentiality: Our discussion will be audio taped to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words. The tapes will only be heard by the researcher for the purpose of this study and will be destroyed once the information has been extracted from them. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time. All of your information and interview responses will be kept confidential. The names of organisations and all individuals interviewed as part of this research will be anonymized at all time, including in filed notes, the dissertation itself and any other publications which arise out of the research.

By signing this consent form I certify that I ____________________________ have read and understand the information above and agree to the terms of this agreement.

____________________________ ______________

(Signature) **(Date)**

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

About the Organisation

When and why was the organisation established?

What provision do they offer?

About the Application Process

Free schools were started as part of the government's Big Society agenda. What does the term Big Society mean to you?

How did you first hear about Free schools?

What made you decide to apply to become a Free school?

When did you submit the application? (Pre/post 2011)

How did you decide who would work on the application?

What kinds of expertise did the people working on the application have?

Did you draw on wider networks of family and friends to complete the proposal? In what ways?

What kind of support did you get from the New Schools Network or any other organisations in completing the application?

What approach did you take to completing it?

What kinds of challenges did you face in completing the application?

How long did it take to complete?

The government guidance says that they prioritise applications from people with the relevant education and financial expertise and a track record of running existing provision. What are your views about whether this is the right criteria to judge applications on?

What other criteria do you think the government should consider when approving applications?

What strengths does your organisation have which would enable you to run a Free school successfully?

What skills exist among the wider school community which could have assisted in the successful running of a Free school?

Were you able to demonstrate these strengths and skills in your application?

(If no) What would have given you a chance to demonstrate your strengths?

What are your thoughts on how the application process could be made more accessible?

The Proposal

What were the aims and objectives of your proposed school?

Was race mentioned in your application? In what way?

What was your approach to demonstrating that local parents supported your application?

What did you identify as priorities in:

- Teaching and Learning
- Curriculum
- Admissions process

What kind of feedback did you receive on your proposal?

What was your proposal team's response to the feedback?

What were your thoughts on resubmitting your application?

Conclusion

What kinds of Free schools have opened in the area near your organisation?

In what ways was your organisation consulted about the opening up of these new schools?

A number of new kinds of schools have been approved including a military school, a Spanish language school and a school based on an Eastern philosophy. Do you think the government would approve a Free school targeting Black children?

What is your view of Free schools now?

Are there other individuals or organisations you would recommend that I speak to?

APPENDIX 4 – List of Approved Free Schools Waves 1-4 (2011-2014)

Wave 1 Schools- opened in 2011	**Wave 2 Schools- opened in 2012**
Aldborough E-ACT School All Saints Junior Ark Atwood Primary School Ark Bolingbtroke Academy Ark Conway Primary Academy Barnfield Moorlands Free School Barwick's Own 2nd Secondary School Batley Grammar School Beckenham Secondary School Bedford Free School Birkenshaw, Birstall and Gomersal Parents Alliance Bristol Free School Canary Wharf College Chorley Career and Sixth Form Academy Discovery New School Eden Primary School Etz Chaim Primary School Harris Primary Free School IES Breckland Free School King's Science Academy Krishana-Avanti Primary School Langley Hall Primary Academy Maharishi Free School Nishkam Free School Looking Glass Academy (now known as Pheonix Academy of Performing Arts) Rainbow Primary School Rivendale Primary School Sandbach School Shooter's Hill Primary School St Luke's Church of England Primary School St. Matthew's Catholic Secondary School Stoke-by—Nayland Free School Stour Valley Community School Tauheedul Islam Boys' High School The Boulevard Academy The Free School Norwich The Priors School Three Valleys Independent Academy We Need a New School West London Free School Woodpecker Hall Primary Academy	Alban City Free School Atherton Community School Avanti House School Barrow 1618 Church of England Primary Free School Barwick's Own 2nd Secondary School (BO2SS) (now known as Ingleby Manor Free School and Sixth Form) Beccles Free School Becket Keys Church of England School Brighton Bilingual Primary School CET (Constable Educational Trust) Primary School, Tower Hamlets (now known as Solebay Primary a Paradigm Academy) City Gateway Cobham Free School Compass School Southwark Corby Technical School Cramlington Village Primary School Dixons Music Primary Dixons Trinity Academy East Birmingham Network (EBN) Free School Emmanuel Community School Enfield Heights Academy Everton Free School Grindon Hall Free School Harmonize Academy Harpenden Free School Hartsbrook E-ACT Free School (now known as Brook House Primary School) Hatfield Community Free School King's Leadership Academy Warrington Kingfisher Hall Primary Academy Lighthouse School, Leeds London Academy of Excellence Michaela Community School Mossbourne Victoria Park Academy Newham Free Academy Newnham School 21 Nishkam High School Oakbank Free School One in a Million Free School Parkfield New School (now known as Parkfield School) Pimlico Primary Academy

	Reach Academy Feltham Rimon Jewish Primary School Saxmundham Free School Southwark Free School St Michael's Catholic Secondary School Star Free School Steiner Academy Frome Stone Soup Academy The City of Peterborough Academy (Special School) The Excellence Academy (now known as Perry Beeches II The Free School) The Gateway Primary Free School The Greenwich Free School The Hawthorne's Free School The Rural Enterprise Academy The Swanage School Tiger Primary School Wapping High School William Perkin CofE High School

Wave 3 schools opened in 2013	**Wave 4 schools opened in 2014**
Abacus Belsize Primary School Anand Primary School Ark Enfield Academy Balham Free Primary School (now known as Rutherford House School) Barnfield Fernwood Free School Boston Free School (now known as Boston Pioneers Free School Academy) Bradford Girls' Grammar School Cambourne Village College Cathedral Primary School CCT Learning (now known as Abbey View Free School) Central Bedfordshire Free School (now known as The Academy of Central Bedfordshire) Chichester Free School Churchill Special Free School Collective Spirit ContinU Plus Academy Durham Free School East London Science School Education Village Trust Free School (now known as Marchbank Free School)	ARK Burlington Danes Primary Academy ARK Byron Primary Academy (formerly ARK Ealing Primary Academy) ARK North Enfield Academy (formerly ARK Pioneer Academy) ARK Pioneer Academy (formerly ARK Blended Learning Academy) Ascot Road Community Free School Aspire Academy Aspire Academy, Worcester Beal 14-19 Business Innovation Hub Big Creative Education (formerly DV8 Academy) Braywick Court School (formerly Bray Free Primary School) Burnley High School Cambridge UTS Canary Wharf College 2 Chapeltown Academy Chetwynde School City Gateway Hackney City Gateway Newham City United Ltd (CUL) Academy Trust Cobham Free School Senior Department

Exemplar - Newark Business Academy (now known as Newark School of Enterprise)
Exeter Maths School
Fulham Boys School
Hackney New School
Hadlow Rural Community School
Harris Aspire Pupil Referral Free School (now known as Harris Aspire Academy)
Harris Free School Tottenham
Hatcham Temple Grove Free School
Heron Hall Academy
Hewens Primary School
Wave 3: Heyford Park Free School
Holyport Free School
Hope Community School
International Academy of Greenwich
Isaac Newton Primary Academy
Judith Kerr Primary School
Khalsa Science Academy
Khalsa Secondary School
Kimberley 16 to 19 STEM College
King's College London Specialist Maths School
King’s School, Hove
Langdale Free School
Leeds Jewish Free School
Longsight Community Primary
Lynch Hill Enterprise Academy
Marine Academy Primary
Mosaic Primary School
Nanaksar Primary School
New Islington Free School
Nishkam School West London
Oasis Academy South Bank
Peaslake Free School
Plymouth School of Creative Arts
Rainbow Schools, Nottingham
REACH Free School, Birmingham
River Bank Primary School
Riverside Co-operative Free School
Robert Owen Vocational School
Route 39 Free School
Sevenoaks Christian School (now known as Trinity School)
Sir Isaac Newton Free School
Sir Thomas Fremantle Free School
Southend YMCA Community School
Sparkwell All Saints Primary School
St Andrew the Apostle Greek Orthodox School
St Anthony's School
St Mary Magdalene Academy Courtyard
Mary’s Hampton Church of England Primary School

Cringle Brook Primary School (formerly Kingsway New Primary School)
Dawes Lane Academy (formerly School Partnership Trust Alternative Provision Academy)
Dixons McMillian Academy (formerly Dixons Free School)
Earl's Court Free School Primary (formerly The Earls Court Primary School)
East London Arts and Music (formerly East London Academy of Music)
Eden Boys' School, Birmingham (formerly The Birmingham Free School)
Eden Boys' School, Bolton (formerly Bolton free School)
Eden Boys' School, Preston (formerly The Preston Free School)
Eden Girls' School, Coventry (formerly Coventry Leadership Academy for Girls)
Eden Girls' School, Slough (formerly Slough Girls' Leadership Academy)
Eden Girls' School, Waltham Forest (formerly Waltham Forest Leadership Academy for Girls)
Eden School (formerly Eden Free School)
Education Links
Essa Primary School
Evendons Primary School
Falcons' Primary School, Leicester
Gateway Academy
Gladstone School
Harperbury Free School
Harris Academy Tottenham (formerly Harris Tottenham Free School)
Harris Invictus Academy Croydon (formerly Harris Invictus Free School)
Harris Primary Academy Beckenham (formerly Harris Primary Free School Beckenham)
Harris Primary Academy East Dulwich (formerly Harris Primary Free School East Dulwich)
Harris Primary Academy Mayflower (formerly Harris Primary Free School Chafford)
Harris Primary Academy Shortlands (formerly Harris Primary Free School Bromley)
Harris Westminster Sixth Form (formerly Harris Westminster Free School for Post 16)
Holy Trinity School (formerly Holy Trinity International School)
INSPIRE Special Free School
Island Free School
Ixworth Free School
Jane Austen College
Jubilee Primary School

St Mary's Primary School, Dilwyn Steiner Academy Exeter STEM Academy Stockport Technical School The Acorn Free School The Archer Academy The Bristol Primary School The Connell Sixth-Form College The Free School Leeds The Heights Free School The Jubilee Academy The Leeds Retail and Financial Services Academy The London Riverside School (now known as Barking Free School) The Maltings Free College The NAS Thames Valley Free School The New Jewish Primary School (now known as Alma Primary) The Northern Lights Primary The Olive School, Blackburn The Olive School, Hackney The Olive Tree Primary School The Reach Free School, Berkshire The SASH (Slough association of secondary headteachers) School The St Marylebone Bridge School The Titan Partnership Trust School The University of Birmingham School and Sixth Form The Wells Free School Thetford AP Free School Thomson House School Tooting Primary School Warrington Montessori School West London Free School Primary West Newcastle Academy Westside Free School Wye Free School	Jupiter Community Free School (formerly Hemel Hempstead Community Free School) Khalsa Engineering Academy La Fontaine Academy (formerly Bromley Bilingual Primary School) Lanchester Community Free School (formerly Watford Town Community Free School) LIPA Primary School (formerly The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) Free School) London Enterprise Academy Malcolm Arnold Preparatory School (formerly Malcolm Arnold Primary Free School) Marylebone Boys' School Meridian Angel Primary School (formerly Meridian Water Academy - Primary Department) Milton Keynes Free School NAS Church Lawton School (formerly NAS Cheshire East Free School) NAS Vanguard School North Somerset Enterprise and Technology College Nottingham Free School Oasis Academy Romford Oasis Academy Silvertown Oasis Community School Walthamstow On Track Chiltern Paxton Academy Sports and Science Pentland Field School (formerly Pentland Special School) Perry Beeches III - The Free School Perry Beeches IV - The Free School Phoenix Free School of Oldham Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Blackburn Raynes Park Community School (formerly Park Community School) Riverside Bridge School (formerly Riverview Special School) Salisbury Sixth Form College Seva School Spalding Bilingual Free School St Mary's Church of England Primary School St Wilfrid's Academy (formerly School Partnership Trust Alternative Provision Academy) Steiner Academy Bristol The Advance School, Norbury The Bridge Integrated Learning Space The Elland Academy (formerly School Partnership Trust Alternative Provision Academy) The Family School The Gatwick School (formerly Crawley Free School)

	The Heights Primary School The Kingston Academy (formerly The North Kingston Secondary School) The Legatum Academy (formerly East London School and Lord Coe Free School) The Marco Polo Academy The Rise School The Ruth Gorse Academy The WREN School (formerly West Reading Education Network (WREN) Secondary School) TLG Bradford Trinity Academy Turing House School WAC Arts Free School (formerly Weekend Arts College (WAC) Free School) Walthamstow Primary Academy Whitehall Park School (formerly Islington Free Primary School) XP School

DfE, (2016).