'But you don't look Irish': identity constructions of minority ethnic students as 'non-Irish' and deficient learners at school in ireland

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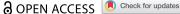
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ABSTRACT

Ireland's schooling population has significantly diversified in the last 15 years. Despite the growing body of research on migrant and minority ethnic students' experiences, we still know relatively little about their relationships with peers and teachers. This paper draws on data collected as part of a wider study, informed by critical race theory (CRT), about the higher education (HE) experiences of minoritised ethnic students, involving interviews with 25 students across seven HE institutions in Ireland. 11 had attended school in Ireland, and this paper examines their schooling experiences including their 1) identity battles in not being recognised as Irish, 2) experiences of racist bullying and inadequate responses of teachers, and 3) construction as 'deficient' learners, including regarding HE progression. From a CRT perspective, the findings are examined in the context of exclusionary constructions of Irishness, and the urgent need for anti-racist education in Ireland for students and teachers.

1. Introduction

Whilst diversity has always been a feature of Ireland's population (Bryan, 2009), between 1999–2007 the number of immigrants to Ireland tripled (McGinnity et al., 2006). Households designated as 'mixed' and/or 'non-Irish' increased by 14.7%, and 'dual Irish nationality' increased by 87.4% between 2011–2016 (Central Statistics Office, 2017a). This significantly increasing population diversity was largely attributed to the 'Celtic Tiger' period of unparalleled economic growth, during which Ireland attracted many 'economic migrants' from diverse countries. While inward migration subsequently declined sharply due to the recession, by 2015, net migration was again positive and Ireland currently has one of the highest proportions of foreign-born residents in the EU (McGinnity et al., 2020a). Based on figures from the Irish census, by 2016, 70% of migrants living in Ireland were born in another EU country, and 30% in a non-EU country (ibid.).

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Another source of migration into Ireland are those seeking international protection, with Nigeria being the top country of origin from 2001–2013 (ibid.).[1] Of Ireland's 4.8 million population, 30,987 are Travellers (representing 0.7% of the general population) (Central Statistics Office, 2017b), Ireland's indigenous ethnic minority group.

In the same timeframe (1990s and 2000s), school populations in Ireland also significantly diversified and by the 2015/2016 academic year, at primary level, 89.4% had Irish nationality, 5.3% other EU nationality, 1.6% Asian nationality, and 1.2% African nationality (Tickner, 2017). At post-primary level,[2] 88% were born in Ireland, 3.8% born in EU13, and 2.5% in UK (ibid.).[3] In Ireland, there is evidence of segregated schooling (Ní Laoire et al., 2009). Black and ethnic minoritised students, including Travellers, are over-represented in larger, disadvantaged ('DEIS'[4]) urban schools (Byrne et al., 2010; see also Ledwith, 2017), which are generally under-subscribed and have a significant concentration of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Darmody et al., 2016). This is partly due to school enrolment policies[5] which disadvantage newly-arrived and Traveller families in terms of access to schools. For example, as reported by McGinnity et al. (2015), 25% of African children attend the most disadvantaged schools at primary level, relative to 9% of Irish children. There are also concerns about how children and young people living in Direct Provision integrate into and are supported by the mainstream schooling system (Ní Laoire et al., 2009). These students live in crowded living conditions with inadequate access to appropriate study spaces and learning resources, including EAL supports (Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2020). The homogeneity of the teaching profession in Ireland, with 98–99% of teachers being White, Irish and of the settled community (Keane and Heinz, 2016, Heinz and Keane, 2018) is another relevant factor in the Irish context, given the importance of a diverse teaching population for both minority and majority students (Keane and Heinz, 2015). While the lack of teachers from minority ethnic groups has been a concern internationally for some time (cf. Carrington et al., 2000), efforts to diversify the teaching profession in Ireland are much more recent (Heinz and Keane, 2018).

While aspects of national policies[6] (such as the Migrant Integration Strategy, 2017–2020; the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021) inform educational policy and practice, the main educational policy initiative has been an emphasis on intercultural education (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2006). This has been regarded by many as a 'policy panacea' (Bryan, 2009, p. 297), and as ineffective, given the lack of training for teachers with respect to its implementation.

In spite of the vast literature internationally on the experiences of Black and minority ethic students of migrant origin in schooling, and a growing evidence base in this regard in Ireland over the past two decades, we still

know relatively little about the experiences of these students in Irish schools, particularly their relationships with their White Irish peers and teachers. This paper draws on data collected as part of a wider study informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) exploring the higher education (HE) experiences of (25) (non-Traveller[7]) minority ethnic students in Ireland (Ni Dhuinn, 2017). In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 participants across seven HE institutions in Ireland to generate 'counter narrative' or testimonio (Harper, 2009, p. 702) on the minoritized ethnic student experience. As part of this, they reflected back on their schooling experiences; and 11 of the 25 participants had experienced primary and/or post-primary school in Ireland. In their narratives about their schooling experiences, the participants focused on their experiences with peers and teachers, particularly on how their identities were constructed by others in the schooling context.

CRT originated in legal scholarship in the US (cf. Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado, 1989). CRT is less a theory and more a perspective (Gillborn, 2006) which foregrounds race in analyses of the social world; it constitutes 'a set of interrelated beliefs about the significance of race/ racism and how it operates in contemporary Western society, especially the US' (ibid., p. 19). In recognition of the complex and changing nature of race and racism (ibid.), there is no unitary statement of CRT. However, a number of concepts are associated with this perspective. Racism in society is seen as ' … endemic … deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically' (Tate, 1997, p. 234). It is regarded as systemic and 'normal' (that is, not rare), and there is a rejection of claims of meritocracy, colour-blindness, objectivity and neutrality (ibid.). Delgado (1995, p. xiv) emphasises 'the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day and that account for much misery, alienation, and despair' rather than the more obvious examples of racism 'that do stand out' (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p.7). Thus, as Gillborn (2006, p. 21) argues, in CRT, racism is seen 'not only in relation to crude, obvious acts of race hatred but also in relation to the more subtle and hidden operations of power that have the *effect* of disadvantaging one or more minority ethnic groups'. In this way, the focus is on the *outcomes or results* of procedures, processes and actions (rather than the intention). CRT is historical in terms of its analytic framework, and the lived and experiential knowledges and experiences of people of colour are prioritised. Thus story-telling and counter-stories are strongly associated with CRT. Bell's (1980) concept of 'interest convergence', where an outcome leading to a positive result for people of colour 'may have resulted more from the self-interest of elite whites than a desire to help blacks' (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7), is also prominent. An emphasis on intersectionality and anti-essentialism are also hallmarks of the CRT perspective, with

the recognition that nobody has a single, unitary identity, but rather 'potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances' (ibid., p. 9) often resulting in the coming together of multiple systems of subordination (Crenshaw, 1989). Importantly, in CRT, there is an aim to change rather than just understand social reality in relation to racial inequity (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Indeed, for Crenshaw et al. (1995, p. xiii), CRT is unified by two 'common interests':

> The first is to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America … The second is a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to change it. (ibid.)

Drawing on Ansley (1997), Crenshaw et al. (1995), and Rollock and Gillborn (2011) note that 'white supremacy' includes more than the more obvious racial hatred of extremist groups; it relates to the forces and resources in societal systems and structures which are controlled and owned by Whites, and in which notions of White superiority (and non-White inferiority) are assumed.

Mahmud (1997) have applied CRT in education (see also Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2005), emphasising the role of institutional and structural racism underpinning the poverty which is often cited as the cause of academic under-achievement of Black students. Additionally, their analysis has demonstrated how racism accounted for specific inequalities in education, including in relation to dropout, suspension and exclusion rates for Black and Latino students in US schools, as well as examining connections between property and whiteness in the context of schooling. In her 1998 paper, Ladson-Billings examines issues of curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation in the US to explore the relationship between CRT and education. She highlights and interrogates the school curriculum as a 'colorblind … White supremacist master script' (p. 18) due to the silencing and erasure of minority voices and stories, instructional strategies as being based on deficit assumptions of Black academic inferiority, as well as inappropriate traditional assessment measures, inequalities in school funding, and ineffective and inauthentic desegregation efforts which actually served to advantage Whites. For Ladson-Billings (1998), CRT in education is not just about 'exposing racism in education' but also involves having to 'propose radical solutions for addressing it' (p. 22).

There are six sections in this paper. Section two examines the school experiences of minority ethnic pupils, drawing on international and Irish research literature. Section three presents the study's methodology. In section four, we present the study's findings pertaining to the participants' schooling experiences, focusing on how the participants' identities were constructed by their peers and teachers, and their related experiences of

racist bullying. Section five discusses the findings with reference to previous research and in the context of CRT, and in section six we conclude with a number of recommendations.

2. Literature review

A significant body of research has accumulated on the life and educational experiences of minority ethnic young people of migrant 'origin' in Ireland. This research from the Irish context corroborates and nuances findings from international studies which emphasise a number of key themes in the experiences of minoritised ethnic students in schools, in particular their teachers' deficit views and low academic expectations, and their regular experiences of racism, including in relation to their peers.

2.1 Teachers' constructions of minority ethnic students in schools

While the experiences of different minority ethnic student groups in schools are complex, nuanced and varied, deficit racialised constructions of minority ethnic students in schools are common both in Ireland (Devine, 2005, 2013; Kitching, 2011, 2014) and internationally (Gershenson et al., 2016; Gillborn et al., 2012; Vincent et al., 2013; Youdell, 2003). In Devine's (2005) qualitative study with school leaders and teachers in Ireland, teachers positioned different minority ethnic groups in particular ways, viewing African and Roma students in particular in a very deficit fashion. In Ireland, constructions of successful and/or desirable learners are also related to English-language proficiency (Darmody et al., 2014). For many students of immigrant origin in Irish schools, English is an additional language, and they are sometimes regarded as 'peripheral and problematic' (Nowlan, 2008, p. 262). Language support needs are often misconstrued by teachers as indicators of low academic capability (ibid., Devine, 2011). Further, there is evidence of these students being steered towards less demanding academic tracks because of their apparent language 'deficiencies' (Darmody et al., 2014; Lyons, 2010). Indeed, as Archer (2008) observes, minority ethnic students are rarely identified as 'the ideal pupil' more generally, and are thus prevented from inhabiting a positive academic identity. In England, Mac An Ghaill (1989, p. 274) observed the 'discourse of deficit' White teachers adopted in relation to Afro-Caribbean students, who are seen as undesirable 'or even intolerable' learners by their teachers (Youdell, 2003, p. 3), negatively impacting the students' academic identity construction and consequently, their academic performance (ibid). Low teacher expectations are generally predicated on assumptions of Black inferiority (Chapman & Bhopal, 2019), and in the US, using large-scale nationally representative survey data, Gershenson et al. (2016) showed that non-Black teachers of

Black students have significantly lower expectations of them than do Black teachers. Further, research internationally has found that minority students are aware of teachers' low expectations (cf. Pringle et al., 2010; Rhamie et al., 2012; Rollock, 2007; Vincent et al., 2013). For example, in Pringle et al.'s (2010) US study of African American seniors at two high schools, the students reported that their teachers did not expect much from them in their academic work (relative to their White peers). Not only were they aware of their teachers' low expectations but they explicitly related them to race, and reported negative interpersonal relationships with their teachers more broadly. In England, teachers' constructions of less academically successful students have also been related to forms of dress and interests in schools, particularly for Afro-Caribbean boys, with hooded tops, baseball caps, Nike clothing, hip-hop music and 'street culture' negatively connoted with engagement and academic success (Rollock, 2007).

Teachers' perceptions of student behaviour have also been found to be highly raced and a key contributor to minority students' academic under-achievement and school drop-out (Peguero, 2011). An over-arching sense of needing to control and enforce discipline (Monroe, 2005) upon minoritised youth, particularly Afro-Caribbean and African American boys perceived as rebellious and nonconformist (Sewell, 1997), is apparent from the literature internationally. In terms of managing behaviour, disproportionate disci-pline-related responses, including school expulsion, has been identified as a key issue for minority ethnic students internationally (cf. ibid.; Bhopal & Myers, 2008; Bondy et al., 2017). In the US, Black, Hispanic, and American Indian youth were two to five times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers (Wallace et al., 2008). Disproportionate disciplinary responses have also been reported in relation to Latino American girls relative to their White American peers (Bondy et al., 2017). In a study of Black boys with African Caribbean heritage in the UK, it was also found that they are disproportionately punished in the school environment (Sewell, 1997). Similarly, in Ireland, evidence is emerging that some teachers per-ceive the presence of minority ethnic students in their classes, and relation-ships therein, as problematic (Fine-Davis & Faas, 2014). Gilligan et al. (2010) found that minority ethnic students perceived that teachers gave preferential treatment to White Irish students. Devine (2005) reported that teachers in her study tended to focus more on the behaviour of their African students than other aspects of their engagement in schooling.

Being viewed as a 'desirable' and/or successful learner is classed as well as raced. Archer (2008) notes the dominant discourse of the 'ideal pupil' as being one who is White, male and middle class. In an analysis of first-generation children from a migrant background in Ireland, Devine (2009, p. 531) discusses how minority ethnic children used school as way to 'accumulate capital' and secure their integration to Irish society. However,

some from lower socio-economic groups were limited in the 'capital' they could accumulate, while middle class, ethnic minority children used academic attainment at post-primary level as a way to 'consolidate' their class position (Devine, 2009, p. 532). Teachers play a role in this consolidation, as Devine (2005, p. 61) found that when an ethnic minority child was perceived as 'good' by the teacher, there was a perception that they came from a middle class background.

2.2 Peer relationships and experiences of racism

There is significant evidence from the research literature internationally of problematic relationships between students from different racialized groups. Research typically reports different groups not mixing together (cf. Tatum, 2017). In Rhamie et al.'s (2012) study in Britain, while the young people surveyed expressed positive views about diverse school populations, there was evidence of a lack of engagement between diverse groups. In a comparative US-UK study of African American and Black Caribbean students' in predominantly White second-level schools (Chapman & Bhopal, 2019), students were racially stereotyped by their peers, particularly in terms of deficit views of their academic ability. Raby's (2004) study in Canada with 12 teenage girls revealed their denial and downplaying of racism in school, and their centring of whiteness, in spite of offering examples of racist incidents in their schools. In the US, African Americans and Latino Americans experience significant discrimination, including physical and verbal harassment from peers, in the schooling environment (Peguero & Jiang, 2016). Not mixing with 'other' groups may, of course, serve a protective function (Keane, 2011); for example, Zhang (2018) reported that migrant children in rural schools in China constructed 'a strong non-local group identity' (p. 60) which enabled them to combat a sense of inferiority in interactions with their more advantaged peers. There is also significant evidence of 'White racism' (Bhopal, 2011) experienced by Gypsy and Traveller groups; in Bhopal's (2011) study, reports of racist incidents by Gypsy and Traveller children in schools were not taken seriously by teachers, compared to reports by 'other' minority ethnic children, and racist bullying and poor peer relationships are commonly reported by this group (cf. Derrington & Kendall, 2004; Deuchar & Bhopal, 2013).

Similarly in Ireland there is evidence of the challenges experienced by minority ethnic students in the socio-relational realm of schooling, fuelled by their construction as 'other' by their White Irish peers due to their different skin colour, first language, religion and/or cultural background (cf. Devine, 2011; Devine et al., 2008; Kitching, 2011; Tormey & Gleeson, 2012). For example, at primary level, Devine et al. (2008) reported an

absence of meaningful mixing and some inter-ethnic conflict (forms of exclusion, racist name-calling and some physical fighting) between students from different ethnic groups. At post-primary level, Kitching (2011) revealed tensions in how students from different racialised groups perceived each other in the context of establishing various types of learner identities, with minority ethnic students regarded as 'undesirable' learners and classmates by their White Irish peers. Language has also been found to impact peer relationships, with relevant students citing being mocked by peers due to their lack of English language proficiency and preferring, therefore, to stick with peers with the same linguistic background, often leading to the development of 'cliques' (Devine, 2011; OECD, 2015). In Northern Ireland, racism and harassment of minority ethnic groups by majority group students has been reported, including physical assault, racist name-calling, and more subtle forms of 'jokes' and 'slagging' (Connolly & Keenan, 2002). Research has also found that migrant children, in attempts to be accepted by peers and teachers, play down various parts of their identities and engage in behaviours to try to prove their 'Irishness' (Devine, 2009). For example, many describe themselves in a 'hybrid' or 'hyphenated' manner, e.g., African-Irish, but are often questioned about such an identity and pressured to choose one identify or nationality over the other, often the non-Irish one (Ní Laoire et al., 2009). Similarly, at post-primary level, Kitching (2011) revealed the complex performed identities of the 'new migrant' students in his study, as they presented their identities in hybrid ways.

3. Methodology

This paper draws on data collected as part of wider qualitative study informed by CRT exploring the higher education (HE) experiences of 25 minority ethnic students of migrant 'origin' in Ireland (Ni Dhuinn, 2017). Highly conscious of academia's legacy in the construction and maintenance of racial hierarchies (Ashcroft et al., 2007) and of how a White researcher 'studying marginalised 'others' may be perceived as colonialistic, manipulative or exploitative' (Henderson, 1998, p. 161), there was an acknowledged need for critical reflexivity and self-examination in relation to researcher identity/ies and positionality/ies. This involved an at-times uncomfortable reflective thinking and writing process throughout the study, culminating in the inclusion of a critical autobiographical reflection and a poem in the final write-up of the research (Ni Dhuinn, 2017) which served to position the researchers in relation to the study's participants, acknowledging their privileged racialized position. It was understood that the racial divides between the White researchers and minoritised ethnic participants could never fully be crossed, and that the lack of an insider perspective precludes

the White person from access to the Black social world (Adamson & Donovan, 2002). In this regard, the use of a CRT approach was seen as particularly valuable, especially in its emphasis on counter storytelling (Delgado, 1989) or testimonio (Harper, 2009), which disrupts the hegemonic White voice by presenting the 'truth' of the minoritised lived experience and in naming oppression (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). The creation of testimonio was of key importance within this study due to the erasure and marginalisation of minoritised voices that do not conform to White, English-speaking Catholicism of dominant Irish socio-cultural discourse, particularly the voices of participants who had experience living on the margins of Irish society in Direct Provision. To facilitate testimonio, it was decided to adopt an in-depth interview approach to data collection. Whilst the interview schedule was semi-structured in nature, the interviews were relatively unstructured in practice, focusing on posing broad questions and then following participants' (counter) stories. The focus on the elicitation of testimonio through (counter) storytelling (Berryman et al., 2013; Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) with members of a community normally silenced necessitated a more mutual and dialogic approach. This enabled the participants to ' . . . speak freely in their own terms about the set of concerns you bring to the interaction, plus anything else they wish to talk about' and to be 'free to interrupt, ask clarification of the interviewer, criticise a line of questioning' (Robson, 2011, p. 288). The focus of the study's research questions, and the interview questions, was the participants' experiences of progressing to HE in Ireland (accessing HE, and their academic and socio-cultural experiences therein). As the approach taken was participant-led, the participants' concerns were 'followed' during the interviews and those with experience of schooling in Ireland engaged in an extended discussion on the subject, considering their interactions and relationships with peers, teachers, and their academic and social experiences. Hence, while their schooling experiences did not feature heavily in the original research questions, this avenue was pursued during the interviews due to the participants' wish to discuss this area.

Participation in the study was open to any Black and/or minority ethnic student studying in an Irish HEI who was from a migrant background. As expected, participant recruitment was initially challenging; informal feedback from the field relayed messages about research fatigue, distrust and resentment, particularly in a study conducted by White researchers, which is not uncommon in research of this kind (Bartolomé, 1994; Berryman et al., 2013). Over time, through advertising the study through Access Centres and International Students' Offices in Irish HEIs, as well as through the authors' contacts and networks, 25 participants volunteered to participate and were recruited. At the time of interview, the study's 25 participants were engaged in a range of HE programmes, at undergraduate and postgraduate level,

across seven HEIs in the Republic of Ireland, 21 in a University and four in an Institute of Technology. Of the 25, 15 were male and 10 were female. 10 were Irish citizens, and six were awaiting Irish citizenship. Full ethical approval for the study was provided by the Research Ethics Committee at NUI Galway, and participants received detailed information about what participation in the study involved in advance of study commencement. Participants were reminded about participation being voluntary and their right to withdraw at any time at the start of the interview.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and transcripts were returned to participants for their review. Due to a White neocolonial tendency to correct 'black English' (Ball and Lardner, 1997), efforts were made during transcription to present the authenticity of each individual voice beyond White pronunciation and therefore no significant 'corrections' were made. In terms of data analysis, influenced by coding techniques from constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), initial line-by-line coding (using gerunds), and focused coding were employed, followed by mapping, and the development of provisional categories. From a CRT perspective, data analysis is a potential site of contestation as the White gaze interprets the narrative(s) of the minoritised 'other'. It was understood that the stories of the participants presented a picture 'not merely part of a neutral and given reality, but as products of power relations and struggle' (May, 2002, p. 237). In this way, and in alignment with CRT principles, priority was given to the concerns of the participants' themselves in determining the emphases of the categories developed. During analysis, it became clear that participants' HE experiences had been significantly influenced by their prior experiences of schooling. Of the total participant group of 25, 11 had experienced primary and/or post-primary schooling in Ireland (see Table 1. for background information on these participants). Core aspects of their experiences of schooling concerned: 1) Identity Battles to Belong: Not being Recognised as Irish; 2) Racist Bullying and Teacher Responses; and 3) Language and

Table 1. Participant characteristics and location(s) of schooling.

Pseudonym	Sex	Ethnic Background[8]	Irish Citizen	Country/ies of Primary Schooling	Country/ies of Post-Primary Schooling
Ado	M	Angolan	No	Angola-Ireland	Ireland
Paddy	M	Pakistani-Irish	Yes	Ireland	Ireland
Awande	M	South African	Yes	South Africa	South Africa & Ireland
Pawel	M	Polish	No	Poland-Ireland	Ireland
Akoni	M	Nigerian	No	Ireland	Ireland
Idai	F	Zimbabwean-Irish	Yes	Zimbabwe-Ireland	Ireland
Adelina	F	Angolan- Irish	Yes	Angola-Ireland	Ireland
Iana	F	Somali	No	Somalia- Ireland	Ireland
Niamh	F	Kenyan-Irish	Yes	Kenya-Ireland	Ireland
Azli	M	Pakistani- Irish	Yes	Ireland	Ireland
Uzoma	M	Nigerian-Irish	No	Nigeria-Ireland	Ireland

Academic 'Deficiencies' and Dis/Encouragement to Progress to Higher Education.

4. Findings

4.1 Identity battles to belong: not being recognised as Irish

The 11 participants who had experienced primary and/or post-primary school in Ireland reported that they were more or less accepted as long as their peers and teachers could acknowledge and 'recognise' them as being different. Furthermore, there was an onus on the participants to recognise *themselves* as being different, 'other' and non-Irish.

For some participants, being accepted as Irish was dependent on skin colour and language, with White skin and English language proficiency being the accepted norm as to what constituted a right to claim an Irish identity. Those who identified as Irish described how they were positioned as 'non-Irish' due to their skin colour despite being biracial and/or having Irish citizenship. For example, Niamh (Kenyan-Irish) stated that she was not always aware of skin colour herself, but was continuously made aware of it by her White Irish peers and teachers throughout her schooling experience.

> Being the new girl in the class where you find everyone is literally either staring at you or not wanting to make any eye contact and I was like 'okay, so it's going to be like that, it's not going to be that easy' [laughter], nobody wants to be my friend for the day [laughter], nothing like that so I think that kind of stuff used to always remind me that I'm different. (Niamh, Kenyan-Irish, Female).

She remarked that, 'I think at least once a day I'd have somebody remind me that I was of a different colour', and was continually asked 'where are you from?' by her peers, despite being an Irish citizen. Noting that 'you can't just be', Niamh had made very deliberate attempts to hide aspects of her Kenyan background in her determination to 'integrate'. She reflected on one such instance when she swapped traditional Kenyan flatbread for brown bread in her school lunchbox:

> I didn't want to bring in any lunches, any kind of traditional food, I would say to my mum I want a ham sandwich on brown bread. Flatbread, I was like none of that, it all smells weird in class, just give me the brown bread . . . it was exhausting because I was constantly trying to prove myself . . . . no I am determined to integrate, even if it kills me, I'll integrate you know. (Niamh, Kenyan-Irish, Female.)

Similarly, Paddy (Pakistani-Irish, Male) described how his White, Irish school peers constantly reminded him that he was different. Despite having an Irish name and an Irish father, his skin colour was used as the reason to identify him as 'non-Irish'. He recalled the way in which his peers described

him and reflected on the difficulty of understanding his positioning as different:

> . . . they go, 'Jesus you sound Irish and you act Irish but you don't look Irish'. I was a bit confused as to why the kids in my class at primary school kept mentioning this thing. Why they would constantly say 'you're different' even though I knew I sounded like them and had similar names to them. [. . .] Why are they saying I'm not Irish when that's obviously all I am? (Paddy, Pakistani-Irish, Male)

Awande (South African, Female) defined herself in her own terms, noting that 'I actually prefer Afro-Irish, African-Irish, it makes sense because it tells you the person was born in Africa and is now Irish'.

Being labelled as 'non-Irish' resulted in significant and longstanding identity-related problems for some participants. Following her experiences at school not being recognised as Irish, Niamh (Kenyan-Irish, Female) commented that she had 'brought an identity crisis to college'.

> I brought an identity crisis to college . . . By the time I had finished school and was going into college I did not want to be associated with anything else other than being a normal Irish girl from Dublin. I hated being asked where I was from. I used to lie, I used to come up with different places just because I didn't want to have to go through the whole rigmarole that I'm actually Kenyan dadada so for some reason I used to say Fiji, I'd never been to Fiji, I don't know what people from Fiji look like. (Niamh, Kenyan-Irish, Female)

Similarly, Uzoma (Nigerian-Irish, Male) carried his schooling identity battles into HE, asking himself 'What am I?' where he felt he was 'constantly battling to belong'. He felt that there had been no space in school to be accepted as both Nigerian and Irish:

> We're battling with ourselves, 'am I Irish or am I Nigerian?' My Nigerian friends say I'm not Nigerian enough, ok I'm Irish, my Irish friends say I'm not Irish enough, so what am I? It's a constant identity battle . . . You're constantly battling to belong. We all have our own battles but it's intensified because of your skin colour. (Uzoma, Nigerian-Irish, Male)

4.2 Racist bullying and teacher responses

Some participants recalled experiences of racist bullying in primary and/or post-primary school, including racist name-calling, being mocked for language or accent reasons, being isolated or ignored, or spoken to aggressively for no particular reason. Pawel (Polish, Male) was mocked when he started post-primary school when his peers picked up on his lack of English language proficiency:

> First couple of weeks were hard. I won't lie to you cause, d'ya know, the language barrier and d'ya know, there were some lads who were always going to make fun of me

for that.[...] There would be lads trying to you know, mock me and kind of test me, d'ya know [...] who did try and take advantage of my lack of language and they were trying to mock me, d'ya know. (Pawel, Polish, Male)

For Awande (South African, Female) to avoid racist name-calling, she found it was easier to spend time with school peers who 'looked like' her.

> It was easier for me to stick to the people that looked like me rather than the ones that didn't look like me because children are taught things so some of them did call us names. (Awande, South African, Female)

For many of the participants, however, it was not so much the experiences of racist bullying that participants reflected upon; rather they highlighted the frustration they felt at their teachers who did not know how to deal with such incidents or, indeed, understand how racist bullying was different from other forms. Paddy (Pakistani-Irish, Male), for example, observed that his teachers failed to recognise, indeed 'ignored entirely the power constructs' in relation to skin colour:

> I think one of the biggest issues I found in secondary school and in primary school with racism was when you reported it to teachers they didn't see it as different to any other type of bullying ... they didn't understand when they were saying to that person of colour ... they were ignoring entirely the power constructs that exist in society. They were ignoring entirely the distinct disadvantage and under-privilege that this person has for being, having skin that is not White. (Paddy, Pakistani-Irish, Male)

Paddy noted teachers' inability to step outside White Irish constructs of experience, with their advice on responding to 'being picked on' not being perceived as useful or meaningful:

> The advice they were giving is impossible to carry out than it would be for another lad who was being picked on because, I don't know, he missed a goal in a hurling match, you know it's different. He can actually question it and the teacher can give him a voice where he can stand up for himself. (Paddy, Pakistani-Irish, Male)

Similarly, Uzoma (Nigerian-Irish, Male) described one particular day at school where he was continuously picked on and teased by his White, Irish peers and how when a teacher found him crying during the lunch break, she was unsupportive:

> I sat in the corner and started bawling my eyes out and a teacher came by and in my head I was like 'oh, thank God, someone's going to talk to me and ask me if I'm alright'. She kind of looked at me 'are you alright?' Of course I'm going to say 'yeah', I'm a guy but you expect more comfort. I am literally bawling my eyes out. I'm crying here, do something. And she was like 'ok, if you're sure' and she kind of walked away and that was it. I obviously remember because it was so traumatic. I remember that we were always pushed aside, neglected in all aspects. (Uzoma, Nigerian-Irish, Male)

Uzoma also described what he referred to as 'race wars' during break time as football and rugby teams were divided into 'Black versus Whites'. He

remembered how 'it got really violent because of [. . .] individuals from the White side being racist'. In terms of the teachers' response, he recalled how it was only 'the Black people' who got suspended while White students received a caution:

> Each time it happened the Black people would have got suspended whereas the White people would have been just cautioned or something like that but we would have been the ones to get suspended. I don't why that was, it was easier just to suspend us or I don't know, it still baffles me and it still happens. (Uzoma, Nigerian-Irish, Male)

Some participants reported that it was their teachers, rather than their peers, who were the aggressors. Awande (South African, Female), for example, believed that the way in which she and others 'like her' were (dis)regarded as 'non-Irish' by a particular teacher, and the way in which they were spoken to in this regard, was both aggressive and demeaning, noting: 'well, she was just very aggressive especially when dealing with people that were not Irish, speaking to us in a very demeaning tone'. Niamh (Kenyan-Irish, Female) recounted similar tensions with her teachers who she felt were less receptive to her due to her non-Irish background

> Teachers who I felt rejected any kind of, not necessarily relationship with me, but were not as open to the fact that they had me in their class or open to being considerate to any of the sensitivities that you might have to have when you have a student from a different country in your class. (Niamh, Kenyan-Irish, Female)

4.3 Language and academic 'deficiencies' and dis/encouragement to progress to higher education

While many participants were bi/multilingual, they noted having to express themselves solely in English in school. Participants whose first language was other than English were very conscious of being perceived as academically lacking in some way. For example, Niamh (Kenyan-Irish), who was fluent in English, was sent to a resource teacher upon arrival in her school as it was assumed that she would need both English language and more general academic support. She described her interaction with the resource teacher:

> There were no words I did not understand, there was no lack of understanding and she was like 'why did you have to come and see me?' And I was like, 'I don't know'. (Niamh, Kenyan-Irish, Female)

Despite being very proficient in English, Awande's (South African, Female) first memory of entering post-primary school in Ireland was her teachers assuming that she could not speak English. She recalled:

> . . . the first question they asked me was, 'where are you from? Can you speak English? Do you understand the words that are coming out of my mouth?' (Awande, South African, Female)

Some participants described actively supporting peers with similar cultural and linguistic heritage who had recently arrived in Ireland and/or their school. Pawel's (Polish, Male), for example, recounted helping newly-arrived Polish students adjust to the new learning system and language environment in Ireland, 'helping them with their homework and stuff like that because some of them wouldn't have the language'. He had been the first Polish student in his post-primary school and he felt that this informal teacher/mentor role had stemmed from not having had anyone to help him when he had arrived:

> So when I was in 3rd year and then in 5th year, more kids started coming in so they obviously had me as a student to look up to. I was always there to help them, the language or whatever else but I was the first one there so there was nobody there to help me. (Pawel, Polish, Male)

Similarly, Azli (Pakistani-Irish, Male), who had been born in Ireland with Pakistani heritage, reported that he had taught English to students who moved from Pakistan and started in his school, in an informal capacity after school. Further, Azli had taken this opportunity to learn Urdu and Punjabi from his peers, (re)affirming a link to his heritage and bicultural identity, through a sort of multilingual 'exchange':

> My friends actually moved over to Ireland when I was 6 or 7 so you know they wouldn't have English [. . .] so speaking to them on a daily basis during school, after school, they got to learn English off us, we got to learn the language off them and then we were all fluent in both languages. (Azli, Pakistani- Irish, Male)

Being perceived as academically lacking in some way also negatively impacted the participants' preparations for the Leaving Certificate state examination and progression to higher education (HE). Several reported a lack of encouragement from their teachers in relation to the Leaving Certificate and HE progression, based on negative assumptions about their English language proficiency and wider academic ability. Niamh (Kenyan-Irish, Female), for example, who subsequently completed a primary degree in Theology and Arts, noted that her teachers were 'expecting me to be poor academically' having started her schooling in Africa before moving to Ireland, and she emphasised having to 'break down' such stereotypes. In fact, she felt that she had been more or less *discouraged* from progressing to HE and explained how she had had to counter this with an insistence that she wanted to further her studies.

> Of course there were all these misconceptions about the fact that I came from Africa, the fact that I spoke English and that it was very good. That seemed to kind of shake

people up a little bit because they were expecting me to be just a certain way and I wasn't any of those ways. I was sort of breaking down all those stereotypes. [...] Nobody pushed me to go to college. In fact, I actually had a conversation where I was told 'it's fine, you don't have to do that', 'just whatever' and I was like 'no, no, no, I want to do this'. (Niamh, Kenyan-Irish, Female)

Adelina (Angolan-Irish, Female) felt that the onus was on her to prepare herself for HE with limited advice and support from her teachers, describing her journey to HE as 'a fight':

We didn't really get much advice when it came to what we could do, what we could choose. Everything was kind of on us. I remember I wanted to do a different course and obviously I didn't get that course so, I had to do everything by myself and fight for this course ... (Adelina, Angolan-Irish, Female)

Uzoma (Nigerian-Irish, Male) claimed that he had never been made aware of the importance of the Leaving Certificate. In terms of his school teachers, he stated that 'we weren't really encouraged to be honest with you. We were just kind of seen as "those guys won't make it if you know what I mean"'. It was only when he entered HE doing Law that he reflected on this lack of encouragement:

I never really thought about it until I went to college and I started thinking they thought I wouldn't do something with my life and here I am do you know, so. [...] There wasn't a big drive to get us somewhere. [...] In Leaving Cert I was given the impression that I couldn't amount to anything. (Uzoma, Nigerian-Irish, Male)

Reflecting this lack of 'push' towards HE, Iana (Somali, Female) recalled being encouraged to undertake the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, which does not allow direct progression to HE, due to concerns regarding her standard of English. She remembered that 'the teachers, guidance counsellors and talking to people, they said Leaving Cert Applied is the best option I can master so I went for it'. Indeed, these low expectations led her to work particularly hard to counter teachers' views about her ability, noting that:

I need to do excellent, work hard all the time. The teachers even gave us ... all the exam papers and me and the other girls we would finish the whole thing before it was due and they would give us another one. (Iana, Somali, Female)

While Iana, a refugee in Direct Provision, did not proceed directly to HE after the Leaving Certificate, she subsequently accessed HE via a scholarship from a non-governmental organisation to study Social Care.

In contrast, Ado (Angolan) and Akoni (Nigerian) reported that they *had* felt actively encouraged to progress to HE. As Akoni, who was eligible for 'free fees',[9] and subsequently did Business, remarked:

They definitely pushed us. They gave us a guide to the Leaving Cert and things like that so they obviously helped us and the career guidance teacher, we could go to him

and tell him like different courses available and where you could do it. It was very important. (Akoni, Nigerian, Male)

Similarly, Ado (Angolan, Male) felt that his teachers encouraged him to progress to HE, but in his case, it seemed that his self-motivation played the key role in his preparation:

> Yes, I was encouraged, yeah but in a way it never mattered to me because I always knew, there's nothing nobody can tell me then and now that would make me say, 'no I don't want to go to college'. (Ado, Angolan, Male)

Unfortunately, Ado's status as an asylum seeker in Direct Provision prevented him for progressing directly from post-primary schooling to HE at the time. In considering the difficulties he experienced in accessing HE, he noted both a lack of relevant information provided and a lack of funding. He eventually entered HE via an Access programme to study Science.

5. Discussion

While a number of the findings presented have been touched upon in previous research about the experiences of minority ethnic students at school, in this paper we provide a sharp focus on their challenged identities, deficit constructions and experiences of racism in Irish schools at a critical juncture in international and Irish race relations. Informed by a CRT perspective, we demonstrate the clear and continued impact of race (and racism) on the experiences of schooling of minority ethnic students at post-primary level in Ireland, exposing some of Delgado's (1995) everyday 'business-as-usual racism' confronting these young people.

5.1 Refusing Minority Ethnic Students' 'Real' Irish Identity: Exclusionary Constructions of Irish Identity

Despite identifying as Irish, and in some cases having Irish citizenship, the participants were positioned by their White Irish peers as *not* Irish, particularly where their skin colour was other than White. Bell's (1980) concept of interest convergence, a core concept in CRT, is useful in considering how the students recounted being *somewhat* accepted, as long as their White Irish peers could 'recognise' them as being different, and if the participants recognised themselves as still being slightly 'other'. Interest convergence relates to how 'the interests of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of Whites' (ibid., p. 523). Bell (1980) had argued that the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision which outlawed segregation in public schools in the US happened only because Black interests temporarily coincided with those of White elites. Milner (2008) gives the example of the convergence of interests

between White upper class and 'non-English speaking' immigrant students, where the latter were being 'bussed in' to one of the 'best' schools in the area, ostensibly to support their English-language learning, but it was noted that the English-speaking students were also, in the process, learning 'different' languages (particularly Spanish) and becoming bi- or trilingual, with the school recognising the significant benefits that would accrue to their students by engaging in this exercise with the immigrant students. Drawing on Bell (1980), Milner (2008, pp. 333–334) argues that 'inherent in the interest-convergent principle are matters of loss and gain; typically, someone or some group, often the dominant group, has to negotiate and give up something in order for interests to converge or align'. In the context of the current study, not wanting to be seen as racist, which is common for people (McGinnity et al., 2020b), it was likely in the interests of the participants' White Irish peers to be seen to accept, at least on the surface, the participants' Irish identities. However, as we have seen, this was by no means a full or easy acceptance; essentially, they were being refused a 'valid' Irish identity. While it is recognised that 'identity is always hybrid, multiple, porous and mutable' (Bennett, 1998, p. 7), it would seem that the participants' school peers held much more fixed conceptualisations of Irish identity. Specifically, White skin colour and, to a lesser extent, English monolingualism, were regarded as precursors to being allowed to inhabit and claim an Irish identity. The focus on skin colour is reminiscent of what Devine et al. (2008) found; in their study, the children's constructions of Irish identity included assumptions relating to skin colour, as well as to lifestyle, language and religion. In discussing racism, the children focused only on skin colour in considerations of their Irish identity and the Black migrant children as 'other'. Waldron and Pike's (2006) study found children's constructions of Irishness to be essentialist; they argue that national identity was 'conflate-[ed] ... with a particular brand of Irishness' (p. 247): to be Irish was to be 'able-bodied, sedentary (non-Traveller), and white' (ibid.). Further, from a CRT perspective, the depictions of the participants as not Irish, *or not Irish enough*, by their White Irish peers due to their (Black) skin colour is illustrative of the 'white over colour' hierarchy (Joseph, 2018), in that the participants' White Irish peers were clearly well-aware of the 'superior' racial status afforded to them by Western society, and were careful to make this explicit. The structural embeddedness in society and education of White supremacist beliefs relating to White superiority and non-White inferiority (Crenshaw et al., 1995) is therein exposed. Niamh's comment about being 'determined to integrate, even if it kills me' and thereby making deliberate attempts to camouflage aspects of her racial identity was in reaction to having her Irish identity challenged on a daily basis. Her observation that 'you can't just be' also echoes what Chapman and Bhopal (2019) found with minority students feeling only valued as 'partial human

beings [who are] . . . negate[d] or penalize[d] . . . for their racial identity' (p. 1124) by the school system. This treatment can be understood as part of an institutionalised racism within society and in the education system, with the participants' continual identification as 'not really Irish' constituting significant acts of microaggression. As Warmington (2020, p. 24) states, 'At micro level institutional racism is reproduced through microaggressions: those small, unremarked, daily acts of disparagement that – intentionally or unintentionally – diminish people of colour in their encounters with those racialised as white'.

CRT is historical in terms of its analytic framework, requiring us to understand the historical origins of racism within a particular context (Gillborn, 2006).The participants' White Irish peers' refusal to fully validate their Irish identity may be understood in the context of Ireland's 'defensive ethnocentrism' (MacGreil, 1996) in the drive to establish national identity after independence from Britain in the 1920s. This historical context contributed to exclusionary constructions of Irishness as White, Catholic, and sedentary, in terms of who was regarded as 'normal' and belonging (Devine, 2011), resulting in significant discrimination against 'other' minority ethnic communities – or, indeed, hybrid cultural identities – who were seen as threatening Ireland's sense of identity (Bryan, 2009). The exclusionary relational process inherent in refusing the participants an Irish identity reveals a desire amongst the White Irish students to demonstrate and protect a perceived superior ethnic (and nationhood) status. The refusal of their minority ethnic peers' Irish identity can be construed as a form of 'distancing to self-protect' (cf. Keane, 2011) by the participants' White Irish peers, deliberately distancing themselves from their minority ethnic peers to protect their more privileged ethnic and nationality status, and creating barriers for those apparently encroaching upon their White Irish ethnic identity space (Keane and Heinz, 2016). This behaviour serves a purpose insofar as it maintains a false sense of cohesion for the dominant culture; in this way, 'implicit assumptions about "fixed" identities, unproblematic nationhood, invisible sovereignty, ethnic homogeneity and exclusive citizenship' (Mahmud, 1997, p. 633) go unchallenged. It is possible that the participants' White Irish peers were making the point that their 'governmental' ('born with it') national belonging capital was worth more and/or was more 'valid' than the 'accumulated' (e.g., acquiring citizenship) passive national belonging of their minority ethnic peers (cf. Hage, 1998). These concerns have also been found amongst White Irish applicants and entrants to initial teacher education in constructions of their own ethnic identities (Keane and Heinz, 2016). From an historical CRT perspective, Ireland's post-colonial status combined with the rapidity of socio-demographic change in the country, in particular during the 'Celtic Tiger' years of economic growth, along with the absence of any meaningful discussion or

education about identity, inclusion and racism, have set the scene for the exclusionary constructions of Irishness reported in this paper.

5.2 Racist bullying, deficit learner constructions, and the urgent need for anti-racist education

Uzoma's reports about differential treatment of students (White students being cautioned vs. Black students being suspended for the same behaviour) echoes findings from international research, and from a CRT perspective is illustrative of the racial stereotyping and racial surveillance experienced by minority students, particularly in mainly White schools (Chapman & Bhopal, 2019), and of the 'business-as-usual racism' consistently experienced by minority students (Delgado, 1995). Indeed, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1997) have pointed to the disproportionate rates of dropout, suspension, expulsion, among African American and Latino males, often for very minor 'violations', emphasising that race and blackness matter, with class and gender factors not adequately explaining the occurrences. Further, in their reflections on their experiences of racist bullying in school, the participants highlighted teachers' lack of understanding about the nature of racist bullying *and* their inaction in its wake. As noted in section two, previous research in Ireland has also reported inter-ethnic conflict and racist bullying amongst student groups in schools (e.g., Devine et al., 2008), but the findings of this paper shine a light on the importance of the teacher and school response, or lack thereof. For the participants, their teachers ignoring the racial dynamics underpinning the bullying they reported was particularly noteworthy. This illustrates the importance and necessity of CRT's emphasis on racial realism, that is the centring of issues of race (Chapman & Bhopal, 2019; Gillborn, 2006); the participants' reports of the normalisation of racist bullying as 'just bullying' in our study indicate the embeddedness of racism denial in the education system, including at institutional policy level. For most schools in Ireland, anti-racist statements tend to be contained in more generic anti-bullying school policies. If school policy sees racism 'only' within a bullying framework, then it is likely that teachers (and majority group students) will follow suit, illustrating the necessity of making explicit race as the category of analysis at policy and practice levels (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The participants were also frequently constructed in deficit terms with respect to their academic ability, primarily based on (often incorrect) assumptions about a lack of English language proficiency. Previous research in Ireland has reported low teacher expectations and a lack of encouragement in terms of progression to HE for those from lower socio-economic groups (Keane, Heinz and Lynch, 2018), but the findings in this paper show that this lack of encouragement is also a reality for some minority ethnic

students, and is connected, at least for some teachers, to beliefs about English language proficiency. Research in Ireland has also found that minority ethnic students are regarded as being academically deficient due to their bilingual or multilingual identity and that this impacts on their academic attainment within the education system (Darmody, 2011). Not having English as their first language meant they were regarded as 'peripheral and problematic' (Nowlan, 2008, p. 262, see also Lyons, 2010). The lack of encouragement to progress to HE experienced by most of the participants in this study not only demonstrates deficit constructions of their ability, but also a limiting of their future possibilities in terms of access to a HE degree, a marker of White middle class Irish identity. The participants perceived that their teachers, consciously or not, were basing their approach on deficit stereotypes of their racial group. Their experiences of consistently having to battle deficit stereotypes about their academic ability and progression possibilities, and the multiple racial microaggressions experienced in this domain, illustrates the urgent necessity, as emphasised by CRT in education, of resisting and deconstructing deficit discourses about Black inferiority in relation to racial minority students (Chapman & Bhopal, 2019; Gillborn, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2005). For Ladson-Billings (1998), instructional strategies typically rest on deficit assumptions of minority student academic failure and their need for 'remediation'. Instead, educators need to focus on the efficacy of the pedagogies and techniques employed, with effective teachers for minority students ' . . . understanding . . . the saliency of race in education and the society' as well as ' . . . the need to make racism explicit so that students can recognize and struggle against this particular form of oppression' (ibid., p. 19).

6. Conclusion

In the context of education in Ireland, there are numerous implications for policy and practice. From a CRT perspective, racism is 'normal, not aberrant' (Delgado, 1995) and indeed is permanent (Bell, 1992) in society. While this is recognised by Milner (2008), in the context of teacher education he nonetheless argues that 'it seems that in the pursuit of convergence and in our working toward convergence through the exposure of racism and inequity, strides can be made toward reducing inequity, racism, and hegemony' (ibid. p. 342).

With a view to 'working toward convergence' (ibid)., the findings of this study point towards an urgent need for critical intercultural education and anti-racist education for *all* teachers (as well as students). Research internationally (cf. Landsman et al., 2011) and in Ireland (Darmody et al., 2012; Devine, 2005, 2011; Leavy, 2005) indicates that many teachers feel underprepared and unsure about how to teach effectively in diverse schools. As

previously argued (see Keane, 2009, Doyle and Keane, 2019; see also Faas et al., 2015), professional development programmes are needed to educate and upskill practising teachers and school leaders on issues of privilege, disadvantage, the impact of socio-demographic positionality on experiences and outcomes, and the role of teacher (often deficit) expectations therein. As part of this, from a CRT perspective, a specific focus on anti-racist education for teachers, incorporating critical identity work regarding White privilege (of which White teachers are aware, cf. Bhopal & Rhamie, 2014), as well as practical strategies, or the 'teaching bag of tricks' (Bartolomé, 1994), that teachers need in their everyday work and interactions with students, is long overdue. While this work is increasingly done at the initial teacher education (ITE) level in Ireland, it frequently does not go far enough, and more experienced teachers generally have not had the opportunity to engage in professional development work of this kind. The ethnic homogeneity of the teaching profession, with between 98–99% of entrants to ITE programmes in Ireland being White Irish (see Keane & Heinz, 2015, 2016; Heinz & Keane, 2018), is also a contributory factor. As argued by Darmody and Smyth (Darmody & Smyth, 2018, p. 129), a lack of diversity amongst the teaching population can result in minority cultural and social capital being 'misrecognised and undervalued'. While numerous innovative programmes are being offered by teacher education centres to diversify teaching under the PATH1[10] programme funded by the Higher Education Authority, the lack of formal inclusion of minority ethnic groups[11] in the list of target groups remains highly problematic. From a CRT perspective, the absence of attention to race equity in education in Ireland, in relation to diversifying teacher education, but also more generally, is unsurprising, given that it is 'on the margins of education policy' and has to 'constantly fight for legitimacy as a significant topic for educational policy-makers' (Gillborn, 2005, p. 493). For Gillborn in England, 'this is a key part of the way in which education policy is implicated in white supremacy' (ibid.), as it is, we would argue, in Ireland.

For students' engagement in intercultural and antiracist education, the lack of diversity in school curricula in Ireland is of concern. Bryan (2012, p. 599) has noted how post-primary curricula, through its representation of ethnic and cultural difference, 'reinforces, rather than challenges' racism by individualising, minimising and naturalising racial experience. As we have seen, Ladson-Billings (1998, p. 18) has specifically pointed to the key role of the official curriculum in maintaining a 'White supremacist master script' which results in the silencing and erasure of minority voices and experiences. This has significant implications for both minority and majority group students in relation to issues of identity, inclusion, voice, power and representation. A positive move in Ireland will be the introduction of Traveller culture and history into the primary and post-primary school

curriculum, following the Traveller History and Culture in Education Bill in 2019. However, much work is needed to better embed intercultural education across the curriculum, not least in terms of the need to update the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2006) intercultural education guidelines for schools, and the provision of appropriate training for teachers to effectively implement these guidelines.

At the time of writing, in the context of the murder of George Floyd in the USA and the ensuing *Black Lives Matter* marches internationally, and in Ireland the shooting of George Nchenko by Gardaí (Irish police), there has been significant media attention to and debate about the experiences of racism of minority ethnic groups, including at schooling level, in Ireland (cf. O'Kelly, 2020; Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2020). Further, the rise of populist alt-right groups and the exacerbation of educational inequalities as a result of COVID-19 (United Nations, 2020) make highly problematic the silence and inaction from the Department of Education and Skills, and other stakeholders (for example, Teacher Unions), on the longstanding (Devine, 2011; Parker-Jenkins & Masterson, 2013) and now *urgent* need for critical anti-racist education for schools, teachers *and* students. It remains to be seen if and when the Irish government will identify race equity and anti-racist education for teachers and students in Ireland as a priority to be adequately resourced and appropriately implemented.

Notes

1. Until 2018, protection applicants were not permitted to access most social welfare benefits or to enter the labour market, but some work-related restrictions have since been lifted. Many protection applicants live in Ireland's Direct Provision system which provides meals, accommodation and a small allowance while awaiting a decision on their application (this often takes years).
2. Country of birth rather than nationality grouping is recorded.
3. The most recent figures that are available are for the 2018/2019 year on the primary online database (POD) and the post-primary online database (P-POD) at https://www.education.ie/However, with 30% and 58% respectively not providing information, or not giving consent, the figures are not reliable.
4. Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). DEIS was an initiative commenced in 2005 by the Department of Education and Skills to address educational disadvantage by providing targeted additional supports to relevant schools.
5. For example, traditionally, school enrolment policies operated on the basis of a 'first-come-first served' approach, which by definition disadvantaged families from the Travelling community and newly-arrived migrant families.
6. At the time of writing, a new national Action Plan against Racism is being developed in Ireland.
7. Travellers/Mincéir were not included in this study as it was felt that a targeted study focused solely on their perspectives and experiences was required in order to address their significant under-representation in Irish higher education.

8. Participants were asked how they wished to be represented in the study, and their self-identifiers/descriptors are employed here.
9. Under the 'Free Fees' initiative, the Department of Education and Skills pays the tuition fees of eligible full-time undergraduate students registered for approved programmes of study. A student contribution charge of €3,000 per year is still payable, and students may apply to SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) for a grant towards this contribution.
10. Programme for Access to Higher Education, Strand 1: Equity of Access to Initial Teacher Education 2017–2020. PATH1 project funding is now being extended for a further three years, to 2023.
11. Other than Travellers, who were included as a target group in the National Access Plan (2015–2019) for the first time.

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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