An exploration of Black student experiences of representation of Black culture and characters in school literature through the lens of Positive Psychology

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Epigraph

**"We're all stories in the end right?
It's the way to help people learn… the power of the story."**
Marcia

"My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive."
attributed to Maya Angelou

**"I greet yu wid a smile,
Yu put me in a pigeon hole, But I am versatile.
These conditions may affect me
As I get older,
An I am positively sure…
Black is not de problem."**
'No Problem' Benjamin Zephaniah

Abstract

UK schools and exam boards are gradually awakening to the importance of diverse representation and anti-racism for their students. However little has previously been done to investigate how the curriculum, specifically school literature, represents Black culture and characters and the potential psychological implications for Black students experiencing this in the classroom. This qualitative study employed the Reflexive Thematic Analysis methodology to explore these questions. Information was gathered through semi-structured interviews and Story Completion texts produced by Black participants ($N = 8$). Themes generated via the analysis relate to *Literature of Past & Pain; Literature of Positivity & Possibility; Questioning Power in the Classroom & Literature Curriculum.* Cultural responsivity of teachers in selection and facilitation of Literature lessons was found to be one of the key factors in mediating individual students' experiences. Through the lens of Positive Psychology, the final theme *What Should The Future of School Literature Be?* shifts the focus towards positive change actions to promote the flourishing of Black students through school literature. Implications for Educational Psychologists, teachers of literature and the English curriculum are discussed, including the introduction of *The R.E.A.D.E.R.*, a new tool to monitor the Anti-Racist Teaching of Literature.

Keywords: Black Students, Literature, Representation, Anti-Racism, Reflexive Thematic Analysis, Positive Psychology

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise, by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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Completing this thesis and doctoral course has been one of the greatest and most rewarding challenges of my life and one which I will always look back on with pride. To be able to achieve it, I have relied on the kindness, wisdom and support of many people from my personal and professional life and I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank them here.

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Abbreviations

AQA	Assessment & Qualifications Alliance Exam Board
BAAREP	Becoming Actively AntiRacist Educational Psychologists
CRT	Critical Race Theory
EP	Educational Psychologist
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
MMAT	Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool
OCR	Oxford, Cambridge & Royal Society of Arts Exam Board
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
UEL	University of East London
WJEC	Welsh Joint Education Committee

1.   Introduction

This study begins with consideration of Positive Psychology in the domain of education, in order to exemplify the theoretical background through which this research is positioned. Subsequently, the historical and contemporary context of race and racism in education in the UK are discussed, including an outline of how Critical Race Theory (CRT) can be used in education research to further anti-racist action. The focus then hones in on representation of race in school literature and its influence on students' experiences, concluding with a statement of the study aims.

1.1 Positive Psychology Education

Positive Psychology Education, deriving from Seligman's broader Positive Psychology movement, prioritises wellbeing and flourishing of students, through helping them identify and enhance their character strengths, better supporting their school experience (Seligman, 2011). Traditional schooling and Positive Psychology Education have some shared aims: to promote human development and improve students' future outcomes (Gawas & Gamal, 2022; Kristjánsson, 2012). Typically, academic success is the foremost goal of UK schools, as the outcome measure by which establishments and individuals are judged, due to the high level of accountability and prominence based on Ofsted Inspections and league tables (Andrews et al., 2023). Conversely, the philosophy of Positive Psychology Education is that schools should prioritise nurturing the happiness, wellbeing and character strengths of its student population (Seligman et al., 2009). As an evidence-based practice, research suggests that this approach, alongside achieving its intended goals of increasing students' satisfaction with life and school, has outcomes of improved resilience, motivation, optimism and creativity, all of which contribute to success in academic

performance (Gawas & Gamal, 2022).

While the goals of Positive Psychology are idiographic, focused on individualised personal development, the route to achievement can be reached collectively, through the development of strengths and positive values in organisations and communities (Morrish et al., 2018). Consequently, Positive Education interventions and strategies do not have to be exclusively within-child focused but can support development of these positive traits in school ethos, staff and curriculum (Gawas & Gamal, 2022).

Therefore, Positive Psychology Education is ideally suited for the promotion of anti-racism in UK education, by examining ways in which the school system can be adapted to advance the wellbeing of young people who are vulnerable to discrimination, including racial prejudice, and to embed positive character traits throughout the school community, such as kindness, social intelligence, fairness and hope (Niemiec, 2017), subsequently contributing to a more harmonious, anti-racist society.

1.2 Race & Racism in UK Education

1.2.1 Definition of Terms: Race, Black, Racism & Anti-Racism

Race

The UK *Equality Act* (2010) defines *Race* as inclusive of colour, nationality and ethnic origin. The contemporary consensus is that the concept of race does not have biological validity, in the sense of distinct genetic variations between groups (Figueroa, 1991). Instead it is a social

construct; a taxonomy through which humans are categorised, largely by ancestry and physical traits (Rutherford, 2020). However, this categorisation of race has been used historically and globally to legitimise oppression of particular groups (usually by White racial groups) and has therefore created real-world social, political and psychological implications of being a member of either a dominant or marginalised racial group (Kumar & DeCuir-Gunby, 2023).

Black

Similarly to the language choice of Eddo-Lodge (2018) , the adjectival phrase *Black person or people* is here used as inclusive of individuals who are of Caribbean or African heritage, including mixed, or dual heritage of Black and any other background. This term is not intended to imply homogeneity between individuals from these disparate heritages, beyond the recognition that this was a group which appeared to be under-represented and negatively represented in UK school literature (see the rest of this chapter and Chapter 2 Literature Review for further justification and elaboration of this premise).

Racism

Wong et al (2021) described racism as perpetuation of overt and covert discrimination or inequities due to ethnic and cultural differences through "verbal, emotional, physical and symbolic forms of abuse or violence" (op.cit., p.359). Naidoo (1992) highlighted the significant contribution of language, not only in expressing racism "but in transmitting and constructing the racist frames of reference which help perpetuate it" (op.cit., p.14).

Anti-Racism

The term anti-racism is harder to define since, as Gillborn (2006) stated, it has been used broadly and with multiple conflicting definitions across literature and academic domains and is required to mirror racism, in its complexity and dynamism. In this research, anti-racism has been understood to be "an active and consistent process of change to eliminate individual, institutional and structural racism" (Hanover Research, 2020, p. 3). It is this emphasis on action and change which conceptually distinguishes *anti-racism* from *non-racism* (D. Gillborn, 2006; Williams et al., 2017).

Ford et al. (2019) argued that education has the greatest need for active anti-racism initiatives, since school is the place where children learn to socialise and determine their future opportunities. However, in reality schools often fall behind other public institutions in progress towards racial equality (D. Gillborn, 2006).

1.2.2 Historic Context

There are sometimes social and political attempts to position racism as an American problem which is not a significant issue in modern British society (Elliott et al., 2021), however, Britain itself has a shameful history of racist laws and practices, all of which have contributed to the institutional injustices, pervading all areas of UK society, including the education system (Figueroa, 1991).

In 1971, Grenadian scholar Coard declared the institutional racism of the UK education system by exposing the systematic racial segregation of schools through discriminatory practice of culturally-biased Intelligence Quotient (IQ) testing. This led to high proportions of Black and

specifically West-Indian children being inappropriately placed in special schools and unjustly labelled as "educationally subnormal". Coard asserted that this was not done with the intention of supporting these children to learn, but of removing them from predominantly White mainstream schools and effectively depriving them of their right to education. Coard (2021) stated that this continued to be done to Black Caribbean children in the UK, throughout the 20th century, through racist bias inherent in schools' policies and practices.

In the 1980s the Swann Report was published, reviewing the state of education for children from ethnic minority backgrounds. The report called for all ethnic groups to be supported and empowered equally and be liberated from preconceptions of societal hierarchies and stereotypes (Swann, 1985). Further evidence found that institutional policies, including elements of curriculum and teacher practice, throughout the education sector, created a racist climate (Swann, 1985). Subsequently, the report was criticised for being overly simplistic in its discussion of power imbalances, with critics claiming that by calling for a shared framework of societal values, the result would be a continuation of dominance of the White status quo (Figueroa, 1991). Furthermore, the report perpetuated the portrayal of underachievement of particular ethnic minority groups, for example the West-Indian children that Coard championed, being the result of within-child deficits and cultural limitations, reflective of the racist perceptions the report itself condemned (Figueroa, 1991).

In 1993, the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence sparked national debate on institutional racism; the ensuing Macpherson Report emphasised the centrality of schools, both in contributing to this prejudice and injustice, but also as the way to make positive changes for the future

(Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). A decade later, in 2003, the Commision for Racial Equality found that few schools were making changes to support anti-racist action; few respondents had identified specific improvement targets relating to racism and school staff were the least likely of all the public sectors groups included in the study to identify need for further guidance in promoting equality (D. Gillborn, 2006).

1.2.3 Current Context

Tragically, throughout the 21st century, racist incidents in schools and deaths of young people of colour continued (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). Extensive pedagogical research has supported the premise that learners of colour regularly experience racist stereotyping, name calling and bullying from teachers and peers (Tikly, 2022). In one example, a national youth survey of over 200 students, found that 17% of Black respondents had suffered racist discrimination by their teachers and more than 20% had witnessed their Black or Brown peers being discriminated against in school (Justice For You, 2023).

Statistically, outcomes for Black students are disproportionately negative: they are less likely to meet academic national standards at each key stage than White or Asian peers (Department for Education, 2021). Considered as a homogenous group, those from Black or mixed Black heritage were the most likely demographic to be excluded from school in England in the academic year 2021 (Department For Education, 2023). In examining what changes have occurred half a century on from Coard's work, Wallace and Joseph-Salisbury (2022) highlighted that Black Caribbean children are still disproportionately, subjectively labelled as having emotional and behavioural difficulties and are overrepresented in special schools. They also noted that since the introduction of GCSEs, Black Caribbean students' results have consistently remained below national average

and below average of White pupils (Wallace & Joseph-Salisbury, 2022), suggesting that the target of quality education for all pupils, set by the Swann report almost 40 years ago, has not yet been achieved.

Research by Demie (2021) highlighted the incommensurate exclusions of Black Caribbean pupils, who were over three and a half times more likely to be permanently excluded than other pupils in English schools. Potential causes suggested by the study included: institutional racism; teacher bias, low expectations and lack of diversity throughout the education workforce (Demie, 2021).

Mental health was another area of risk for adolescent, Black males, explored in a qualitative study by Meechan et al. (2021), who found this demographic were subject to unique risk factors for mental health difficulties, being disproportionately vulnerable to exclusions, deprivation, crime, racism and discrimination, while also less likely to access mental health support. The researchers considered implications aligned with a Positive Psychology Education perspective, such as strengths-based interventions and relational wellbeing support from Black male role models in school.

A 2020 review of race in English secondary schools found the teaching profession is disproportionately White and that curriculum and policies lacked cultural diversity and racial literacy (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). While teacher respondents were able to suggest potential ways to integrate positive messages about race and inclusion throughout the school, especially through English literature lessons, the consensus was that very little tends to be done from a positive perspective (Joseph-Salisbury, 2020).

1.2.4 Critical Race Theory in Education

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a helpful framework to apply to education research which aims to address the inequalities and discriminatory practices exemplified in the preceding section. CRT centralises race and acknowledges the reality that racism is not only ubiquitous throughout society, but is often unrecognised (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The critical lens moves away from intentions, affirming that, if the outcomes of actions of an individual, organisation or policy, are detrimental to people of colour, then the action was racist (D. Gillborn, 2006). By adhering to these fundamental principles, education researchers can ensure the anti-racist positioning of their research (D. Gillborn, 2006).

A key aspect of CRT in education is facilitating individuals from marginalised backgrounds to share their lived experiences and views, through the promotion of diverse representation (Figueroa, 1991). This serves multiple purposes, as a way of enlightening and informing the national conversation around race and racism, balancing the equity of perspectives and as a therapeutic tool for self-expression, counteracting the damage of oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Curriculum and pedagogical resources are subject to a hegemonic approach, with the government specifying to schools what must be taught, including how and when, then school leaders dictating to teachers, who deliver the curriculum to the young people. As the lowest rung of the hierarchy, pupils rarely have the opportunity to express what and how they would like to learn. From the perspective of students, 32% surveyed said the curriculum in England is not sufficiently diverse, with Black respondents being the group most likely to hold that opinion (Justice For You, 2023). *Lit in Colour* research ($N = 650$) found that 70% of student

respondents felt the school curriculum should be diversified to become more representative of British society (Elliott et al., 2021). These surveys were indicative of the need to explore the impact of this lack of diversity and to instigate positive anti-racist action to improve curriculum diversity. Consequently, CRT exposes the curriculum's role in perpetuating the cycle of oppression and racist discrimination (S. Gillborn et al., 2021). Decolonisation of the curriculum is vital, not only for Black children to be represented in their school community, but also for the betterment of the wider community, by deconstructing White privilege and creating a more just society (Henry & Ryder, 2021).

1.3 Literature & The Representation of Race

Bishop (2007), a leading theorist in the representation of race in literature, emphasised the complexity and significance of the issue when declaring: "race or colour is one of the most, if not *the* most, divisive issues in society" (op.cit. p.3).

Literature can play an important role in anti-racist action in multiple ways. Critical pedagogy philosopher Freire (2000) advocated for literacy as a fundamental tool of social justice, enabling access to information and education, and rejected the notion of neutrality in stories, theorising that what and how stories are told actively constructs society in the view of the author. Critical literacy counteracts this by empowering the oppressed to question the stories that are told about them, their position within the inequitable structures of society and the possibilities which are open to them (Freire & Macedo, 2016).

Furthermore, storytelling enables 'outgroups' to share and promote their experiences and share

across cultures, which can reduce ethnocentric viewpoints (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As a universal experience, even when deprived of writing materials, oral storytelling traditions have been employed by oppressed people as an act of resistance and hope, for example, by enslaved Black Caribbean people in British owned plantations in the 18th century (Henry & Ryder, 2021).

Bishop (2007) examined literature as a tool to counteract racist depictions of Black culture and individuals by reflecting and celebrating their beauty and strength. Counternarratives in literature guide readers to identify errors in stereotyped portrayals, about themselves or others and to replace them with authentic representations (Meier, 2015). Furthermore, by engaging with real-world issues such as the role of race in modern society, literature can encourage students to develop their critical thinking skills and to question accepted truths, such as institutional hierarchies (Araujo & Dias, 2019).

Johnston (2019) described literacy development as a fundamentally socialising action, with the core principles of developing engagement in young readers all involving connection between reader, self and others. Although not explicitly referring to representation through race, Johnston's literacy theory aligned with Bishop's (1990) analogy of reading and psychological development, which suggested fiction texts should provide a balance of mirrors and windows. In the mirror texts, readers find representations which are reflective of their own lives, through which they see and develop constructs of self; window texts provide an insight into worlds which are different to their own, developing curiosity and an open-minded worldview (Bishop, 1990).

Furthering this idea, Naidoo (1992) expressed that literature exploring race can elicit empathy in

a reader and even more powerfully, can instigate reconstruction of perceptions and assumed truths. They argued that, while explicitly didactic anti-racism messages are imperative for young people to encounter, they have limited impact and will only be received by those who are already open to difference (Naidoo, 1992). More powerful, Naidoo suggested, is the implicit introduction of equality and cultural inclusion, through capturing the reader's attention with well-crafted plots, centring realistic and relatable characters of colour (1992).

Through these dual roles, embracing the universality of human experience and connection, combined with the introduction of difference and perspectives beyond the self, literature can become a tool for anti-racist action (Spencer, 2022).

Beyond this, literature also fulfils a social constructionist role, especially popular literature, which can contribute to stereotyped beliefs and sustain discriminatory social hierarchies if race is not represented authentically and positively. Eddo-Lodge (2018) reflected on the phenomenon by which characters of colour are often included tokenistically, in supporting or one-dimensional roles, with division being created when a Black or Brown hero is centralised. One example of this was the criticism when a Black actress was cast in the theatrical version of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* story: "That some *Harry Potter* fans struggled to imagine a Black Hermione meant that they couldn't imagine little Black girls as precocious, intelligent, logical, know-it-alls with hearts of gold… It's sad that Blackness in their heads is stuck in an ever-repetitive script." (Eddo-Lodge, 2018, p. 139).

Conversely, when race is represented successfully, literature is an ideal medium for celebrating the range and diversity of individuals' lives and strengths and so can teach an important lesson to White readers about equality and the damage that is done through oppression (Henry &

Ryder, 2021). When well delineated, by in-group authors writing with authenticity, literature has the potential to provide a platform for young Black people to examine ideas about their lives and the society they are growing up in; to inspire them with imagined role models and opportunities for the future (Meier, 2015). However, there appears to be evidence that currently, the literature being read in schools, through the curriculum, is not yet reflecting or celebrating young people of colour.

1.4 Current Context of Literature in UK Schools

Conducting an inventory of the literature in the curriculum, *Lit in Colour* found that there was scope for improved diversity at all stages of UK schooling (Elliott et al., 2021). At Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 (Years 1-9), teachers reported a degree of diversity, as there are greater opportunities for independent reading. At Key Stage 4, choices are limited, due to exam boards specifying set texts for examination; Key Stage 5 A Level Literature offers more student choice again, but often limited by teacher recommendation and text availability (Elliott et al., 2021; Teach First, 2020).

Up until 2019, no full prose texts by Black authors were offered on any exam specifications, with only two non-White prose authors included (Elliott et al., 2021). The set poetry texts included a more diverse range of writers and poetry continues to be the form in which students are most likely to encounter the work of a writer of colour (Elliott et al., 2021).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the *National Literacy Trust* survey of 2020 (N = 58,346) found that 40% of young Black readers (aged 9-18) said books do not include enough characters they think are like them, the ethnic group most likely to report a lack of representation (Best et al., 2020).

Since 2020, exam boards have diversified the texts they offer, in the wake of the *Black Lives Matter* movement (AQA, 2022; OCR, 2021; Pearson, 2023) although that has been impacted by the disruptions to examinations since the Covid 19 pandemic and by schools' limited funding amid the cost of living crisis, to purchase new texts (Teach First, 2020).

Most significantly, multiple researchers commented that there are currently no official guidelines for teachers on how to discuss race in literature and so even when race is represented, if teachers are not personally racially literate, their handling may be more corrosive (Elliott et al., 2021; Joseph-Salisbury, 2020; Teach First, 2020). As recently as 2023, the BBC broadcast an interview with a Black student who expressed feelings of discomfort in reading books in school which include racist language and themes, specifically Steinbeck's *Of Mice & Men*; subsequently, the student was personally targeted with threats of harm for expressing these views (Carroll, 2023), evidence of both the ongoing racism within UK society and the need for examination of the representations and language used regarding race in school literature.

1.5 Research Question & Aims

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the role of Positive Psychology in education and how this is relevant to anti-racist action. The argument has been presented that more needs to be done to redesign UK education structures which contribute to racism and unjust outcomes for young people of colour in UK schools, especially for Black students who are disproportionately affected. The curriculum has been identified as contributing to this imbalance and as a potential tool for anti-racist development, through application of CRT in Education and its emphasis on storytelling

and developing counter-narratives. Subsequently, the current context of representation of race in literature was examined, including mechanisms by which portrayals can be either damaging or beneficial to anti-racism.

This has delineated the foundations for the current study. The aim of this research was to elicit the narratives of Black students regarding their experiences of Black culture and characters in literature and then to apply an inductive Positive Psychology lens to the dataset, with the intention of exploring what these experiences revealed about the importance of representation to a positive educational experience. To achieve this the following research question was posed:

What are Black student experiences of representation of Black culture

and characters in school literature?

2. Literature Review

This chapter describes the systematic method undertaken to conduct a critical review of existing literature in relation to the field of representation of Black culture and characters in school literature. It then goes on to explore themes regarding the psychological implications examined in the studies, either explicitly or implicitly. The aims were to identify what is already known about this area and to identify ways that this research can be positioned to enhance the current knowledge base.

2.1 Literature Search Method

In designing this research, the overarching aim was to investigate Black student experiences of representation of Black culture and characters in school literature. Applying the SPICE framework for qualitative research studies (Booth et al., 2022) honed in on key concepts to identify what needed to be explored in the existing academic knowledge-base (see **Appendix 1**)**.**

Table 1.
SPICE Qualitative Literature Review Framework

Setting	School
Perspective	Black Students
Interest	Representation of race in literature
Evaluation	Qualitative orientation of research evaluation

NB. - the Comparison of the SPICE framework is an optional element which was deemed not to be relevant to the current study.

Deconstructing the topic elements in this way, helped to identify the dimensions of the review question:

What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood

literary fiction?

The subsequent literature search and review explored answers to this question, with the aim of contextualising issues around racial representation and identifying what empirical researchers have hypothesised and concluded to be some of the effects of either negative or positive representation.

In order to ensure exploration of the literature was extensive and critically sensitive, Grant and Booth's (2009) framework for conducting critical literature reviews was followed. Simultaneously, it was important to remain consistent with the epistemological and methodological orientation of the current research and so, in keeping with Braun and Clarke's (2022a) guidance, literature has been critiqued from a qualitative, interpretive standpoint. Concepts considered within the studies related to positioning, ethics and scope, within the themes and were explored with reflexive focus.

The literature search stage involved conducting searches on the EBSCO Web Host platform. Initially a scoping review was conducted, experimenting with a range of databases, search terms and filtering criteria. For the systematic review the following databases were selected: *Academic Search Ultimate; APA Psych Info; British Education Index; Child Development and Adolescent Studies; Education Research Complete* and *ERIC*. All of these provide access to a broad scope of academic journals, including subjects relevant to this research.

Subsequently, an advanced search was conducted, using pre-prepared search terms, restricted to Abstract inclusion, to improve relevancy of returns.

Table 2.

Search Terms

AB	Race or ethnicity or "people of colour"
AB	Representation or depiction or portrayal or stereotype or image
AB	Fiction or books or literary or story

Searches were expanded through including a range of synonyms prompted by the EBSCO platform, and through the *Thesaurus.com* search engine, to ensure a range of returns to consider. Additionally, the *Expander* functions *Apply Related Words* and *Apply Equivalent Subjects* were selected to ensure no relevant terms would be missed.

Some key decisions were made at the point of limiting the search terms: principally, the exclusion of the noun 'literature' to denote a work of literary fiction. Although central to the research, as a homonym for any academic text, it was decided that 'literature' would return too many irrelevant items. The first search field included generic terms relating to race, rather than specifying terms relating to Black ethnicity, since it would be likely that pertinent research would have been conducted to examine the representation of other groups. While this research thesis aimed to capture specific interpretations from a Black student experience, the literature review aimed to explore what had already been identified on racial representation, so it was considered preferable to maintain a broad scope, encompassing a range of perspectives. It was also found during the initial scoping search that terms relating to specifically Black ethnicity, such as Caribbean or African, primarily returned items relating to indigenous literature, while the focus here aimed to be on texts which are readily available and likely to be read by students in UK schools.

The initial search terms returned a high number of articles and so the next step was to narrow the

search. This was done through exclusion of any articles not peer-reviewed from an academic

journal and for pragmatic reasons of conserving time and resources, also excluded any articles

for which the full-text was unavailable or not written in the English language.

The topic was subsequently acuminated further through hand-searching, exploring titles and

abstracts to ensure the relevancy of the article to this research. This stage was vital since it

ensured that all the literature reviewed was germane to the present study. Criteria chosen for

Relevance Criteria is outlined in Table 3:

Table 3.
Search Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Research about a genre, type or collection of books	Research is about an individual book or author
Research focuses on representation in one or more forms of literary work	Research focuses on representation in a range of media
Topic focuses on texts which children or young adults might be expected to read in school	Topic focuses on texts which are aimed exclusively at adult readers (e.g. adult romance or crime novels) or at pre-school readers (e.g. 0-3 board books)
Race is one of the primary lenses (if not the only lens) through which representation in literature is explored	Race is a subordinate consideration to other demographic factors through which representation is explored
Articles report empirical research studies	Articles are opinion-based and do not report empirical studies

In selecting Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria, the aim was to draw the Review Question closer to

the focus of my own research. Firstly, it was necessary to exclude research which focused on

micro-analysis of portrayals of race in individual books or authors' bodies of work. Considering

the literature through a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) lens, it was important to acknowledge that the way individual narratives portray characters will have multiple motivations and contributing factors, whether that portrayal is positive or problematic. Because of this, the decision was made that it would be unhelpful to dwell on a specific character. As Paciga and Koss (2022) explained, an individual text or character are likely to include many contradictions and so it is not necessarily helpful to examine their representation of race minutely. Instead, it is more enlightening to consider research which seeks to observe and analyse trends at this stage, before delving into a closer questioning of individual texts at the data analysis stage, if they are relevant to the experience of participants of this study. It was also deemed important to restrict exploration to written texts only, since although there is a myriad of research into portrayal through film and music, these mediums create different relationships with their audiences than that of a literary text.

Additionally, the search was restricted to research exploring literature which might be reasonably expected to be read by children in school, in order to stay relevant to the school setting and experience of students. Therefore studies were excluded if they explored genres exclusively designed for adult readers, such as erotic and romance fiction.

Finally, in order to ensure that representation of race remained as the primary focus, articles were excluded which prioritised analysis of representation of a different aspect of identity, only briefly touching on ethnicity as an additional intersectional aspect.

Additionally, two other pertinent studies were identified through incidental searches. Further details and quantified data on yields, is tabulated in Figure 1. PRISMA (Moher et al., 2009).

Concurrently to the relevancy stage, the yield was narrowed further by assessing each remaining article for quality criteria, using the *Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool* (Hong et al., 2018) . Using this tool foregrounded various aspects of quality for consideration, including: clarity and relevance of the research questions; appropriateness of data collection methods and rigorous and considered analysis (**Appendix 2**). Following this process, one paper was excluded, once it emerged that two of the studies reported on the same dataset with different emphasis (**Appendix 2a**). The retained paper, *Mapping the Diversity in Caldecott Books from 1938 to 2017: The Changing Topography* (Koss et al., 2018), explored the data through an exclusive focus on race and ethnicity, employing a CRT framework and so was more directly relevant to this literature review.

It is pertinent to note, that although no date restrictions were placed on the search, all papers included in the final selection were written post the year 2000, with only one text from the review library being written pre-2010. This suggests that since the millennium, awareness of issues of racial diversity and equality of representation has grown in academia, and in wider society. However, it also connotes that there are still questions to be asked and answered, since almost half of the papers were published within the last five years. Similarly, selection was not determined by geographical restrictions, beyond the language specified, yet 87% of studies were conducted in the U.S.A., suggesting that there is a research gap regarding literary racial representation in the UK.

Overall, the 15 papers selected for eligibility on the basis of relevance to the research topic were of good quality and provided pertinent and novel insights regarding the representation of race in literature (**Appendix 3**).

Figure 1.
PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)
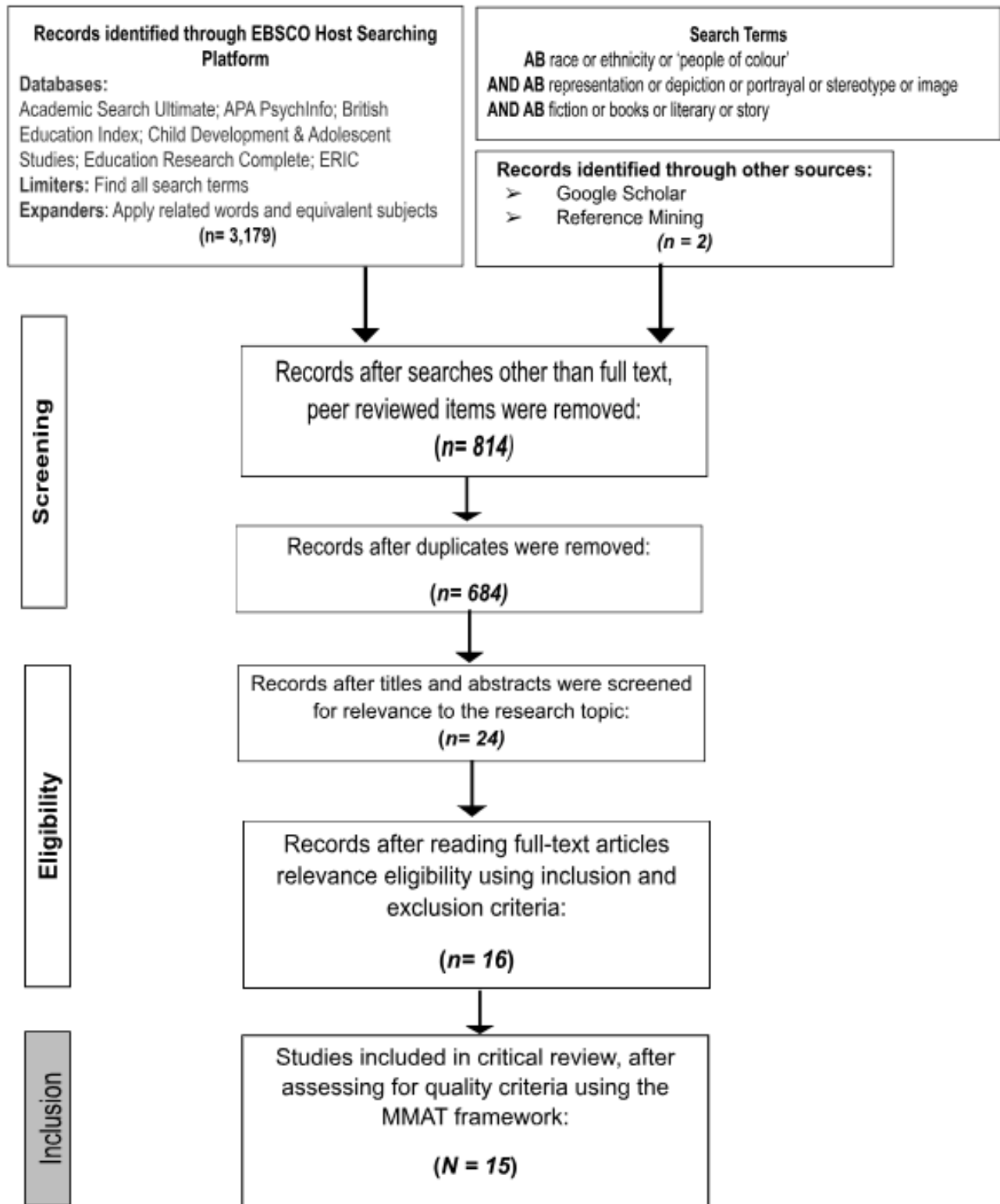
2.2 Thematic Synthesis

The final papers were individually coded (**Appendix 4**) with specific reference to the Literature Review Question and reflexivity considerations (**Appendix 5**). At this stage, it was noted that, while the findings of each paper were apposite to the current study, some of the most relevant and enlightening excerpts were from other sections of the papers, largely in the Introduction and Discussion sections. Therefore, it was decided to broaden the review focus to the full papers. An initial thematic map was synthesised based on the generated codes (**Appendix 6**). This was then developed into four themes overarching the literature: *Literature & Power; Literature & Identity; Positivity of Portrayals* and *Learning & Achieving Through Literature* (**Appendix 7**) . In keeping with the methodological stance of this study as a whole, themes generated related to Positive Psychological constructs which the authors of the papers drew upon in their discussions of representation of race in literature, either explicitly or implicitly (see **Figure 2**).

To pay heed to ethicality while reporting on this literature, the terms used to describe ethnicity are the same as those used by the authors of each study. Similarly, gender-neutral pronouns are used, where the preferred pronouns of the authors are unknown.

Figure 2.

Map of Thematic Synthesis for Reviewed Literature
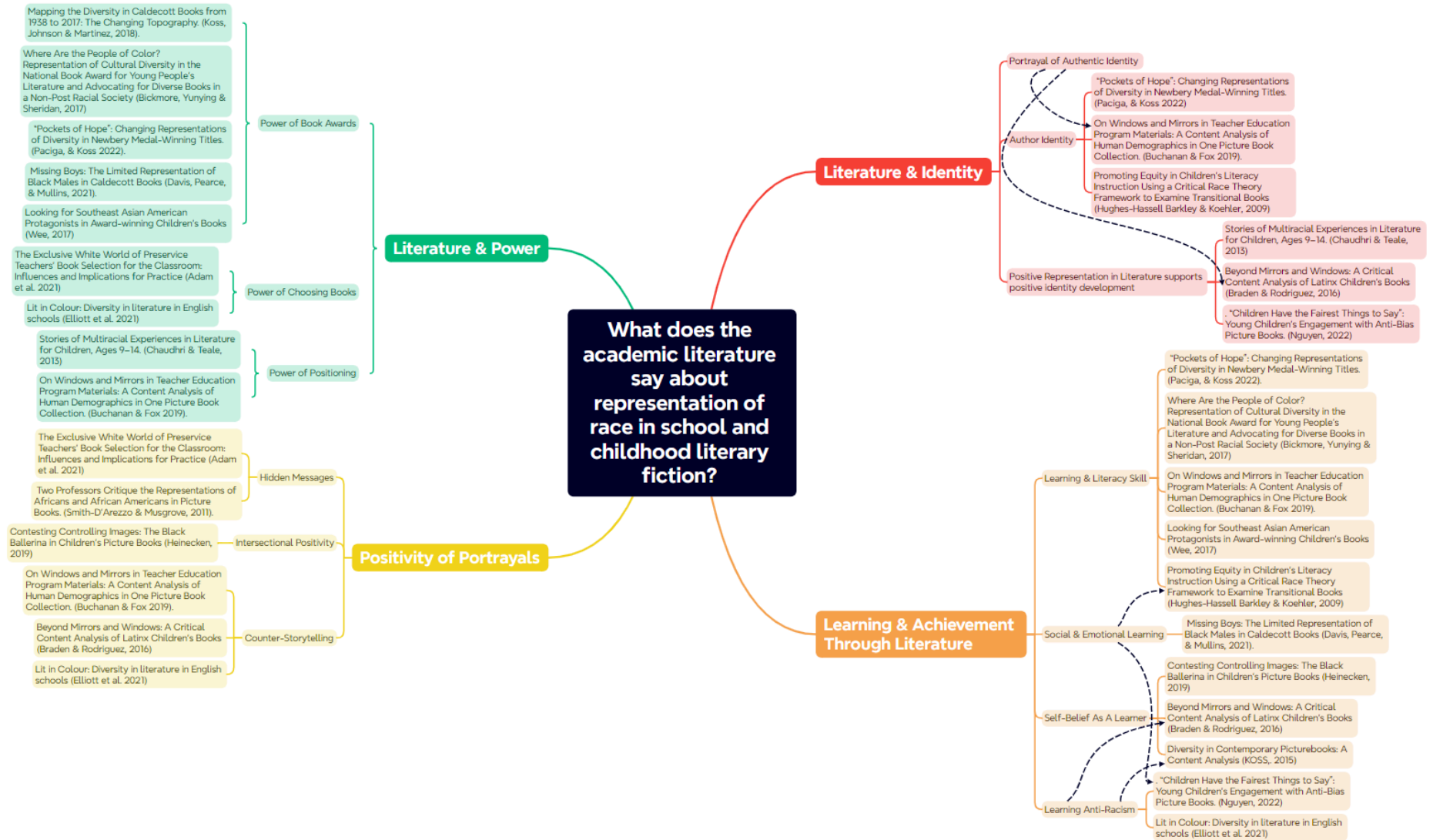
2.2.1 Literature & Power

Power was a recurring theme throughout the literature; primarily the way in which portrayal of individual characters in narrative operates to mirror power structures existent in wider society. For example, one theme generated from the work of Chaudhri et al (2013) within their analysis of fiction for 9-14 year olds featuring mixed-race characters, was characters' exploration of their non-White ethnicity, while the White aspect of their identity remained unexamined. This is indicative of the power imbalance so taken for granted in Western society that it is rarely even noticed or questioned, an erroneous assumption of Whiteness being considered as neutral. Through societal positioning of Whiteness as a state of normality, Chaudhri et al (2013) asserted that to be Black, Brown or mixed-race is to be problematised and oppressed and that this is the message young readers are receiving through the literature they read.

In the investigation into teacher and student views on diversity in literature in English schools, commissioned by the Runnymede Trust and Penguin Random House (Elliott et al., 2021), the conclusion was drawn in the Discussion, that power is imbued to works of art which are judged to be canonical through a process of social reproduction, whereby texts which are judged to be of literary value continue to be part of the curriculum *because* they have always been on the curriculum (Elliott et al., 2021). Teachers are likely to return to the established tradition of books which they were taught at school, when choosing books to introduce to their students (Elliott et al., 2021). Consequently, a perpetual cycle has been created where these same books (largely authored by White, heteronormative males) accumulate respect and literary kudos, while emerging writers struggle to break through the systemic barriers. This nonprogressive state is likely to continue, unless conscious change is made on the part of curriculum designers and

educators to make space for writers of colour to become part of the new literary conversation

(Elliott et al., 2021). See **Appendix 5** for further information on the findings of this study.

A similar finding emerged from the mixed-methods research Adam et al (2021), which analysed

surveys on the text choices of 82 Australian pre-service teachers. Although the data was not

initially collected with the intention of use in the empirical study, and so the demographic data of

the respondents was not collected, the study is nonetheless informative, shedding light as it does

on teachers' preferences to teach books they read as children. The significance of this preference

was that less than 16% of books teachers reported using in the classroom had been written in the

decade preceding the study; therefore they were unlikely to be representative of modern

multicultural ethos. Of the 177 books mentioned, only 8 included a person of colour, with only 4

of these being a main character. In congruence with Elliott et al. (2021), Adam et al (2021)

suggested, in their Discussion, that the power teachers hold in selecting books for their pupils to

read in the classroom is not being deployed effectively to increase diverse representation of race.

Further, literature could be used to dispel stereotypes and increase a sense of belonging in the

classroom for children of colour but instead is perpetuating inequitable societal structures (Adam

et al., 2021). A solution proposed within the study's Implication section, was for selection,

evaluation and teaching of diverse children's literature to become a mandatory element of study

within Initial Teacher Training programmes, including support for teachers to develop

understanding of the impact of diverse representation of race in children's literature and to reflect

on their own cultural biases and how these are reflected in the literature they introduce to their

classes (Adam et al., 2021).

Interrogating another guise of societal prestige, a selection of studies explored power endowed

on texts through the medium of literary awards, including the Newberry, Caldecott and National

Book Awards (Bickmore et al., 2017; Davis et al., 2021; Koss et al., 2018; Paciga & Koss, 2022;

Wee, 2017). Discussions explored the cyclical and sustaining nature of books being selected for

nomination which reflect existing societal power structures and then the power of the award

itself meaning that these books are subsequently more likely to become part of the literary canon,

to be included in libraries, classrooms, the curriculum and therefore play a role in shaping the

future zeitgeist (Paciga & Koss, 2022). From a social constructionist perspective, this suggests

that unless texts chosen and celebrated by awarding institutions are proportionally representative

of community ethnicity demographics, then the power positioning within these communities will

remain unequal.

This said, in their content analysis of diversity of characters in Newbery Medal winning books,

Paciga and Koss (2022) concluded that there are positive trends across time, with a significant

increase in racial diversity of main characters, as well as diversity of gender and physical ability,

over the last two decades. The authors cited the findings of their research as a hopeful sign of

movement towards social justice, which they attributed to socio-cultural awakening to the

importance of representation, resulting from the shifting historical-political context (Paciga &

Koss, 2022). However, in the Limitations section, the authors acknowledged that their study does

not control for the total number of characters included, of any race in any of the books in the

category, which they state has also increased over that time. This arguably diluted the impact of

the number of Black and Brown characters because there were also a higher number of White

characters. A further, unexamined, limitation is that, as a quantitative exploration of the number

of characters included, Paciga and Koss (2022) did not analyse the portrayal of those main characters to consider whether the descriptions of them could be viewed as stereotyped or discriminatory, or who is telling their stories. Therefore, some key questions remain unanswered about the narratives' handling of behaviours, relationships and outcomes for characters of colour and the messages these convey about their positioning in the social hierarchy of the world of the novel.

Wee (2017) also examined representation of characters in certain book awards, although in a more exclusive focus on portrayals of Southeast Asian American characters. Discussing the oppressive power of stereotyped classification of disparate populations under one umbrella, Wee (2107) provided insight into the very different lived experiences of sub-groups of Asian Americans and the assumptions often made about them. From the 267 book award nominees Wee inspected, only one featured a Southeast Asian Protagonist (2017), emphasising the argument that children from this demographic lack the power of literary representation. Interestingly, Wee concluded with the statement: "The ethnicity of protagonists has nothing to do with the medal criteria" (op.cit. p. 16). While this premise is technically correct, it would be challenged from a CRT perspective, because although ethnicity is not in the specified criteria, the consistent lack of equitable representation, evidenced through the literature reviewed here alone, suggested that there are systemic barriers to diverse books being recognised and celebrated in book awards in the USA. What is not clear, is whether the barriers to representation and empowerment in the literary world are operating at the stage of writing, publishing or rewarding the books, or perhaps throughout every stage.

The nature of the representation of characters is a crucial element in how power is viewed and

managed, both within the microcosm of the novel and for the readership in the ideas that they then carry from the page into the real world context. In Buchanan and Fox's (2019) content analysis, quantifying human demographics in books in their faculty education lab library, from which preservice teachers selected the books to teach their classes *(N = 268)*, they considered the power implications of inclusion or exclusion from stories in their Discussion section. The study was conducted using a framework of Educational CRT, which interrogates societal constructs relating to schooling which exclude people from marginalised groups and maintain archaic power structures which established White privilege (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The aim of the study was to examine the books teachers are selecting for their students to read and to ask questions about whose story is being told and whose is absent; who has the power in the story and how it is utilised (Buchanan & Fox, 2019).

Perhaps predictably, they found Black characters were underrepresented, along with other minoritised racial groups, with the writers concluding that it would be very hard for readers of colour to find a mirror in the books available for their teachers to offer (Buchanan & Fox, 2019). This was deemed to contribute to unjust societal power dynamics at a number of levels. At the micro-level, the potential classroom implication of this absence was likely to be a feeling of powerlessness for the children whose ethnicity is excluded from the books, Buchanan and Fox (2019) further suggested in their Discussion. More widely, this would disseminate to the macro-level of the wider community, where those children would continue to see examples of stories of the dominant social groups, but not their own. Furthermore, publishing trends have gradually shown more diverse cultural representation (Paciga & Koss, 2022), yet as teaching is a predominantly White profession (both in the US and the UK), power is being exacted by the

teachers in the choice of books they are purchasing to be read by their racially diverse students (Buchanan & Fox, 2019).

For the books which did present characters from non-White ethnic groups, the authors were transparent in describing the constraints of their study, that they did not go further than tabulating the number of characters of each race, along with multiple aspects of the intersectional human experience (Buchanan & Fox, 2019). Therefore, they were not able to consider the nature of the portrayal of each of these characters of colour, or the implicit messages these portrayals convey to young readers as they shape their own identity.

2.2.2 Literature & Identity

The influence of literature on aspects of identity development and self-esteem has been extensively researched (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013) and this arose as both a named feature in a number of studies, but also as an implicit recurring theme in others, which raised questions of how the reader might be able to see themselves in the story.

In their Introduction section, Nguyen (2022) referenced the lack of diverse curriculum resources in schools, along with the reluctance of many teachers to explicitly discuss anti-racism with their pupils, as being detrimental to the healthy development of children's intersectional identities.

A number of authors of the reviewed literature drew directly on the "windows and mirrors" metaphor coined by Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) that a book should provide a window, through which to see the world and experience people and circumstances different to our own and also

a mirror, through which to see ourselves or the future-self we wish to become (Bishop, 1990). Hughes-Hassell et al. (2009) analysed representation of characters of colour in transitional books for young readers (referring to books aimed at readers moving away from early-years picture books to more advanced chapter books). Findings showed that Black and Brown characters were consistently under-represented, with only 25.8% of the 556 books sampled containing any character of colour, compared to the 83.5% which included a White character; while non-human main characters were more often featured than those from African American, Asian American, Hispanic, Native American or multiracial backgrounds combined (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2009). The researchers concluded in their Discussion that children will only find books engaging and meaningful to them if they see something of their own identity depicted, a mirror of themselves.

In the Discussion of their content analysis of children's books (N =90) featuring mixed race characters, Chaudhri et al (2013) explored the role of literature in forming both individual and societal views of racial identity. When portrayals of Black and mixed-race characters were stereotyped, discriminatory or absent, this contributed to racist discourse pervasive in Western society. The researchers concluded that, for the 9-14 age range, the focal demographic of the study, at a key stage of self-discovery and identity formation, this negative representation can be especially damaging for their self-concept and perceptions of peers (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013).

As one of the ways that we shape our world and self-view, literature has an important role to play in anti-racist education, since the implicit suggestion for young children who see literature which exclusively presents their own background and cultural experiences, is a false

narrative that their culture is superior and dominant (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). Conversely, literature which is inclusive, opens avenues for recognising and celebrating difference and reinforcing a sense of belonging for children of colour in classrooms which have been modelled on Eurocentric, White-normative educational practices (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016).

However, it is not enough just to include characters from a diverse range of racial backgrounds and cultural heritages, as many of the researchers in this field have explored, what matters is that the portrayals and the authors come from a place of authenticity. Braden and Rodriguez (2016), in their critical content analysis of representation of Latinx culture in children's picture books ($N = 15$), concluded that because of the dual role literature plays as mirror to the self and window to other's lives, the accuracy of the representation is of utmost importance, especially when depicting children from an ethnicity which is minoritised in their own community.

In their Introduction, Buchanan and Fox (2019) explored the imperative of countering "the danger of the single story" of marginalised groups, a term coined by writer and cultural commentator Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) to signify the harmful prejudices which disseminate through society, arising from stereotyped portrayals of people of colour in fiction texts across all media. Adichie (and subsequently Buchanan and Fox) called not only for increased narratives telling the stories of Black and Brown individuals, but specifically for variety and complexity in these narratives. They stated it is vital that Black and Brown protagonists are sometimes heroic and extraordinary, but also had opportunities to be ordinary and to tell stories which realistically described their own cultural experiences (Buchanan & Fox, 2019).

Of further relevance to the issue of authenticity, is the racial identity of the authors of the literary texts and whether they are cultural insiders or outsiders, as some studies explored in their Discussion sections (Paciga & Koss, 2022). Hughes-Hassell et al (2009) commented on the lack of representation of authors of colour, who accounted for just 2.2% of the sample they analysed. Their concern was that children would not be able to aspire to tell their own stories if they do not see role models who mirror their identities as writers or creators (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2009).

Moreover, Buchanan and Fox (2019) presented national data on publishing and author demographics of books submitted to the Cooperative Children's Book Centre in the USA, as part of the context-setting for their study. In 2019, 45% of all books available featured any characters from marginalised groups and of these texts, only 43% were written by an in-group author, meaning an author of the same ethnic background as the character depicted (Buchanan & Fox, 2019). The hypothesis proposed by Buchanan and Fox (2019), was that writers depicting characters from their own cultural background are more likely to portray characters as multi-dimensional, complex and realistic figures, and less likely to position the characters in a submissive, deficit-based role or root them with stereotyped features and traits.

It is also interesting to note here the relevance of the cultural heritage of the research authors, which was not always reported. Nine of the fifteen studies had researchers who appeared to be cultural outsiders to the demographic whose experiences they were investigating and while some reflected on their positioning and its implications for their interpretations, others left this unexamined, which seems to be a limitation when considering the significance of representation

of race.

2.2.3 Positivity of Portrayals

Linked with authenticity is the question of the positivity of the portrayal and some researchers examined the psychological implications of representations of characters of colour which could be considered to be problematic.

In their one-to-one critical literary analysis, professors Smith-D'Arezzo and Musgrove (2011) drew on their differing lived experiences (as a White woman and a Black woman respectively) to interrogate the portrayal of African and African American characters in children's books and to scrutinise the implicit messages they each perceived in the stories. Applying theories of Transactional Reader Response (Rosenblatt, 1978), Smith-D'Arezzo and Musgrove (2011) contemplated in their Discussion whether children would even be consciously aware of the discriminatorily negative ways African and African American children were often portrayed (for example, in the didactic book they discussed, in which a thief is depicted as a Black girl and the victim as a White boy). Nonetheless, whether or not children actively recognise the antagonistic way Black characters are portrayed, Smith-D'Arezzo and Musgrove concurred with Freire's Critical Literacy Theory (2000), asserting that Black children will be directly impacted by this portrayal, through the way it pervades and constructs societal oppression. The researchers went on to suggest that teachers should consult their students to gauge the extent to which they are affected by such representation in literature, the very question the current research sets out to answer (Smith-D'Arezzo & Musgrove, 2011).

Considering how aware teachers are of the positivity of portrayals of race in their book selections, Adam et al (2021) found not only that characters of colour were largely absent, appearing in only 0.05% of texts cited, but additionally that of the eight books featuring characters of colour, only five of these were main characters and of those three were positioned in a victimised role. Although this was a relatively small-scale study conducted with a single cohort, it raises questions in the Discussion about whether the teachers sharing these books with their classes have considered what meaning this conveys to all young readers about the position of people of colour in society (Adam et al., 2021).

Transferring the focus to a single genre, Heinecken (2019) explored various aspects of literary portrayal of Black ballerinas, through an intersectional content analysis of picture books. The intersectional positioning of Black girls was judged to make them particularly vulnerable to discrimination through the dual prejudices of racism and sexism. In their Introductory section, Heinecken described the genre of ballet books as one that had historically excluded Black females, which they attributed to a reflection of the reality of White supremacist ideology in the ballet world. Heinecken associated this exclusion as related to Eurocentric beauty standards, which they suggested had traditionally privileged pale skin and hair in Western cultures. While Heinecken made important points about the aspirational power of picture books which centralise Black personification of beauty, for example through the ballerina role, their research focused on a counterpoint to other very problematic themes in the ballet genre. Acknowledging the problematic aspects of ballet books, Heinecken explained the tendency to overtly objectify females, projection of unrealistic body images and suggestions of sexualisation through the adult male gaze. In the Conclusion, Heinecken presented the argument that these problematic portrayals of all

females are counterbalanced by their celebration of Black femininity. However, this argument appears limited, since a damaging portrayal for one girl is likely to be damaging for all and it would seem that a less-objectified, virtue-based celebration of Black girls would be preferable.

Buchanan and Fox (2019), advocated "counter-storytelling", a concept stemming from CRT, which they defined as telling stories of groups in society who are either absent from the dominant discourse or who are portrayed in distorted or stereotyped ways which privilege the White perspective (p. 192). Through their Discussion section, they, and other researchers, highlighted the need for Black and Brown authors to have the opportunity to depict characters from their cultural backgrounds who can be portrayed in a positive light, experiencing success, happiness and the chance to be the hero (Buchanan & Fox, 2019; Elliott et al., 2021). Conversely, they also suggested that characters should not be idealised; troubles and traumas must not be ignored or devalued (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Buchanan & Fox, 2019). The key is for a well-rounded portrayal, which presents people of every race as multi-faceted individuals, who deserve to have their stories told (Buchanan & Fox, 2019; Elliott et al., 2021; Heinecken, 2019).

2.2.4 Learning & Achieving Through Literature

How literature can be optimised to support children's learning and achievement is of particular relevance to educational psychology research, and specifically Positive Psychology Education. As a fundamental tool of all aspects of learning, literacy development is key to academic achievement and a number of the reviewed studies touched on the ways that diverse racial representation in literature can contribute to improving equity in this field.

Davis et al. (2021), through investigating the limited literary representation of the Black, male intersectional identity specific to Mullins (one of the co-researchers), argued in their Introduction that positive representation of "characters who look like them" (p.10) is necessary for all young learners, empowering them with an increased sense of self-competence, belief in their ability to achieve, developing intellect and gaining knowledge and understanding of the world. In addition, they contested that literature which children can relate to on a personal level, can support growth of social and emotional literacy (Davis et al., 2021). In terms of literacy skills, Davis et al (2021) also discussed ways that the possession of contextualised cultural knowledge supports reading fluency, comprehension and inference.

This view of the varied applications of representative literature, was supported by Hughes-Hassell et al (2009), who were particularly concerned with the significant decline in reading interest which they said typically occurs between the ages of eight and eleven. In their Discussion section, they argued that when characters and narratives are disconnected from readers' real lives they are less likely to be interested and will be less proficient in interpreting implied and contextual meanings (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2009). In contrast, culturally relevant literature is more likely to capture the interest and motivation of young children and help them to feel successful and insightful as readers. Hughes-Hassell et al. (2009) stressed that it is the responsibility of teachers to ensure children have full and varied access to such texts.

Many of the researchers studied agreed that literature can be an effective vehicle for instilling the concept of self-belief. Literature can support individuals' sense of competency as a

learner and view of themself as someone who has the potential to achieve great things in their future, when it is suitably diverse and provides depictions for all young readers to see reflections of their own culture in characters who have achieved their ambitions (Koss, 2015). By presenting Black and Brown characters in disparate achieving roles, such as star of the show (Heinecken, 2019), social activist (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Nguyen, 2022), or even behind the page as the published author or illustrator (Koss, 2015), this can give children an insight of what might be possible in their future.

Buchanan and Fox (2019) outlined an array of evidence in their Literature Review, to support the argument that when books successfully provide authentic windows and mirrors to young readers, the effect is for them to be more engaged and consequently successful in the curriculum, as well as becoming better-informed and more aware of diverse perspectives. However, in Wee's (2017) Introduction section a note of caution was included, warning that stereotyped character portrayals in books can be harmful to children's learning and achievement, even when the depiction appears to be positive. Outlining what he terms '*the model minority myth*' (2017, p. 10), which positions Asian-American students as naturally high-achievers, Wee explains that this can prevent children from Asian heritages being identified as requiring learning intervention and not receiving an equitable amount of support to help them achieve.

Through the studies' Discussion sections, more than one researcher advanced the need for representative diversity in all texts, but particularly in younger children's picture books, as key to encouraging a love of reading in children, which has direct consequences for their developing literacy competence and engagement with learning (Bickmore et al., 2017; Koss,

2015; Paciga & Koss, 2022).

Additionally, by providing diverse texts which are also entertaining, young children are more likely to be engaged in literature and supported in beginning to consider socio-emotional and socio-cultural ideas (Nguyen, 2022). Nguyen's exploration of anti-bias picture books begins with the premise in the Introduction that young children's ability to become successful learners, critical thinkers and agents for social justice is often underestimated. However, Nguyen contested that it is not enough to just have diverse representation of race in books, but that for children's learning around anti-racism to be developed, their teachers must facilitate critical discussions around race and racism, something a number of researchers reviewed concur, teachers are not necessarily equipped to do (Adam et al., 2021; Elliott et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2022)

Further to this, Braden and Rodriguez (2016) posited that cultural representation of all students' experiences in literature encouraged deeper, more meaningful reflection from the developing readers and instils the beginnings of criticality, encouraging discussions which stemmed from connections they made between the fictional portrayal and their real lives. They also proposed in their Discussion that, in literature where diverse or authentic representation was missing, teachers should take the opportunity to pose critical discussion questions to their pupils, encouraging them to consider the themes and issues from their own cultural perspective or those of others outside of the White- or Eurocentric perspective which may have been privileged in the book. However, there are some aspects in which it would have behoved Braden and Rodriguez to apply a critical lens more thoroughly to their content analysis, since a significant section of their study's Discussion relates to criticism of a

particular author presenting what they term a "utopian" view of childhood Latinx experiences (2016, p. 67). This critique did not explore the possibility that this may have been the author's intention, since the book was designed for an early years readership.

Koss (2015), writing in the USA, described in the Introduction section, the role of literature in teaching about racism and activism towards social justice, through raising awareness, development of empathy and sharing perspectives. Also in America, Braden and Rodriguez (2016) concluded that literature as a safe medium through which to invite children to make sense of and push back against the discrimination and social inequities they had faced in their own lives.

However, in their Discussion, Elliott et al. (2021) provided a warning to English schools that there is a tendency in the UK to frame racism as 'an American problem', an argument supported by the fact that this was the only UK-based study to be identified within the current review criteria. As it stands, Elliott et al. suggested that the curriculum in English schools exacerbates this false-picture of racism as geographically and historically removed from the British experience, as texts exploring racism tend to be American (such as Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men,* Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird)* and written or set more than half a century ago (including Syal's *Anita & Me)*. Therefore, this opportunity for authentic racial representation in literature to play a role in social justice and deconstructing the institutionally racist structures and discriminatory assumptions which are still active in the UK today, can only be effective if texts are studied by young people which speak to their lived experiences and invite honest discussion and analysis about the issues and ways to make positive change towards an anti-racist future.

2.3 Summary of Findings from the Literature

The reviewed literature was largely united in the acceptance that diverse and authentic representation of race in school and childhood literature is both not yet occurring and vital to children's positive psychological development. The majority of the studies (eight of fifteen) employed quantitative content analysis techniques, four used mixed methods and three were qualitative. The themes synthesised from the studies' findings and wider discussions focused on *Literature and Power, Literature and Identity, Positivity of Portrayals* and *Learning and Achievement Through Literature*. Some took the perspective of teachers, most focused exclusively on texts; just two explored the responses of students; Nguyen (2022) through a case study and Elliott et al, (2021) through a survey and focus group. Only the latter of these directly sought the views of students in their analysis, demonstrating a clear role for the current research to make a significant contribution.

2.4 Conclusions from Literature Review

Having the opportunity to review the academic literature on representation of race in literary fiction situated the current research in context and provided rich insights into the potential psychological implications for student readers. Through exploring these empirical studies, the majority of which employed quantitative, content analysis methods and were based in the USA, the rationale and unique contribution for this research is clear. This study provides an in-depth interpretive, qualitative, reflexive analysis of Black student experiences in the UK, who are part of the proposed readership for the literature being delivered as part of the UK Curriculum. This aligns with CRT values of providing counter-stories to the dominant cultural narratives and amplifying the voices of individuals from marginalised groups

(Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), which several studies reviewed here called for (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Buchanan & Fox, 2019; Heinecken, 2019; Paciga & Koss, 2022). This critical literature review provided a foundation on which to build the current research study and to inquire into how Black students have experienced Black culture and characters in school literature in the UK.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the ontological and epistemological stance adopted, which informed design choices in this research; an exploration of the primary and secondary purposes of the project; deep dive into the research design and justification of design choices, including personal positioning statement; procedures of recruitment, data-gathering, transcription and analysis. Throughout the chapter, a critical reflective perspective is maintained, to interrogate the chosen methods and consider implications for ethical validity and trustworthiness.

3.1 Ontological & Epistemological Positioning

This research stems from an ontological position of critical realism (Bhaskar, 2020), accepting there is a knowable reality, encompassed in the shared cultural, political, societal foundations which all the participants have been part of, with the simultaneous understanding that each individual perceives, interprets and experiences this system in subjective and equally valid ways (Bhaskar, 2020). Critical realism also encompasses an epistemological approach, stating that the truth of reality can be investigated and learnt. However, this requires the learner (in this case the researcher) to examine and recognise the validity of each individual's interpretation of their experience, making reflexivity key (Shipway, 2013) .

Grounding the research in a critical realist perspective, achieved the research aims of acknowledging that these participants will all have experienced the racial inequality which is embedded throughout the UK education system, while curiously exploring the unique ways each of them interpreted, processed and expressed these experiences.

Considering the theoretical orientation of language, to uphold ethical values, as an outsider to the social group whose experiences were being investigated in this research, language was conceptualised as experiential and intentional, with the words participants chose being accepted as the direct meaning they have made of their thoughts, feelings and beliefs, without further exploration of what the researcher might interpret as the latent or dual meanings of particular phrases (Braun & Clarke, 2022b).

3.2 Purpose of the Research

An exploratory approach was adopted for this study, as the literature review revealed that very little investigation had been conducted into the experiences of students regarding the representation of race in school literature. Through a systemic orientation, the research addressed one element of discrimination in the UK school system, the under-representation of Black culture and characters in the literature curriculum. This research formed a substantive part of qualification to become an Educational Psychologist (EP). Part of the EP role is to develop understanding of the complexities of students' classroom experiences (Health and Care Professions Council, 2023). School policies, curriculum, learning resources, relationships with teachers and peers, all have implications for students' wellbeing, learning, personal and psycho-social development (Morgan et al., 2023). The hope was that this research will provide insight for EPs, teachers and other education professionals, into an aspect of education which they may not have previously considered: the psychological experiences of Black students of the representation of Black culture and characters in school literature. A secondary hope was that there may be aspects which could be further developed into a transformative framework for anti-racist Literature selection (see **Discussion** chapter

for further details).

A central motivation behind the research was the personal positioning of the researcher. The objective was to triangulate knowledge of the curriculum and the psychological power of literature with burgeoning awareness of anti-racist educational practices. Feeling that this topic was an injustice that I had been complicit in, as a former literature teacher who did not give sufficient consideration to the impact on Black students from the literature they were assigned to read for their studies, it was my hope that by promoting the voices of the students who gave their time to this research that current teachers may be prompted to consider the implications for their own students.

All of these motivations behind the purpose of the study interacted to inform the various decisions which needed to be made in designing the research project.

3.3 Research Design

The research adopted a qualitative design, to examine the meaning-making which Black students have engaged in regarding Black portrayal in literature. Previous research (as outlined in **Chapter 2 Literature Review**) indicated that literature which is read in schools is not currently representative of diverse racial identities. This research aimed to move beyond this knowledge to examine *how* this under-representation is experienced by individual Black students in the classroom and what the psychological implications were, which seemed to lend itself to a qualitative design. Furthermore, a qualitative, experiential mode of research aligned with principles of CRT research, with the intention of constructing counter-narratives and promoting voices of individuals from marginalised groups (D. Gillborn, 2006).

Within the qualitative design, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), a methodology devised by feminist, critical psychology academics Braun and Clarke (2022b), was chosen as a way to explore patterns and shared concepts across the experiences of a group of people, Black students, with a specific phenomenon, of reading school literature. RTA was apt for highlighting connections and disparities between the participants' experiences, in order to construct conceptual themes which would encapsulate some potential aspects of this experience.

An initial reason for the choice of RTA was the theoretical flexibility of the approach, enabling the researcher to apply it to any theoretical orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Being able to cultivate the design through a critical realism form of RTA, allowed the opportunity to simultaneously state the truth of systemic racism throughout the education system, as well as the truth of the participants' experiences with literature in school, alongside the acknowledgement that each individual will have interpreted those experiences differently.

Furthermore, the use of RTA allowed the further theoretical alignment within the Positive Psychology domain, since this was the theoretical perspective through which the psychological implications of the experiences shared by the participants was examined (for further exploration and justification of the choice of a Positive Psychology perspective, see **1.1 Positive Psychology Education** and **3.4 Reflexivity on Personal Positioning**). Working within the RTA system, researchers are actively encouraged to maintain flexibility throughout implementation of their design, adapting and pivoting as the dataset suggests (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

This meant that while simultaneously adopting an inductive approach, where the research was led by what emerged from the data, it was possible to maintain open-mindedness about what

specific Positive Psychology framework would eventually be applied to the themes which were generated through analysis of the data.

3.4 Reflexivity on Personal Positioning

At the heart of the RTA method, is an emphasis on awareness of how positioning and self influence and shape the research. In RTA researcher-subjectivity is viewed, not as a limitation which one would attempt to control against, but as a strength and tool which supports knowledge generation and an original, personalised research output (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Therefore throughout this project, the aim was to recognise and reflect on my own interpretations and biases which I bring to the research and value this as an aspect to be acknowledged, ultimately adding richness and humanity to the research.

In coming to this project I bring all aspects of myself and acknowledge the ways my identity has motivated me to pursue this topic and helped shape the way I have constructed this work.

To help me to explore this fully, I used Rowley et al.'s *Framework for Critically Reflective EP Practice* (2023), to consider my past and present life and work experiences, personal positioning and values and how these will impact the current research.

Figure 3.
A Framework for Critically Reflective EP Practice (Rowley et al., 2023, p. 24)
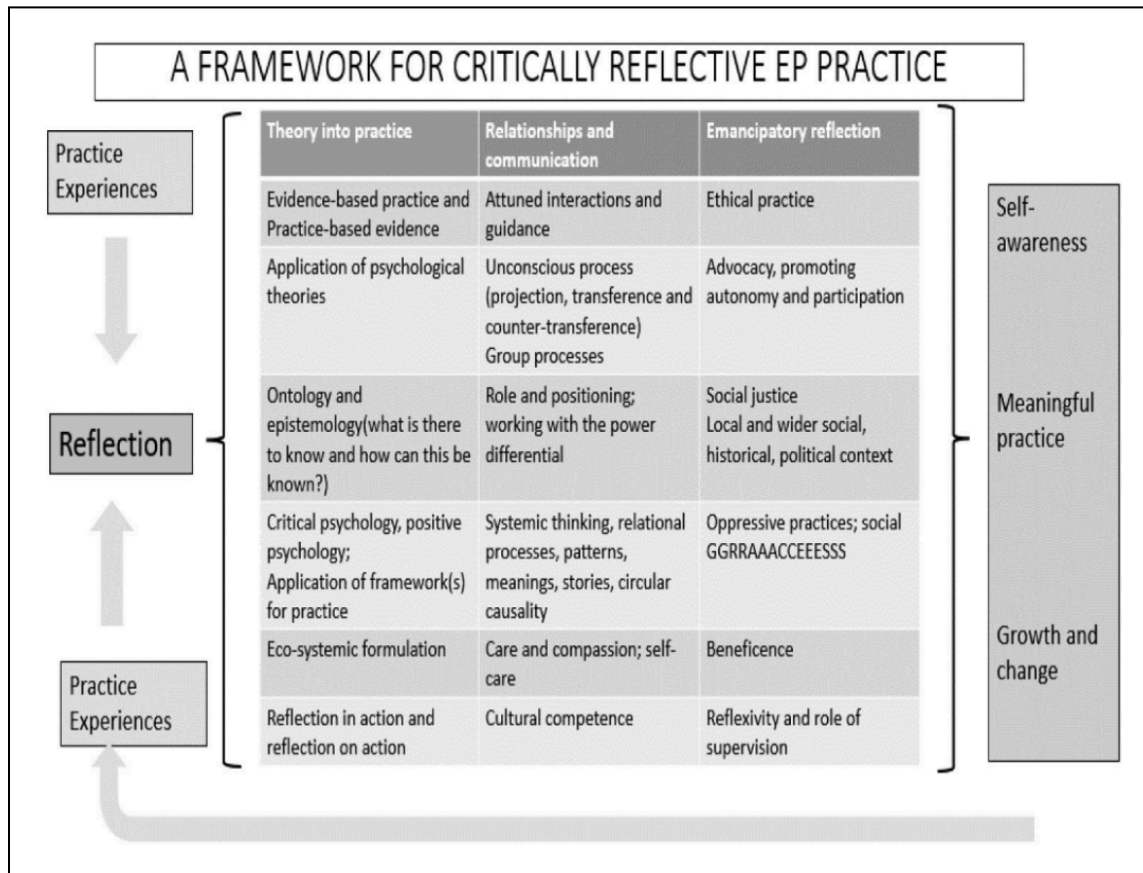
3.4.1 Theory Into Practice

Through all aspects of my practice and academic study, I align with the values of Positive

Psychology, supporting children and young people to identify and operationalise their strengths

and aspirations for the future. My personal hypothesis, based on practice-based evidence, is that

literature can be a significant tool in putting these values into practice, and so I am motivated by

exploring further how literature can be used to support positive development and wellbeing for

young people.

Furthermore, my practice is fundamentally child-centred, focused on making the curriculum work for the child rather than moulding the person to meet the curriculum. In this aspect, this research adopted a critical stance towards a key tool of the curriculum, literature, and asked whether it is good enough to meet the needs of Black students, in its current form.

As an interdisciplinary research study, the design was further grounded in CRT in Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), in its focus on an aspect of race and discrimination in school. Alongside this was the operation of literary theory, and this grew around the Bishop (1990) *Windows and Mirrors* model, relating literary representation to identity and world-view development (see **Chapter 1 Introduction** and **Chapter 5 Discussion** for further discussion of these frameworks).

3.4.2 Relationships & Communication

My personal values are most strongly influenced by my familial relationships: my foremost identity is as a mother, who wants her children to grow up personifying kindness, valuing diversity and celebrating the multi-faceted strengths and qualities of all their friends and being allies against prejudice. My husband and parents are all public servants, with a belief in the duty to serve the community and we all hold shared hope for an equitable and compassionate society, as summarised by Martin Luther King's message that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice" (King, 1968). My parents further instilled in me a passion for literature and a belief that reading is the key to unlocking knowledge and creative possibilities.

Appropriately, listening to the experiences of authors of colour also helped the conception of the study design: Sir Lenny Henry explaining in an interview the inspiration for his latest children's

fiction *The Book of Legends* being that as a child he never encountered fantasy books with Black main characters and the need for Black children to have opportunities both to be perceived as the hero but also to let their imaginations fly above the ordinary (Lamont, 2022). Writer and activist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TedTalk on *The Danger of a Single Story* (2009)*,* in which she illustrated the systemic impact of the routine portrayal of Black characters as stereotyped sidekick or villain roles and how this message spills out of the pages into the subconscious perceptions of both Black and White members of society. Adichie eloquently explained the need for books to portray a multi-dimensional view of Black culture and characters, both for the sake of realism, and also to enrich society's understanding and individuals' self worth. Finally, the words which most resonated, were those of Meera Syal when I had the chance to speak to her directly and tell her about this research. Until recently, Syal was the only woman of colour to be included on the UK GCSE curriculum, and her message to me was that storytelling was "at the heart of humanity" and that equality could only be achieved by telling the stories of those who have been silenced historically.

3.4.3 Emancipatory Practice

My profession as an educational psychologist is key to emancipatory practice, since all my work is driven by the values of striving for equality for every child to thrive and enjoy an enriching educational experience.

 Through my training at the *University of East London*, I have been inspired by the department's ethos of social justice, beneficence and autonomy, as well as by the skill, insight and compassion of all the tutors who model reflective, ethical practice. Examining my cultural positioning, using the Social Graces model (Burnham, 2012), I recognise that I hold a privileged position in many

aspects of my life, as a White, able-bodied, cis, heterosexual woman and therefore have a responsibility to contribute in the form that I am able towards a more equitable society.

Additionally, I am a member of an exceptional cohort who have supported and challenged each other to become the best EPs that we can be and our working-party Becoming Actively Anti-Racist EPs has helped us reflect and prepare to stand up to racism in all forms, whenever we encounter it. Through this group I have learnt the imperative for White psychologists to engage in anti-racist research (Mngaza, 2021), which must not be the sole responsibility of Black researchers, since it is equally the responsibility of White practitioners to take on the fight against racism and marginalising practices in our education system. I am aware of concerns around a White researcher examining an area of Black experience and have at times of the project felt discomfort in my positioning. It is important to accept and experience this discomfort as the necessary toll of making a contribution towards enhancing social justice, since racism is a problem for all in society who have ambitions for social justice (Heinecken, 2019). This is especially true for those who seek to become educational psychologists and promote the flourishing of all children. Agyeman (2008) clarifies that for any researcher exploring the experiences of a group of which they are not a member, the key is to maintain honest and ongoing reflexivity, openly acknowledging their positioning, power dynamics and political implications, making this explicit to the participants. In this research I am sensitive to my positioning and have endeavoured not to speak for the participants but to present their perspectives to be heard in academic literature of educational psychology.

3.4.4. Guiding Personal Principles for the Research

The preceding factors of my identity and experience all interacted to synthesise my worldview and personal response to this topic. This influenced the way this research was designed and the way that the analysis of the data was shaped and discussed. This led to the acknowledgement of four principles which I held as accepted truths in approaching this specific research question:

1) Literature can have a significant impact either positive or negative, on a reader's state of wellbeing, happiness, social and emotional development, and even their mental health.

2) Literature, as a form of cultural output which is legitimised as a knowledge source and imbued with authority in the UK context, plays a role in constructing and embedding societal structures, belief systems and frames of reference.

3) Literature in UK schools does not tend to include the authentic, positive representation of Black culture and characters which young readers deserve.

4) Schools have a duty not only towards the academic advancement of their pupils, but to support and enrich their social and emotional understanding of themselves and their place in society.

3.4.5 Research Design Plan

With the above principles in mind, the design was created, whereby I aimed to recruit a pool of participants, all Black students, who would be involved in individual interviews, conducted by the researcher, exploring a range of questions to elicit their experiences of reading and discussing literature in school and specifically their perspectives on the portrayal of Black culture and characters. In keeping with the literary theme, the plan was to supplement the interview data, with a creative writing response from each participant, using the method of Story Completion

(Gravett, 2019). Story Completion, requires the participant to engage in meaning-making through the act of crafting a story (Gravett, 2019), which was hoped to elicit further insights regarding participants' experiences. Furthermore, utilising a third person narrative, facilitates participants to respond indirectly (Gravett, 2019), which can be protective when dealing with sensitive subjects.   See **3.5.4 Data Gathering** for further details on the method.

Anonymised datasets would be created from these interviews and creative writing texts; the data would then be coded inductively, according to the RTA method. At this stage, each participant would be sent a copy of their own coded transcript, providing them with the opportunity for member-checking and to put forward amendments to any points they felt did not accurately portray their experiences or what they had intended to convey through their responses. Following the time frame allotted for responses, the agreed codes would be compiled and initial theme generating begun across the dataset. The intention was then to further develop this exploration of themes and to create a clear, rich picture of how portrayal of Black culture and characters influences Black students with regard to aspects of their wellbeing. The following section (**3.5**) outlines the steps and procedures that were taken to put this design into practice.

3.5 Research Design Procedures

3.5.1. Research Timescales

Table 4.
Research Timescales

Actions	Timescale
Ethical Approval received and first advertising launched	20th March 2023
First interview completed	30th May 2023
Final interview	15th September 2023
Transcribing; familiarisation, initial coding	June - October
Developing codes; generating initial themes	30th September 2023
Member checking stage	November 2023
Developing and reviewing themes	December 2023
Refining, defining and naming themes; writing the analytic narrative	January 2024

3.5.2 Recruitment Strategy

Initially, the participant demographics as outlined in the application for ethical research was for

individuals who identified as Black or mixed race (Black with another ethnicity), who were

students in the UK, aged between 16 and 25. This was felt to be the most suitable age group for

participants as they would be currently in education with recent experiences to aid recall of their

school literary experiences. At the same time they would be old enough to be able to reflect on

the relevance of the portrayal of the characters and culture they read about and to manage the

difficult emotional topics being explored by discussing portrayal of race in the context of an

unequal society, hopefully without suffering psychological harm. No additional inclusion or exclusion criteria was specified for participants as the aim was to hear from individuals from a range of educational backgrounds, geographical locations and school experiences.

Recruitment was through advertising to elicit volunteer participants. An advertising poster was produced in order to outline the study topic, parameters of involvement and contact details to express further interest (**Appendix 8**). The initial strategy for publicising the research used a variety of approaches:

1) advertising via online platforms, including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, specifically focusing on Black special interest groups, teaching groups and literature groups;

2) direct messaging of secondary schools, further and higher education institutions across the UK ($N = 359$). This message included sharing the advert and requesting recipients to share the information with any students in the relevant criteria. These emails were addressed to individual members of school staff where email addresses could be located online, often the head of English or Post 16 studies; for schools where email addresses were not available the general office address was used.

3) through word of mouth advertising, mostly through contacts at the University of East London and across educational psychology services. Also contacted were Black community interest groups, such as the African Caribbean Education Network and Black Student Voices at University of Kent; as well as literature and curriculum based organisations, such as *Lit in Colour* (a branch of Penguin Book publishers, focused on improving equality and diversity in children's publishing) and the English and Media Centre.

The hope was that this wide-spread advertising drive would attract the interest of teachers across the UK from a range of school demographics, who would then promote the opportunity with their Black students. This said, all this promotion (and repeated prompting of schools with direct contacts), only attracted replies from 11 schools or organisations, agreeing to promote the research amongst their student population. Whilst it would be informative to investigate further why more schools were not willing to be involved or chose not to respond, this consideration was outside the feasibility of this study. As a result of the first recruitment drive, three participants responded and subsequently took part in the study.

Due to a lack of contact with the original demographic group, the decision was made, following discussions with the research supervisor, to extend the participant criteria to remove the upper age limit. This now included people who were former students in UK education, so that participants needed to be Black or mixed race (Black and another ethnicity), over 16, who went to school in the UK.

When the participant criteria was changed it was necessary to re-apply for ethical approval, which was granted in early July 2023, and the additional caveat was added by the ethical review board that approval of the head teacher must be gained, before seeking to advertise in any school. At this point, no further schools were contacted, since the aim was now to seek interest in adults who were not in the original 16-25 age range.

This second round of advertising continued (online and through word of mouth), until a participant pool was gathered which was judged to be large enough to meet the needs of the project ($N=8$), to be able to gather a rich set of data and sufficient depth to be able to conduct a thorough and meaningful analysis.

3.5.3 Participants

The final group comprised eight participants (seven who self-identified as female, one who self-identified as male). Participants all self-identified as Black when volunteering for the project; those who participated were asked to describe their ethnic identity at the time of interview.

Table 5.
Participant Demographic Characteristics

Participant Pseudonym	Self-described gender	Self-described ethnicity	Age Student Status
Tee	Female	Multi-ethnic (heritage from Angola, Jamaica and England)	17 Current student
Leah	Female	Mixed-race (Black and White)	17 Current student
Ava	Female	Black British	17 Current student
Eve	Female	Mixed-Race	52 Former student
Hayley	Female	Dual heritage (White and Black Caribbean)	Undisclosed age Former student
Marcia	Female	Black British North Caribbean	39 Former student
Samuel	Male	Black British African	Undisclosed age Former student
Mya	Female	Black British	25 Former Student

3.5.4 Data Gathering Strategies

While a full pilot study was judged not to be required within the parameters of this research, preliminary-efficacy was established prior to commencement of data collection, through a mock-interview and peer reflection phase with a fellow trainee educational psychologist, which allowed joint reflection on the suitability and phrasing of the question schedule and design of the creative writing stem.

The intention for the study was to conduct two-fold data collection. For the initial stage, participants were invited to respond to a Story Completion Task. This refers to a narrative technique, first envisaged by Albert Rabin, a specialist in personality psychology, as a projective assessment tool, used to elicit and investigate an individual's constructs relating to a particular subject. Latterly, it has been employed within qualitative psychology research as a mode through which participants can express their sense-making of specific phenomena (Gravett, 2019a). In the current research, participants were given a brief stem as a stimulus and asked to contribute two or more paragraphs to continue the narrative, in the third person voice. The stem depicted Black students in an English literature lesson, where the teacher proposes a discussion on the Black characters in the novel (**Appendix 9**). This was shared via email and participants were invited to complete it in their own time and return their response via email, according to the typical procedure for story completion research (Gravett, 2019b).

Only two of the participants chose to respond to the Story Completion, however the data that was gathered through this method was rich and provided valuable insights into the topic, especially related to the ways Black students might experience the dynamics of a predominantly White

classroom, discussing literature (see **Chapter 4** for further details). It would be interesting to

know why the other participants chose not to contribute in this way, however, ethical

considerations overrode this as it was decided that asking them further about this element may

create undue pressure on them. In retrospect, it may have been more efficacious to have

scheduled the story writing time to be completed within the interview session, as this may have

encouraged more participants to produce a text, while already focused on the interview topic.

The predominant part of the data gathering was the one-to-one semi-structured interviews, which

were conducted via Microsoft Teams and recorded for subsequent transcription. Each was

organised separately, according to timing that was suitable for the participant.

An email link was sent for a Teams meeting; each participant had an initial meeting where the

research was explained and the Participant Information Sheet (**Appendix 10**) was read through

together discussing any specific queries or questions they may have had, before individuals went

away to read, consider and complete the consent form (**Appendix 11**).

Individual interviews were selected as the optimal method, in order to enable participants to

speak freely about their personal experiences, without being influenced by other participants'

views. Participants were informed in advance that the interviews would be recorded and how the

videos would be managed confidentially, both in the Participant Information Sheet shared at

contracting stage and verbally before the start of the interview.

Interview lengths ranged from 38 minutes to 94 minutes. The style was semi-structured, based

around a planned schedule of questions, focusing on specific books participants remembered

from school reading and their perspectives on those books and the portrayal of Black culture and characters. Questions were planned with the Positive Psychology ethos in mind, encouraging participants to reflect on wellbeing, future change and the potential to consider character strengths and values. Semi-structured interviews enabled the discussion to be driven jointly by the research topic and the participants' unique contributions, for example one participant was a writer and volunteered information on her views and experiences of constructing characters in her own literary work so this was an enriching topic to explore, sparking additional questions. Questions used as the basic interview structure included: *What Black fictional characters have you read about in school- can you describe what they are like and what happens to them? What strengths do you think Black characters in books demonstrate and how? Do you think representation of Black culture in books in school is realistic and why? What hopeful stories have you read about Black characters and culture? How do teachers encourage discussion of the role of race and racism in novels? How do you experience these conversations?*

As the interview process continued, topics which had emerged in early interviews influenced the questions posed in later discussions, in keeping with the RTA method of maintaining flexibility and adaptability. For example, early participants mentioned the issue of not just whether characters were Black but whether authors were Black, in order to ensure authentic portrayals, and so this topic was introduced into later interviews. Similarly, one of the first interviewees commented that they felt texts featuring Black characters tended to focus solely on struggle and the negative features of Black experience, primarily through racist structures and individual encounters, but thought it was more important to feature Black experiences related to topics of what she viewed as the modern experience and interests of young people. Again, this was a topic

which was added to the line of later questioning and the responses to these issues will be further explored through the chapters on analysis and discussion.

After the interviews were completed, each participant was contacted again with a Debrief Form, explaining a little more about the intentions of the study and signposting to areas for further support if their involvement in the research and topics explored during the interview caused any distress (**Appendix 12**).

3.5.5 Data Transcribing

The transcribing process was conducted manually by the researcher, using the Microsoft Teams transcribing app as an initial basis but manually formatting and correcting computer errors, through watching the interview recordings, in a private room, to retain anonymity of the participants (**Appendix 13**). Additionally, identifiable data was anonymised during transcription to ensure written texts did not compromise confidentiality.

The transcription phase was an active process which required reflexivity and conscious consideration of the operational decisions. For example, the orthographic style of recording was chosen, which aims to create a verbatim text. This included, transcribing all utterances as they were pronounced including dialectical variances, avoiding correction of grammatical errors or abbreviations. Paralinguistic features, including laughs, coughs, emphasis, were consistently included across the dataset. Punctuation additions can significantly change meaning and so these were considered carefully to ensure they did not divert from the participants' intended meaning and were used minimally, when required to support coherence. Brief, non-verbal interjections by the interviewer, such as "hmm / aah" are included in parenthesis to evidence them, while

minimising interruption of the flow of speech. From an ethical perspective, this was an important style choice, to ensure capture of as authentic a presentation as possible of the words of the Black participants. This was especially significant in research conducted by an outgroup member.

From a technical perspective, line and page numbers were used to support cross-text analysis and quotation in the write up; double-spacing was used to allow space for coding annotations.

At the end of this phase, the dataset comprised ten manuscripts, including eight interview transcripts and two Story Completion texts (**Appendix 14**).

Although a time-consuming process, completing transcription independently and manually enabled the simultaneous commencement of the familiarisation phase and was a valuable chance to begin Phase 1, Data Familiarisation.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

Once the transcripts were prepared and the data set was created, it was possible to begin the analytical process. This was implemented following the directions of Braun and Clarke, the creators of RTA. They conceptualise the method as a six-stage process:

Figure 4.
Stages of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the dataset
Phase 2: Coding
Phase 3: Generating initial themes
Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes
Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes
Phase 6: Writing up

(Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 35–36)

As Braun and Clarke advise, although the phases of RTA were followed, the priority at all stages was to focus on the essence of the data and exploring researcher responses to it, rather than being too rigidly tied to procedural guidelines. A reflexivity journal was composed throughout the process and reviewed regularly to inform future action (**Appendix 15**).

The guide to the methodology was helpful in informing the decision-making process on a number of essential analytical choices. Firstly, Braun and Clarke conceptualise the analytical orientation as being on a continuum between inductive and deductive exploration, rather than these being polarised constructs (2021). The approach used here leaned towards inductive analysis, since although the research was grounded in the overarching frameworks of Positive Psychology, the specific models were ascertained, based on their appropriateness to the themes which had been generated and parallels drawn by the researcher between the participants' expression of their experiences and previously established Positive Psychology frameworks and constructs.

In Phase 1, familiarisation was established through creating transcriptions of each data item (n = 10) and then an immersive process of repeated reading.

In Phase 2, 363 codes were generated across the dataset, with the aim of capturing the meaning expressed by the participants. Semantic coding was used for this phase which was conducted from a position of hermeneutics of empathy (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Semantic codes verbalised the explicit meaning expressed by the participant, as understood by the researcher. This meant examination focused on the meaning-making which the participants deliberately sought to communicate in their responses; in contrast to a critical stance, interrogating participants' potential latent meanings. Codes were crafted, first by handwritten annotations of the printed transcripts (**Appendix 16**) and then were checked and revised as they were compiled in an electronic codebook (**Appendix 17**). At this stage, each participant was sent the codes from their interview for member checking; no suggestions were made for alterations to codes.

Through Phase Three, 21 Candidate Themes were constructed, incorporating all the codes (**Appendix 18**). Across Phases Four and Five, those themes were further developed and refined (**Appendix 19**) until the final four themes were generated, with twelve sub-themes (**Appendix 20**). Additionally, the specific literature texts and authors participants discussed in their interviews were mapped using a quadrant chart to analyse how students were introduced to the texts (independent choice versus school literature) and authors' ethnicities (Black or Non-Black), to explore whether participants described reading each text as a negative or positive experience (see **Chapter 4** for all analytic outputs*)*.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the conception, design and implementation of this research, ethical implications were of paramount concern. Guided throughout by the *British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics* (Oates, 2021), the research prioritised duty of care for the participants, focusing on handling of the sensitive nature of the subject matter (issues regarding representation of race) and because of the vulnerable position of some of my participants as under 18 years old. In order to ensure non-maleficence of the research, the fundamental principle at the heart of all decisions was based on the emotional wellbeing of the participants and protecting them from harm. As well as relying on the researcher's ability to be reflexive and consider implications for their emotional wellbeing in practise, the project was also put through various stages of scrutiny by outside assessors, in order to uphold these ethical principles. Initially, all decisions were discussed with the project supervisor and management of potential hypothetical scenarios and risks were explored. Subsequently, applications for ethical approval were made to the University of East London (UEL) School of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee; the UEL Data Management Committee and the *** County Council Research Governance Committee (placement Local Authority). The research was approved by each of these professional bodies (**Appendix 21** & **Appendix 22**).

Research documents were created (and scrutinised as part of the ethical process) to ensure participants had full understanding of the study intentions and procedures, so that they were able to give fully informed consent (**Appendix 10 & 11)**. The participants' understanding of their right to withdraw was outlined in the initial information shared, and reiterated before interviews took place. Two individuals expressed interest initially and then chose to withdraw before

providing written consent. No participants chose to withdraw after the point of being interviewed.

At all phases, protection of the participants' data and identifiable information was protected and confidentiality ensured through storing metadata (participants' email addresses and names) separately to primary data, and keeping everything within password protected files on an individual Microsoft OneDrive account, following the approved outlines in the Data Management Plan (**Appendix 23**).

Regarding the Story Completion task, there was the additional complication of the potential ethical risk of plagiarism, since participants created this text independently without researcher involvement. The need for originality was stressed in the contracting interview with participants and the two individuals who completed this element signed to confirm that they were the sole authors of the texts.

As alluded to previously, considerations of power dynamics between researcher and participants was a key aspect of ethical validity, centring around difference in ethnic identities, especially as the topic was one which would potentially make the participants feel vulnerable. To alleviate this, the positioning of the White researcher was named and acknowledged from the beginning of the working relationship. Participants were invited to examine this perspective and ask any questions they had. This was uncomfortable to do but was important to ensure participants were aware that the research was oriented from a position of humility, seeking to learn from and

privilege the views and experiences of the Black participants, not to make power-seeking claims of knowing or othering their perspectives.

A thorough risk assessment was carried out in collaboration with the research supervisor. As a discussion-based mode of research, the main area of risk related to psychological harm; there was no risk of physical harm. Specific psychological hazards anticipated were in the form of either emotional distress from the participants, regarding the sensitive subject matter or the risk of abusive communications toward the researcher, which could be a hazard of publicising the research online. Ways to control for these risks were considered and implemented, for example, ensuring that participants were fully informed of the subject matter before they offered consent for their involvement. They were made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage, even during the interview. It was also judged that as a psychologist, the researcher had training and expertise in communication and attunement, making them adept at identifying any emerging signs of distress. Regarding researcher protection against internet trolling, this situation did not transpire, however, a clear action plan was in place for had it done, including protecting personal contact details and blocking the perpetrator and reporting further if necessary.

The priority ethical consideration for the analytical stage lay in reflexivity in ensuring interpretations were respectful of and authentic to the participants' intended meaning-making. It was clear that if this was not achieved, the work would become paternalistic as opposed to empowering. As part of the iterative analysis process, testimonial validity was returned to repeatedly, questioning whether codes and themes were accurately interpreting what participants had sought to convey in describing their experiences.

In a similar vein, the ethical implications of the mode of analysis were considered, which connected back to the theory of language the research was grounded in. After ongoing self- and peer-reflection, in this case semantic level analysis was decided to be the most ethically appropriate. This acknowledged the researcher's perspective as a group outsider as a White researcher and that it would be ethically inappropriate/unsound to claim a position of superior insight into the participants' meaning than they do themselves through their language choices. This position aligns with the theoretical position of experiential language adopted with regard to participants accepting as intentional their word-choice and meaning making, without adopting a hermeneutics of suspicion or critical language approach, which might be options for researchers who are themselves part of the same demographic. It would not be in keeping with the value system outlined above for the researcher to claim to have greater insight or understanding of the latent meanings underlying Black experiences to those of the ingroup participants themselves. This was another reason why the opportunity to participate in member checking was such an important stage of the ethical validity of the research.

Each participant was contacted once the analysis reached the end of Stage 2 and codes had been developed for each transcript. This was to give them the opportunity to suggest modification of any codes they felt were inaccurate, before the codes were amalgamated and theme generation began. Every participant was sent a copy of their anonymised transcript, including codes and were invited to comment. Participants were told of this opportunity at the start of the research, but were told explicitly that it would be an optional stage which they were only required to support if they chose to and wanted to review and comment on the analytical output based on their contributions. All eight participants were contacted; $n= 2$ responded. Only one participant

requested an amendment, which related to the pseudonym their data had been assigned. The change was made according to their suggestion.

Although the participants did not request further changes to codes, the incorporation of a member-checking phase was nonetheless invaluable in the analytical process. Holding in mind that each participant would have the opportunity to read interpretations of their meaning, added an additional layer of accountability. This was especially helpful with ambiguous or nuanced phrases, since it provided a reminder of the need to capture meaning as directly as possible, with a semantic interpretation and to stay alert to any comments which appeared to stray towards latent analysis.

3.8 Conclusion of Methodology

In summary, throughout the design and analytical process, critical reflexivity and ethical considerations were prioritised over pragmatic concerns. The central focus at all times has been ensuring the protection of participants. Through this design and procedure, the study produced a compact but high-quality data set with rich and meaningful themes, with a variety of implications for literary choices and discussions of portrayal of race in the curriculum.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview & Themes

The dataset, comprising eight semi-structured interviews and two Story Completion narratives, was analysed, using the RTA method. **Figure 5** depicts the themes and their relationship to the research question and each other. Exploration of each of these themes and sub-themes follows, with quotations shared to exemplify the ideas as expressed by the participants. The texts referenced by participants were also a focus of reflection (**Appendix 24**) and these were categorised according to where they were encountered, the ethnicity of the authors and whether participants experienced it positively or negatively (see **Figure 6.**)

4.2 Theme 1: Literature of Past & Pain

When asked to recall their experiences of Black culture and characters in school literature, each participant had varying degrees of negativity to share and all recalled either a text or situation in the classroom which created painful feelings of discomfort or frustration. Some of these issues the participants described as being "traumatic" and explicitly linked to real-world incidents of racist discrimination or abuse. Issues sparking negativity and painful experiences were the portrayal of specific Black characters, largely written by White authors; texts which feature racism as a theme of the narrative, including the overt portrayal of racist behaviours and language; damaging teacher approaches to literature choice and discussion, and finally participants experiencing isolation or othering during their English literature lessons.

Figure 5.

Map of Findings from Reflexive Thematic Analysis
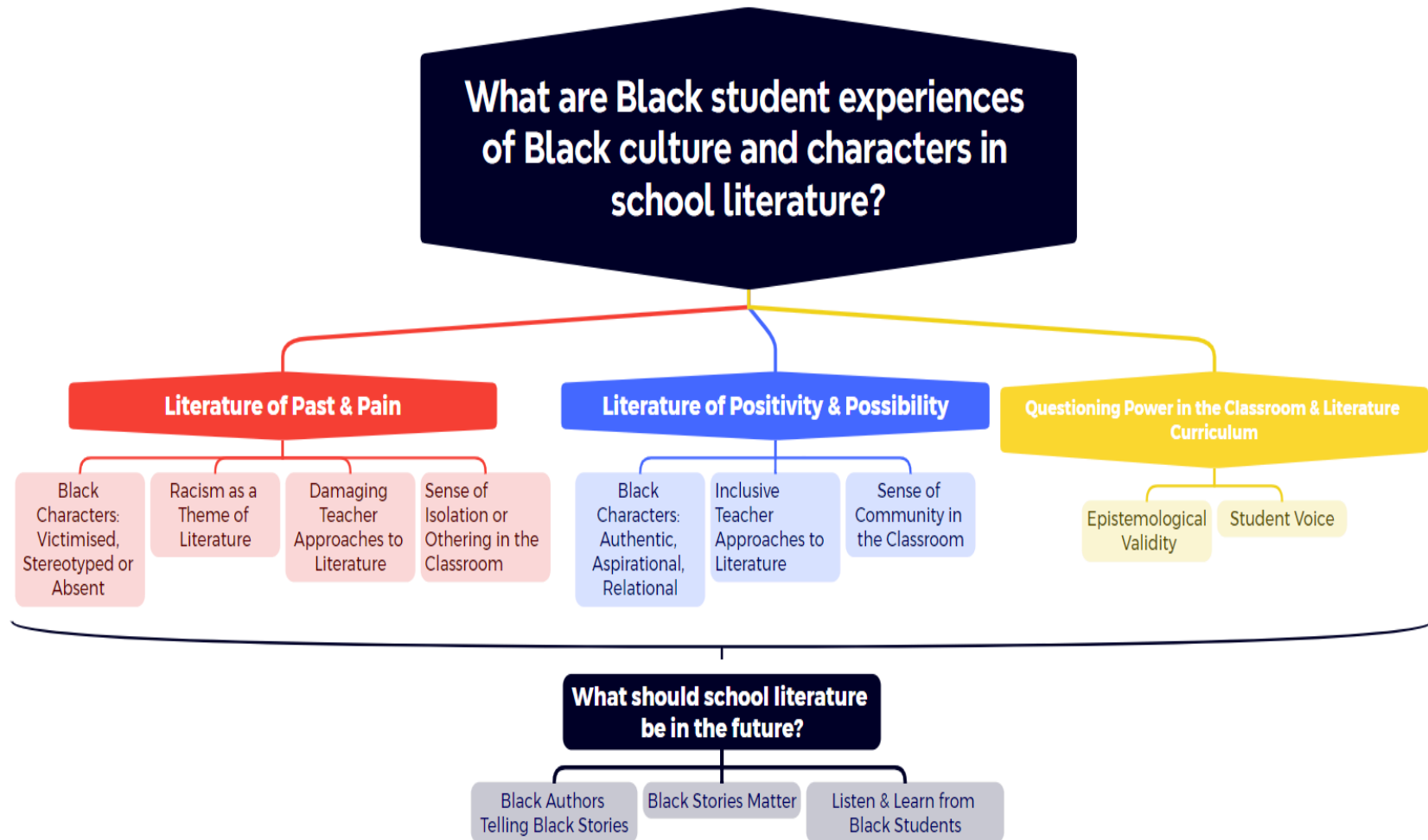
It is noticeable when considering the specific literary texts which participants mentioned, that the majority described as being a negative or painful experience were those which were both **School Literature** (defined as a text which is read as part of an English Literature lesson, usually as part of the GCSE or A Level curriculum) and written by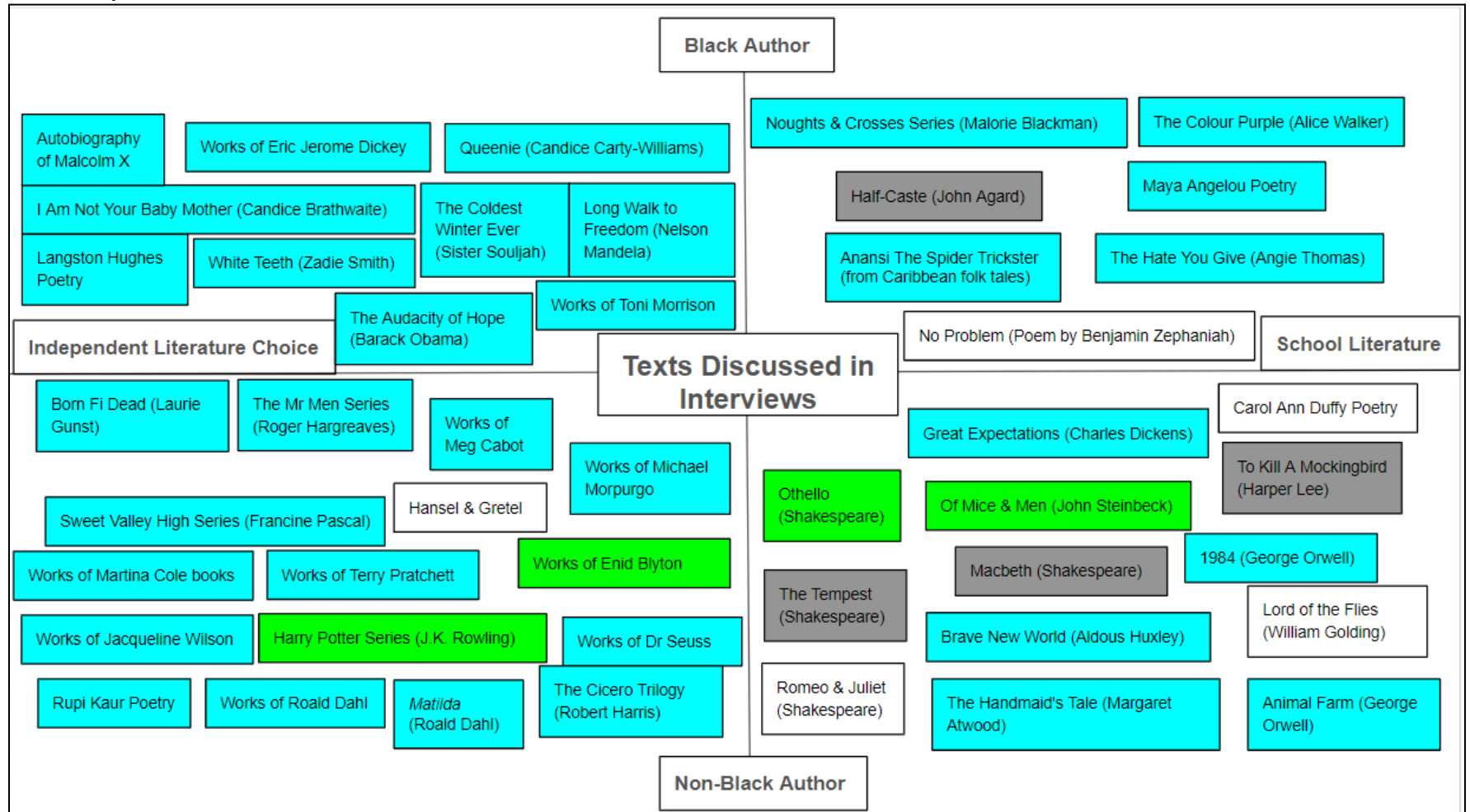 a **Non-Black Author** (see Figure 6*)*. Furthermore, most of the texts mentioned in a negative light by participants featured Black characters and culture, including experiences of racism. The only exceptions to this are the Shakespeare plays *Macbeth* (which the participant shared was a negative experience due having to read it multiple times as part of exam preparation) and *The Tempest.* More than one participant referenced *The Tempest* as depicting a racist portrayal of the character Caliban who they perceived to be Black due to the casting of a Black actor in a film version, and the way their teacher spoke about the character, despite the race of the character not being described in the play script itself.

4.2.1 Sub-theme 1a: Black Characters: Victimised, Stereotyped or Absent

This sub-theme explored portrayals of individual Black characters in school literature which participants described as creating a painful reading experience for them, evoking emotions of upset or anger. Participants spoke of characters they felt were victimised or negatively stereotyped. They also discussed the lack of representation of Black characters within their school texts, which is signified here through the term 'Absent'.

Tee felt that this limiting portrayal of Black characters was universal in school literature, saying: "whenever we have read a book with a Black character, they're always kind of…they're more presented as someone who's just kind of less than the other characters, just like a not very important character." (p.9; l.13-15)

Figure 6.
Quadrant Chart of Texts Discussed in Interviews

One of the characters most frequently described as being victimised was Crooks, a farmhand in

Steinbeck's *Of Mice & Men.* Despite the book being removed from the GCSE curriculum in the

UK in 2014, five of the eight participants discussed reading it in school (including two of the

participants currently studying). They all recalled the portrayal of Crooks, the only Black

character, as a particularly negative experience. Ava was the only participant to express any

positive regard for the novel, as she felt "it was always a good source for a debate" (p.9;l.5-6) but

said of the character:

> I think especially that he was the only Black character, that only gives one outlook
> on the Black experience, and he was more like a shadow character. You didn't
> really see him alot, and when you do see him, it's like, he's working. Or he's being
> cussed out or something. It's nothing very like, sustainable… it's means now that
> Black people are just being portrayed in one specific light that isn't even true or
> the only option. (p.11;l.10-15)

This response to this character was particularly significant since this was one of a very small

number of characters, who are specifically described by the author as Black who any participants

remembered reading about at school.

Another character remembered by multiple participants as a Black figure was Caliban from

Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* who is positioned in the play as the slave of the wizard Prospero.

Maya spoke of the experience of reading *The Tempest* as being distressing, because of the

portrayal of Caliban as an inferior character.

> "I just remember him being described as like this beastly monster creature. Not
> really humanlike, bit of an idiot. I just remember that. And I think that was the
> only Black character I remember. … But I used to just hate reading *The Tempes*t. I
> just used to hate reading it. I hated that, that period of when we were studying that
> story and it was mainly because I just didn't want to hear about Caliban because it
> just felt like, you know, people would make fun of him and yeah, he's a fictional
> character, but I guess in my head it was like, no, this is a Black person. I don't like
> this, you know, this is upsetting me. But it was part of the syllabus and we had to
> learn it and that was that. " (p.24;l.1-12)

In terms of exploring the stereotyping of Black characters, participants suggested that literature could play a significant role in both constructing and reflecting stereotyped views held in UK society.

Speaking about her A-Level study of Walker's *The Colour Purple (*which she described as a book she valued), nonetheless Marcia recognised how it could be viewed as perpetuating oppressive stereotypes of Black women:

> Black women take a lot anyway in terms of society, we're kind of the lowest denominator. So I don't know if it [*The Colour Purple]* kind of influences that kind of thinking, you know what I mean, and yeah, I would say so, I think it just kind of added fuel to the fire so to speak (p.12;l.5-7).

Samuel summarised the experience of Black characters in school literature as being generally negatively focused and lacking positive experiences:

> So one thing that stood out to me, when I was younger, was that there wasn't any joyful books about any Black characters. It was always either slavery, oppression, or things being hard… I remember another book that I read, about Caribbeans, coming over to the UK and how they found it cold, so the Windrush generation and how they found it cold and difficult and so on (p.8;l.16-19).

Beyond these painful and negative experiences in relation to the portrayal of victimised or stereotyped characters by White authors, the phenomenon most participants' recalled regarding Black characters was their absence. Former student Hayley struggled to recall any school literature featuring Black characters at her predominantly White school, saying "[I] don't remember anything book-related and I've got a good memory so I'm just like, I've really been trying to like recall back but yeah, I'm struggling to think." (p.7;l.2-3). Ava, who is currently

attending what she describes as a fairly diverse school, stated "I don't remember any like Black characters,or Black experiences being represented in books that I read, for GCSEs." (p.8;l.8-9)"

Black absence was spoken of with resignation by participants as something "taken as a given" (Maya, p.36;l.1-2), so typical that they did not even question it. Leah explained that she is accustomed to a lack of Black representation, as it has become "so normalised now that it doesn't really affect me" (p.11;l.15). Marcia also suggested that the absence of Black representation in school literature was so prevalent that "it was a bit of a norm, it's kind of "O, it just is what it is"" (p.4;l.8-12).

Maya noticed a lack of representation of Black characters in books she read in her own time for pleasure, as well as in school: "I didn't really take it in as like "Oh this Jacqueline Wilson book hasn't got any Black characters". I was just like "Well, why would she? She never does"" (p.35;l.8-10).

Some participants associated the absence of Black characters with the historical context in which the author created the literature. Leah stated: "I was thinking about… how in *Great Expectations* there's not really any Black characters. But I also think that's probably because it was written so long ago. So they wouldn't have done" (p.9;l.8-9).

Marcia also took this view, rationalising the lack of variety of Black characters in Shakespeare's work by saying:

> There weren't really many Black people around that time. So why would they be portrayed in that literature? And I understand diversity and inclusion and obviously equity….. I'm not saying it should be disregarded, but what we do today is brilliant but we do immerse different cultures and people to play different roles, it brings a different spin to a very classic tale (p.16;l.8-14).

When prompted to reflect on the impact of these negative or absent character portrayals, some

participants felt that it would decrease Black students' interest and enjoyment of literature, as

Hayley described:

> If there's things that like never include you or never relate to you, it's easier to disengage and like "O that's not for me".... So, if you're having that repeated experience of like, this is really hard for me to relate to and I can't really get into that, it's likely to impact your engagement over time, isn't it? So if you're always hearing stories, about people, experiences and lifestyles that, you can't relate to, I'd imagine that that would kind of decrease your ability to kind of meaningfully engage with it and get fully stuck in (p.9, l.6-8).

Furthermore, Tee discussed their view that stereotyping of Black characters can have a damaging

impact on the self-concept and worldview of young Black readers:

> A lot of like Black people are kind of shown to be criminals or you know involved in violence… They're involved in knife crime or gang crime and all of that and I feel like because it's shown so often a lot of younger Black people or Black children will kind of get the idea that "Okay this is you know, this is who I am meant to be. This is like, my role basically". And especially if they see like a lack of successful Black people, they'll kind of just think "Yeah, this is definitely, how I am supposed to be" (p.19; l.9-14).

From a personal perspective, some participants described intense emotional pain related to the

portrayal of Black characters in literature, with Eve recalling such a negative experience reading

Steinbeck's *Of Mice & Men* and Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird* that "those two books in particular,

I hate even to this day" (p1, l.11-12). Maya described the experience of reading about Black

characters in literature as a complex emotional and physical sensation which she did not fully

comprehend while she was a student and now understands more fully when reflecting

retrospectively.

> I feel like at the time, I just felt like something bad in my stomach. In that like I think, it's only been looking back as an adult that I've been able to reflect and think ok that wasn't an enjoyable experience or I felt really

> unprotected. But I think in the moment I felt a sense of injustice. And a sickness and a sadness and I think I felt a melancholic feeling, whenever I went to school. That's kind of how it made me feel (p.28;l.5-9).

This experience, of a developing awareness of the representation of race in literature and its implications was also discussed by Marcia, who expressed "at that age, it never dawned on me that these weren't representative of me" (p.4, l.18-19). This suggests that young readers themselves are unlikely to be consciously aware of the absence or stereotyped portrayal of Black characters, unless deliberately introduced to a more diverse range of characters by their teachers. However, even if child-readers may lack recognition of under-representation, they are not protected from the consequences of how it informs their view of themselves, their place in the world and how non-Black readers view them.

4.2.2 Sub-theme 1b:Racism as a Theme Literature

The sub-theme of racism as a topic for study and exploration in literature was an important one to explore, as participants discussed that almost all of the texts featuring a Black character which they were taught were viewed through a lens of learning about racism. As Leah expressed it, "the only poems about people of colour are about how they're so discriminated against" (p.8; l.14-15). Most instances of racism as a dominant theme in a literature text recalled by participants were through historical narratives, such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and *Othello*, American early twentieth century literature or through poetry. Views were divided amongst participants; some appreciated reading literature which explored racism, as a tool to develop understanding and facilitate anti-racist discussion. Others found it a painful and sometimes traumatising experience to read about racism as a theme in literature and felt it was detrimental to their learning experience.

Marcia expressed that although she sees the value in learning about historical racism, it does not

create a relatable narrative for modern readers:

> *The Colour Purple* [Walker] was in, to my understanding, the late 1800s, early
> 1900s you know, post-slavery, just as slavery was finishing and that kind of
> stuff....So, I couldn't, you know, the 90s child, if you will, I couldn't relate to that
> per se. But historically, you could feel it. ...I can feel the trauma, do you know
> what I mean? (p.10; l.1-11)

However, Marcia did also feel that there is an educational purpose in reading texts which include

what is now understood to be unacceptable racist language or portrayals. Using an example of

Enid Blyton, an author whose texts she enjoyed in childhood, Marcia explained:

> If you read that today, it's like, "Say, what?" … But it's also helping you know,
> that growth piece to understand, this is how it was back then. You know, I'm not
> saying it's right. But how have we grown and evolved to the kind of books that are
> in there today? So …you've got to know where you've been to know where you're
> going (p. 20; l.13-18).

Similarly, Leah expressed a sense of gratitude and hope for the future of anti-racism, which she

felt emerged through reading about painful narratives about racism of the past and comparing

that to the experiences of herself and her peers:

> For me personally, I feel like it shows how lucky I am to be born in this day, in
> this period of time because in that period of time it was so much worse. Like, it's
> obviously not perfect now, but …society has gotten a lot better at inclusivity and
> just prejudice in general. It shows how far society has come…. people try and
> pick out all the bad things and how bad society is but when you look at it in
> perspective with how bad it was then… you can see it's progressing (p.23,
> l.13-18).

Tee felt that exploring racism through literature was vital in terms of educating young people and

ensuring that racism is acknowledged and tackled:

> I would say like a lot of books, they relate to... what's going on in society, which
> is a lot of social issues. And if it's not addressed in books in school, we're hardly
> ever really gonna talk about it because, you know, we go to the school to learn

what's on the curriculum. So, yeah, I think you know, it gives a chance to bring up a discussion but because we're like, we're not reading books that bring up racism, or race at all, we just don't really talk about it much. We just don't discuss those kind of things (p.14; l.4-9).

While Tee and Leah considered the racism portrayed in literature at the societal level, other participants expanded on their personal response to reading racism. In recalling his experience of studying *Othello* for A Level, Samuel recounted:

I was quite offended by a lot of it. I think one particular line that I remember off the top of my head was "the beast with two backs" and which was basically describing, I believe, Othello and his partner having sex and from the way he would look was basically like a beast… so I found that quite offensive and when I found out the hidden meaning behind how they would describe Othello continuously… his character was basically fighting against all of that all the time. So a lot of it for me was I was quite offended, quite disgusted and found some of it difficult to read at the time, but now I can kind of see some appreciation in what I read as well. (p.15; l.6-19)

Looking back as an adult reader, it appears that Samuel has developed an appreciation of what the play contributes by reflecting the racism in society, however, this does not negate the personal pain he experienced through reading this portrayal as a young Black student.

Eve summarised her argument against situating racism as a contextual theme of literature:

The problem with reading about these historical *[inverted comma hand gesture]* novels, … is that it's current, so it's absolutely a nonsense to say "This was the attitude in the 50s" when it's still around now, it's an absolute nonsense. It's like some kind of, delusion that some people suffer that, like "Yes, yes, before, Black people were lynched. But now look, they can head up Google", you know, it's this really, really ridiculous argument (p.8; l.17-22).

This viewpoint suggests that contextualising racism as a historical element of texts, creates a false illusion that racism is a thing of the past, which does not align with the experiences of Eve or of the other participants.

Although literature which depicts the racist discrimination of individual characters may be hoped to inspire anti-racist learning and action, for some readers it can in fact be a catalyst or instigator of real world racist abuse. This is especially true of literature which includes racist language and descriptions of racially-motivated attacks. Eve, who described herself as the only non-White pupil in her school during the 1980s, cites the reading of the N-word in *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *Of Mice & Men* in her English lessons as a direct cause of subsequent racist abuse by her peers.

> We started to read the book, and as soon as the racial slurs appeared and the teacher, used to make, not just me, but other people in the class stand up and read extracts from the text. So, I would often have to read extracts that included these slurs and after we had finished the first day, we started doing the book, I remember that that is all I heard being screamed at me in the playground, on the way home. So from that day forward, like, it was almost like… permission was given… there was a direct correlation between what we read in class and how I was then treated… It wasn't imagination or the fact that it took a few months… it was literally the following day or that day. And every time that book was read, it would increase (p.2;l.18-23).

This harrowing account, which has clearly had an enduring painful impact on Eve, is all the more concerning when connected to the experiences of Leah and Ava, who are students at the time these interviews were conducted and who have read the same books and experienced the same choice by teachers to instruct students to read the offensive word aloud in class.

Two participants spoke directly about their experiences of reading texts exploring racism as part of their examined assessment for GCSE and A Levels. Leah explained that she had been explicitly directed by her teacher that when the exam question names a poem by a Black poet, "you have to compare it to the other one about a Black, from a Black writer because in the

GCSE… you compare it to the other one because they're both about race so you have to do them together" (p.5; l.15-16). Leah was alert to the dismissive connotations of this, implying that a poem by a Black writer would have nothing else to offer but a perspective on race. Furthermore, Leah recognised the limitations of her teacher's understanding, stating: "It's so cliche, White teachers telling us to compare two poems about race because it's just easier" (p.6; l.12-13). Leah's remark indicates that her lived experience as a Black individual in a majority White society has given her an advantage in comprehending the complexities of race relations and racism, over her White teachers.

Hayley also spoke about the potential for examination texts by Black authors to be emotionally distressing for students, describing her reaction to studying Agard's *Half Caste* for GCSE, a poem which confronts the reductionist nature of the term.

> I remember the poem *Half Caste,* and that one is one that massively sticks out in my mind and it's interesting because when I thinking about having this meeting that's the first thing that sprung to mind. And I forgot what the content of the poem was, I forgot what the author even said, but I literally just remembered the title and that made me just think. Yeah, just lots about that term. How it was used. How frequently it was used when I was in school (p.4; l.16-20).

Because the term felt personally painful to Hayley it had a detrimental impact on her ability to engage with the poem and absorb its content on a purely academic level, resulting in her not being able to recall the poet's message.

Hayley went on to discuss her memories of the AQA exam board's poetry anthology *Poetry from Different Cultures* (which at the time of Hayley's schooling was a set GCSE text and was the only section a Black writer was included in the AQA curriculum). Hayley observed the

problematic nature of authors who are Black or from an ethnic minority background being

positioned separately from mainstream authors:

> Obviously, well it's positive that, you know, *other* authors have been included the fact that they've had to be given this kind of separate category, what is that communicating? Like that, they're kind of like a bolt on, they're an add-on. Why are they not part of the main body? So yeah, it's the kind of "both and" isn't it? Because you want to be like "Oh grateful" that other authors are included because you know it's not a given but then it's like "Oh but are they really included?" Because they're excluded within the inclusion. So in a whole different category (p.6; l.1-5).

Eve elucidated most clearly why it is so disadvantageous for Black students to have to read about

racism as a theme of literature, especially when they are required to be assessed on their

responses to the text.

> I'm a big fan of Toni Morrison, for example… most people are because she's amazing. But I can't read what I call 'racism porn' anymore because I find it too depressing…. I can't read it like I'm reading about, you know, troubles in the Greco Roman Empire [*laughs*], when you know it's still happening now (p.9; l.16-21).

This comparison illustrates the extent to which Black students are emotionally impacted by

reading about racism, even in an historic text, since the reality of racism is still operating in their

lives, thus creating a substantive academic disadvantage for them when they are expected to

produce work from a critical academic stance, of a comparable standard to White peers, who do

not have the personal connection to experiencing racism.

4.2.3 Sub-Theme 1c: Damaging Teacher Approaches to Literature

Each of the participants expanded their discussion from beyond the literature they were reading

to explore the way their teachers spoke about the books and positioning of Black characters. The

majority of the participants shared examples of either ongoing or isolated incidents where an individual teacher's approach was psychologically damaging to them and their Black peers.

Connecting to the discussion of racist language in the previous sub-theme, Ava felt that the text itself was not the issue but more important was the teacher's approach: "My real problem was just from the classroom and reading out loud, where the teacher would encourage students to still say the racist slurs" (p.10; l.7-8).

Similarly, Maya recalled:

> There was a section in [a novel] where the N word was used quite a lot and the teacher was…in her head, she was like "Well because it's part of the book, we've got to read it out loud" and I was just like "We don't need to read it out loud. We don't need to say that word. We could just not say the word" but she insisted, she <u>insisted</u> that whoever was reading out was saying the word…. for her, it was crucial to this whole experience of this book. … She was just like, "Well we have to. It's part of the book, this is on the syllabus."... She was there arguing with Black students, who are literally pleading with her to not let someone read out the N word because it's triggering for us and we're here to learn at school. We're not here to be traumatised (p.22; l.2 - p.23;l.8).

In reflecting on her teacher's competence with facilitating conversations about race, Hayley doubted that they would have felt able to: "my English teachers, they were both White, both White women and I don't know whether they would be able to have that conversation or could trust it" (p.14;l19-20).

Tee conveyed a similar sentiment about her experience of White teachers in her school and explained the impression this avoidance of acknowledging racism conveys to the students:

> In my school, my teachers tend to get very uncomfortable...Even in assemblies that we have, they most of the time they get a Black student or Black teachers, to

> talk about it [racism] rather than a White teacher. I think a lot of my White teachers are just scared of saying the wrong thing. So yeah, they just kind of avoid talking about it… It just gives us all the impression that they just don't want to acknowledge what's actually going on in the real world. And so it…gives the idea of … I'm saying, like ignorance really (p.13; l.3-14).

In the Story Completion narrative composed by Leah, racism is not avoided, but "taught by most of the teachers" (p.2; l.3), with the English teacher making sweeping generalisations about characters based on race: "Mr Smith continuously pointing out how the skin colour of the characters allowed the class to infer the position in society of the characters" (p.1; l.5-6).

Leah's fictional storyline closely mirrors Eve's real-world experiences, as she identified her teachers as being aligned with the perpetrators of racism: "Obviously because it was only me… I had to stomach all of it. And there is absolutely no way that I could have approached any of the staff because… they were all on the same page (p.2; l.24-25).

While it is to be hoped that in the 21st century, Black students would be protected from discrimination in the classroom like Eve endured, the experiences of current students Tee, Leah and Ava suggest that there is still work to be done in developing all teachers' confidence and competence in managing an actively anti-racist classroom.

4.2.4 Sub-Theme 1d: Sense of Othering or Isolation in the Classroom

Experiences of how participants felt in relation to the class group when studying literature differed significantly between participants and was largely reliant on whether they were in a predominantly White class or a more diverse group.

Hayley, who went to a majority White school in Wales, expressed: "I was just like, 'head down, get through it' because I was in top sets… So, even though there was some representation in my

year group, you go up the sets and it, yeah… [Interviewer: Less?] Yes" (p.15; l.10-14). Hayley

described the phenomenon of how othered and pressurised she felt in her class group, when

poems exploring race were read in the lesson:

> It was awkward, because I definitely felt a weird pressure… It just felt like there was a spotlight because it was just like 'This is the poem we're talking about and you are that thing.' So it felt like a real kind of pressure (p.5;l3-7).

As discussed in the previous sub-theme, Eve identifies the description and positioning of Black

characters in novels read in class as directly encouraging White students in her class to make her

a target of sustained racist abuse:

> Prior to that, there was a couple of boys that would make my comments to me, but the book, the book itself, there was a turning point, because once the book was read, it …became commonplace, you know, so it would be every single break time, at lunchtime, as soon as I left school. So it kind of…. yeah, it kind of gave permission" (p.2; l.6-8).

Discussion of the experience of Black students in the classroom was a predominant theme

explored in Story Completion data (composed by participants Marcia and Leah). Through the

narratives, the Black main characters are described as "not fitting in" and "outcasts amongst their

peers" with their school referred to as "hell on earth". The participant authors allude to

discriminatory behaviour management systems, with Leah narrating "they had to accept it

otherwise they would end up back in isolation like last time." (p.1, 3-4) and Marcia introducing

another character who says "this place sounds proper racist. It's blatantly obvious your teacher

has unconscious bias" (p.1, l.2).

Speculating on the impact of feeling isolated in the classroom, Tee expressed the perspective that

Black students in a predominantly White classroom are likely to find it harder to share their

views about issues of racism in literature:

> There are some people that I know who have gone to schools where, you know, the majority of the people in the class are White. So they felt very alone and just as if maybe they're being a bit too sensitive, or being a bit too, you know… judgemental of the text that they're reading (p.12, l.3-5).

Samuel, who attended a majority Black boys' school shared a similar view and exemplified this with the contrast between his experiences in the classroom at school and at university:

> With hindsight now, because I went to a predominantly Black school with Black children, I feel that we probably didn't take it as seriously as probably we would have at the time. …So reading out wasn't difficult because I was around other Black people. I think if I went to a predominantly non-Black school then I think, oh, that would probably be quite challenging to read out. When I went to university and I …had a bit more understanding of some of these books and I'm reading to a more non-Black audience in class daily. It was slightly a bit awkward sometimes (p.9; l.16-20).

While schools cannot increase the diversity of their classroom populations, it is important for them to be aware of the effect being in the minority can have. School staff can take measures to ensure that when selecting literature which features Black characters and culture that it is not something which is going to exacerbate Black students' experiences of othering and isolation but will instead promote inclusion and facilitate an anti-racist study of literature.

4.3 Theme 2: Literature of Positivity & Possibility

Positivity and possibilities inspired by literature and the act of reading was a central theme which was generated across the dataset, despite the negative experiences explored in the previous theme. The majority of participants described their positive regard for literature generally, with some stating this as their reason for volunteering to participate in the research. Eve stated that "reading is my passion" and Marcia shared that "I lived for the library". Maya painted a vivid image of the importance of her identity as a reader:

> I loved it, I still love reading... I think that it's very important just to be well-read and expand your vocabulary and my mum was very big on reading when I was younger, but I didn't even need to be forced because every night I'm going to bed and I'm falling asleep with the book on my face, you know? (p.29; l.15-18).

Other participants explored why reading was a positive experience for them and what it gave to them. For example, Samuel discussed that he recognised at an early age that reading was a strength of his and found pleasure in reading books which were "advanced" for his age, stating, "I didn't always understand the words as much but I really enjoyed it because it was something a little bit different" (p.3; l.18-20).

Tee vocalised the moral and emotional benefit she gains from reading literature: "every piece of literature, every book has some kind of meaning that can apply to a person,... regardless of whatever situation they're in, it could always create meaning for a person" (p.8; l.11-13).

As the quadrant chart demonstrates, each of the participants had a number of examples of books they had read, written by Black authors and featuring Black characters and culture which they experienced positively and which they found to be optimistic for the Black community, although the majority of these books were those which they had chosen independently, rather than being introduced to them through the school English literature lessons.

4.3.1 Sub-Theme 2a: Black Characters: Authentic, Aspirational, Relational

In contrast to the Black characters discussed in the *Literature of Past & Pain* theme, some participants spoke about being inspired by reading about characters who have emerged from struggle to become successful. Marcia spoke of several novels and poems she has read which gave her a sense of "liberation" and "empowerment" and recalled specifically the depiction of

Celie in her A Level study of Walker's *The Colour Purple*: "The protagonist, she's obviously

being abused and disrespected initially. So you know she becomes the victim, the survivor… the

hero. So threaded throughout her story I felt that bravery" (p.11; l.9-12).

Samuel spoke about being drawn towards Black characters, even a complex figure with hamartia

(a fatal flaw), such as Shakespeare's tragic hero, Othello:

> Personally, I kind of saw him as a hero but I know obviously some people have
> different views, but I saw him as a hero and I think it was because he was Black.
> Because he was a Black man, that was continuously being oppressed, he wasn't the
> greatest character, obviously, but …I did see him as a hero (p.16; l.13-17).

The importance of seeing aspirational Black characters was explored by Marcia describing the

type of narratives that she finds inspiring:

> Progressive, I think that's the word… aspirational, you know, because in the
> books, okay, you had some that were from what we call the 'hood', or the
> 'ghetto', you know, you know, let's be real, in the heart of underprivileged areas,
> But you have people that have made it out of the hood and maybe live in the more
> nicer parts of London… they drive a nice car, it's showing that you could have, it's
> kind of fictionalised, but it's showing you can have that too (p. 9; l.4-10)

Reading inspirational stories of successful Black individuals was also important to Tee who

explained: "I've read a lot of autobiographies and biographies of Black celebrities…. [they]

spoke to me because it kind of made me realise that although… Black people in society have a

disadvantage, they can still be successful" (p.18; l.10-12).

Samuel explained the phenomenon of being drawn to characters due to shared aspects of identity,

as he recognises it in himself and in his children:

> I've got two kids and I will notice, they'll resonate with particular types of
> characters because they are Black… Just seeing someone that looks like you, it
> resonates and you can't describe what that feeling is. It just stands out more and
> because you recognise that, that person looks or is similar to what you are. And so
> they fill you with a bit of empowerment as well (p.22; l.4-10).

Tee also recollected the importance of Black characters she felt she could relate to in books she read as a young child:

> Growing up I had a lot of Disney books and I remember reading like *The Princess and the Frog* a lot because it had like a Black princess…However like when I was younger, I never really saw race as a big issue because, you know, you're a child, you're quite naive… but it did, I would say it did help. You know, seeing representation of princesses that looked like me (p.23-24;l.15-4).

Considering their awareness of Black protagonists as they became older readers, several of the participants mentioned books by Malorie Blackman (former Children's Laureate), including the *Noughts & Crosses* series. The narrative explores an alternative reality where the Black community is the powerful majority and White people are the discriminated-against minority. Participants described this book series as a sensitive and empowering depiction of Black characters and culture, which for Maya *"changed my perspective on everything"* (p.32; l.8). Leah elaborated further on why the novel is so groundbreaking for Black representation:

> I just love the concept… it's so cool how she has just flipped it. But it also shows that no matter which way it was like… with racism, then it would still be the same. Like it's not just because of skin colour it's just because of mindsets…people always need to feel better than someone else…. People just need to be knowing there is someone else who's suffering more than them" (p16;l1-6).

When asked to reflect on the impact of reading about positive and relatable portrayals of Black characters, Tee identified that when individuals "read things that you can relate to and that you find, apply to you and your life, it's more likely to kind of, support you and benefit you" (p.18;l.1-6).

Marcia also felt there was potential for non-Black readers to benefit from authentic representation of Black culture in literature as it may enhance their understanding and dispel preconceptions they may hold:

> Even if subconsciously because also you've got to think about what people hear in their own homes and their own environments outside of the school or the college. So definitely, I'm sure it had some level of influence, especially if they didn't have much to do with people of colour (p.11; l.16-21).

4.3.2 Sub-Theme 2b: Inclusive Teacher Approaches to Literature

Some participants had positive experiences to share about the way their teachers spoke about

Black culture and characters in school literature, in a way that helped Black students to feel

included and comfortable in the lesson. Samuel had particularly fond memories of a primary

school teacher:

> She would introduce us to Caribbean books, that were celebrating Caribbean culture… So I remember there was a particular song and a particular book that she read to us about a character Anansie I think it was called? … It was a celebratory book, …celebrating their culture, their food, their families, and so on. And so that was quite positive. But I remember, even to this day, even before speaking to you, at least once a year… I do remember her and that particular period of time of my life being quite positive (p.19; l.1-10).

Maya contrasted the negative experience described in the *Damaging Teacher Approaches to*

Literature sub-theme with another teacher who took a more progressive stance in relation to

racist language used in literature: "I actually remember one of the other English teachers… she

made a big point of 'We're not reading that word out. We don't do that kind of thing. So it was

interesting …" (p.23; l.9-13). Maya's comparison of the two teachers' approaches indicate the

significance of an individual's cultural competency in approaching texts and possibly signifies

the need for universal guidelines on the subject.

When considering his A Level texts with the hindsight of adulthood, Samuel reflected that his

teacher likely made a deliberate choice in selecting *Othello* as the Shakespearean play for the

class of Black boys to read, as it centralises a Black tragic hero:

[Othello] was constantly fighting against racism and backlash of people treating him terribly, even though he was in this, he was quite a high, relatively a high figure in society, and people were treating him badly just because of the colour of his skin. I remember and I found that, again our teacher didn't need to show us this element of Shakespeare but he could have read any book or any play, but he decided he obviously chose this one for a particular reason. And I felt that was quite a good time for them to be able to do that, and to be able to showcase that as well. Especially with hindsight now going back, I feel that it was a real eye-opener (p.15;l6-19).

Although the experience of reading about racism was difficult for Samuel and his peers he appreciated his teacher choosing a play which facilitated learning about the insidiousness of racism throughout the stratas of society and the prejudice Black men face.

Ava credits her A-Level English teacher with introducing her to a range of Black authors and ensuring there is diversity in the texts the class are reading.

My English teacher definitely, like she's very forward in telling me, like "You should read these artists, because they're Black" and she's very encouraging. So I'd say she's definitely done a lot for changing my outlook on how the curriculum presents Black students and authors." (p.7;l.18-19)

In contrast to the examples shared of teachers who either ignored or mishandled discussions of race in literature, Ava also shared ways that her teacher is able to skillfully explore issues of race and diversity through literary texts in an inclusive way:

I think my English teacher is very good at bringing those conversations and putting it in the curriculum. So it's never a case of me bringing those conversations up. So yeah, basically it was already there and then I'm speaking about it (p.3; l.13-15).

By Ava's teacher guiding the whole class of students in developing their awareness of racial literacy and modelling an anti-racist approach, the responsibility does not fall to Black students.

4.3.3 Sub-Theme 2c: Sense of Community in the Classroom

Tee expressed that the sense of community in the classroom is created where exploration of racism is acknowledged by all: "When you're in a class where everyone is agreeing on the fact that this could make someone potentially feel uncomfortable… you feel like you know your opinion… it's validated basically (p.12;l.3-8).

Through the story completion narrative, which painted a largely negative view of the experience of Black students in school literature lessons, Marcia also signified the importance of peer support to provide a protective factor to Black students: ""Thank God for Jordan man. At least I've got one bredrin there." he whispered" (p.2; l.9).

For Eve, her friendships provided the only source of support against the racism she endured: "My immediate friend group. So there was, there was three of us, you know, they would argue with people doing it as well. You know, they used to try and stand up for me" (p.3; l.17-18). These instances of peer support emphasise how transformational the relational element of the school experience can be, when students encounter racism and prejudice.

Ava identified cause for hope amongst difficult experiences of racist language in the text through the solidarity of other students:

> When anyone was reading out loud, they'd like look towards us and they just wouldn't say it. Even though the teacher said it was ok, they just wouldn't say it. I'd get a spark of hope… it kind of just reinforced the idea of not everyone is racist (p.10; l.10-14).

This classroom experience encouraged Ava's faith in her peers to make meaningful anti-racist change, with her belief that "this generation will just keep educating people and it will die down… It's just something that has to be taught (p.10; l.15-18).

4.4 Theme 3: Questioning Power in the Classroom & Literature Curriculum

When the interviews progressed from specific texts which students had read to the way that the texts were chosen and the repercussions of these choices, the overarching theme which was generated was expressed as power and Black students questioning the accepted power structures. Participants had strong and varied views and experiences of who holds the power in the classroom and for the literature curriculum and how that power is used.

One of the younger participants, Tee had particularly insightful views about the power structures in education and, as she sees it, the damaging effect that has on students' autonomous thinking and creativity:

> When it comes to school… education has become more like a business, and all those businesses are trying to compete with each other, to present themselves as the best school, the best grades, the best students, best behaviour, all of that. So, while these teachers are trying to, you know, build a really good presenting school, maybe not intentionally, but it can kill off creativity. (p.7;l.2-8)

This metaphor of schools as competitive industries is interesting to consider in light of the experiences which the participants relate in how power operated in their experience of school literature.

4.4.1 Sub-theme 3a: Epistemological Validity of Literature

In this context, epistemological validity refers to the extent to which literature is valued or seen as worthy of being studied. Considering the socio-cultural connotations of literature in the UK, Hayley identified the potential for it to be viewed as an elitist and exclusionary medium:

> If we think about literature and English and people think about Shakespeare and it sounds really kind of academic, high-class… literature, sounds incredibly posh, doesn't it? And can seem somewhat unobtainable when actually, you know, we're accessing literature… around us all the time when we're reading (p.12; l.2-7).

Ava questioned "how they pick books for the curriculum" and felt that the selection process may be limiting the representation of Black authors in school literature:

> Why is it that Carol Ann Duffy can fall into the category but Maya Angelou can't fall into the category? Or an author from the Harlem Revolution?... Maybe the category, like the specification that you're looking for needs to be a bit broader and more varied. (p.12; l.9-13)

Other participants questioned the literary validity and worth of specific books they have been instructed to study. Maya queried the widespread inclusion of *Of Mice & Men:* "I actually don't think it was crucial to people's understanding of literature. I don't feel like, it benefited me as an adult, you know?" (p45;l.14-20).

Referring to the same text, Eve went further, rejecting the choice entirely:

> To be frank, I never agreed with the book being of any real literary value, do you understand or social value?... You know, the fact that we in the English department here still have 600 copies of *Of Mice and Men*, and they bring it out every year because they say "Ohh well, it's on the curriculum"... It's an absolute farce, given how much literature there is in the world (p6.; l.18-24).

Hayley expressed curiosity at the continued study of Shakespeare:

> I remember talking to a teenager and they're talking about like *Romeo and Juliet* and stuff and it's so interesting that they still do that… and while I don't want

to… disrespect the history and like the historical origins of literature and stuff it's just interesting, isn't it? (p.16; l.12-15).

Samuel also considered the privileging of Shakespeare as central to the literature curriculum:

We could showcase other writers of different backgrounds, that are… equally as fantastic writers as Shakespeare… I think Shakespeare suffers from that whole British element of, because… we've got that, everyone knows we're going to kind of focus on his literature and his work, we're not really celebrating anyone else's... I'm not saying take away from Shakespeare or not to read his work because I think it is fantastic, but I do feel that there's other work that could be looked at and studied as well (p17; l.6-12).

This statement offered a reminder that there is space within the curriculum to celebrate and validate the creations of authors outside the British literary canon, while still studying the works of Shakespeare and other classic writers.

Finally, Tee expressed that, in her experience, teachers do not respect the literary choices or tastes of young people as having any epistemological worth:

I think there's a very well known stereotype of teenagers kind of just being on their phones and not learning about real life... and you know teachers just think… they're not reading… they're not like doing anything really valuable with their time but you know a student could be reading a very interesting book and yeah, the teacher might not acknowledge that (p.22; l.4-10).

Tee's viewpoint is supported by the variety of texts participants discussed during the interviews, of books they had chosen independently of school and found to be a positive experience (see **Figure 6**). This perspective may suggest that by holding a higher regard for students' autonomy and showing curiosity about what they choose to read in their own time, schools may be better able to create a more racially literate and inclusive curriculum.

4.4.2 Sub-Theme 3b: Student Voice

In the experience of all of the participants spoken to, teachers and curriculum designers rarely take any account of students' views on what literary texts would be valuable for study. Maya questioned whether teachers are interested in hearing students' views on literature and curriculum content: "I just wonder whether teachers would even be receptive to hearing this kind of stuff, and it's a bit depressing" (p.47; l.17-22).

Similarly, Leah described her experience that teachers were dismissive of pupils sharing their views about portrayal of race: "if people have their hands up to talk, they'll just be "Okay, we're moving on, we don't have time to do this" (p.7;12-13). Leah went to express the importance of teachers, especially White teachers, listening to Black students' views about the use of racist language in texts: "I don't think anyone should say it but especially not a White English teacher who has no idea what it's like to have it used against you" (p20; l.6-7). This illustrates that those who do not have lived experience of racism should not have the power to decide what language is or is not acceptable to be used in literature or to be voiced in the classroom, because they do not have the personal insight into the impact it creates.

Some participants spoke about the experience of using their voice in the classroom to address their views on literature and of the portrayal of Black characters and culture to their teacher and peers. Samuel recalled his growing confidence as he started his second year at university creating a solid foundation for his ability to make himself heard in the workplace:

> I felt that I wanted to express my opinions and I wanted people to hear it because I was slightly a bit more confident… and that's kind of helped me out even in my work workplace. So, a lot of places I work currently, I'm usually the only Black person there and… I feel that my opinions are just as important as anyone else

that's in the room (p.12; l.8-12).

Ava perceived using her voice in the classroom as more of a mixed experience:

> I do think if we're talking about anything to do with Black culture or African culture like, or even like African American or Caribbean, I'm like the voice for the whole race in general because there's no one else in there to talk about stuff like that. So, it's like my opinion, is the only Black opinion in the room… So it's a good thing, because I'm doing my part basically, but when I think about it, it is a bit strange, not strange but unfortunate, that's the word, that that's the case but I'll never stop speaking up (p.2;l.1 - p.3; l.2-3).

While Ava's determination and confidence in making her voice heard is admirable and inspiring, it is important for school staff to consider the psychological toll which this sense of responsibility could have on a Black student in the classroom and how they could use their power in the school system to support Black students in making their voices heard.

4.5 Theme 4: What should school literature be in the future?

This theme shifted focus from the *prior* experiences of the participants to considering what lessons can be learnt from these experiences, to ensure that Black students have more hopeful and positive literary experiences in the future. There was consensus across the participants, as exemplified in the preceding themes, that literature is an important component of the curriculum for all students, with the potential to be of both personal and academic significance.

Marcia drew an explicit connection between literature and universal humanity:

> I always say, we're all stories in the end, right? …Literature is made up of stories… it's the way to help people learn…they understand the power of the story…because people remember stories more so than they do just stand alone facts because it's that emotional connection (p.20; l.20-23).

However, as the instances shared thus far communicate, the literature which is currently taught in schools and the way that it is spoken about by teachers can often be detrimental to the experiences of Black students. Therefore, it is important to turn focus to the changes which could be made to create a more positive future for the literary experiences

of Black students.

4.5.1 Sub-Theme 4a: Black Authors Telling Black Stories

The majority of participants felt strongly that in order for representation of Black experiences to increase in school literature, the key was to include and promote more Black writers. In each interview, most texts discussed were by White authors, as Tee described it: "I feel like my mind has been kind of bombarded with White authors in all honesty (p.21;l.1). Significantly, it was most frequently White authors whose texts were experienced negatively by participants (see **Figure 6**).

The participants were unanimous in their message that the solution to this problem was ensuring that portrayal of Black characters and culture is explored through literature written by Black authors.

Hayley explained:

> For me, and this is not just always about Black characters, but also Black authors and making sure that, you know, everybody in that literature space is represented. Not just White people writing about Black characters. I think it's really important that Black voices come out of everywhere so in the diversity of authors as well (p.7;l10-13).

Marcia took a different view, that White authors, or those from other ethnicities, should be able to depict Black characters, however it is vital that they carry out extensive research to ensure that they have developed a holistic understanding of the culture they are portraying.

> It's that authenticity...And that's really interesting. So, from a research perspective, if they've seen the research from a Black personal experience to write that book then so be it. I can give you a quick example… a book called *Born Fi Dead*? It's written by a Jewish American lady about… Jamaican politics in the 70s and 80s, ... some people could look at that and think "Well, she's a White lady, what does she know?" But the difference being she went and she did the research and

immersed herself in it. I think the respect is different than to someone who just on the outside and you're looking in and you're giving your viewpoint on, you're trying to think what a Black person is, or what their experience is, but you're not living it day to day, you're not going and researching it (p.14; l.5-18).

Other participants expanded on this view, asserting that not only should more Black authors be introduced to the curriculum but that the choice of texts needed to be diversified to include texts by authors from across the globe. Samuel expressed:

It's not just a Black or White thing, but it's a Black, Brown, Asian and so on of authors and literature to celebrate. Because if you only have Black or White authors, you're missing out on potentially eighty percent of authors around the world. So I feel like you're missing out on a massive, massive opportunity to learn about other people's culture, and other people's experiences and other people's ways of writing and skill set as well. (p.25; l.1-4)

Maya conveyed a similar sentiment, emphasising the importance of international variety in the literature that students are introduced to:

I would try and just to have, you know, some Black authors, some Asian authors, I would want to have some authors from around the world, you know, there's some great Russian literature, have that translated… I would want literature to be vast. Not just "These are the American authors that we're gonna read….You know, I would just want my students to be genuinely well-read" (p.47; l.4-8).

This exemplifies the role of literature in providing a window to explore and learn about cultures outside of our immediate experience.

4.5.2 Sub-Theme 4b: Black Stories Matter

In opposition to the examples participants shared of literature which they felt stereotyped Black characters and culture, reducing the experiences to a single story, a consistent message across the dataset was the need for stories which conveyed the myriad lives of Black individuals. From an intersectional perspective, Tee felt the portrayal of Black women most needed to be developed in order to be representative and authentic:

> I would definitely kind of involve books that involve a Black female lead, I don't think we see enough of that… kind make them more like normal people… they're kind of shown as confident or the loud one, or the one that has a lot to say when, you know, it's like they should show Black girls who are allowed to be shy and introverted, or allowed to be, you know, just within themselves (p27; l.8-12).

Maya focused on the positioning of the Black characters and said that the vital factor was their status in relation to other characters and the social hierarchies in the world of the novel:

> I think subconsciously that would just send the message that Black people are… equal, I guess, and I think that just sends that image of… [*long pause*] …just Black happiness, I guess rather than struggle and slavery and… sadness… I would make sure that those characters are equals (p.43;l.4-12).

In thinking about positive future changes, Leah returned to the previous theme of racism as a topic of study in literature:

> I feel like if there was books by people of colour, they should not be about race because I feel like it's definitely in English literature anything you read from a person of colour, it always has to be about race because that's the only way they can show it in school because they need to show that they're trying to do something about… racism and stuff but because… it's too stereotypical to read a book by a Black author about race (p.24; l6-10).

When asked what topics Leah would like to read Black authors writing about, she responded simply but powerfully: "just the same ones that White authors do, I don't know why it should be different" (p.24; l.12).

Hayley expressed that the lack of representation speaks to the theme of epistemological validity and a lack of acknowledgement of the value of Black lives and Black experiences:

> If you're only ever seeing your stories being written about or spoken about when they're particularly traumatic or particularly big, it makes you kind of wonder… how much value or importance is based on those other daily experiences. So whereas other cultures get books written about loads of different things and so they're important…. what's important enough to write about? (p.8; l.12-20).

When reflecting on the effect that increased diversity of narratives could have on student readers, Eve explored the potential for anti-racist action to support the Black community:

> I think that would have a positive effect by far, because I think, literature is very important... it encourages empathy in, people doesn't it? That's the bottom line. If you introduce literature from other people's world views, I think it can have potentially very, very good effects… I think it's useful to read about how non-White people were treated or specifically Black people because anti-Black racism is very difficult… And it tends to be universal as well (p.8; l.8-11).

By focusing on the educative power of literature to inspire cognitive and affective empathy, without recourse to didacticism, Eve highlighted the untapped potential of literature to combat racism.

4.5.3 Sub-Theme 4c: Listen & Learn from Black Students

Echoing the sub-theme exploring Student Voice, another potential source of positive future change was for Black students' views and experiences to be listened to and valued in the literature classroom and in the wider school and community.

Hayley acknowledged the pressure on teachers and the additional work involved in introducing new texts and authors into the curriculum, but simultaneously stressed the importance of taking that time to make positive change and to learn from messages which have emerged from the Black community about increasing diversity in schools :

> I'm trying to be understanding, I guess of taking on extra work and learning a new kind of text...It's a shame. A massive shame and there's not really an acceptable reason why, is there? Like we can have empathy and we can be like, I know things are busy, but actually, this isn't an add-on, we have to change it and there's so much talk and work being discussed about decolonising the curriculum and making things more diverse but what's actually being done, in classrooms? (p.11; l.6-11).

Tee referred back to her comments on students' personal literature choices and recommended

that this would be the best way to ensure the literature in the curriculum was representative of

Black experiences:

> I would also bring in what other people are reading, what the students are reading
> because yeah… students could be reading a completely different book that's from a
> different author that can be just as good as what we are reading about in the
> curriculum… I would…pass it more to the students, you know, to give them the choice
> of "What do you think would be beneficial for you, for us to read?" (p.21; l.8-14).

While some schools and exam boards may be reluctant to engage students in this degree of

autonomy over their reading choices, it is irrefutable that by opening the discussion to include

Black students in choosing what texts should portray Black experiences in school, the literary

output is more likely to be more inclusive and representative.

Finally, Maya emphasised that the central determinant to any literary choices in school should be

its psychological impact on student readers:

> I would be actively making sure that there aren't [texts] that are going to be
> damaging to the psychology of students, Black students, I feel like what it comes
> down to is that Black students are just not really taken into account. Because I
> think if they were then a lot of that literature wouldn't be in the curriculum
> because people might think, "Oh, well, this might be damaging, let's not do
> that"…in my opinion, when there's the N-word in a book, let's just leave it out of
> the syllabus because we don't even know how each class and each teacher and
> each student is gonna process that and it's just not worth the hassle. So, you know,
> perhaps pick a different book that doesn't have that in or that doesn't depict Black
> people like that." (p.46; l.4-12).

This final statement underlines not only the severity of the impact of these choices of school

literature, but also the ease with which these detrimental experiences could be lessened or

removed, merely by listening to the views and experiences of Black students.

4.6 Conclusion of Findings

These analytical findings created a picture of Black student experiences of Black culture and characters in school literature. Using RTA, extracts were drawn from the dataset and thematised to make sense of the experiences as a whole. The first theme was *Literature of Past & Pain* which encompassed students' experiences of reading school literature which was emotionally painful for them and which centralised traumatising experience from Black history. This included four sub-themes. First, Black characters who were victimised or stereotyped or, what was most common, literature where no Black characters were represented at all. Secondly, literature which examined racism as a theme of the literary text and the varied responses participants had to this. Next, participants' experiences of how their teachers approached and discussed literature, in ways which they found damaging to their school experience. Lastly, the ways participants experienced isolation in the classroom during literature lessons. The second theme was *Literature of Positivity & Possibility*. The first sub-theme for this was Black characters which participants found to be more relatable or aspirational. Mirroring the previous sub-themes, there followed experiences of inclusivity facilitated by teachers and the class community. The third theme drew back from the immediate classroom experiences to consider what structures and assumptions were in place which had created these experiences, a theme expressed as *Questioning Power in the Classroom and Literature Curriculum*. This theme focused on the epistemological validity of literature, questioning who has the power to decide what literature is of value for students to study. A second sub-theme explored the ability for students to have their voices heard in discussing literature.

Finally, the focus shifted to consider what changes can be made and what lessons can be learnt from the experiences shared in this study, to ensure that Black students in the future have more

positive literary experiences: *What Should School Literature Be In The Future?* This examined the need for more variety of Black authors to be introduced to the curriculum to tell authentic Black stories. Another sub-theme called for school staff and curriculum planners to recognise why Black Stories Matter and the contribution this would make towards a more equitable society. The final sub-theme stressed the need to listen and learn from Black students who have valuable views and experiences to share, which would enrich the literary curriculum for all students, starting with those which have been expressed through this research.

5. Discussion

5.1 Overview

This chapter commences with a summary of the findings, then goes onto situate these findings in the context of the academic literature base and Positive Psychology theoretical frameworks. A summary of the role that reflexivity has played in this research process is then presented, before outlining the implications for educational psychology practice, both at the micro-level of supporting individual Black students and at the macro-level of working towards anti-racism in schools and the literature curriculum. An evaluation of the project as a whole is then included, through a SWOT analysis model, followed by plans for dissemination of the findings and implications for future research. Finally, the chapter, and thesis, conclude with the predominant messages which can be drawn from the study and an ultimate message of hope for anti-racism in UK school literature, through the power of stories.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This research study sought to answer the exploratory question:

What are Black student experiences of representation of Black culture and characters in school literature?

Through RTA of eight individual semi-structured interviews and two participant-authored narratives, four themes were generated, with 12 sub-themes.

What are Black student experiences of Black culture and characters in school literature?

Literature of Past & Pain	Literature of Positivity & Possibility	Questioning Power in the Classroom & Literature Curriculum
Black Characters: Victimised, Stereotyped or Absent; Racism as a Theme of Literature; Damaging Teacher Approaches to Literature; Sense of Isolation or Othering in the Classroom	Black Characters: Authentic, Aspirational, Relational; Inclusive Teacher Approaches to Literature; Sense of Community in the Classroom	Epistemological Validity; Student Voice

What should school literature be in the future?

Black Authors Telling Black Stories · Black Stories Matter · Listen & Learn from Black Students

These themes encapsulated the interpretations of the Black student participants' experiences and were expressed as: *Literature of Past & Pain*, which they had found personally painful or traumatising because of its negative, dismissive and racist portrayal of Black culture and characters and because of damaging or isolating interactions with teachers or peers in the literature classroom; *Literature of Positivity & Possibility* which participants felt portrayed a more authentic or aspirational depiction of Black culture and characters and ways in which teachers and other students created a more inclusive and community environment in exploring literature together; *Questioning Power in the Classroom & Literature Curriculum* which discussed how the epistemological validity of individual authors and works of literature is evaluated and who makes these judgements. Finally the perspective shifted to examine what changes could be made to facilitate a more positive experience for Black students moving forward, by considering: *What Should School Literature Be In The Future?*

These findings were wide-ranging and powerful in scope, touching on more than 40 literary texts and authors and varied classroom experiences from 40 years ago up to the present day. It is necessary to contextualise these experiences and consider what can be learned from them, by exploring how they align with the academic literature base, as well as considering the psychological implications by examining relevant theoretical frameworks.
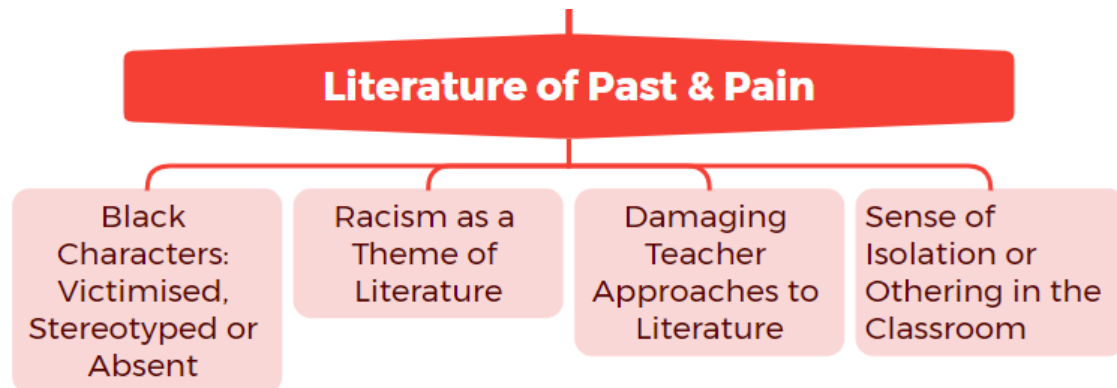
5.3 Situating the Findings within the Existing Literature & Theory

To contextualise the findings, the first step is to consider the themes in relation to the original systematic critical literature review of this study, which examined: **What does the academic literature say about representation of race in literary fiction?** The literature which was gathered through this search was explored through a thematic synthesis, generating themes of *Literature & Power; Literature & Identity; Positivity of Portrayals* and *Learning & Achievement through Literature* (see **Chapter 2** for literature review methods and findings). Wider literature and relevant theoretical understanding are also examined to consider the implications of the findings.

The primary research presented in this thesis stems from the Critical Realist ontology & epistemology and the initial literature review was bound to the same positions. Consequently, the primary research findings and literature are considered within the reality that racism operates through the educational structures of UK society; furthermore, that the experiences, as expressed by the participants and interpreted through RTA, are subjective to the individual and will have been influenced by their personal context and viewpoint.

The following subchapters will focus on the primary research themes, integrated within the research literature identified and within the theoretical frameworks identified as relevant.

5.3.1 Literature of Past & Pain

Literature of Past & Pain

- Black Characters: Victimised, Stereotyped or Absent
- Racism as a Theme of Literature
- Damaging Teacher Approaches to Literature
- Sense of Isolation or Othering in the Classroom

The theme of *Literature of Past & Pain,* identified in this research, captured the experiences, shared in different forms by each participant, of literature which they associated with emotionally painful experiences in the classroom because of either negative Black representation or complete absence of Black characters, which they felt reflected the dismissal of Black experiences by wider society. Participants also discussed pain caused by the teaching of literature which explored racism as a theme of the narrative, especially in historic texts, where racist language was used within the text. This led to a further sub-theme examining experiences where participants found teacher approaches to these texts damaging through a lack of cultural competence or awareness of the impact of the language on Black students. Finally, participants expressed examples where they had felt isolated or othered during literature lessons, either directly through the content of the text or through peer responses to it.

The finding relating to Black characters being either negatively portrayed or excluded from literature mirrored themes identified in the original literature review, primarily through arguments explored in the section on *The Positivity of Portrayals.* Despite recent attempts by publishers and exam boards in the UK to broaden the curriculum availability of texts from writers of colour (AQA, 2022; OCR, 2021; Pearson, 2023; Penguin Random House & On Road, 2021), both the literature review and current research findings suggest that teachers have not selected books which portray a variety of Black characters (Adam et al., 2021; Bickmore et al., 2017; Elliott et al., 2021). Those which have been selected tend to be characters who are victimised or in a subservient role to the central White characters (Buchanan & Fox, 2019; Elliott et al., 2021). When Adam et al (2021) found that White preservice teachers in their Australian-based study (*N*=82) had chosen very few books featuring protagonists of colour, they hypothesised that this was due to teachers having a preference for books they had read as children, therefore being reluctant to develop familiarity with emerging authors or narratives outside of their personal experience.

One particular text which was referenced by multiple participants as being a negative experience was Steinbeck's *Of Mice & Men,* a book which is still frequently taught in schools since its removal from the GCSE curriculum in 2014. Participants described reading this book, which includes racist (as well as misogynistic, ableist and ageist) language and scenes of overt racist abuse, as uncomfortable and traumatising. This was exacerbated for participants by teachers they perceived as being reluctant or ill-equipped to be able to manage the content in a culturally-responsive manner. This book is particularly controversial, due to the juxtaposition of its prevalence in UK classrooms with the problematic themes and language (Elliott et al., 2021). A recent UK case study, focused on surveying the diversity and representation in one school's

curriculum, in response to the *Black Lives Matter* Movement, found similarly that their students were still expected to read this book and found it an "uncomfortable" experience (Macfarlane & Catchpool, 2022, p. 123). This school chose to remove the text as a result, replacing it with a short stories unit exploring a range of cultural experiences. As expressed in the final thematic finding *What Should School Literature Be In the Future?* difficult experiences like this could be avoided simply by schools and teachers listening and learning from their Black students about how they respond to the portrayal of Black characters in texts.

Mirroring the research findings in this area, writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explained the impact of stereotyping Black characters through a single, often victimised lens, in the *TedTalk* about *The Danger of a Single Story* (2009). Adichie comments on the damaging dual-effect that the 'single story' has. Firstly, she comments on the detriment to Black individuals' self-concept, in potentially limiting their view of their own abilities through a lack of positive, aspirational role models. Secondly, Adichie explains that this can also limit the concept that Non-Black readers will have of Black individuals, perpetuating negative stereotypes. While ethnicity is one aspect of identity, the participants in this study have made clear that it is an aspect which is largely excluded or problematised within the school literature they have been introduced to and that they found this to be a painful experience.

In the UK curriculum, research suggests that the majority of pupils' experiences of characters or authors of colour is usually through poetry, rather than more developed narratives in novels or plays (Elliott et al., 2021). Participants in this research observed that these poems are usually confined to depicting experiences of racism. This was deemed to be not only a reductionist view

of individual Black experiences but also commented on the additional challenge it gave them when writing about literature for the purpose of examination, through asking Black students to write academically and formally about a topic which they were more likely to have had painful personal experience of. They explained that they therefore carried an additional emotional obstacle, which their White peers would not have to overcome. Considered from the perspective of Positive Psychology, this creates injustice across multiple-domains of wellbeing. Noble and McGrath devised the PROSPER Positive Education framework (2015), conceptualising the seven key components to ensure the academic success and emotional wellbeing of every school student. Being required to write academically about racism could be detrimental to Black students in the three of the seven components: *Positivity, Outcomes, Engagement*. Furthermore, for a fourth component, it requires them to exert greater *Resilience* than their peers. Additionally, Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Literature (1978) envisions the reading experience as affected by the past experiences and circumstances of the reader and therefore it is imperative for teachers to recognise the additional emotional demand on a Black student in reading literature in which racism is a theme of study.

Further to the impact on a Black student's examination performance, are the repercussions of emotionally painful literary portrayals. This is at times exacerbated by dismissive or disparaging treatment by teachers and peers in regard to Black culture and characters. Nguyen (2022) asserted that teachers have a responsibility to facilitate conversations around anti-bias and discrimination in a way that helps all students to feel safe, which was not the experience of participants in this study. These painful experiences can be detrimental to the individual's developing self-concept and worldview. Luthan's (2017) Positive Psychology theory of

Psychological Capital centralises an individuals' development of *Hope, Efficacy, Resilience* and *Optimism* as interactive character strengths which form the foundational elements of positive wellbeing. The experiences shared within this sub-theme told of literature and classroom interactions which were potentially damaging to Black individuals' sense of hope (through a lack of aspirational Black figures depicted in literature) and self-efficacy (through the portrayal and positioning of Black characters as inferior to White characters).

5.3.2 Literature of Positivity & Possibility
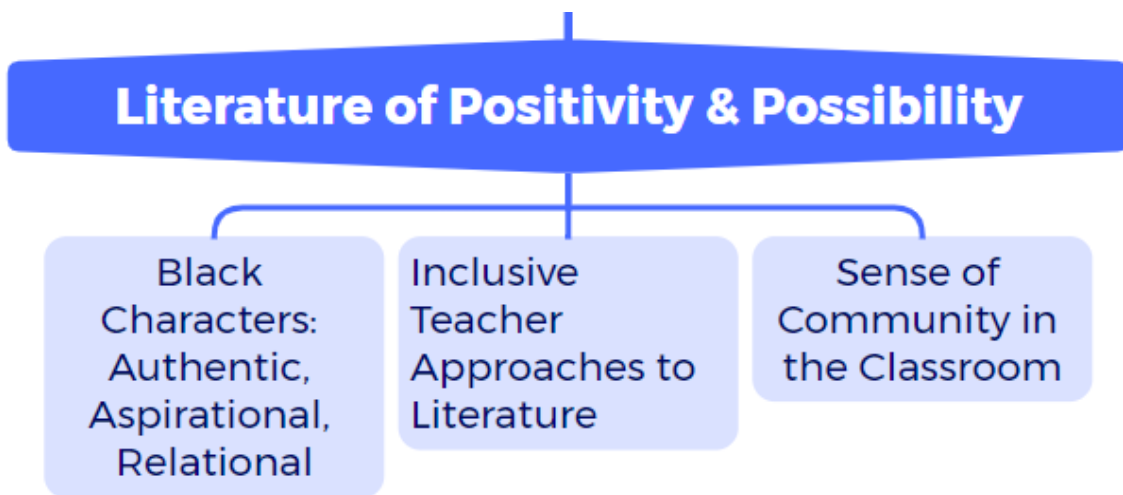
In contrast to the first theme, *Literature of Positivity & Possibility* explored reading experiences which participants found affirmative and aspirational. These experiences followed the same structure, of focusing on first the portrayal of individual characters, then the ways teachers spoke about characters and themes and finally exploring the whole classroom ethos, which in this theme was found to be inclusive and conducive to a sense of community for Black students.

Each of the participants shared experiences of literature which had brought them joy and extolled the importance of reading as of personal value to them. Adam et al (2021) discussed the many

benefits of reading literature beyond literacy skills, in terms of an individual's social and emotional development as well as supporting young people in reflections on their emerging sense of identity and belonging, both in the classroom and wider community. Although the majority of texts cited by participants as a positive reading experience were those which they had read independently outside of school, this emphasises the availability of texts which will create a positive portrayal of Black culture and characters which could be introduced to the classroom (see **Chapter 4**, **Figure 6**).

Bishop's (1990) framework for literary representation, states that books should provide for readers both mirrors of their individual experiences and windows into the worlds of others to support development of empathy and wider cultural understanding. Participants in this research shared examples of books and characters which they found to be relatable and aspirational, with characters providing role models of the success which can be achieved by Black individuals and providing a counter-narrative to the struggles and trauma which many participants perceived to be the only story told by school literature texts. Viewed from the perspectives of the 'windows and mirrors' metaphor, these texts have provided positive mirrors through which participants could see reflected, characters who they described as "looking like them" whose success they could aspire to, providing a source for hope and optimism, while simultaneously providing a window through which non-Black peers can learn about positive aspects of Black experiences.

While it was not representative in all cases, most texts which participants shared as being a positive and relatable portrayal of Black culture and characters were those written by Black authors. Mixed views were expressed on author ethnicity, with some participants stating that

only Black authors should write stories centering Black culture and characters in order for the stories to be authentic, while other participants viewed that non-Black authors should be encouraged to depict Black characters, on the proviso that those characters should be thoroughly researched and crafted with as much respect and complexity as any other figure. Despite these nuanced views, this theme largely aligned with the findings from the literature review and the proposition by Buchanan and Fox (2021) that in-group authors are more likely to depict realistic portrayals of Black experiences than those attempting to express their view of a Black experience from the outside.

Braden and Rodriguez (2016) explored the positive impact created for children by reading texts which reflect their real-world experiences, which they felt increased engagement with the narrative. Furthermore, they related their view that it is also necessary for improving students' academic literary skills, as they believed that discussion of topics related to their own lives are helpful in increasing students' criticality and ability to analyse literary texts. Furthermore, they extolled the role of representative literature in anti-racist teaching, counteracting the perception that stories of White characters are at the centre of experience and helping to dispel prejudiced views that non-Black readers may hold (Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). In this way, literature can be used as a tool for social justice, when viewed through a Critical Race Theory perspective, combating ethnocentrism and disrupting a White-dominant view of the world (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

It is important to note that although expressing the need for more positive stories about Black culture and characters, participants in the current study did not call for the removal of all texts

depicting racism or struggle of Black characters, acknowledging that these themes are realistic

reflections of the racial injustice which has always pervaded society and continues to do so.

Rather, they stated, like Adichie (2009), that this should not be the *only* story that is told but that

it should be balanced by stories of success, possibility and, in the words of participant Maya,

"Black happiness".

A key element in the differentiation between whether literary experiences are perceived

positively or negatively by Black students is the context in which they are taught and discussed,

which relies on the relationships in the classroom. Findings of this study suggested that teachers

who responded with cultural competence and sensitivity to Black students' responses to the

portrayal of texts, created a much more positive experience even when the subject matter of texts

was emotionally challenging for Black readers. This aligned with the findings of Bickmore et al.

(2017) who emphasised the need for teachers to be culturally responsive and to support Black

students in processing their emotional reactions to texts exploring suffering of Black characters.

Judging by the experiences shared in this research, it appears that this is not something which

teachers are necessarily trained in or confident to be able to do, suggesting a potential training

need (see **Section 5.6 Implications for Educational Psychology Practice**).

Furthermore, it was apparent that participants whose peer groups were diverse or predominantly

Black, found the exploration of racism in texts less traumatising than those participants who

were in majority White classrooms. This finding was supported by Ajewole's (2023) research

into Black students' experiences of attending predominantly White schools, which found that the

principal in-school facilitators of a positive educational experience for Black students were

individual teachers' belief in them and their friendships with Black peers. Support and happiness derived from positive relationships is one of the fundamental elements shared by Noble and McGrath's (2015) education-based PROSPER framework and Seligman's PERMA theory of wellbeing (2011). Related to this research, these theories would suggest that the key to positive future change lies in the hands of teachers who have the power to make a substantial difference for Black students they teach, through building positive relationships with them and by facilitating an inclusive co-operative classroom ethos amongst all students. Furthermore, teachers must take time to consider their choice of literature and the way they discuss it, as they have the potential to create positivity and possibility for Black readers, which could potentially have a direct effect on their holistic wellbeing and experience of school literature.

5.3.3 Questioning Power in the Classroom & in the Literature Curriculum
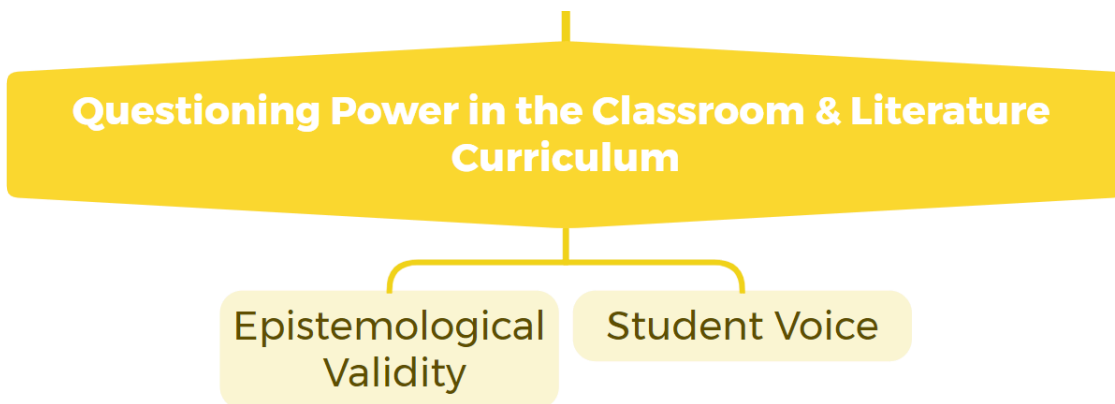
The third theme stemming from the current research drew together various challenges participants had to power in the classroom and literature curriculum, as they queried the ways individual teachers used their power; which authors and texts were viewed as valid for study in UK classrooms and the degree of autonomy and respect afforded to students, regarding their views on what and how they were taught. This theme was emblematic of one of the central

debates in UK education, stemming from school inspector and poet Arnold's assertion that culture is defined by "the best which has been thought and said" (1869, p. viii). This was paraphrased in 2013, by then Conservative education secretary Michael Gove as the foundation of the proposed curriculum reforms. However, the questions posed by the participants in this study, and by many pedagogical theorists and commentators, are who has the power to judge what "the best" is; on what criteria are they basing that evaluation and have they selected it from a homogenous sample of White, male, hetero-normative, Eurocentric output.

A significant proportion of papers identified in the systematic literature review focused on analysis and critique of ethnicity representation in prestigious book awards. Researchers consistently found, as in the current study, that Black characters and authors were under-represented (Bickmore et al., 2017; Koss, 2015; Koss et al., 2018; Paciga & Koss, 2022). This is pertinent to Education CRT (D. Gillborn, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), which identifies and interrogates structures which create oppression of students and their families from Black or other global majority backgrounds; the current research provides support to the argument that the literature curriculum currently contributes to that oppression.

 In a metaphorical sense, book awards provide a clear symbol for power in the literary world - those privileged with the position of judge are imbued with the power to decree which texts are worthy of esteem. In a more practical sense, book awards have a direct impact on school literature, as prize-winners are more likely to be read in schools and therefore, the racial-bias evident in book awards means that school literature is being selected from a White-saturated sample (Koss et al., 2016).

Considering the argument raised by participants about democracy in the classroom and the extent

to which students' views are considered, Adam et al. (2021) highlighted that the choice of books

available in the classroom is almost exclusively selected by adults, increasingly so as students

progress through the Key Stages to national assessments. Similarly with Adam at al (2021), the

current research identified the importance for these adults to have specific cultural awareness,

both of the importance of Black representation in literature and of which Black authors and

literary works are available to be studied. If they do not have this knowledge, because they have

been limited in their own reading education by White-centric narratives (Adam et al., 2021), then

they will not be equipped to provide diverse texts for their students, which reflects the

experiences of participants in the current study. In reality, the evidence suggests that without

specialised training, teachers are not necessarily equipped to select culturally responsive texts or

to teach them in appropriate ways and this was agreed by the experiences related in this research

and in the wider academic literature base (Adam et al., 2021; Smith-D'Arezzo & Musgrove,

2011).

Additionally, if students are not actively introduced to a variety of authentic and empowering

portrayals of Black culture and characters, they may not even be aware of the absence

themselves, as related by some of the participants in this study who recognised their own lack of

conscious awareness of representation of Black characters in their childhoods. Smith-D'Arezzo

and Musgrove, attributed this to being "conditioned by White cultural dominance" (2011, p.

189), a phenomenon which they explain Black and White individuals are equally subject to.

Crucially, they argued that even if Black children do not question the lack of Black characters,

their absence still has potentially damaging consequences to individuals' developing constructs of society and their value in it (Smith-D'Arezzo & Musgrove, 2011). This conclusion, supported by the findings of the current study, evidences the imperative for teachers to diversify their literature choices to ensure Black readers regularly encounter varied and encouraging portrayals of Black culture and characters.

Furthermore, some, though not all, participants named feeling dismissed and ignored by their teachers when attempting to share their views on literature in the classroom. Denying students a choice in the texts they study can be detrimental to their motivation regarding learning. Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2012) related to goal-oriented behaviours being reliant on three components - autonomy, relatedness and competence. Each of these is likely to be compromised by teachers not allowing students any voice over the book selection or the opportunity to express their views on the portrayal of Black characters in the narrative. This is likely to limit their motivation in studying the text, a phenomenon expressed by study participants who felt disinclined to engage with texts they felt portrayed harmful portrayals of Black figures, such as in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Through this research the participants shared the view that they interpreted the lack of diverse representation of Black cultural experiences in school literature as indicative of the lack of value placed on Black individuals and experiences in society. This was supported in the literature review where researchers consistently stated the view that not giving a voice to specific demographic groups is a method for maintaining the status quo in racially-unjust societal power structures and oppression of marginalised groups (Koss, 2015). From a CRT perspective of

education (D. Gillborn, 2006), the participants' experiences of school literature which centralise White-experiences as the norm and delegation of Black and Global Majority experiences as 'Other Cultures' is an oppressive act, which must be addressed as a matter of social justice (Chadderton, 2013).

Ultimately, the power at play in UK classrooms could be reframed as a force for good, through democratic and thoughtful selection of high-quality literature from a diverse range of authors and contexts. These texts could be used to encourage students' development of empathy, social skills, cultural and ethical awareness and to facilitate anti-racist discussions and ethos (Adam et al., 2021; Bishop, 1990; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016; Elliott et al., 2021; Heath, 2017; Pulimeno et al., 2020; Spencer, 2022). As Thomas (2016) wrote, in exploration of diverse children's literature, children and young people hold the power to create a more equitable and anti-racist future, if they grow up reading stories which celebrate all aspects of humanity.

5.4 A Positive Future for School Literature: Theory & Practice

What should school literature be in the future?

- Black Authors Telling Black Stories
- Black Stories Matter
- Listen & Learn from Black Students

The final theme of the research focused on future action based on the participants' experiences, specifically what changes participants envisioned would make positive differences to the experiences of Black students in the future, regarding the portrayal of Black culture and characters in school literature in the future. Each of the proposed changes stemmed from the

original three themes and are considered from a Positive Psychology perspective. Positive

Psychology, which prioritises human flourishing and wellbeing (Noble & McGrath, 2015) would

seem to be the ideal fit with the UK Department For Education's goal of enabling "children and

learners to thrive… realise everyone's potential" (2024). Positive Psychology Education (Gawas

& Gamal, 2022; Seligman et al., 2009) applies the frameworks and evidence-base of Positive

Psychology to educational settings, to optimise students' holistic development and thriving in

school, since evidence suggests that psychological flourishing correlates with academic

achievement and successful future outcomes for young people.

The findings of this research suggested that school literature in the UK is not yet meeting the

psychological needs of Black students to enable them to flourish and so change is needed.

Proposals for positive future action from the participants were organised into three categories.

The first was in differentiating between increasing the number of Black characters included in

literature to emphasising the importance of more Black authors to be used to tell these stories.

Bickmore et al. (2017) talked about the authenticity of cultural outsiders depicting characters of

an ethnicity different to their own. Thomas (2016) referred to this controversial issue in diverse

children's literature and concluded that it is a matter of concern when authors from dominating

ethnicities and social groups attempt to invent stories from the oppressed cultures. Other

theorists, such as Smith-D'Arezzo and Musgrove (2011), argued that writers of any ethnicity can

create literature which is positive in its portrayal of Black children, with the caveat that a Black

author is most likely to tell a story that speaks to Black children as an authentic depiction of their

lives. This suggests that a wider range of Black authors should be promoted in the publishing

world and integrated into the curriculum, especially in recognition of the positive experiences

highlighted in this research of reading the work of Black writers such as Malorie Blackman and Maya Angelou in school.

The next sub-theme of *Black Stories Matter,* spoke to the message from CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) which centralises the need to redress historic silencing of marginalised groups by promoting their stories and viewpoints. The LUUUTT Model (Pearce & Pearce, 1990) can be helpful for teachers to apply to the literature they are sharing with their classes, both in developing students' literary criticism skills and developing teaching of literature from a social justice perspective. This model focuses on exploring Stories which are Lived; Stories Untold, Unknown or Unheard, which have previously been silenced and marginalised; Stories Told, focused on the meaning made from experiences and interactions and finally StoryTelling, considering how stories are told, in terms of narrative, language, form and structure. By considering the contribution of literary choices through the LUUUTT perspective, teachers could engage with literature to promote exploration of diverse perspectives from a range of marginalised demographics.

In order to develop understanding of how to do this inclusively and appropriately, teachers will need specialist training, as Adam et al. (2021) suggested, culturally-responsive literature should be incorporated into the training of all primary and secondary English teachers, with all teachers trained specifically in anti-racist teaching and cultural competence.

The final sub-theme emphasised the contribution which Black students can make to the improvement of representation in school literature, if teachers are willing to listen and learn from

them. The findings of this research indicate that, as Braden and Rodriguez (2016) asserted, in order for a curriculum to be inclusive and culturally responsive, it should be regularly reviewed to investigate whether it is representative of a diverse range of cultures and primarily of all the cultural backgrounds of the students in the school where it is being delivered. In reviewing this aspect of pedagogy, teachers would benefit from seeking the views of Black students and learning from them about how they perceive school literature. This would meet the dual aims of improving the literature programme and of Positive Psychology's emphasis on Strength Activation and Relationship building (Seligman, 2011), by demonstrating to Black students the degree to which they are respected and valued in their school community

5.5 Role of Reflexivity in the Research Process

The findings of this research portray a situated story of the experiences the eight participants shared. The RTA methodology emphasises the importance of acknowledging that this is not the only way to interpret these experiences, in alignment with the critical realist ontology and epistemology of this research, that while these are the real experiences of the participants, the way they have been interpreted and expressed is a narrative of the features which presented themselves as of most significance as the researcher made sense of it. Another researcher could have crafted a different story in asking this research question, through their choice of interview questions, selection of codes and defining of themes. Therefore, while I strove to faithfully capture the views of my participants, through my values, positioning and theoretical perspectives, I have possibly shaped the story created and made it unique to my perspective, in keeping with the philosophical intentions of the RTA methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). To ensure trustworthiness and transparency of the research I have acknowledged these influences

throughout the project and have supported my awareness through my RTA Journal (**Appendix 15)**.

In seeking to ensure the authenticity of the analysis, I was conscious of the lack of engagement with member checking. Only two participants responded to the request to verify the coding and the only amendment suggested was one change of pseudonym (this was amended). Reflecting on whether sufficient effort had been made to seek participants' views, it was concluded that they had already contributed significant time to the project through the data gathering stages and so were unlikely to have more time available. Despite this, I hope that I have captured their meaning authentically and respectfully. Throughout the process I have been part of an anti-racist EP practice action group, Becoming Actively AntiRacist Educational Psychologists (BAAREP) which has supported my ongoing learning of practising with an anti-racist ethos and benefited from Supervision from *The Better Project* which has further supported my developing understanding of my positioning, the wider context of race relations in the UK and around appropriateness of language and the power it can have to construct and convey meaning.

The overriding element which I have brought to the project is my personal love of literature and wish for all students to feel inspired. I found moments of the interviews and analysis emotionally affecting, for example when participants shared traumatic racist experiences which they had suffered, but also when participants spoke of their dislike of texts which are significant to my own life, especially *To Kill A Mockingbird* and the works of Shakespeare. However, this reaction prompted realisation of the influence of personal positioning in relating to a text and the privilege of my position as a reader who has never encountered racial prejudice or lack of

representation of my ethnicity. This reflection supported me in focusing on participants' experiences and interpretations of these texts and trying as far as possible not to influence the analysis with my own views.

An additional aspect for reflexivity was my ethos as a Positive Psychologist and solution-focused practitioner. I notice in myself a bias towards optimism and my natural tendency is to seek out opportunities for change and hope. While this was an important element of the research, it was just as vital for me to sit with the painful experiences which participants related and to consider how to convey these faithfully and authentically. Again, this is something which White privilege enables me to *choose* to engage with, whereas the Black participants have been subjected to against their will. By taking time and space to fully examine and contemplate the painful, sometimes traumatising experiences the participants have endured, I have aimed to respect these experiences and balance them with elements of change and hope, to spark consideration for positive action to improve the experience of Black students reading school literature in the future.

From devising and conducting this research, I have learnt that there are many aspects which I should have considered when teaching, which would have made me an anti-racist teacher. I have developed a deeper awareness of the significance that a teacher has in creating an anti-racist ethos in their classroom and to ensure that Black students are able to feel a sense of belonging in their class group. I have learnt that many educators do not acknowledge or understand the impact of literary representation of race on Black students. Furthermore, I have learnt that this impact is by far greater and more crucial than I myself had understood, reaching as it does into the

individual students' self-concept, experience of reading, academic achievement, relationships with teachers and peers and even their worldview. Finally, I have learnt, from the participants, exactly what future changes could be made, to ensure that subsequent Black students have an improved experience of school literature and read texts which portray an empowering, authentic and nuanced portrayal of Black culture and characters.

5.6 Implications for Educational Psychology Practice & Beyond

The intentions of this study focused on exploring a very specific aspect of the education experience, the contributions from the participants have been so enlightening and thought-provoking, that it appears the research will have broader implications for wider society, in contributing to the growing change narrative and societal awareness of the imperative for anti-racist education.

5.6.1 - Micro Level Implications: Psychology of Thriving for Individual Black Students

The initial importance of this study is that it provides an insight into a previously unexamined perspective of the student experience, and it is important for educational psychologists to have understanding of the psychological implications of experiences for all learners in the classroom. When working with Black students, to be person-centred, EPs should sensitively seek out individual experiences of how they respond to the curriculum content and classroom experiences. Ethically, EPs need to consider impact of race on students' wellbeing and development (Kumar & DeCuir-Gunby, 2023), both as part of their moral values for beneficence and social justice and as part of their statutory obligations to work in anti-discriminatory ways

(Health and Care Professions Council, 2023). This research has shed light on how literature can be contributing to systemic racism and discrimination against individual Black students.

Furthermore, by holding in mind awareness of how individual elements of the curriculum may be creating painful and traumatising experiences for individuals, like those shared in this research, EPs can support Black students. Teachers are not necessarily trained in supporting emotional impact of racist experiences. Here lies a potential role for EPs, in providing tools and training to help students navigate difficult emotions evoked by texts. EPs can consider ways to make teachers aware of these issues and to up-skill their ability to discuss texts with cultural sensitivity, as well as identifying and supporting Black students who may have been negatively affected by depiction of racism or suffering of Black characters in literature.

5.6.2 - Macro-Level Implications: Anti-Racism in Schools & The Literature Curriculum

EPs are trained and skilled in reflexivity and reflection, with a particular eye to their cultural competence and internal biases. This is a vital skill needed for all teachers yet especially those in humanities subjects which touch on curricula exploring subjects of race, culture or emotionally sensitive topics. With the most recent statistics suggesting that the UK teaching workforce comprises more than 85% of White British teachers and only 3% Black teachers (UK Government, 2023), it appears there needs to be explicit guidance for teachers about the importance of diverse representation in literature in order for this White-character dominance to be disrupted. In their work with teachers, EPs should consider how to support them in applying a

critical reflexive lens by sharing tools for developing anti-racism and prejudice awareness in

staff, such as M'gadzah's Racism Spectrum framework (2022).

Reflective tools, common in EP practice, like the Critical Reflection Framework for EP Practice

(Rowley et al., 2023) would be equally beneficial to the teaching profession. This research has

prompted the drafting of a Positive Psychology Education literature-specific reflection

framework, *The R.E.A.D.E.R. Tool*, which could be trialled by EPs with their work in schools to

encourage reflexivity from teachers in planning their selection and approach to school literature

(see **Figure 7**). The tool comprises a range of reflection prompts for teachers to consider,

structured by the seven component elements of education wellbeing identified by Noble and

McGrath (2015) in their *PROSPER* framework.The intention is that this will support the

development of anti-racist, Positive Psychology literature teaching, directed towards enhancing

students' wellbeing.

Figure 7.
The READER Tool

The **R.E.A.D.E.R.** Tool ***Reflections for Educators on Anti-racist Depictions and Empowering Representation*** Use **R.E.A.D.E.R.** for Black Students to **PROSPER***	
Positivity* Reflection Prompts:	-What positive emotions might this literary text evoke in Black students? -What positive experiences can I facilitate in the classroom relating to the teaching of this text? -What positive support is in place for Black students who have a negative emotional response to this text? -If Black characters and culture are absent from this text, which other texts are they included in? -What am I doing to include and celebrate Black authors in my teaching and that of the school curriculum?

	Reflection Notes:
Relationships* Reflection Prompts:	-How are relationships portrayed in this text between Black characters? -How are relationships portrayed in this text between Black and non-Black characters? - What messages does this literary text convey about Black individuals or communities to non-Black students? - What am I doing to cultivate my professional relationships with Black students in my class? -What am I doing to regularly review the classroom structure and dynamics to ensure I am actively promoting an anti-racist ethos?
	Reflection Notes:
Outcomes* Reflection Prompts:	-What are the outcomes for Black characters in this text and how might this affect the hope and optimism of Black students? -How might themes in this text impact Black students' academic / exam performance? -How can I support Black students in my class to ensure that they have equity of opportunity to excel in their study of this text?
	Reflection Notes:
Strengths* Reflection Prompts:	-What strengths are demonstrated by Black characters in this text? -What strengths do individual Black students in my class demonstrate in their literary study? How can I promote and celebrate this? -How do I regularly seek, listen to and respect the views of Black students in selecting and discussing literary texts?
	Reflection Notes:

Purpose* Reflection Prompts:	-What do individual Black students see as the purpose of this literary text? -What is the relevance to Black students' lived experiences? -What opportunities do Black students have to contribute their views to the discussion of this literary text?
	Reflection Notes:
Engagement* Reflection Prompts:	-Are there any themes or episodes in this text which have the potential to impede Black students from engaging with the narrative? -What learning opportunities have I facilitated to encourage all students to employ their critical and creative thinking skills to issues of racism, prejudice and inequality? -To what extent do I engage with diverse literature from a range of cultures and genres for my own reading experiences?
	Reflection Notes:
Resilience* Reflection Prompts:	-What messages does this text convey to Black students regarding resilience in the face of adversity? -What message does this text convey to non-Black students regarding resilience in allyship? -What am I doing to be an actively anti-racist teacher and ally to Black students? -How resilient am I in addressing and challenging racism in the classroom and wider school environment? What support have I sought to educate myself in this aspect of anti-racism?
	Reflection Notes:

*Concepts derived from *PROSPER Framework* (Noble & McGrath, 2015)

It is well-established that relationships in the classroom have a significant impact on students' wellbeing and mental health (Morgan et al., 2023), with the new insights derived from this study and with the use of *The R.E.A.D.E.R. Tool* EPs can help teachers to minimise the ways that Black students are at times isolated or othered within the classroom by the way teachers and peers discuss the portrayal of Black culture and characters or approach examples of racist language in written texts, instead working towards anti-racist literature delivery. Working from a person-centred perspective, EPs are skilled in advocating for students' voices to be heard and encouraging a more democratic approach to curriculum development. EPs have a moral duty to promote work of social justice (Kumar & DeCuir-Gunby, 2023) and are legally bound to "actively challenge" barriers to inclusion (Health and Care Professions Council, 2023); this brings with it an ethical responsibility to promote the psychological experiences of students who have been marginalised. It is to be hoped that EPs will work to increase schools' and teachers' awareness of the implications of school literature on Black students.

5.7 Evaluating the Research: SWOT Analysis

In order to fully examine the efficacy and value of this research a SWOT analysis was conducted by the researcher, with the aim of evaluating the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. While only the most pertinent of these points are discussed here, the full SWOT analysis can be examined in (**Appendix 24**).

 A potential weakness of the project occurred during the recruitment stage, when it transpired that it would not be possible to attract a sufficient number of participants aged 16-25 who were currently studying in a UK school, college or university. This was due to a lack of engagement from schools contacted across the UK, leading to questions of whether the majority of schools are ready to engage

with reflection on the anti-racist positioning of their curriculums. It may be that this was due to the discomfort some participants identified in their own teachers in discussing issues relating to race; it may also signal a lack recognition of the significance of the issue being explored. It can only be hoped that this research will go some way toward raising awareness in UK schools and alerting teachers to the imperative of overcoming this discomfort, for the sake of improving the experiences of the Black students they teach.

At this point a reapplication for ethics was made, removing the upper age limit and inviting those who had previously been students. At the time this appeared to be a significant limitation as the aim had been to capture voices from the current generation of students. However, since recruiting the older participants and including their stories, it transpired that their experience and insights added richness to the project, despite the significant amount of time that had passed since they had been at school. Specific elements introduced by the former-students included, exploration of what has changed in school literature over the past 50 years and questioning how perspectives change when events are considered retrospectively, specifically, how a reader's awareness of portrayal of characters can change over time and the emotional impact this can create. It was also interesting that some participants noticed disparities between their experiences at primary school, secondary school and in further education and so future studies could be planned which explore and compare the experiences of groups of students at these different phases of study.

An additional weakness was identified post-analysis, with the realisation that some elements of the interview schedule would have benefited from more careful scrutiny as some questions may have introduced bias be considered leading. For example, the question: "*Do you think representation of Black culture in books in school is realistic and why?"* could perhaps have influenced the participants' responses with the implied suggestion that the representation is not realistic.

The strength in the research lies in the richness of the data gathered from the participants, due to the depth of their reflections and perceptions. Each participant contributed a unique insight and opened up new questions and possibilities. As the researcher, I was in awe of their criticality and wisdom. I hope that the research has been further strengthened by my own investment in reflexivity, which I have tried to prioritise in order to ensure that as an out-group researcher of an aspect of race research I have maintained a humble and sensitive stance. While some may question the decision to conduct research about a group experience of which I am an outsider, I maintain the argument purported through Mngaza's (2021) Black Feminist epistemology argument, that White researchers have a greater responsibility than Black researchers, to further the research base of anti-racism. In this research I have tried not to speak for the participants, but to model the message this research promotes to all education professionals, especially White teachers, that we must all listen to and learn from Black students in order to improve anti-racism in schools.

It must be acknowledged that there are significant threats to the implications and transformational potential of this research. The most obvious threat stems from a political sense of the discomfort prevalent in society of discussing race and acknowledging systemic racism, evidenced by the lack of engagement from schools approached about the project. However, there are also pragmatic threats, as schools are operating under financial restrictions, with limited budgets, which places restrictions on the ability to purchase new literature texts and on teachers' time to be able to familiarise themselves with these texts and plan schemes of work around them. These threats are considerable and yet not insurmountable; it is hoped that the power of the experiences shared by the participants will be enough

to inspire educational professionals to make some effort towards creating an anti-racist literary experience for the children in their schools.

The opportunities presented by the research are of most significance. In itself, the research has contributed to the aim of Critical Race Theory Education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) by promoting the voices of Black students in describing their school literary experiences. Before this research there was a gap in the academic literature, as previous research on diverse representation in school literature had only explored the views of teachers or asked students to briefly share their experiences in quantitative research, while this provided a platform for the participating Black students to express all of their school literature experiences, from both primary and secondary schools, at length. The participants themselves had so much creativity and practical insight into specific and tangible actions for change that this has opened up opportunities for positive future change, for example through the *R.E.A.D.E.R. tool,* outlined above.

5.8 Dissemination

From consideration of the implications of the SWOT analysis, it appears that there are numerous opportunities for future change presented by this research and so it is imperative for it to be disseminated widely. Initially, the full paper and an executive summary will be shared with the participants who are central to the research and then more widely amongst my colleagues in educational psychology at The University of East London and in my local authority educational psychology service. Subsequently, my intention is to seek publication in a journal focused on either educational psychology or literary psychology. Beyond this, the findings will be shared via online education focused webinars

and websites. Further thought will be given into how best to promote the findings amongst literature teachers and exam boards curriculum writers, most likely in the form of a scientific research poster which summarises the key findings and implications.

5.9 Implications for Future Research

While conducting this research, numerous ideas were sparked about future directions to expand on the topic. Exam boards are opening up the literature curriculum to include a wider range of authors and texts, including more authors of colour and representing more variety of Black stories. Based on the experiences of Black students examined in this study, this positive change is not yet consistently filtering through into the classroom and so future research should be commissioned to see the extent to which these new texts are being taught and the confidence and skill teachers have in planning and delivering culturally-competent, anti-racist lessons in literature. With a view to transformational practice, it may also be helpful to examine what teachers see as the barriers and facilitators of improving and diversifying representation of race in school literature.

There is a further research gap which could be met through applying Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) to explore representation in literature of more aspects of identity. For example, Davis et al. (2021), suggested a more specialised review of Black representation in literature, with focus on Black females and Black members of the LGBTQ+ community. Other researchers have proposed exploration of the literary representation of other aspects of identity, including sexuality (Crawley et al., 2022), religious groups, social economic status, ability and neurodiversity (Koss, 2015).

Even more far-reaching, it is my belief that literature has enormous untapped psychological potential, for example as explored in Fletcher's psycho-literary analysis *Wonderworks* (2021) and so I intend to continue theorising the ways literature can be used in my work as a Positive Educational Psychologist, to support anti-racist practice and to enhance the psychological flourishing of all children and young people.

5.10 Conclusion

This research was designed and implemented with the intention to explore the psychological implications of the research question: **What are Black student experiences of representation of Black culture and characters in school literature?** The Reflexive Thematic Analysis methodology supported the exploration of eight semi-structured interviews with Black students (either current or former) and two participant-authored narrative compositions to create a dataset for analysis. From this analysis four themes were identified, capturing the experiences participants shared under the themes: *Literature of Past and Pain; Literature of Positivity & Possibility; Questioning the Role of Power and What Should the Future Be For Literature?* This research has opened up novel considerations of how Black students experience the portrayal of Black culture and characters in school literature and the potential consequences of this for their psychological well being and flourishing. The experiences they shared were at times harrowing and often indicative of the extent to which unexamined racist power structures still operate in modern schools in the UK. However, in contrast to this, a sense of hope emerged, through the joy participants' shared in inclusive, relatable literature, and through the potential to reimagine school literature as a tool for anti-racism, when well-selected and taught by culturally-responsive teachers. This glimmer of hope, and the ultimate message of this research, was articulated by Participant Marcia, expressing the centrality of literature to the human experience:

"We're all stories in the end right? It's the way to help people learn… the power of the story".

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Wong, B., Elmorally, R., Copsey-Blake, M., Highwood, E., & Singarayer, J. (2021). Is race still

> relevant? Student perceptions and experiences of racism in higher education. *Cambridge

> Journal of Education*, *51*(3), 359–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2020.1831441

Appendices

Appendix 1. *Extract of Planning for Systematic Literature Review*

Appendix 2. *MMAT Framework Notes for Included Papers*

Qualitative Studies

Qualitative Studies	Study Being Appraised:	Braden & Rodriguez (2016) Beyond Mirrors and Windows: A Critical Content Analysis of Latinx Children's Books			Heinecken (2019) Contesting Controlling Images: The Black Ballerina in Children's Picture Books			Nguyen, A. (2022). "Children Have the Fairest Things to Say": Young Children's Engagement with Anti-Bias Picture Books.		
Category of Study Designs	**Methodological Quality Criteria**	**Responses**			**Responses**			**Responses**		
		Yes	No	Can't Tell	Yes	No	Can't Tell	Yes	No	Can't Tell
Screening Questions (for all study designs)	S1. Are there clear research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.									
1. Qualitative Criteria	1.1 Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑		
	1.2 Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☑		
	1.3 Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑		
	1.4 Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑		
	1.5 Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☑		
	Summary Comment	Qualitative Content Analysis, detailed exploration of each dataset; some elements of subjective statements-as-fact without interrogation or critical reflection.			Although the data is suitable for qualitative analysis the methodology is not fully explained to specify why qualitative was selected. Reflexivity positioning as a White researcher-explored clearly. Data gathered through a search on Amazon - this does not suggest that it was systematic and thorough.			Disrupted and minimised due to pandemic - adapted original study design to studyign half of the planned books and half of the planned sessions. Planned collaboratively with teacher, enhanced trustworthiness through sharing findings with teacher for member checking. Ethical consideration - critcial of research collaborator's stance on challenging biased views in the classroom. No info on whether the collaborator was informed of thisnarrative or they were given the chance to comment.		

Quantitative Descriptive Studies

Quantitative Descriptive Studies	Study Being Appraised:	Bickmore, S. T., Yunying Xu, & Sheridan, M. I. (2017). Where Are the People of Color? Representation of Cultural Diversity in the National Book Award for Young People's Literature and Advocating for Diverse Books in a Non-Post Racial Society			Buchanan, L. B., & Fox, S. G. (2019). On Windows and Mirrors in Teacher Education Program Materials: A Content Analysis of Human Demographics in One Picture Book Collection.		
Category of Study Designs	**Methodological Quality Criteria**	**Responses**			**Responses**		
		Yes	No	Can't Tell	Yes	No	Can't Tell
Screening Questions (for all study designs)	S1. Are there clear research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.						
4. Quantitative Descriptive Criteria	4.1 Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	4.2 Is the sample representative of the target population?	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑
	4.3 Are the measurements appropriate?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	4.4 Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	4.5 Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	Summary Comment	Explored ethnicity of authors and protagonists of award winning and finalist books of NBA prize. Methodlogy sound.			The use of a university library (where the researchers work) is practical but is not necessarily representative of the typical tecaher education literature resources. Particularly the includion of a 'culturally relevant' section may have skewed results to appear *more* representative than they are generally.		

Quantitative Descriptive Studies	Study Being Appraised:	Chaudhri, A., & Teale, W. (2013). Stories of Multiracial Experiences in Literature for Children, Ages 9-14.			Davis, J. M., Pearce, N., & Mullins, M. (2021). Missing Boys: The Limited Representation of Black Males in Caldecott Books.		
Category of Study Designs	**Methodological Quality Criteria**	**Responses**			**Responses**		
		Yes	No	Can't Tell	Yes	No	Can't Tell
Screening Questions (for all study designs)	S1. Are there clear research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.						
4. Quantitative Descriptive Criteria	4.1 Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	4.2 Is the sample representative of the target population?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	4.3 Are the measurements appropriate?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	4.4 Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	4.5 Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	Summary Comment	Appropriate sampling strategy gathered a large data set of relevant texts. Detailed, rigorous content analysis used to identify thematic patterns; systematic selection of data;researchers read all 90 books identifid by the parameters; deductive (pre-defined categories). Then conducted a deeper CRT Literary analysis to explore whatmeanings current children's lit makes from the mixed race experience. Study limitations are not discussed. Mention that 'mixed race' is a relatively modern concept and this may have limited the portrayal of mixed race characters in historical fiction as anachronistic.			Content analysis used, idiosyncratic to one of the researchers, systematic searches and rigorous analysis method, including intercoder reliability and justification of research design choices. A rigorous, reflexive study.		

Quantitative Descriptive Studies	Study Being Appraised:	Hughes-Hassell Barkley Koehler (2009) Promoting Equity in Children's Literacy Instruction Using a Critical Race Theory Framework to Examine Transitional Books			KOSS, M. D. (2015). Diversity in Contemporary Picturebooks: A Content Analysis.		
Category of Study Designs	Methodological Quality Criteria	Responses			Responses		
		Yes	No	Can't Tell	Yes	No	Can't Tell
	S1. Are there clear research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
Screening Questions (for all study designs)	Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.						
4. Quantitative Descriptive Criteria	4.1 Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	4.2 Is the sample representative of the target population?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	4.3 Are the measurements appropriate?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	4.4 Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	4.5 Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	☐	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐
	Summary Comment	Only one database used (assumed to be representative of other library databases. Researchers' acknowledge the limitation of their analysis in using subjective judgement of character ethnicity based on illustrations. High inter-rater reliability.			Compiled sample from searches of publishers' databases. Does not explore how publishers were selected (what classifies as "major"?) to be sure this was rigorous and representative. Analysis was detailed and followed established procedures.		

Quantitative Descriptive Studies	Study Being Appraised:	Koss, M. D., Johnson, N. J., & Martinez, M. (2018). Mapping the Diversity in Caldecott Books from 1938 to 2017: The Changing Topography.			Paciga, K. A., & Koss, M. D. (2022). "Pockets of Hope": Changing Representations of Diversity in Newbery Medal-Winning Titles.		
Category of Study Designs	Methodological Quality Criteria	Responses			Responses		
		Yes	No	Can't Tell	Yes	No	Can't Tell
	S1. Are there clear research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
Screening Questions (for all study designs)	Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.						
4. Quantitative Descriptive Criteria	4.1 Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	☑	☐	☐	☑		
	4.2 Is the sample representative of the target population?	☑	☐	☐	☑		
	4.3 Are the measurements appropriate?	☑	☐	☐	☑		
	4.4 Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	☑	☐	☐	☑		
	4.5 Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	☑	☐	☐	☑		
	Summary Comment	Researchers' acknowledge the limitation of their analysis in using subjective judgement of character ethnicity based on visual text (illustrations) and verbal text (writing).			Explores reflexivity and positioning and how this will have influenced the study. Systematic, rigorous, trustworthy. Acknowledge the limitation that analysis does not factor in data trends of overall number of characters increasing over time - have not recorded the relative percentages of character representations, only raw data.		

Mixed Methods Studies

Mixed Methods Studies	Study Being Appraised:	Adam, Hays, Urquhart, Bickmore (2021) The Exclusive White World of Preservice Teachers' Book Selection for the Classroom: Influences and Implications for Practice			Elliott, V., Nelson-Addy, L., Chantiluke, R., & Courtney, M. (2021). Lit in Colour: Diversity in literature in English schools		
		Responses			Responses		
Category of Study Designs	Methodological Quality Criteria	Yes	No	Can't Tell	Yes	No	Can't Tell
	S1. Are there clear research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
Screening Questions (for all study designs)	*Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.*						
5. Mixed Methods Criteria	5.1 Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	5.2 Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	5.3 Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	5.4 Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	☐	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐
	5.5 Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	Summary Comment	Data collected for a different purpose was analysed in light of the research questions. Primary limitation is small sample based in one university, this is discussed and findings are suitably tentative. Study meets criteria for all aspects. Qualitative element only focused on seeking further information on quantitative responses and so no divergences appeared.			Widespread, detailed analysis and justification of methodoloigcal decisions. Integration of qualitative and quantitative components is adequate and sheds further light on the research questions.		

Mixed Methods Studies	Study Being Appraised:	Smith-D'Arezzo, W., & Musgrove, M. (2011). Two Professors Critique the Representations of Africans and African Americans in Picture Books.			Wee (2017) Looking for Southeast Asian American Protagonists in Award-winning Children's Books		
		Responses			Responses		
Category of Study Designs	Methodological Quality Criteria	Yes	No	Can't Tell	Yes	No	Can't Tell
	S1. Are there clear research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
Screening Questions (for all study designs)	*Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.*						
5. Mixed Methods Criteria	5.1 Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	5.2 Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	5.3 Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	5.4 Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	5.5 Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐
	Summary Comment	Thorough reflexivity and rigorous design of mixed methods. Quant and qual are interpreted and integrated fully. All aspects adhere to the quality criteria.			Generally effective and adequately addressed the research questions. Makes choices regarding parameters of the dataset (eg. exclusion of certain book awards and boundaries of certain dates) without explaining justification.		

Appendix 2a. *MMAT Framework Notes for Excluded Paper*

Quantitative Descriptive Studies	Study Being Appraised:	Koss, M. D., Martinez, M., & Johnson, N. J. (2016). Meeting Characters in Caldecotts: What Does This Mean for Today's Readers?		
Category of Study Designs		**Responses**		
	Methodological Quality Criteria	**Yes**	**No**	**Can't Tell**
	S1. Are there clear research questions?	☑	☐	☐
	S2. Do the collected data allow to address the research questions?	☑	☐	☐
Screening Questions (for all study designs)	*Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'Can't tell' to one or both screening questions.*			
4. Quantitative Descriptive Criteria	4.1 Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question?	☑	☐	☐
	4.2 Is the sample representative of the target population?	☑	☐	☐
	4.3 Are the measurements appropriate?	☑	☐	☐
	4.4 Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?	☑	☐	☐
	4.5 Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	☑	☐	☐
	Summary Comment	This paper analyses the same data as Koss et al *Mapping Diversity* (acknowledged on Pg 7), - this has a broader focus than the other paper, exploring a range of intersectional aspects of identity in addition to race and ethnicity, so is less directly relevant than the other paper.		

Appendix 3. *Texts Included in Critical Literature Review*

Title	Authors	Date	Method	Country
The Exclusive White World of Preservice Teachers' Book Selection for the Classroom: Influences and Implications for Practice.	Adam, H., Hays, A., & Urquhart, Y.Bickmore	2021	Mixed Methods Quantitative & Qualitative Survey (N = 82 teachers)	Australia
Where Are the People of Color? Representation of Cultural Diversity in the National Book Award for Young People's Literature and Advocating for Diverse Books in a Non-Post Racial Society.	Bickmore, S. T., Yunying Xu, & Sheridan, M. I.	2017	Quantitative Descriptive Content Analysis (N = 100 books)	USA
Beyond Mirrors and Windows: A Critical Content Analysis of Latinx Children's Books.	Braden, E. G., & Rodriguez, S. C.	2016	Quantitative Descriptive Content Analysis *(N= 15 books)*	USA
On Windows and Mirrors in Teacher Education Program Materials: A Content Analysis of Human Demographics in One Picture Book Collection.	Buchanan, L. B., & Fox, S. G	2019	Quantitative Descriptive Content Analysis (N= 286 books)	USA
Stories of Multiracial Experiences in Literature for Children, Ages 9–14.	Chaudhri, A., & Teale, W. H.	2013	Quantitative Descriptive Content Analysis (N= 90 books)	USA
Missing Boys: The Limited Representation of Black Males in Caldecott Books	Davis, J. M., Pearce, N., & Mullins, M.	2021	Quantitative Descriptive Content Analysis (N= 96 books)	USA
Lit in Colour: Diversity in literature in English schools	Elliott, V., Nelson-Addy, L., Chantiluke, R., & Courtney, M.	2021	Mixed- methods: interviews (n = 37); quantitative survey (n = 242); focus groups (n = 20)	England
Contesting Controlling Images: The Black Ballerina in Children's Picture	Heinecken, D.	2019	Qualitative Textual Analysis (N = 7	USA

Title	Authors	Date	Method	Country
Books.			books)	
Promoting Equity in Children's Literacy Instruction: Using a Critical Race Theory Framework to Examine Transitional Books	Hughes-Hassell, S., Barkley, H. A., & Koehler, E.	2009	Quantitative Descriptive Content Analysis *(N=* 556 books)	USA
Diversity in contemporary picturebooks: A content analysis.	Koss, M.D.	2015	Quantitative Descriptive Content Analysis (*N*=455 picturebooks)	USA
Mapping the Diversity in Caldecott Books from 1938 to 2017: The Changing Topography.	Koss, M. D., Johnson, N. J., & Martinez, M.	2018	Quantitative Descriptive Content Analysis (*N*= 337 books)	USA
"Children Have the Fairest Things to Say": Young Children's Engagement with Anti-Bias Picture Books.	Nguyen, A.	2022	Qualitative Case Study of one class group involved in anti-bias literary intervention	USA
"Pockets of Hope": Changing Representations of Diversity in Newbery Medal-Winning Titles.	Paciga, K. A., & Koss, M. D.	2022	Quantitative Descriptive Content Analysis (*N*= 98 books)	USA
Two Professors Critique the Representations of Africans and African Americans in Picture Books.	Smith-D'Arezzo, W., & Musgrove, M.	2011	Mixed Methods: Descriptive Summary of quantitative data and qualitative thematic analysis of the sample (*N* = 23 books)	USA
Looking for Southeast Asian American Protagonists in Award-winning Children's Books	Wee, J.	2017	Mixed Methods: Quantitative survey (*N* = 267 books) and qualitative textual analysis of one text.	USA

Appendix 4. *Extracts of Coding Annotations of Reviewed Literature*

Early childhood is a unique realm where the overwhelming discourses of care, love, and protection dominate, and can be used to justify the silencing of social injustices. Children are often seen and perceived as innocent, racially unconscious, asexual, and cognitively incapable of understanding complex matters such as race, gender, and sexuality (Howard, 2016; Robinson, 2013). These topics are mostly deemed controversial (Husband, 2012), developmentally inappropriate (Sonu & Yoon, 2020), and risky business (New, Mardell, & Robinson, 2005). For a long time, the early childhood field has been both exempted and marginalized from the social justice movement. In the last decade, an emergent body of early childhood literature has started to recognize that early practices are neither neutral nor apolitical, but that they strongly contribute to upholding the oppressive systems of -isms beginning at the earliest grade levels. This handful of studies has contributed significantly to a more critical perspective that moves away from the discourse of diversity and inclusion (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2016; Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018; Willox & Brandt, 2018; Boutte & Bryan, 2019; Escayg, 2020). These scholars and their studies have started to advocate for confronting and eliminating systemic problems in early childhood classrooms.

[handwritten margin notes: learning potential; Power of early experience in social constructs]

Race and Racism: From Colorblind to Anti-Racist

Believing that children are too young to have racial consciousness or an understanding of race and racism, early childhood teachers tend to take the colorblind approach in teaching that "treats race as an irrelevant, invisible, and taboo topic" (Howard, 2016, p. 60). Colorblind ideologies

[handwritten margin note: Role of teachers]

call for neutral treatment and purposely ignore racial differences to promote equality (e.g., "I don't see color", "I treat all my students the same"). Ironically, colorblindness also helps constitute White innocence by erasing the legacies of slavery, segregation, and other forms of racial oppression (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Tatum, 2017). Instead of eliminating racial inequality, colorblind ideologies function as another form of racism that "covers up continuing racist thought and practice that is often less overt and more disguised" (Feagin & Hernan, 2000, p. 93). Many researchers in this area have argued that the avoidance of discussions of sensitive topics makes racism, racial discrimination, biases, and White ideologies go unnoticed, unchallenged, and eventually become the social norms in young children's perceptions (Derman Sparks & Ramsey, 2011; Husband, 2012; Boutte et al., 2011).

Contrary to the colorblind approach, the anti-racist approach is grounded on the belief that racism is permanently embedded in the U.S. education system. As Ladson-Billings (1998) stated, to adopt the anti-racist approach is "to take bold and sometimes unpopular positions" to advocate for transformative actions in the classrooms (p. 22). To create meaningful discussions of race and racism with young children, many scholars recommend using critical literacy practices such as shared-readings of race-themed picture books (Kim et al., 2016; Beneke and Cheatham, 2019) or teaching history through drama and writing (Husband, 2012, 2019). Husband suggested that early childhood teachers should aim to explicitly teach about racial injustice and actively intervene by equipping students with "numerous models and methods" for combating injustices (2019, p. 10). Learning from these projects, the present study takes on the anti-racist approach to intentionally encourage young children to engage in meaningful conversations around racial issues.

[handwritten margin notes: EUK Context; facilitate; Role of teachers to support anti-racist learning]

Gender and Sexuality: From Silencing to Advocating

Receiving even stricter censorship compared to issues of race and racism, the topics of gender and sexuality are often considered taboo topics that should not be discussed with young children (Robinson, Smith, & Davies, 2017). Under the unspoken sacred mission of child protection, early childhood teachers often fail to recognize that gender and sexuality have always existed within every single aspect of early schooling. There is a myriad of evidence showing how explicit and implicit curricula contain consistent messages that actively promote a gender binary and heterosexuality (Wallis & Van Every, 2000; Blaise, 2005; Gansen, 2017), and further invalidate and discriminate against young children's gender nonconforming acts (Gunn, 2011).

Seeing gender as a sociopolitical construct, some critical education researchers have argued for the inclusion and open

[handwritten note at bottom: Positioning & Power]

[publisher mark: Springer]

After all the transcripts of the reading sessions were coded, I looked across units to identify common themes and select illustrative examples from the data. Table 2 showed how codes were organized and how themes were developed.

To validate the process of data analysis, I employed a triangulation method to cross-check the children's responses to (i) discussion questions posed during read-aloud sessions and (ii) their conversations and actions in pre-reading and post-reading activities. To establish trustworthiness and embrace the collaborative aspect of this project, I also shared thematic findings with the lead teacher as a form of member check (Kirk & Miller, 1986). After getting the lead teacher's comments, I went through the findings and incorporated the lead teacher's perspectives on the interpretation of students' responses during discussion sessions. After that, I confirmed and finalized the findings.

[handwritten margin: Method]
[handwritten: Reflection on role of researcher in classroom & interaction with collaborator?]

Findings

[handwritten margin: Summary]

Across reading units, the findings demonstrated that the students of this kindergarten classroom were active meaning-makers who possessed a complex and sophisticated understanding of racial and gender issues. They were able to immediately detect and verbally condemn unfairness presented in the stories. However, the students needed substantial support to move beyond recognizing unfairness and to actively responding against discriminatory actions. The study's findings also showed a variety in students' engagement and responses with anti-bias picture books. While most students had difficulties resisting gender binary perspectives and stereotypes, a few students, especially boys, were strongly empowered to embrace gender-nonconforming practices. Problematically, some students' verbal responses also provided concrete evidence of their internalized anti-immigrant, anti-Blackness, and gender discrimination, which often went undisrupted and without intervention by the early childhood teacher.

[handwritten margin: child potential]
[handwritten margin: Conceptions. Power to make change]
[handwritten margin: books exposed biases]
[handwritten: → Importance of teacher response.]

[handwritten margin: Themes]

Young Children's Complex Understanding of Racial Issues and Recognition of Unfairness

In the reading unit of *Race Cars*, the children were exposed to the issues of unfairness and White privilege, "the invisible knapsack of unearned assets" (McIntosh, 1989, p. 1). When the first red flag of a racist act happens (i.e., the White-car committee adds a sign that says "White cars only" to prevent the Black car from crossing the bridge), most students immediately recognized that the situation was completely unfair for the Black car. They raised their objection against the White-car committee: *"It's mean"* and *"I don't like them"*. At the same time, they also understood the benefits and

[handwritten bottom: anthropomorphised characters - cars less impactful than human portrayal?]

[handwritten top: Power explored through portrayal of White Privilege in accessible format]

privileges from the White car's perspective. Consider this exchange and dialogue as an example:

Ms. Byrd: Why do you think he was feeling sad, Nancy?

Nancy: When people, um... when people don't like other people from other races sometimes they put signs, or they put tapes, or they put little nets so they can't cross and... and if there's no way to get then other race cars will get to win.

Ms. Byrd: All right, let's see what happened. But Chase and Ace were still happy for each other. How do you think his best friend Ace might've felt about this sign? What do you think he was thinking about? What do you think, Hannah?

Hannah: He is happy.

Ms. Byrd: So why do you think he was happy?

Hannah: Because it said White cars only.

Ms. Byrd: Oh. And can you say a little bit more about that?

Hannah: Because the Black car was sad because he couldn't go 'cause it said White cars only. But, but the White car was happy because it said like White cars only so, so then he can win faster.

Ms. Byrd: Okay. That's one idea. How about you, Wendy?

Wendy: I'm thinking that the White car was feeling sad for his friend. He'll feel a little happy cause he could go across, but it wasn't fair for the other cars and... and the property [committee] do not care about... it is actually not fair because you have to be nicer to other people.

[handwritten margin: considering White perspective as ego motivated. Developing Theory of Mind]
[handwritten margin: Social Justice Community Perspective]
[handwritten margin: Lit supporting critical reflection]

As shown in this vignette, students could critically engage with a complicated situation in which the White car, who is a good friend and a fair player, was completely unaware of the Black car's discriminatory experiences. Students' responses demonstrate conflicted feelings, as explained by Wendy: *"sad for his friend"* and *"a little happy"* [for himself]. Many students drew an immediate connection between the White/Black cars and White/Black people even though the teacher did not explicitly mention this. Another student, Nancy, proposed that other potential racist acts (*"sometimes they put signs or they put tapes or they put little nets"*) were also motivated by hatred and discrimination (*"when people don't like other people from other races"*). Both Hannah and Wendy showed their comprehensive understanding of two different perspectives: the oppressed and the privileged. To Wendy, fairness is equivalent to *"being nicer to other people"*, a sentiment that echoes the well-circulated discourses of kindness and niceness in this early childhood classroom. Being nice, problematically, means not causing any harm to others, but it does not imply activism (i.e., taking a stance and acting to correct an unfair situation).

[handwritten margin: recognise analogy in lit]
[handwritten margin: awareness of power + discrimination]

[handwritten bottom: lit supports childrens understanding & criticality of different perspectives - deepening learning]

U2190380

[handwritten:] Why is poetry the main area for authors of colour? ↳ shares 1 are of many

become a very popular choice for NEA following its Booker Prize win in 2020. There is often a boost for recent Booker winners but this was a particularly large and rapid increase. At A level text choice is not recorded in the same way after examination so that it is not possible to say how many students are studying these choices.

Of the 84 survey respondents who taught A level or IB English Literature, 44 taught a text by an author of colour, either a novel or the poetry in the Pearson Edexcel anthology (n=27) or both. A further seven mentioned that their students chose a text in this category for their NEA, and nine included diverse authors via extracts to support various texts. 24 teachers did not teach any texts by an author of colour as part of their A level teaching.

[handwritten:] Lacked time/autonomy for students

The young people interviewed disliked how many books they study are written by White middle-aged men; the lack of different perspectives (no LGBTQ+ or non-White perspectives) and the lack of modern books and authors. They also disliked the time pressure on them having to read a book in a short space of time for assignments, the unnatural way of reading a book in school (a couple of pages in class and then wait weeks to read more), and the open interpretation of texts (as opposed to the one right answer in sciences).

[handwritten:] Monopoly of 1 identity perspective

"I really enjoy studying Macbeth – I love the themes and the characters, and find it interesting. In fact this is the same with An Inspector Calls and Jekyll and Hyde - however, I only liked them when I began to study them in depth. However, my issue with them is they're all old texts - it would be interesting to read one by a modern author, and all written by heterosexual cis white men, which isn't firstly good representation, but also means no variation in perspective, so I think they should change that." Bethan, 15

[handwritten:] ↳ Pupil views value variety

"I feel like it's not a good representation of the population, most books taught in school are written by middle class white men." Zoe, 18

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authors set for study. OCR's 45 poems across three clusters include four poems by Black poets and two by Asian poets. AQA's 30 poems include two poems by Asian poets and one by a Black poet. Pearson Edexcel did have five poems spread across two of its three clusters by one Asian and four Black poets; their newly diversified specification which has not yet been examined includes a new cluster called 'Belonging', in which, of the post 1914 poems, there are three Black poets, two White poets, one each from mixed-race Asian and White, and from mixed-race Black and White heritage, one Asian poet and one Kurdish. Poetry remains the most likely place for a secondary student to encounter a text by an author of colour.

A level – Key Stage 5

In comparison to over half a million students taking GCSE English Literature in 2019, just 36,920 students entered for A level English Literature. Of the young people surveyed who were not studying or did not intend to study English Literature at A level, 57.4% agreed that "More diversity in the writers and stories we study" would make them more excited to continue with English at or after A level.

[handwritten:] Limited! Limited engagement with reading

At A level, as with GCSE, there are limited choices of set texts which are by authors of colour: AQA has two specifications each with two set texts by authors of colour (A: Arundhati Roy The God of Small Things and Alice Walker The Color Purple; B: Andrea Levy Small Island and Khaled Hosseini The Kite Runner); Pearson Edexcel has five (Alice Walker The Color Purple, Sam Selvon The Lonely Londoners, Kazuo Ishiguro Never Let Me Go, Toni Morrison Beloved, and Khaled Hosseini A Thousand Splendid Suns) and there are three poems out of 20 in the compulsory poetry anthology by poets of colour, one by Patience Agbabi, one by Daljit Nagra and one by Tishani Doshi; and OCR has one (Mohsin Hamid The Reluctant Fundamentalist) although it also lists eight texts by authors of colour recommended as comparative reading for the set texts. OCR is the only Awarding Body to monitor and record the names of texts used for Non-Examined Assessment (coursework); in an interview OCR English Subject Adviser Isobel Woodger noted that Bernardine Evaristo's Girl, Woman, Other had

[handwritten:] NEA > only KS4/5 opportunity promoted for students to select their own texts 27

[Infographic:]

34.4% of students are Black, Asian, or minority ethnic

0.7% of students answered a question on a novel by a writer of colour at GCSE

0.1% of students answered a question on a novel by a woman of colour at GCSE

*Students in England in 2019

[handwritten:] ↳ options are NA here! Not representative

160

[handwritten: Who has the autonomy of teachers & boards? over texts/choice & teachers? over students' exam leadership? If not then.. school leadership.]

teach. About 25% of primary teachers said they chose the texts they taught, and in secondary a similar proportion had control over their text choices at Key Stages 4 and 5. With these caveats the following data was generated from the survey respondents.

70% of youth survey respondents, rising to 77% of Black, Asian or minority ethnic youth survey respondents, agreed that diversity is part of British society and as such should be represented in the school curriculum.

[handwritten: significant sense of belonging]

The wider secondary curriculum of...

At Key Stage 3 the curriculum is much freer, as it is not limited by exam specifications. However, it is also much harder to find out what is being taught. The survey data is unlikely to be representative, as it has a higher proportion of Black, Asian or minority ethnic teachers than would be expected from the profession, and it is likely to have been taken by people who are interested in issues of racial diversity. However, there is a large degree of centralisation of curriculum decisions; most teachers do not have full control over what they

[handwritten: reg. limitations addressed]

> "I feel like it's not a good 'representation' of the population, most books taught in school are written by middle class white men."
>
> Zoe, 18

The majority of student contact with texts by authors of colour is via poetry, largely because of its ease to include in the curriculum, according to survey respondents. One White secondary survey respondent said 'I genuinely believed the only literature written by people of colour was poetry. I understand why poetry is often used to explore different experiences – it is brief, deep, well-attuned to capture a multifaceted snapshot of a lived experience. But it never gives Black, Asian or minority ethnic literature a chance to breathe.'

[handwritten: does not necessarily / 'the Black backdrop' / reactionary]

A total of 79 different poets were named by respondents to the survey. The top ten poets mentioned by survey respondents are given in table 5. The most mentioned, John Agard, had one poem, 'Checkin' Out Me History' mentioned by 17 respondents; after this the most popular were Imtiaz Dharker's 'Tissue' (12), Maya Angelou's 'Still I Rise' (9), Grace Nichols's 'Island Man' (8) and Moniza Alvi's 'Presents from My Aunts in Pakistan' (8).

Table 5. Top ten poets mentioned by secondary respondents

Poet	Number of mentions	Appears on GCSE syllabus?
John Agard	74	Yes
Imtiaz Dharker	48	Yes
Maya Angelou	37	No
Grace Nichols	31	Yes
Benjamin Zephaniah	25	Yes
Moniza Alvi	14	Yes
Sujata Bhatt	11	Yes
Daljit Nagra	10	Yes
Langston Hughes	10	No
Jackie Kay	6	Yes

[handwritten: Most of these 'poets' have published novels/plays which could be introduced to the curriculum.]

Seven full length prose texts were mentioned by ten or more secondary respondents: Noughts and Crosses (Malorie Blackman, 27); Refugee Boy (Benjamin Zephaniah, 16, whose Face was also taught by six teachers); The Color Purple (Alice Walker, 14); The Kite Runner (Khaled Hosseini, 14); Things Fall Apart (Chinua Achebe, 12); The Hate U Give (Angie Thomas, 11); and the English and Media Centre's Diverse Shorts (10) Only two of these (The Color Purple and The Kite Runner) appear on the A level specifications and none appear on the GCSE specifications. The Hate U Give, like two of the most popular novels for primary students, is a recent and award-winning text.

Speeches are another popular way to include diverse voices in the curriculum. Secondary respondents mentioned 19 different speakers, seven

[handwritten: Reflection - how do the Black children in these classes experience this? Will these teachers reprint + diversify?]

of whom were mentioned by more than one teacher: Martin Luther King (10); Barack Obama (7); Malala Yousafzai (5); Nelson Mandela (5); Chimanda Ngozi Adichie (3); Chief Joseph (2) and John Boyega (2).

Of 126 respondents who teach Year 7, 44 teach no texts by a person of colour (35%), which rises to 69 if we exclude poetry (55%). Of 125 respondents who teach Year 8, 35 teach no texts by a person of colour (28%), which rises to 60 if we exclude poetry (48%). Of 133 respondents who teach Year 9, 39 teach no texts by a person of colour (29%), which rises to 57 if we exclude poetry (43%). 14 secondary

[29] Any respondent who just gave a name where the author is known for either poetry or prose was counted as prose.

Appendix 5. *Analytical & Reflexive Notes of Reviewed Literature to Inform Thematic Synthesis*

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
Adam, Hays, Urquhart, Bickmore (2021) **The Exclusive White World of Preservice Teachers' Book Selection for the Classroom: Influences and Implications for Practice**	Australia N=82 teachers. Names 177 texts. Mixed methods survey. " A mixed methods approach was adopted for this study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through two surveys and descriptive analysis was used to describe, aggregate and present the constructs and the associations between them." Research Questions: 1. What is the nature of children's books PSTs report as being their preferred books to use in classroom practice? 2. How frequently are the preferred texts also texts the PSTs have been exposed to in their Initial Teacher Education course? 3. How frequently are the preferred texts also texts PSTs know from personal experience or preference? 4. To what extent is representation of diversity reflected in the children's book preferences of PSTs?	How book was encountered (mode was Personal Favourite *n=100);* Cultural Diversity of the books *n=8* (4.5%) portraying a person of colour; *n=4* (0.02%) main character of colour; Top Ten Books Most Likely to be Selected by PSTs for the Classroom Only one from 8 books including people of colour (this book *Possum Magic,* included one picture of a person of colour who is NOT mentioned in the story). Mode publication date of books was over 30 years ago, 14 (2%) were published in the previous 10 years; *n=3* (0.04%) contained some representation of characters of colour. representation of people of colour was limited to only 8 of 177 titles. Conclusion that most teachers are anglo-european backgrounds (in UK as well as Australia) and so if preference for choosing books is based on	Prompted me to consider my own positioning when I was a White English teacher, including the degree of autonomy I had in choosing texts and which factors prompted me. Consideration of connections and differences between the Australian and UK contexts. Positive Psychology - focus on preferred future and some discussion of pupil wellbeing in relation to the literature.	Power of White teachers in choosing what books are read. Positivity of representation - prevalence of victimised role for Characters of Colour and the psychological impact this has on readers. Focus on limited inclusion of characters of colour; Discussion of impact of representation on identity (discusses Bishop's Windows & Mirrors);

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
		childhood reading and own experiences reflected this is likely to be perpetuated for subsequent generations.		
Bickmore, S. T., Yunying Xu, & Sheridan, M. I. (2017). **Where Are the People of Color? Representation of Cultural Diversity in the National Book Award for Young People's Literature and Advocating for Diverse Books in a Non-Post Racial Society**	USA Book awards. "How are the diverse issues of race/ethnicity represented in theNBA?," Descriptive content analysis of 100 NBA winners and finalists from 1996 to 2015. Explored ethnicity of authors and protagonists. Focus on Young Adult Literature.After cataloguing all the information, recorded the frequency of each subcategory separately. Collected data on all 100 finalists and then isolated the findings of the 20 winning titles.	Race / Ethnicity of Author 77 texts were written by White authors (or unidentified authors) and 23 texts were written by non-White authors. When isolating the 20 winning titles, the data shows 15 were written by White authors and five were written by non-White authors. Questions whether out group authors should depict protagonists of other ethnicities to their own. Notice that struggle is often a theme of racially diverse texts.	Appears to be written with political bias? Even though the politics may be aligned with my own, still need to maintain awareness of how this may impact on presentation of findings. S.T. Bickmore - race not mentioned?? Co-authors one Latina, one Chinese. Specific menton that these authors wanted to examine whether/how their racial identities were featured in the books.	Positivity of Portrayals Impact of representation on Identity Book awards- White dominated

Concept of Post-Racal Society

Researchers shared they were discouraged from critiquing - told "we are doing better"

Power of heremony - overt racist messages from Trump government

Explores political context |

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
Braden & Rodriguez (2016) **Beyond Mirrors and Windows: A Critical Content Analysis of Latinx Children's Books**	USA Provocation: As racial diversity increases in previously ethnically homogenous areas, the representation of race in literature and media must increase proportionately. **RQ: 1.** What experiences do the picture books with Latinx content portray? 2. What cultural narratives are implicitly and explicitly suggested by Latinx story picture books? Used a Critical Multicultural Perspective (like Davies et al), focusing on deconstruction of Latinx representations in lit and CRT to "uncover assumptions and ideologies that are often represented in children's lit. Data collection: Books published in 2013, received by Cooperative Children's Book Centre as Latinx content category. Narrowed to picture book inclusion and fiction only, *N*= 15 books.Chose to present the 4 most prevalent insights in relation to RQs, rather than presenting all themes generated.	Themes: English is Privileged (some use of Spanish common and kinship terms, posit that these are used as tokenistic cultural nod); Cultural Authenticity, generally defined in superficial terms, such as food, although some more authentic depictions; The Role of Mothers, portrays traditional gender roles largely, not reflecting recent shifts in LAtinx culture towards female labour; some examples of Latinx females enacting agency, Assumption that there is a Utopian Society, 8 of the books portrayed utopian society, 'normalised' family relationships and circumstances and did not represent complexity or explore social justice topics, critiques one text in detail for its 'anglicisation' of a story of immigration to America.	Noticing that the same issues are arising with depiction of a racial identity I am less familiar with as a British researcher.

Also leaves me to consider my own Positive Psychology ethos, the researchers are very critical of the picture books which focuses on the characters' strengths, protective relationships instead of the negative experiences which are more prevalent. While I agree this is realistic and important to portray, I feel Latinx readers should also have hopeful portrayals to read - not just a single story. | Language as marker of power and privilege, used to advantage some and disadvantage others.

Positivity portrayals (although rare) are powerful and can inspire Latinx readers;

Lit can encourage children to activism and becoming informed, critical agents for anti-racist change; |

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
Buchanan, L. B., & Fox, S. G. (2019). **On Windows and Mirrors in Teacher Education Program Materials: A Content Analysis of Human Demographics in One Picture Book Collection.**	USA Critical Race Methodology Framework combined with windows and mirrors pedagogy. Aim of identifying limitations and possibilities for diversity in lit, recognise gaps and recommend changes. Study based in the researchers' university library. **RQ: Who might find a mirror in the realistic fiction picture books? What characters, groups of people and family experiences are illustrated in the realistic fiction titles within the collection? What gaps exist in the collection?** Narrowed the collection they were exploring (originally more that 9000) Read each book fully from this sample. Conducted inter-rater reliability. *N=286* books were selected for the quantitative content analysis. Use of digital survey to record key info including characteristics and experiences of characters	Ethnicity portrayals: 80% White, 19% Black, 10% Hispanic&Latino other findings all relate to quantities regarding gender, family situation etc.

Most frequently occuring character type: White, female, able-bodied, traditional family. White cisgender females most likely to find mirrors in the collection.

Black, Latinx, Asian, Native / First NAtions and multi-racial children would find few if any mirrors. | Makes me think more deeply about elements of cultural portrayal (eg mention of silk headscarves) how these could be enriching when portrayed authentically (ingroup authors) and how I can draw these elements out in interviews. | Power of teachers (predominantly White in US & UK in choosing what books their students will read. Teachers choosing books portraying dominant group perspectives.

Assumption that book selection is paramount to instructional design. Power and identity in disrupting dominant discourses.

Learning & Literary Achievement - students of colour engage more successfully in "mirror" curriculums and express more enjoyment of reading; "windows" broaden perspectives.

Positivity - danger of the single story and counternarratives of aspiration. Out-group authors depicting stereotyped or marginalised views of marginalised groups.

Identity development - as well as increased self-esteem, representation in lit may increase children's appreciation for others |

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
				and skills for cooperation and dialogue. Significant lack of culturally conscious books exploring differences in cultural experiences as well as commonalities. Power of publishing and who decides what books should be promoted. Recommends that schools create a literary advising council and prioritise diverse realistic fiction purchases in budget.
Chaudhri, A., & Teale, W. (2013). **Stories of Multiracial Experiences in Literature for Children, Ages 9-14.**	USA N=90 books. Content & Literary Analysis, CRT to explore portrayal of multiracial identities. Aim to find out what readers 9-14 might learn/perceive about multiracial identity based on portrayals in these books. RQ: What is current children's literature aimed at 9-14 year olds saying about the experience of being mixed-race? What historical/ideological perspectives inform books about multiracial characters? To what degree are contemporary authors maintaining or challenging racial paradigms?	Findings: Far too few books centralising mixed-race identity and too many which problematise mixed-race identity as 'incomplete' rather than challenging racist societal perceptions. Only 1% of books for 9-14 year olds appear to portray mixed race protagonists. Themes: Content Features, Mixed Race Elements of the Books, 87% of he texts featured mixed-race of part non-White and part White, suggesting that political interest/scholarly attention when Whiteness is a feature; Environments,	Before this study - how often did I ever examine my Whiteness? This is key in considering equitable representation of race	Biracial identity, promoting children's self-esteem is key, positivity/authenticity of portrayals - many of the texts portrayed a mixed-race identity as a source for internal conflict and negative self-concept without an alternative experience to counter. Emphasises the danger of ignoring difference in the hope of promoting universality. Some examples of empowering and authentic

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
		majority of modern day texts were in urban contexts, Interracial relationships; Socio-Economic Situation varied portrayal. Findings of 3 broad descriptive categories: Mixed Race In/Visibility (stereotypical, no critique of racism); Mixed Race Blending identity was described as MIxed Race but this was not relevant to narrative; Mixed Race Awareness authentic and varied experiences for biracial characters. Role of literature to support young readers "seeking racial affirmation or looking for insights into others not like themselves". Over-representation of absent parents, theme of "being socially and biologically incomplete"		counter-storytelling

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
Davis, J. M., Pearce, N., & Mullins, M. (2021). **Missing Boys: The Limited Representation of Black Males in Caldecott Books.**	USA Content Analysis framed through Critical Multiculturalism framework (moves beyond literary appreciation to exploring relevance to equity and social justice; also used by Braden & Rodriguez). Considers: "who is represented, underrepresented, misrepresented and/or invisible?" Also expands focus beyond character portrayal to the diversity of authors, illustrators and publishers. RQ: 1. How often and in what ways are Black males represented in Caldecott Medal and Honor books? 2. Who is involved in the creation of the books with Black male characters, including the authors, illustrators and publishing companies? N = 115 books that received Caldecott award between 1995 and 2020 (n=96 had human characters). Dates based on lifetime of Mullins (student researcher). Three stage analyse: 1. Black male characters represented and at what level 2.How characters depicted 3. Identity of book producers (author, illustrator published).	Black Male Characters: 38 (33%) included any Black males. 18 books with Black male primary characters.; 9 secondary; 11 background. Most of those with primary characters also featured secondary Black male characters. Under-representation of Black males creates negative message about who is important in society.

 Role of Primary Characters: 9 were children; 3 lifespan narrative. Jobs included artist, railroad worker, civil rights activist, unknown job. Two were enslaved people All 8 books with adult Black males had historic settings. Related Diversity in Characters 9 books featuring Black male secondary characters featured diverse protagonists. 55.6% had a Black female lead. Others featured Asian Americans or centralised location over character. Authors & Illustrators: 20 were written and/or illustrated by Black males. Of the 18 books with make Black | Researchers' ethnicities explored and central to the devising of the study. One Black male participant in my study. How are Black males treated/viewed differently to Black females?

 Would there have been increased diversity outside of the awards / in the UK context?

Intersectionality- I have only adopted a Critical Race Lens and not considered the intersectional subtleties of the experience. | Recognising the impact of representation of Black children increases their sense of competency and achievement.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is impactful of children's intellect, emotional development and socio-cultural-political awareness.

 Essential Learning Tool. Learning Skills - Background information/cultural insights increase comprehension ability and chance to develop inference skills.

Critical to choose quality childrens lit representing diverse identities to support positive identity development. Power through book awards "signifies distinguished children's literature" |

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
		primary characters, only 5 had Black male authors. Several books published in collections designed for diversity collections. Queries whether publishing companies actually produce as much diversity and culturally responsive children's literature as they claim to. Other Awards: Explores several other books awards, including one dedicated to appreciation of African American culture. Books that Focus on Everyday Diversity including discussion of the portrayal of Black spaces and cultural inclusivity.		

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
Elliott, V., Nelson-Addy, L., Chantiluke, R., & Courtney, M. (2021) **Lit in Colour: Diversity in literature in English schools**	England Mixed- methods: interviews (n = 37); quantitative survey teachers (n = 242); student focus groups (n = 20); quantitative survey students (n = 660) Commissioned by Exam Board with specific focus on examining Diversity in school literature and the implications of this with a view to increasing diversity. A range of research strands were drawn together, including surveys and qualitative interviews with teachers and students from across England.	Primary - more opportunities for diversity of content. Malorie Blackman & Benjamin Zephaniah most popular authors referenced. Secondary - at time of research (this has since been updated) Post-1914 British text was the only place where Black, Asian or minority ethnic authors were represented in the exam specs apart from in Poetry anthologies. Only two full prose texts by authors of colour (Meera Syal & Kazuo Ishiguro). 70% youth respondents agreed that "diversity is part of British society and should be represented in the school curriculum" 126 Year 7 teacher respondents: 44 taught no texts by a person of colour, 69 if you exclude poetry Most of the CYP interviewed had NO exposure to Black, Asian or minority ethnic authors or protagonists in school apart from poetry. Those that had been read related to experiences of racism. 27.4% of Black, Asian Minority ethnic YP agreed that "The books I study in English Lit make me feel that I don't belong. 129	More closely focused on the literature and context I am familiar with from my history of teaching Literature in UK schools.	Power of the Canon. Only paper in the literature review which draws on the voices of Young People. Focuses on how YP are made to feel about the texts - how does it affect their identity development? ge. Explores how ationships with teachers.

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
		Secondary teachers reported their schools were planning on diversifying the curriculum following BLM Movement. Teachers from Multi-Academy Trusts sometimes expressed that they would not have the power to make changes of text choices. Young People Section Methodology: - n=20. Online written data collection; focus group (mix of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status. - N=660 quantitative survey. Thematic Findings from Student Focus Group: Problems with the current literature curriculum: too many books written by		

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Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
		White, middle-aged men; lack of diverse perspectives (especially LGBTQ+, non-White); time pressure to read too quickly; unnatural method of reading books in class limits enjoyment; open interpretation of texts; only poetry modules include writers of colour. Theme of interest in portrayal of racism and agreement that this is an important area of study. Survey Findings: · % of all KS4 Candidates answering GCSE question by a person of colour in 2019 (nb. with relevance to this study it should be noted none of these authors are Black):		

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
		- Pearson Edexcel 0.1% - AQA 0.52% - OCR 10.9% - Eduqas 1% · 57.4% agreed "More diversity in writers and stories we study" would make them more excited to continue with English at or after A Level. · 70% agreed "Diversity is part of British society and should be represented in school curriculum." 77% of all Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic respondents agreed with this statement. · 82% did not recall ever studying a text by an author from a Black or Ethnic Minority		

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
		background.		
		· 27.4% of all Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic respondents agreed "Books I study in English make me feel like I don't belong". 14.5% of White respondents agreed with this.		
		· 51.7% of all respondents agreed "English literature curriculum does not reflect the diversity of British society today."		
		· 37.7% of all respondents agreed "Books I study at school/college put me off reading."		
		· 41.2% of all respondents had not read a book		

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	**Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?**
		for pleasure in the last 12 months. · 54.7% of all respondents agreed that they were keen readers when younger but less so no. Themes from Teacher Focus Group: Barriers & Solutions: The racial profile of the English teaching profession; Teachers knowledge of diverse texts available and how to teach and talk about them; Time and Resources; Confidence; Language and Race; Pushback & Structural Barriers		
Heinecken (2019) Contesting Controlling Images: The Black Ballerina in Children's	USA Qualitative Textual Analysis. N = 7 books about Black ballerinas. Data collection via searching on Amazon. Researcher states: "Based on my familiarity with an initial text by ballerina Misty Copeland, I	Ballet books include problematic imaging in terms of feminist theory BUT Black girls previously excluded from ballerina fiction - portrayal here as beautiful and competent.	Explores positioning and responsibility as a White female researcher exploring portrayal of Black characters and experiences - similar to my own	Power Control Challenging Stereotypes Intersectionality Positivity Portrayals Feminist Lens

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
Picture Books	used Amazon's linking function to discover similar works. Books were selected based on their narrative focus on a Black ballerina, by age range (preschool to third grade), and date of publication". 86% (n = 6) Black female authors; 71% (n =5) Black male illustrators.	Black girls face intersectional discrimination RACISM SEXISM ADULTIFICATION - increased rates of punishment in school and CJS. Discussion how fictional portrayals add to "eurocentric standards of beauty... negatively affect Black girls self esteem" Challenging stereotypes of Black femininity. Validates for Black girl reader identifying with the celebrated ballerina. CRITIQUE OF PAPER-ethical issues raised, male sexual gaze, objectification unrealistic body stereotypes. THEMES *Appearance-Focused Femininity and Objectification; Celebrating Black Beauty; The Empowered Ballerina; Reinventing Ballet as a Black Space ;*	positioning, I have also reflected on this and considered the potential implications. Problematic for a White female researcher to judge what is a 'positive portrayal' of Black female characters - in my research the critique of the portrayals will be led by the Black participants not myself.	Portrays possibilities for achievement/success/talent/brilliance. Identity development - representation of Black (and multicultural) community groups; sense of cultural belonging. Difficult balance between not silencing / ignoring the discrimination and disproportionate challenges faced by Black dancers and giving Black readers the chance to read stories of Joy and success.

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
Hughes-Hassell Barkley Koehler (2009) **Promoting Equity in Children's Literacy Instruction Using a Critical Race Theory Framework to Examine Transitional Books**	USA Quantitative Descriptive Content Analysis. RQ: What percentage of the books recommended for transitional readers features people of colour? What individual groups of colour are represented and to what extent? What race or ethnicity are the authors of these books? Choose books from Fountas & Pinnell Levelled Book List Database in the transitional readers section (transitional here is defined as the move between 'easy-reader' picture books to 'advanced-reader' chapter books. Final sample N= 556. Each reviewed from online content available (did not read the full book) and recorded: bibliographic info; level of book; race or ethnicity of the main and major secondary characters; race or ethnicity of authors/illustrators. Calculated inter-coder reliability 90% (80% is the accepted benchmark).	Characters 83.5% books in sample contained at least 1 White main or secondary character. 25.8% contained at least one person of Colour as a main or secondary character (viewed *as a homogenous group*) 9 of these were biographies (White authors). From this - African American children were the most frequently depicted. There were more 'other' (non-human) main or secondary characters than African American, Asian American, Hispanic, American Indian or multiracial. All books that contained more than one ethnic group included White characters. 2.2% of authors were people of Colour.	Note to consider - race was usually decided by researchers based on illustration judgements. Discuss the limitation of this and the diversity amongst racial.ethnic and cultural groups AND limitation of making the judgement as cultural outsiders who do not have the tacit knowledge of the group.	Learning & Achievement: In America, reading scores of African Americans Hispanic American Indian 4th graders significantly lower than White and Asian American children. Authors reflect that the results evidence racism is at work "in its most subtle form". Lack of representation "jeopardises motivation and achievement in reading " for children of Colour. Transitional period when children are encouraged to become independent readers but children of Colour "are denied the very resources that might not only motivate them to read but also allow them to make text-to-self connections - a critical part of becoming proficient readers". Identity: Lack of authors of colour fails children in not providing role models. Children will only see themselves as readers if literature speaks to their

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
				experiences.
KOSS, M. D. (2015). **Diversity in Contemporary Picturebooks: A Content Analysis..**	USA Quantitative Descriptive Content Analysis. Theoretical Frameworks: Critical Race Theory; Gender Schema Theory; Critical Disability Theory. RQ: 1. Who are the characters and populations represented in contemporary picturebooks across categories of ethnicity, gender and disability? 2. Who are the authors and illustrators of these titles in terms of their ethnicities and genders? N=455 picturebooks published in 2012 by US publishers (searched publisher websites). Researcher read and coded all books, results analysed by systematic calculation of characteristics then analysed through CRT, GST & CDT	(Primary Culture = predominantly represented in the text; Secondary culture characters from a different culture to the main characters appear) Books featuring Black culture: Primary 9%; Secondary 17%. Books featuring White culture: Primary 45%; Secondary 21%. Asian, Latino, Native American & Middle Eastern combined: Primary 5%. Black main character: 15%. Authors: 0.05% Black; 0.06% Black Illustrators. White Authors: 90%; Illustrators 83%. Asian Authors: 0.03%; Asian Illustrators 0.06%; Latino Authors: 0.02% Latino Illustrators: 0.03% Native American Authors: 0.007% Illustrators: 0.002%.	Does this paper represent a wider systemic threat to my primary study? How can the problem of lack of diverse authors and illustrators be addressed? This study moves the question beyond the immediate classroom and teachers text selection to the wider systemic issue that there are not enough books which positively represent diverse races available.	Power - conclusion that despite increasing diversity in the US population this is not reflected in the available picture books or authors/illustrators being published. "Children's literature is still not authentically portraying our multiethnic world." Representation & Identity - children predominantly see White faces in picture books - damage this does to self-esteem and sense of place in the world.

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
Koss, M. D., Johnson, N. J., & Martinez, M. (2018). **Mapping the Diversity in Caldecott Books from 1938 to 2017: The Changing Topography**	USA Theoretical Frameworks: Reader Response Theory; Critical Race Theory; Counterstorytelling Theory. RQ: How has the diversity in Caldecott books changed since the inception of the award as reflected in the race/ethnicity of illustrators, authors, and main characters? Term 'Caldecott books' used to describe all those which were honoured or won prizes in the Caldecott Book Awards between 1938 and 2017. Used systematic content analysis procedures. Compiled database of N=337. A Priori coding system used. Online research used to identify the race of authors and illustrators. Used both visual text and verbal text to determine character ethnicity/race	White Illustrators: 86.2% of all books. Black illustrators: 8.6% (first award for Black illustrator 1972); Asian Illustrators 3.2%; Latinx Illustrators 1.4%; 'American Indian' (studies term) illustrators 0.3%. Authors: White - 86.9%; Black - 6.0%; Asian 3.1%; Latinx 1.7% First 3 decades, no Black authors. Main characters: n= 195 books had human characters. From this subsection, 70.6% were White, 12.9% Black, 8.5% Asian and 0.4% multiracial.	Keep returning back to this pointabout researchers' making judgements on ethnicity of characters based on fairly superficial premise, and then making statements on the disrespectful nature of the texts, without stopping to reflect on their own use of power and language use. Some phrases by the researchers make me feel uncomfortable in their dismissiveness/assumptions (e.g. "we used text references (e.g. slavery, the underground railroad) to determine a character's race /ethnicity.") Reflexivity is at the crux of this primary research as I need to be alert to making similar errors myself.	Personal identity development and links to transactional/aesthetic reading- reader becomes part of the story if they see themselves (part of their identity) represented in it. Portrayal that is negative can be detrimental to core self-concept. Deeper connection when readers have the same ethnicity as a character. Books as Mirrors explored again. Learning is increased as books that are Mirrors will be more pleasurable to read. Also increase the chance of literacy development as children comprehend the text better. Lack of representation adds to marginalisation and oppression in society. Seeing ambitions, paths to the future - without representation aspiration and achievement are limited. Most characters of colour were NOT written by cultural insiders - this

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
				goes against the Counter-storytelling initiative, oppressed voices are NOT being heard. Stereotyped and non-authentic portrayals are detrimental to young readers.
Nguyen, A. (2022). **"Children Have the Fairest Things to Say": Young Children's Engagement with Anti-Bias Picture Books.**	USA Qualitative case study. Intersectional lens. Study design is based on the goals of anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2019): Identity, Diversity, Justice, Activism. RQ: How do the early childhood teacher and young children in a White-predominant kindergarten classroom engage with and respond to the interactive read-aloud sessions of anti-bias picture books and related activities? Purposeful sampling. Main study aims: a)establishing a collaborative relationship with the teacher b)supporting the teacher's commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity and openness to anti-bias texts c)representing the student demographic as predominantly White (reflecting geographic location of the	Themes: **Young Children's Complex Understanding of Racial Issues and Recognition of Unfairness.** **Fostering Child Activism.** Gender Non-Conformity. **Anti-Immigrant, Anti-Blackness & Intersectional Struggles.**	Researcher discusses their Vietnamese-Asian identity. Explores intersectional identity and impact on the study. Also explores identity of teacher.Considering this study research participants through intersectionality lens - as students they are automatically in an oppressed role - subject to school rules/curriculum. Only one male participant. Have I considered the implications for Black males or the different generations for example?	Intersectional lens adopted related to power - move away from assumptions of homogenous groups. Exclusion of young children from socio-political contributes to oppressive structures as it becomes normalised/engrained in their core beliefs. Learning & Achievement - underestimation of young children as being unable to cognitively theorise or comprehend issues of race / gender etc. Can actually be critical thinkers and engage with social issues, become social justice activists if supported with appropriate materials. Power of picture books for anti-biased learning.

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
	neighbourhood. N=21 students (14 White, 7 of Colour - Asian, Latinx & mixed-race); 4 books read and discussed over 8 weeks. Data collected: observational records of students and teacher, audio-recording (approximately 200 mins) and learning artefacts (drawing/writing/art). Qualitative coding, inductive and deductive iterative process,			Power - children tend to be discouraged from challenging authority figures or participating in decision-making, this makes encouraging anti-bias activism challenging. Power Positivity Identity - found evidence of the young children holding stereotyped and biased views of race and gender - picture books were useful first step in challenging these views, alongside critical discussion. Identity - supporting healthy identity development of diverse intersectionality

| Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
Paciga, K. A., & Koss, M. D. (2022). "**Pockets of Hope": Changing Representations of Diversity in Newbery Medal-Winning Titles.** .	USA Systematic Content Analysis of human main characters in Newbery-wining books from 1922 (start of the award) to 2019. RQ: What populations are represented within the main characters across categories of race/ethnicity, gender, and disability? 2. How have these representations changed across time? 3. How have sociocultural, historical, and political contexts shaped the way racial, ethnic, gendered, and/or able-bodied identities are privileged in the corpus? N = 98 books. Phases: 1. Identify Main Characters; 2. Coding Representations; 3. Patterns & Trends Over Time; 4. Considering Context. Inductive Coding.	**Macro-Level Representations Across Time.** n = 120 main characters: 29% Characters of Colour. White characters increased in the 1990s and then declined through 2000s as more diverse characters (specifically Asian, Black and Latinx) increased. Asian main characters second highest group represented, followed by Black $n=10$. **Micro-Level Connections to Contexts.** Increased diversity in characters across 2000s (also in gender and disability suggest growing societal recognition of representation significance. Connects mapping of changes to events including WWII; Brown vs Board of Education; Civil Rights activism in 50s/60s/70s; 1960s Chicano movement (championing Mexican-Americans); Vietnam war, end of Cold War; rise of Hip-Hop. No non-White characters in 1980s. Spike in diversity in 200s is predominantly historical	Researchers reflect on their intersectional identities and how this dictates their positioning. Exploration of limitations of terms as social constructs. acknowledges positioning as both White female able-bodied researchers. Also relate identity to transactional reading and the way their own assumptions and biases will have influenced their relationship to the research and the texts they have analysed. Important considerations for myself while conducting interviews and analysing.	Power Privilege Empathy Intersectionality Hope. Diversity "Grounding to problematize the status quo of the curriculum" Focus on Newbery Medal - "awarded annually to 'the most distinguished contribution to American Literature for children'". Status of the prize increases likelihood of being included in classrooms and libraries, being reprinted, included in curriculum. Privilege Power. EDUCATION IMPLICATIONS "Teachers use knowledge to structure discussions around books...advocate for characters in ways that mirror current climate and need for inclusivity and equitability... parallel to privelege set within history, students are set up to enter into a critical space.". Encourages social engagement Talks about Freire discussion of critical literacy as interconnected with social justice through the promotion of democratic dialogue.

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
		fiction - does not represent modern children's experiences. 2010s more representative of contemporary experiences - more "opportunities for psychological realism".		Through "examining texts for representations and stereotypes" which social issues are explored? How are they positioned - where are the counternarrative of hope? How are characters portrayed in "pushing back against societal constraints and offer new possibilities for a more equitable world?"
Smith-D'Arezzo, W., & Musgrove, M. (2011). **Two Professors Critique the Representations of Africans and African Americans in Picture Books.**	USA Theoretical Frameworks; Reader Response & Critical Literacy (based on the work of Freire "allows readers to examine texts closely, reading for meaning and speaking back to the text instead of 'silently consuming other people's words'". Analysis based on personal responses to 6 Guiding Questions (all developed from Rosenblatt and/or Social & Cultural Theories of Reader Response). *1. What is my initial reaction to the story? 2.What is my initial reaction to the pictures? 3. What are the hidden messages in the stories and how can we as professors in education and*	Quantitative:Agreed on book judgement in 14 cases. 5 told stories of Happy Black Families. 3 Unhappy Black Families. 3 Stories of Slavery; 6 stories of Oppression; 1 of Pride in Self and Community and 1 of Hope. 12 had Hidden Messages of Positivity; 6 had Hidden Messages of Negativity. 16 had at least one Black author. 5 had sole White author. Qualitative Themes: *Common Stories Being Told or Left Untold; HIdden Messages; Different Interpretations.*	The researchers' ethnicities (one Black and one White) is central to the study - drawing on their unique perspectives and exploring the commonalities and differences their lived experiences bring to the texts. Feel a connection with these researchers as they are leading with their love of literature and belief in the power of literature to promote social justice. Talk about the importance of recognising the influence of age in responding to books intended for children.	Key discussion point - both researchers acknowledge being "conditioned by White cultural dominance" which prevented them from recognising the absence of representation of African Americans/Black characters - the lack of diverse representation goes unnoticed due to the racist structures. Researchers state key themes of the research as examining POWER and SOCIAL JUSTICE. Concludes that "meaning resides in the juxtaposition of reader and text...reader background interacts with the text to form meaning"

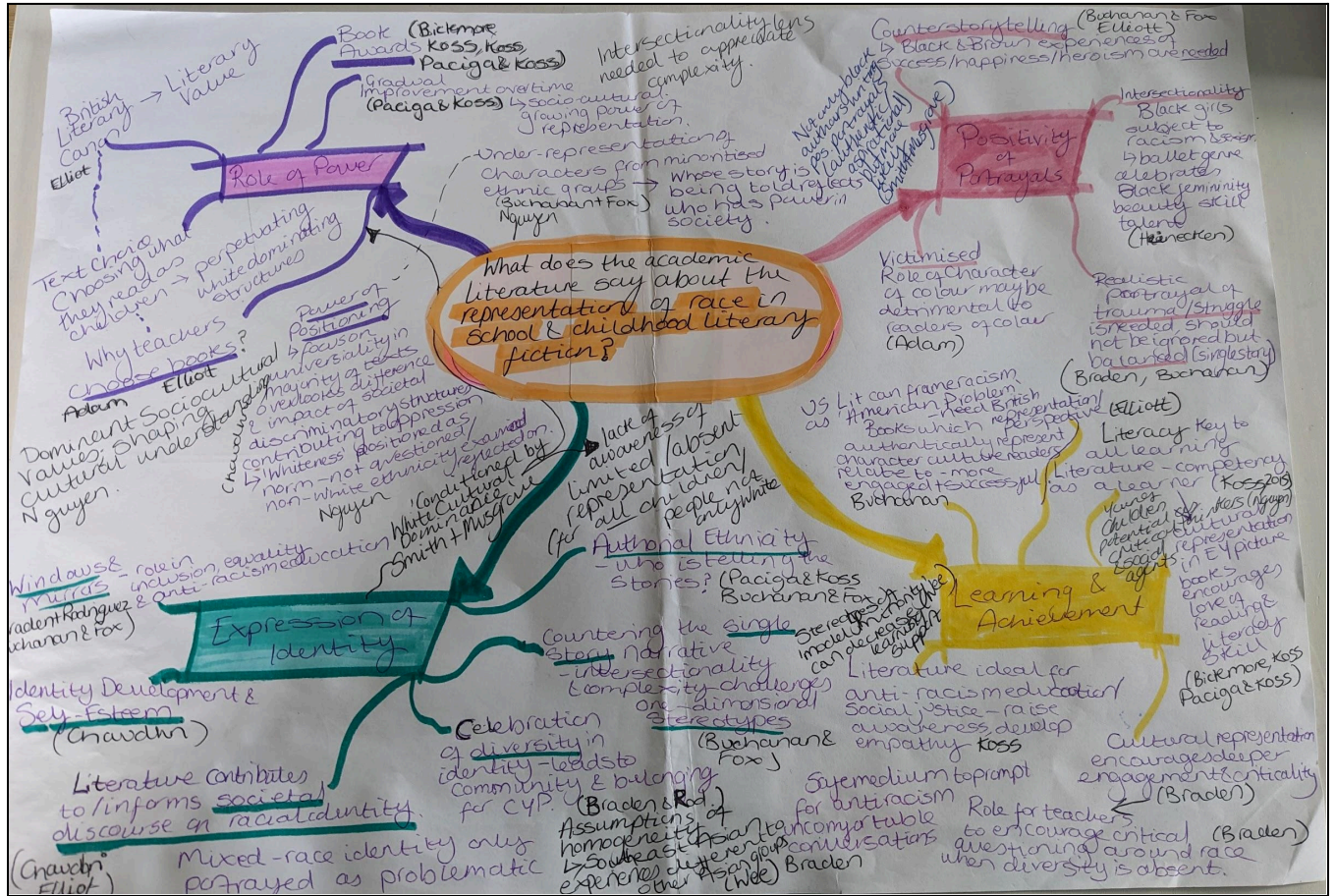| Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
	in writing help young primarily White students begin to recognise some of these hidden messages? 4. Whose stories are being told in these books and who is telling the stories? 5. What do these stories say about the relationships between Black and White people in America? 6. As teachers of young people, what do we need to understand about the effects of these stories and their messages? Databases searched: *Children's Literature Comprehensive DatabaseEnoch Pratt Library Database & New York City Library Database.* Selection Criteria: published between 2000-2004; appropriate for early childhood (up to age 8); including illustrations of African or African American children. Total of *250 books* narrowed further through purposeful sampling. Final sample *N=23* Conducted the study across a year, individually writing responses to each of the Guiding Questions. for each book. Then used the notes to conduct full discussions on each book. Descriptive summary of		This will be important for consideration relating to older participants retrospectively reflecting on their school literature experiences.	- important to listen to individual students and value their reader response. Learning - supports anti-racist awareness of how domination and subordination are perpetuated an operate. Concludes that the "Black American story is... fragmented and incomplete...most of the stories are most useful to the dominant group and told repeatedly, as if there are no other stories to tell." State that it is not yet clear whether children will interpret the texts as problematic or on the surface - suggest teachers should investigate their reactions That's what my study is doing! Learning and achievement - vital for teachers to teach students how to engage critically with texts. Otherwise they will view the world through a biassed lens. "The results of this are seen when African American children view themselves and their peers as subservient to White children and

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Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
	data collected. Then thematic analysis.			adults.
Wee (2017) **Looking for Southeast Asian American Protagonists in Award-winning Children's Books**	USA RQ: **How many Southeast Asian American protagonists appear in children's books that received awards? Who are those SOutheast Asian American protagonists and how are their lives described? 3. Do images of Southeast Asian Americans in award-winning children's books display the image of war refugees and the model minority myth?** Survey of books that are in 4 awards presented by the American Library Association (excluded those aimed at diversity and lifetime contribution. Limited to 2000-2016). *N*=267. Close qualitative textual analysis of single text.	Quantitative: 0.03% of books surveyed (*n*=7) depicts Asian protagonists. 0.004% (n=1) depicts Southeast Asian American main character. Only 1 of the 0.03% books was a contemporary setting. Only example of Southeast Asian American character (based on author's life experiences) is a Vietnamese refugee - researcher presents that this is a stereotype assumed by American society of Southeast Asian people and that this character is the ONLY representation of that culture in the books surveyed. Qualitative Themes: **Nostalgia** cultural markers largely food-based, they seem to imply a narrative that her life would have been "normal and peaceful" if not for the war. Nostalgia makes assimilation to new home harder. **Hardships** political turmoil, danger, lack of food, spaces, school is unsafe, racist	Discusses "the model minority myth" which I was not aware of before -however this has triggered recall of reference in a number of the contextual and academic literature comparing experiences of Black children and Asian children - need to hold this stereotype in mind and question whether what I am reading (and writing) perpetuates this. Also noticing that time is an important contextual issue. Are the majority of characters of colour portrayed in historical fiction? If so, even when they are included, modern Black readers and Asians and other non-White readers will still not see a mirror of their own lives. Also - does this create a false implication that when we see racism	HOW characters are portrayed is key - despite increase in diversity in Caldecott characters, often stereotypes and insignificant to plot. Assumption of homogeneity by society (and researchers??) - talks about representation of Asian American characters tends to present Far East Asians and Indians more than other cultures. Learning at risk through stereotyping - 'model minority myth' can prevent Southeast Asian American students accessing learning support in school and impede their achievement. Discusses the PRESTIGIOUS POWER of book awards - increases book sales, circulation, attention, power to influence children's learning about the world. Finishes with the

Study	Method & Context	Findings	Reflexivity Considerations	Elements in the Study most pertinent to the Review Question: What does the academic literature say about representation of race in school and childhood literary fiction?
		discrimination and bullying. **Adjustment** efforts needed to launch a new life in America.Assimilation to culture, learning English. Researcher's surprise at only 1 book in the category. Hypothesises - either not many books written/published with Southeast Asian American protagonists OR they may not have "displayed award-winning quality". This text describes authentic experience of the writer and so cannot be labelled as a stereotype, complexity of narrative, Main character Ha does NOT fit the 'model minority myth' as she is not shy quiet or passive - she does have close relationship to her family but she is active in situations and wants to be in charge of her life.	depicted or stories of struggle that this is a problem of the past, which no longer exists?	statement that "The ethnicity of protagonists has nothing to do with the medal criteria" - this would be challenged from a CRT perspective. It is not in the specified criteria but the consistent lack of equitable representation would suggest that there is an obstacle (ingrained in the racist societal structures and biases) which are affecting the award judgements.

Appendix 6. Initial Map of Thematic Synthesis for Reviewed Literature
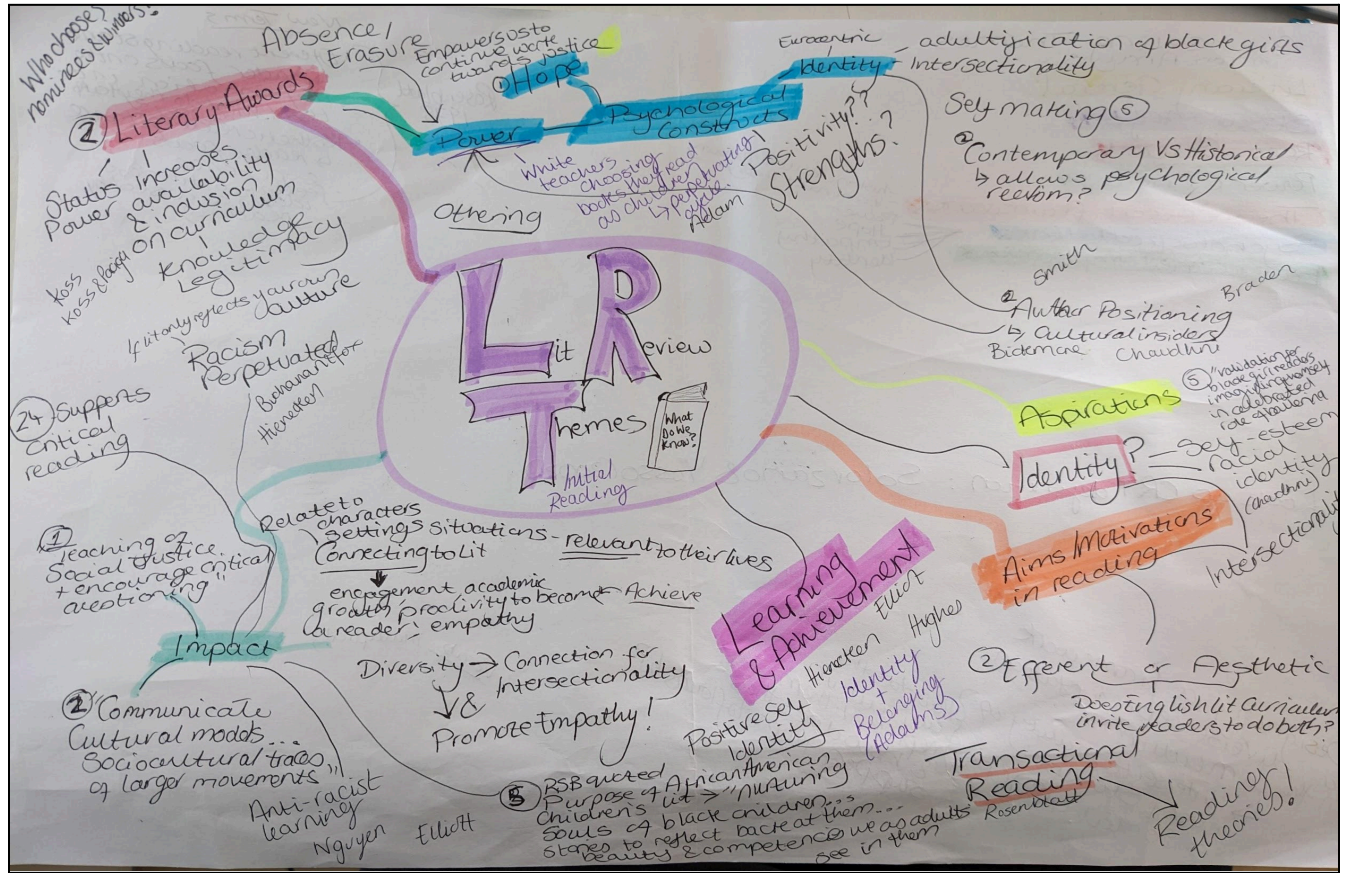
Appendix 7. Developed Map of Thematic Synthesis for Reviewed Literature

Appendix 8. Recruitment Advertisement

Appendix 9. Story Completion Stimulus Proforma

Story Completion Stimulus

*Please read the stimulus below and then add to/complete the story. There is no rule on how long it should be, but try to fill the page if you can (you can use an additional page if you choose to). Remember that I am asking for **your** imaginative response here and there will be no judgement on writing quality. The most important thing is that you only include your own ideas and phrasing. Please type your name to represent your signature at the bottom of the page to indicate that everything included in this written text is your own words and that no part of it has been copied/adapted from another source.*

Jordan and Alex were in their English lesson and the white teacher told them to take out their notebooks and the novel they were studying. "Today we are going to talk about the black characters in the novel..."

Please complete the story, explaining what happened next.

I _____ declare that this piece of writing is entirely my own work based on my imaginative response to the task. I further declare that I have not engaged the services of another person or information source, to either assist in, or complete this assignment.

Appendix 10. Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

An exploration of Black student's experiences of representation of Black culture and characters in school literature through the lens of Positive Psychology.

Contact person: Hannah Gilson

Email: U2190380@uel.ac.uk

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part or not, please carefully read through the following information which outlines what your participation would involve. Feel free to talk with others about the study (e.g., friends, family, etc.) before making your decision. If anything is unclear or you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above email.

Who am I?

My name is Hannah Gilson. I am a postgraduate student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London (UEL) and am studying for a Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. As part of my studies, I am conducting the research that you are being invited to participate in.

What is the purpose of the research?

I am conducting research into Black students' experiences of representation of Black culture and characters in literature in the classroom. This means questions like: what do you think about the books you have been given to read in school? How often are Black characters and cultures featured? When they are included do you think the representation is accurate and fair? How well do you think Black characters and culture in literature represent your life and experiences? How does reading about Black character and cultures in school literature make you feel?

The intention for the research is that it will promote anti-racism in the UK education system, by encouraging and informing the design of a more representative literature curriculum.

Why have I been invited to take part?

To address the study aims, I am inviting **Black individuals** to take part in my research. If you are **Black or mixed race**, are currently or previously educated in the UK and over the age of 16, you are eligible to take part in the study. It is entirely up to you whether you take part or not, participation is voluntary.

Please note – volunteers aged 16-18 will also need to obtain signed consent from their parent or guardian.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to take part?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to contribute to the study in two ways:

1. A short piece of **creative writing**, on a topic which will be set and explained by the researcher.

This will be emailed for you to complete and return in your own time; it is expected to take between 10 and 20 minutes.

If you have any questions about this piece of writing, you will be able to ask them either before consenting to take part in the study, or at any time before, during or after you complete the writing.

2. A **1:1 discussion** with the researcher discussing your experiences of reading about Black culture and characters in school literature.

This will not involve any test questions, it will be an informal chat; you can choose not to answer any questions you would prefer not to, without being asked to give a reason.

The discussion will take place online; you will be sent an invite to join a Microsoft Teams meeting online (you do not need a Microsoft Teams account to be able to do this) and is expected to take between 30 and 60 minutes. The meeting audio will be recorded for me to transcribe later but will not be played to anyone except the researcher (and possibly the research supervisor) and will be deleted as soon as transcription is complete. You will be asked at the start of the interview whether you want to have video recorded as well or if you would prefer to turn your camera off.

If you have any questions about this discussion, you will be able to ask them either before consenting to take part in the study, or at any time before, during or after the discussion.

During the interview you will be asked whether you would like to be contacted at a later point in the research cycle to give your views on the analysis of the data and to be updated on the findings. If you choose not to, you will not be contacted again.

Can I change my mind?

Yes, you can change your mind at any time and withdraw without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. If you would like to withdraw from the research, you can do so by not sending in the written text or by leaving the online discussion. If you withdraw, your data will not be used as part of the research.

Separately, you can also request to withdraw your data from being used even after you have taken part in the study, provided that this request is made within 2 weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

Are there any disadvantages to taking part?

Apart from giving up approximately 2 hours of your time in total, there are no disadvantages involved in taking part in the study.

How will the information I provide be kept secure and confidential?

- Participants will not be identified by the data collected, on any material resulting from the data collected, or in any write-up of the research. I will anonymise the data, using pseudonyms (made-up names), as soon as I have transcribed the video interviews. Creative writing responses will be separated from your personal data as soon as they are received and added to a shared participant document, so they cannot be connected to your real name either. If you would like to, you can choose the pseudonym your data is given so that you can identify yourself later in the finished thesis.
- In order to save the data (including videos, word documents and consent forms) I will use my university-approved cloud drive (which requires password access) in a dedicated folder - access to this will not be shared with anyone, with the exception of my Supervisor, if necessary. This will only be stored until the end of the research period and once the thesis has been approved (during summer 2024). After this time all personal data, video recordings and email correspondence will be permanently deleted.
- We will communicate and data will be transferred via secure UEL emails, which require password access.
- Only I, as the researcher will have access to any identifiable data (your name and contact details). Once the data is anonymised it may be shown to university tutors and research colleagues.
- Please note, your responses to the research will be confidential and will not be shared or discussed with anyone known or unknown to you (until after anonymisation). The one exception to this is if anything you say leads to concern for the safety of yourself or others. In this event, the information and your name would have to be passed onto the appropriate safeguarding authorities.

For the purposes of data protection, the University of East London is the Data Controller for the personal information processed as part of this research project. The University processes this information under the 'public task' condition contained in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Where the University processes particularly sensitive data (known as 'special category data' in the GDPR), it does so because the processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes. The University will ensure that the personal data it processes is held securely and processed in accordance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information about how the University processes personal data please see www.uel.ac.uk/about/about-uel/governance/information-assurance/data-protection

What will happen to the results of the research?

The research will be written up as a thesis and submitted for assessment. The thesis will be publicly available on UEL's online Repository [Registry of Open Access Repositories, ROAR]. Findings will also be disseminated to a range of audiences (e.g., academics, clinicians, public, etc.) through journal articles, conference presentations, talks, magazine articles, blogs. In all material produced, your identity will remain anonymous, in that, it will not be possible to identify you personally (personally identifying information will either be removed or replaced with pseudonyms.

You will be given the option to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed for which relevant contact details will need to be provided.

Anonymised research data will be securely stored by Dr. Helena Bunn for a maximum of 3 years, following which all data will be deleted.

Who has reviewed the research?

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Ethics Committee. This means that the Committee's evaluation of this ethics application has been guided by the standards of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Who can I contact if I have any questions/concerns?

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Researcher Contact Details:

Hannah Gilson, Trainee Educational Psychologist

Email: U2190380@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact my research supervisor Dr. Helena Bunn. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: **helena.bunn@uel.ac.uk**

or

Chair of School Ethics Committee: Dr Trishna Patel, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: t.patel@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 11. Participant Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

An exploration of Black students' experiences of representation of Black culture and characters in school literature through the lens of positive psychology.

Contact: Hannah Gilson

Email: u2190380@uel.ac.uk

	Please initial
I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet dated 16/06/23 (version 2) for the above study and that I have been given a copy to keep.	
I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time, without explanation or disadvantage.	
I understand that if I withdraw during the study, my data will not be used.	
I understand that I have 2 weeks from the date of the interview to withdraw my data from the study.	
I understand that the interview will be recorded using Microsoft Teams and that it will be up to me if I have just audio, or audio and video recorded.	

I understand that my personal information and data, including audio/video recordings from the research will be securely stored and remain confidential. Only the research team will have access to this information, to which I give my permission.	
It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the research has been completed.	
I understand that short, anonymised quotes from my creative writing response and interview may be used in material such as conference presentations, reports, articles in academic journals resulting from the study and that these will not personally identify me.	
I would like to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed and am willing to provide contact details for this to be sent to.	
I agree to take part in the above study.	
For the parent/guardian of participants aged 16-17 only: I am the legal parent/guardian of the person named below on this form. I have read the Participant Information sheet provided (dated 16/06/23; version 2) and have had an opportunity to ask any questions. I agree to the participation of the person named below in this study.	

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

………………………………………………………

Participant's Signature

………………………………………………………

For the parent/guardian of participants aged 16-17 only:

U2190380

Parent/Guardian's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

……………………………………………………………

Participant's Signature

……………………………………………………………

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

HANNAH GILSON

Researcher's Signature

H.Gilson

Date

4/7/23

Appendix 12. Participant Debrief Form

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF

An exploration of Black student's experiences of representation of Black culture and characters in school literature through the lens of Positive Psychology.

Thank you for participating in my research study on the experiences of young Black students of the ways Black culture and characters are represented in school literature and the ways that this may affect their psychological development. I especially wanted to focus on how this might affect them from a Positive Psychology perspective, a field which is interested in human flourishing and wellbeing. This document offers information that may be relevant in light of you having now taken part.

How will my data be managed?

The University of East London is the Data Controller for the personal information processed as part of this research project. The University will ensure that the personal data it processes is held securely and processed in accordance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. More detailed information is available in the Participant Information Sheet, which you received when you agreed to take part in the research.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The research will be written up as a thesis and submitted for assessment. The thesis will be publicly available on UEL's online Repository. Findings will also be disseminated to a range of audiences (e.g., academics, clinicians, public, etc.) through journal articles, conference presentations, talks, magazine articles, blogs. In all material produced, your identity will remain anonymous, in that, it will not be possible to identify you personally (personally identifying information will either be removed or replaced with a pseudonym).

You will be given the option to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed for which relevant contact details will need to be provided.

Anonymised research data will be securely stored by Dr. Helena Bunn for a maximum of 3 years, following which all data will be deleted.

What if I have been adversely affected by taking part?

It is not anticipated that you will have been adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise distress or harm of any kind. Nevertheless, it is possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way. If you have been affected in any of those ways, you may find the following resources/services helpful in relation to obtaining information and support:

- **Mind. Email -** Mind.org.uk

Mind provide advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

- **Bayo. Email -** bayo.ubele.org

Bayo is a space to find collectives, organisations and services from across the UK that offer mental health and wellbeing support to the Black community.

- **SARI. Webpage -** **https://saricharity.org.uk/contact-us/** **Phone -** 0117 942 0060

SARI provides free and confidential support for anyone who is a victim of hate crime.

- **BLAM** (Black Learning Achievement and Mental Health). Email - blamuk.org

Offers mental health support to people from Black British communities, including racial wellness workshops. Works to embed Black British cultural heritage and African and Caribbean histories into teaching.blamuk.org

Who can I contact if I have any questions/concerns?

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. **Hannah Gilson**

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If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact my research supervisor, Dr. Helena Bunn. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

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(Email: t.patel@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking part in my study.

Appendix 13. Image of The Transcription Process

Appendix 14. Examples of Completed Transcripts

1	and culture or even like across <u>time of when</u> it was written? What would you say are some of the
2	connections?

	Tee:
3	Yeah. So in the book [*Brave New World*] there's a character called John the Savage and he was
4	raised <u>in like a</u> different kind of society. So when he meets the other characters who are raised <u>in</u>
5	<u>like a</u> completely different, different traditions and different cultures to him, he is very taken aback
6	and very just very confused and I'd say that's like the same <u>with like growing</u> up in an ethnic
7	household. I would say, you know, you're raised a certain way you know taught certain morals.
8	However, if you're living in the UK, you go to school and you're kind <u>of like taught</u> completely
9	different things. So it's kind of like, you get two struggles because you're kind of learning two
10	different traditions or even if you're from other places, you have to learn multiple traditions, and
11	cultures, and it can be a very overwhelming <u>thing, to</u> go through.

	Interviewer:
12	Hmm, it sounds really overwhelming. So, can you give me some examples of what are some of the
13	<u>kind</u> of things that you feel you're taught at home and then it's very different when you go out into
14	UK society?

	Tee:
15	I would say, one thing is probably language. So, you know, you grew up and you hear how your
16	parents speak and your parents may when you're <u>from like an</u> ethnic background, your parents may
17	not speak, you know, perfect fluent English. So you kind of grow up speaking a certain way that you
18	think is like, okay? And then you go into school and wider society and you speak kind of maybe like

	Tee:
1	I would say it's more of like, it's not, maybe like a direct thing that they've said, but like in kind <u>of like</u>
2	<u>an</u> attitude. So let's say two students get in trouble, one student speaks better English than the
3	other. The student who speaks, you know, not perfect English would get in more trouble than the
4	one that speaks perfect English because the one that <u>speaking</u> perfect English, is like, you know,
5	being taken more seriously.

6	Interviewer:Mmm. Oh yeah. I see what you mean. Absolutely. And is there any role for literature and
7	books… any way that having more representation in literature could help that issue?

	Tee:
8	Yeah, I think… I think just having characters who aren't, who come from ethnic backgrounds really
9	can actually help with that. Yeah, I think, I think like a lot of people just, you know, need someone to
10	relate to and it's very difficult because in my English Literature class, there's not many People from
11	ethnic backgrounds in my class and I think there would be, if there were just characters that they
12	could relate to, and that they could feel some kind of like connection to.

13	Interviewer: That's important, isn't it?

	Tee:
14	I think it just intrigues the person more in all honesty. Like, you know, when it's like when you're
15	scrolling through social media, you are more likely to like posts that apply to you, you know, and be
	like oh, that's so relatable to me, and just enjoy it more. So, I think that's really the same <u>with like</u>
1	anything really. Especially, literature, you just, you want to read things that you can relate to and
2	that apply to you and your life and it's more likely to kind of, support you and benefit you.

4

	Ava:	
1	So the NEA [*non-examined assessment*] was literally all up to us. So, we were given an example of an old	
2	one. We were told that we could do it literally our own or, like the school had a structure we could use which	
3	was a Charles Dickens novel and but most of us did our own. Our teachers just said pick a theme and pick a lit	
4	and a non-lit text that could music, a documentary, could be a movie, could be an interview, we had free reign	
5	of kind of everything, so it could literally be whatever we wanted.	
6	Interviewer: That's so interesting. I've never heard of using a non-literature text before. Ooh exciting.	
	Ava:	
7	Yeah. It was really nice. The main basis was just to show how the theme is represented in both extracts.	
8	And not much of a comparison but more like this did this and this did this and in the conclusion we just said	
9	this was similar and this was different. So it was good.	
10	Interviewer: What text did you choose?	
	Ava:	
11	So, for the literary text, I use a book by Angie… I can't remember her last name. But it was called *The Hate*	
12	*You Give [Angie Thomas]*. I read it. I want to say maybe year seven, year eight and even though I like English,	
13	I sometimes don't like reading books. But I managed to just read this whole book and like from when I opened	
14	it, I just never stopped by.	
15	So it was a good read and so I used that and then for the non lit text, to compare it with I used song lyrics by	
16	Dave, I used his… Brit Awards performance of the song *Black*.	
17	And the theme that I compared was the Black experience and just how Black people are portrayed in each	
18	one, and what they go through. So, the main character in the novel is called Star, so what Star goes through,	
19	and what Dave kind of talks about. So yeah, that was it.	
20	Interviewer: Well it sounds fantastic and so what kind of conclusions did you draw then? So how did you feel?	

5

	Ava:	
1	I found that there's no specific thing that is the Black experience. It's like that's the title and then there's lots of.	
2	like other chemicals under one umbrella. There's loads of little branches and legs that kind of come off it. And	
3	even though most things happen to one person, it kind of affects the majority, not even the majority, it just	
4	affects everyone, like something could happen in America but then it affects people in Britain, or people in	
5	Thailand or like literally worldwide Russia, it doesn't really matter.	
6	And I found that, I think a lot of Black people, just feel things at a very empathetic level. So even though it's	
7	happening to someone across the road, even in the book, like what Star goes through, you feel like it could be	
8	you like, it feels that you're in that position as well, like you're struggling with what they're struggling as well.	
9	But I found some even though like books, the book and the song have two different storylines, the song was	
10	about, they've grown up in London and his friends finding out their heritage and Star was more a teenage girl	
11	going to high school, private school but she lived in a very predominantly Black community but she went to	
12	school in a predominantly White community and she also witnessed, when she was younger, her best friend	
13	being killed.	
14	And then when she was like 16, 17 her best friends, again, was a boy who was shot by police, so, it's two very	
15	different storylines. Yet, the experience is still the same and the ending is still the same and the hurt is still the	
16	same and so yeah, that's what I kind of concluded.	
17	Interviewer: That's really powerful. Have you got your marks back already?	
	Ava:	
18	Not yet. They're being marked, I think we're gonna get them back like in the winter and then I think again in the	
19	spring because our teachers mark it and then they get sent off to like be checked and stuff. So yeah.	
20	Interviewer: Yeah, well it sounds like you've done brilliantly. That sounds really good. Well done. And I want to	
21	go back to a couple of things you said, so you you just said that you feel like and I'm paraphrasing a little bit	
22	here. But so that empathy is a particular characteristic of Black people? So do you, can you talk to me a bit	

Appendix 15. Extracts from Reflexive Journal

Uni Day: Renewed Confidence

Friday, November 11, 2022   5:20 PM

Good day at uni today, which I began with resentment that I just needed to have a study day to be able to get on with writing my proposal, but in fact has given me the energy and focus I needed.

As usual talking to Cohort 16 gave me renewed confidence and sense of all being in this together.
- Hearing about other people's plans gives me helpful reflection points of my own (eg. Recruitment / Analysis / Points to explore in Risk Assessment

Things that have resonated with me today:

"It's not a tattoo!"
"What is your unique contribution?"
Complexities and Vital need for pursuing anti-racist action
Making decisions / justifying – think everything through, record everything

• *Reflections: Positioning and Power

Friday, September 22, 2023   1:39 PM

- Thoughts on the canon – not questioning the value of the text / author or how the text itself would influence/ psychological impact on students

- BUT - did consider how it would make black students feel in terms of other students – being alert to atmosphere/comments. Informally checking in after the lesson etc

- Is it problematic for me to be focused on a positive psychology perspective when exploring the position of black students in white majority schools?– are the problems too endemic for me to look for positives from a white perspective?

- Discussion with H about the subjective nature of literature, how each person will respond differently to a text (eg. Participant L loves Harry Potter, others view it dismissively "a little white boy"). Mentioned the Transactional Theory of reading – H said this is helpful and must incorporate into the Discussion chapter.
  ○ Found an article where Jacqueline Wilson told a mixed race interviewer that Tracey Beaker was intended to be mixed race and that she had thought this was obvious to readers through her description and the illustrator's depiction.
  https://confidentials.com/body/tracy-beaker-looks-just-like-you-meeting-jacqueline-wilson-the-author-who-helped-shape-my-childhood
  Is this disingenuous? – why is the image on the cover so white if she intended readers to identify her as mixed race and why did she not comment when a white actress was cast in the tv series? Think of the power this would have had if one of the main modern children's protagonists was visibly/proudly mixed race. Interested to know what Participant H and Participant My (who both mentioned reading JW as children) would think about this?

Retrospective insights...

Wednesday, January 24, 2024   10:25 AM

An idea is emerging while reviewing my codes.... I had considered Memory as a potential theme and I am wondering if tied into that is something regarding retrospective consideration of the experiences of texts and classroom discussions/dynamics.

This is obviously facilitated by my mix of current student participants reflecting on literatue they have read in the past couple of years and an experience they are still in and in my adult participants who are 20+ years out of school.

Anyway -Participant 8 (adult) specifically has named the sensation of a physical discomfort experienced at the time of being in the classroom which was elusive/subconscious/indefinable at the time and which they now recognise as being directly related to a sense of (WHAT???) the racism in the text/feeling that their teachers were uncomfortable regarding race and would not protect them in a situation where they felt under attack/discriminated against.

Definitely very interesting to explore this sensation/concept while reviewing all the codes/transcripts but particularly those relating to participants mentioning memories/lack of memories.

Peer Supervision On Data Analysis

Friday, February 02, 2024   11:23 AM

Sharing with peers – generally feeling of exhaustion, confusing, changing goal posts.

Sense of isolation on the Data Island

I think my peers could see the sense of the story I was telling. I don't think they recognised necessarily the main plot points I wanted to get across and maybe this is a limitation in my explanation – or have I got too close to the data and need to step back to see if there is a clear thread??

Helpful talk around the Isolation sub theme and how this doesn't quite capture the meaning that I wanted through the participants use of the term "under a spotlight" - phrases discussed were being othered or judged, feeling exposed or just using the spotlight term itself. I think using othered is helpful as it fits with the themes around feeling a pressure to be a voice for the black experience and the literal othering of "Poetry from Other Cultures"

Questioning of my Positivity theme – should it be classified as Hope? I don't feel that encompasses all that was shared, especially about enjoyment of the act of reading, positive role models in lit, teachers who have

So what? Teachers to consider black students perspectives. EPs to consider this aspect of the psychological implications for black students (esp in predominantly white classrooms) - so many complexities. Also for EP implications – our work focuses on student voice, person-centred. Important to acknowledge that many aspects of the curriculum and school experience are NOT person-centred and have not even considered the student perspective and so we are working at odds with this system.

Reflections on Authors and Literature Referenced in Interviews

Saturday, February 17, 2024   12:16 PM

- Most positive experiences are from independent choices
- Black authors are almost exclusively positive experience (only exception is John Agard's Half Caste – this was due to the participant's experience of being othered in the classroom while reading the poem, rather than the poem/content itself)
- Some books were experienced differently by different participants (eg OMAM, HP) or some participants had mixed views on a book (eg enjoying Enid Blyton/Othello despite racist portrayals)
- Some participants' views of texts were influenced by their perception of the character's race (e.g. participant really enjoyed Handmaid because the tv series depicted some characters as black/some participants had strong negative reaction to Tempest due to film portrayal of Caliban as black)
- Double number of white school lit mentioned as black

Thoughts shared in peer discussion:
- Make the key clearer – not easy to spot
- Make the pos&neg ones crossed or something to make clearer?

- School-Non Black most negative experiences
- Small amount of school lit by black authors, although there is clearly a wide degree of choice judging by non-school black author section
- No mixed feelings in black author section – only positive or negative
- Biggest number of mixed feelings in non-black-school category. Is there a tendency to be more critical of school vs independently chosen literature?

Appendix 16. Extracts from Coded Transcripts

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19	Eve: And um, but my son had a very hard time at school. He's now in year 10 and he's been made to read several texts that have racial slurs and he has then tried those slurs out in school and been excluded for them. [Interviewer: Ohh] He's also had people screaming the slurs at him. So it's had a different effect, because I think largely because my daughter goes to a girls' school, you know, the response to everything is far more considered, whereas because my son is in a mixed school, where there's boys and other things you know. Um, the text also drew out other problematic behaviour even from him. So he had a response to them, as did other kids. So it's not neutral, you know that you, you know, you can't be reading text like this in this environment when we don't live in an equal society, it's not neutral, is it so? You know it's it's, um, well, I don't know what the word is, but um. To this day I'm, if I think back on what I went through because of what we read, you know, literally makes my, um, the hairs on my skin bristle because I remember to this day like how it made me feel and how, umm… how dehumanising it was? You know? Even at this school the black girls, African, Afro-Caribbean, Somali, and and some of the Bangladeshi students also complain to the English teaching staff about books that contain racial slurs and being made to read them, study them. This happens every year without fail. Its only a handful of students each time but they all they all say the same thing every year. I've been here 19 years and it occurs every year. The English department persist with the same texts. [Interviewer: Yes] And also because, to be frank, I never agreed with the books being of any real literary value, do you understand or social value?

Handwritten annotations (right margin and within text):

6

Text encouraging racist language

injustice of child punished for using language taught in text

texts encouraging antisocial/problematic behaviours

racism in society means racism in texts is dangerous

Texts with negative portrayals of black characters are dehumanising

Powerful negative feelings from text

modern problem continues of racist language

Teachers not listening to black students

Books exploring racism in schools lack value.

Interviewer: Yes, can you talk to me more about that?

Eve: The fact that they're selected is an absolute farce, given what is available as literature. You know, the fact that we in the English department here still have 600 copies *Of Mice and Men*, and they bring it out every year because they say "Ohh well, it's on the curriculum", it's just an absolute farce. Given how much literature there is in the world. Absolute farce.	Literature choices in school antiquated/lack value

° Repetitive without thought?

° Lack of diverse choices in school although vast choice of lit in the world.

1	superstar, not superstar like superhero type little girl. So I'd introduce those, more of that kind of
2	literature from different cultures and, and, you know, we're not just talk about the blacks, you've got
3	Arab, you've got Asian, really just stories that people can look at.
4	And you may have heard of this… off the top of my head. Oh my god, it's a magazine. And it's done
5	so well but it really took off in 2020. I think it's called *Cocoa Magazine*. Yeah that's it. *Cocoa Girls*
6	and *Cocoa Boys* I'm sure, yeah, sure that's already in some scores have picked that up and they
7	have regular subscriptions to it but it's just you've got different channels. So okay, it's the hard,
8	nothing beats the books and stuff. So in terms of that it's just making sure that you know rather than
9	just assuming what the students need, to go out and do the research to find it before you bring it in.
10	That's what I'm talking about, whether there's a body that goes and looks at all this stuff and
11	assesses and look at what's got on in the communities. What's, you know, what's relevant today in
12	society? And I don't think we should negate from the classics at all. Do you know what I mean? But
13	to your point earlier, the conversation might be different because like you know, Enid Blyton, you
14	know, if you read that today, it's like, "Say, what?" Do you know what I mean? [I: Yeah.] But it's also
15	helping you know, that growth piece to understand. This is how it was back then.
16	You know, I'm not saying it's right and how have we grown and evolved to the kind of books that are
17	in there today. So and sometimes as I say, you've got to know where you've been to know where
18	you're going, so to understand. Not… set a book down if they're through and through racist. Yes,
19	you're not going to socialise them but for people to have an understanding of what it was like for
20	their parents or their grandparents, this is the kind of stuff that was, you know, it's an integral part of
21	the culture, you know, the learning culture, I think.
22	
23	I: Yeah, just to clarify, so you're saying that we can even learn from those books that are problematic

Margin notes:

20

Black characters as superheros (fantasy genre)

Diversity across literary mediums

Lit should be assessed for social relevance

Argument that historic lit with racism should be cancelled as it gives an insight into reality of racism for modern generation

Appendix 17. Extracts from Electronic Codebook: Phase 2 Coding

11. Marginalising / degrading portrayal of 'black' character. Enslavement & mocking representation of Caliban (Tempest)	I remember reading The Tempest Shakespeare's, The Tempest and I can't recall the exact name. But there was a black character where he was basically presented as like a slave pretty much and it like the character of him was just, it was quite like, comedic really. Like it wasn't as serious as all the other characters and yeah. (p.10; l.1-4)
12. Reimagined as black? Character described as slave in play is cast as black in modern movie adaptation	I remember we were discussing it in class and I think my yeah, my teacher kind of based it on the description of him and we were also watching the movie, the film of it at the same time. So in all the depictions, he was just presented or depicted as a black character. (p.10;l.9-11)
13. Historical context is important in considering portrayal of black characters. Racism against black characters is authentic portrayal of historic racism in society	I suppose like based on the time, the time period in which like Shakespeare wrote, it wouldn't really be as far-fetched or like negative as how it would be seen now. I don't think it's like I don't think it's like awful to depict him like that because I suppose it's quite accurate for the time period.(p10-11; l.16-2)
14.Peer relationships/perspectives affects response to text. Sense of belonging created by presence of other black stuents in the classroom. Community agreement on response.	my class is pretty diverse. So we would all have like a discussion about it and say, like, we would kind of always agree. Like that this is kind of, you know, a bit off, [mmm]. But I think because everyone else agreed on that it didn't make me specifically feel uncomfortable because, like, everyone in the class knew, okay, like we're all uncomfortable about this. So, it's like, I wasn't really, alone in it. (p.11;l.11-15)
15. Importance of peer reactions to texts to feel validated in your own experience/response.	there are some people that I know who have gone to schools where like, you know, the majority of the people in the class are white. So they felt very, just alone and just as if maybe they're being a bit too sensitive, or being a bit too, you know… judgemental of like the text that they're reading [mmm]. But yeah, when you're in a class where everyone is agreeing on the fact that this could make someone potentially feel uncomfortable… you feel like you know your opinion isn't like, it's validated basically. (p.12;l.3-8)
16. Feels teacher rushed exploration of racial inequality - suggestion that teacher felt uncomfortable discussing race? Or teacher prioritising deadlines/content over moral discussions?	like my teacher at the time she acknowledged it, but I think she was just kind of desperate to get through the class or, like, get through the text. So she kind of just like rushed over it a bit.(p.12;l.11-13)
17. Topic of racism is avoided by majorty of white teachers in the school	I n my school, my teachers tend to get very uncomfortable...Even in assemblies that we have, they most of the time they get a black student or black teachers, talk about it rather than a white teacher. I think a lot of my white teachers are just like scared of saying the wrong thing, I would say. So yeah, they just kind of avoid talking about it. (p.13;l.3-8)

18. Dehumanising portrayals of black characters. Discussion of portrayal of slavery in text creates association with black characters.	"I do believe that the depiction of black people at that time, was to ensure that people didn't see them as human because that was the main justification for having them enslaved. So, it's kind of like, you know, if they, if he just depicted him as a man being a slave, then it's kind of "O no, this is a bit too human, you know, this, this might be morally a bit wrong, whereas, if you depict them as an animal, then it's like, "oh, that's an animal." (p.27;l.4-8)
19. Teachers are uncomfortable discussing racism. Teachers lack of interest/respect for students' views/perspectives.	"we didn't talk much about him being a slave. Like, I think my English teacher was actually very avoidant when it came to subjects of race. It was only when I changed groups in the next year or something and that teacher was a lot more like vocal about race and stuff. And but that the English teacher I had… funny because I used to imagine her, she reminded me of Miss Honey from Matilda, right? SHe was very sweet. And like yeah, you know, but not so much of a social justice warrior as Miss Honey, obviously clearly but she was very like, sweet and kind and, you know, she had that kind of innocent sort of thing about her. But when I think back, I just think to myself well, she was completely avoidant. She never liked, you know, anything that she deemed as conflict she wasn't gonna get involved in and a lot of the time that was when someone had, you know, something to say. And I feel like, I think a lot of teachers don't like student feedback from my experience. "(p.27;l.9-19)
20. Negative physiological reaction to racism in texts and lack of teacher support in class discussions	" I feel like at the time, I just felt like something bad in my stomach. In that like I think, it's only been looking back as an adult that I've been able to reflect and thing ok that wasn't an enjoyable experience or I felt really unprotected. But I think in the moment I felt a sense of injustice. And a sickness and a sadness and I think I felt a melancholic feeling, whenever I went to school. That's kind of how it made me feel. " (p.28;l.5-9)
21. Retrospective consideration of level of awareness experienced in the moment of reading lit/discussing racism in class. Lack of support from teacher (lack of teacher's cultural competency in managing discussions of racism) evokes painful emotional reactions	"it wasn't anything where I understood. I think I had an inkling. Or not even an inkling, but just kind of It's almost like, you know it, but you don't know how to say it to someone else. [I:Yeah]. Or you don't say it because you feel like no one's gonna understand you and no one's gonna believe you so you just keep it yourself. But you know that something's happening, if that makes sense? You know, you don't feel protected." (p.28;l.10-14)
22. Passion / positivity relating to memories of reading (NOT school literature - influenced by parent).	" I loved it, I still love reading. I still do love reading, actually, I think I think that it's very important just to be well-read and expand your vocabulary and my mum was very big on reading when I was younger, but I didn't even need to be kind of forced because that was like every night I'm going to bed and I'm falling asleep with the book of my face, you know?" (p.29;l.15-18)
23. Importance/pleasure of reading. Reading as a pleasurable pastime.	" I used to love it and I remember like and when we had to do like you know, say read this chapter tonight but I would just end up reading the whole book and that was that, you know? So yeah I still love reading and I think I think that it's important for children to read." (p.30;l.1-2)

| Story Completion	Tee	Ava	Marcia	Eve
1. SC Positioned in the minority in their class. White peers do not understand experiences.	1. Makes connections between lit and society. Prefers lit which relates to modern themes. Describes a lack of sensitivity in modern generation.	1. People are drawn to commonalities of identity	1. Storytelling evokes positive emotions	1. Strong negative emotions related to texts
2. SC Racism is encouraged in school. Black students segregated / isolated.	2. Concerned about apathy in peers. Need for discussion / facing of problems for youth (predominantly black youth)		2. Self-representation due to lack of authentic portrayals	2. Personal pain caused by racist language in text. student lack of autonomy. love of literature damaged by experience in school.
3. SC Black students segregated / isolated.	3. Enjoys self-improvement, non-fiction texts	2. Feeling responsibility / pressure to represent a black perspective in the classroom	3. Joy and dedication to reading	3. Explicit racist langugae used in texts - direct causation of racist abuse. Racist language /behaviours in the book gave permission to racism in real world.
4. SC Black students segregated / isolated. No hope for inclusion in the future.	4. Lit for education / social commentary	3. Regrets / questions why she needs to represent a black perspective	4. Black absence was assumed as the status quo, including by black students. - Sought out books independently due to personal literary passion.	4. Incessant racist bullying related to the text. Racist language was normalised by the text.
5. SC Black students feeling exhausted/disappointed by experience in school	5.School learning is detrimental to creativity / inidividualism	4. Teach skillfully introduces discussion of race/racism issues.	5. Strong positive emotions connected to reading.	5. Passion and expertise in literature. Direct link between racism and portrayal of black characters and racist language in texts.
6. SC Unfairly punished / isolated if questioning treatment of race.	6. Philosophy on education - views it as being damaging to young people's creativity	5. Text by black author/black characters - found easy and enjoyable to read	6. Unaware of lack of representation while primary school age. Not consciously affected in childhood.	6. Isolated in sschool as only black pupil. No support from school staff/saw teachers as aligned with racist abusers.
7. SC Race associated with class - negative stereotyping.	7. Pressure of exam study reduces enjoyment of literature	6. Black experience cannot be reduced / classified as one thing	7.On the portrayal of black culture in books by black American authors (provided by family, not school). Literature creating aspriational portrayal.	7. Some peers acted as allies/supporters.
8. SC School / teacher viewed as racist.	8. Litcreates personal connections. Multiple applications / interpretations of meaning	7. Sense of global black community and joint impact	8. Narrative from struggle to success.	8. Texts assumed racial inequality as the norm / no discussion of presentation / treatment of black characters in classroom.
9. SC An unhappy school experience.	9. Enriching / instructional role of lit. Lit for moral/ social justice education	8. Sees empathy as a trait associated with the black experience - link to sense of responsibility to represent black voice?	9. American literature more representative of black culture than British texts.	9. Focus on inequality among white characters but not racial discrimination
10. SC Black students segregated / isolated.	10. Portrayal of black characters is rare, those that are included are marginalised	9. Commonalities across black experience; shared emotional response	10.Some black American texts but lack of representation of a British experience she could identify with.	10. Unthinkable to have had black authors on the curriculum

Appendix 18. Extract from Planning Notes for Phase 3: Generation of Initial Candidate Themes
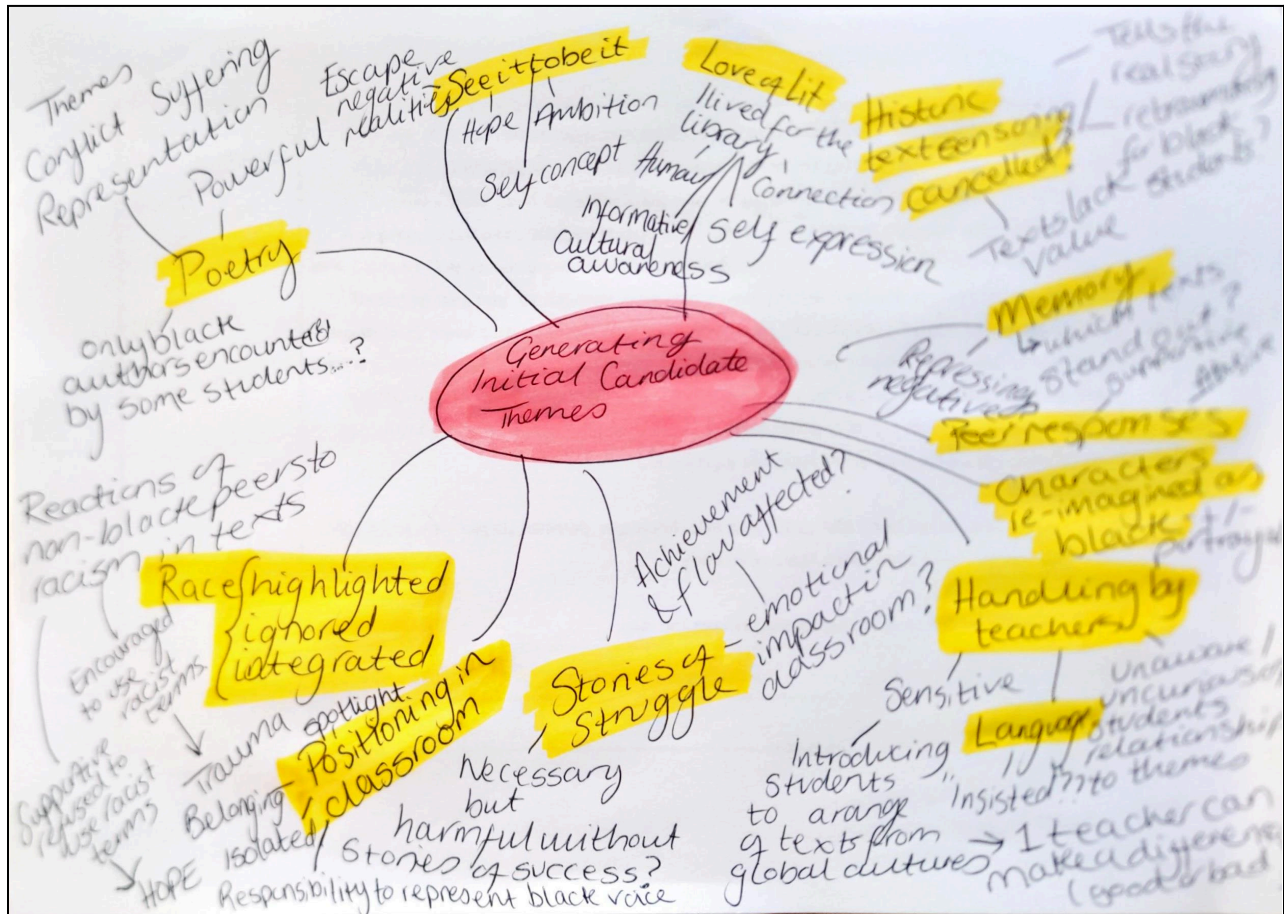
Identifying with Characters	Connection / Community	Achievement / Academic	Positioning In Classroom / Peers	Positive Teacher Approaches	Negative Teacher Responses / Approaches
25. Feels readers connect and benefit more with characters they can identify with / have commonalities with	30. Relationship to texts is dependent on personal experience and social context	8. Narrative from struggle to success.	6. Isolated in sschool as only black pupil. No support from school staff/saw teachers as aligned with racist abusers.	34. Teachers were competent in facilitating conversations about race, did not make students feel uncomfortable (p.14;l.2-4)	8. Texts assumed racial inequality as the norm / no discussion of presentation / treatment of black characters in classroom.
10. Felt a deep connection to black female in the text (also school student , similar age - many commonalities beyond race between reader and character)	8. Litcreates personal connections. Multiple applications / interpretations of meaning	16. Achievement / optimism - positive emotion is found within the suffering	7. Some peers acted as allies/supporters.	35. Teachers were sensitive to students reactions to portrayals of racism (p.14;l.10-12)	9. Focus on inequality among white characters but not racial discrimination
52. Connection to a text is more immediate and meaningful if the reader can see their own identity / experiences	11. SC Feeling that only another black student can understand. Gratitude for one friendship.	46. Danger of a single story. Need to depict black aspiration. excellence / success in lit to counter negative stereotypes	14.Peer relationships/perspectives affects response to text. Sense of belonging created by presence of other black stuents in the classroom. Community agreement on response.	41. Teacher considered choice of text and its effect on the black students (p.15;l.17-19)	10. Unthinkable to have had black authors on the curriculum
58. Feels a closer connection to black characters in books; more powerful impact of the text because of commonality in identity (p.21;l.10-15)	25. Highlights universal themes in literature / storytelling	42. Difficult to manage emotional elements if required to write about race in an exam, as a black student. Affects achievement and Flow	15. Importance of peer reactions to texts to feel validated in your own experience/response.	49. Positive memories of a primary school teacher who shared books and songs from Caribbean culture (p.19;l.1-8)	15. Problem of racist language in texts continues in present day. Teachers are not listening to black students' opinions about texts.
59. Indefinable connection to others of the same ethnicity; can create a sense of empowerment through community (p.22;l.4-10)	1. People are drawn to commonalities of identity	43. Achievement affected - more difficult to discuss race in an exam answer about a text if you have been a victim of racism or are a black student considering racism againt black community	27. Uncomfortable/ upsetting experience for black students to discuss race and racism in class setting (especially in predominantly white class) (p.14;l.18)	51. Felt a close connection to the teacher because they shared these affirming texts of Caribbean cultural experiences (p.19;l.9-13)	17. Literature chlices in school are antiquated/lack value/quality.

What literature is validated / considered worthy of study?	What impact can literature have?	Memory / Awareness of Black Representation when a child reader?	Language	Future Change	Transactional Reading / What are participants looking for in lit?
22. Select classics / greats from global south. Positioning of black African writer's as greats, rather than assuming the voices which dominate the British literary canon	23. Role of literature to teach empathy and expand world views.	8. Stresses good memory but cannot recall any books featuring black-characters (p.7;l.2-3)	2. Personal pain caused by racist language in text. student lack of autonomy. love of literature damaged by experience in school.	21. Changes? Global literature will enrich the curriculum	20. Makes connection between literature text (BNW) and experience of culture clash of growing up black in modern UK.
21. Accessibility of literature - can seem to be elitest (P.12;l.3-7)	1. Makes connections between lit and society. Prefers lit which relates to modern themes. Describes a lack of sensitivity in modern generation.	23. Lack of memories / absence of black characters?	3. Explicit racist langugae used in texts - direct causation of racist abuse. Racist language /behaviours in the book gave permission to racism in real world.	37. Change? Increase intersectionality of portrayals. Consider positioning of black characters. Include strong black females.	2. Focuses on character development and relationships in stories GE (p.3;l.6-9)
11. What characters/cultures are portrayed in literature is indicitive of what people value in society. If black 'everyday' experiences are excluded, are they considered important? (p.8;l.12-17)	3. Enjoys self-improvement, non-fiction texts	36. Not consciously aware of black portrayal/absence while younger. Lacked awareness of black authors - this limited her view of the capability of black people. Now beginning to make own discoveries of texts.	4. Incessant racist bullying related to the text. Racist language was normalised by the text.	38. Change? Desires range of character types for black females - move away from negative stereotyping	3. Values self-awareness in characters GE (p.3;l.13-14)
34. Surprised by inclusion of historic texts in modern curriculum (p.16;l.19-20)	4. Lit for education / social commentary	5. Unaware of representation of race when a child reader. (p.4;l16-19)	21. Feels black cultural dialect is not considered acceptable in English society. Expereince that black people are judged by dialect.	35. Changes? Increase the diversity in the types of stories told about black characters/culture	14. Discusses role of class in Great Expectations and it's impact on a characters fate (p.9;l.16-17)
39. Literature that is most impactful on modern black readers is not necessarily recognised by the establishment / awards (p.21;l.14-17	8. Litcreates personal connections. Multiple applications / interpretations of meaning	50. Positive stories of black experience and culture creates happy memories of reading (p.19;l.7-13)	22. Feels people underestimate her intelligence due to language use.	33. Changes? Make sure text choices are accessible and relevant to modern society (p.16;l.11-16).	18. Enjoys fantasy genre; passionate positive emotion evoked by childhood reading (p.12;l.14-16)
32. Value of teen interest is underappreciated. Knowledge validation	9. Enriching / instructional role of lit. Lit for moral/ social justice education	61. Are young children consciously aware of the race of characters? (p.22;l 18-19)	23. Experience that language traits unfairly prejudice behaviour system in school - implication that black students disproportionaltely punished	34. Changes? Introduce more texts with black characters (and other ethnicity groups) as heroes/superheroes /fantasy genre (p.20;l.1-2)	23. Inspired / motivated by the description of a book character (Hermione) (p.15;l.1-2)
37. Questionning the curriculum selection - how are texts chosen and why can the specification not be broadened?	19. Lit as a tool for social reflection / growth. If race/racism is excluded from literature it is also excluded from school conversation	21. Retrospective consideration of level of awareness experienced in the moment of reading lit/discussing racism in class. Lack of support from teacher (lack of teacher's cultural competency in managing discussions of racism) evokes painful emotional reactions	32. Describes negative experience with racist language read in school text (OMAM) (p.19;l4-7)	35. Diversity should be across literary mediums (e.g. include magazines in school featuring black characters (p.20;l.5-6)	24. Relates more easily/naturally to positive descriptions of black characters/experience; feels unaffected by negative portrayals because it is imaginary (p.15;l.9-11)

Appendix 19. Extract from Planning Notes from Phase 4: Reviewing & Developing Themes
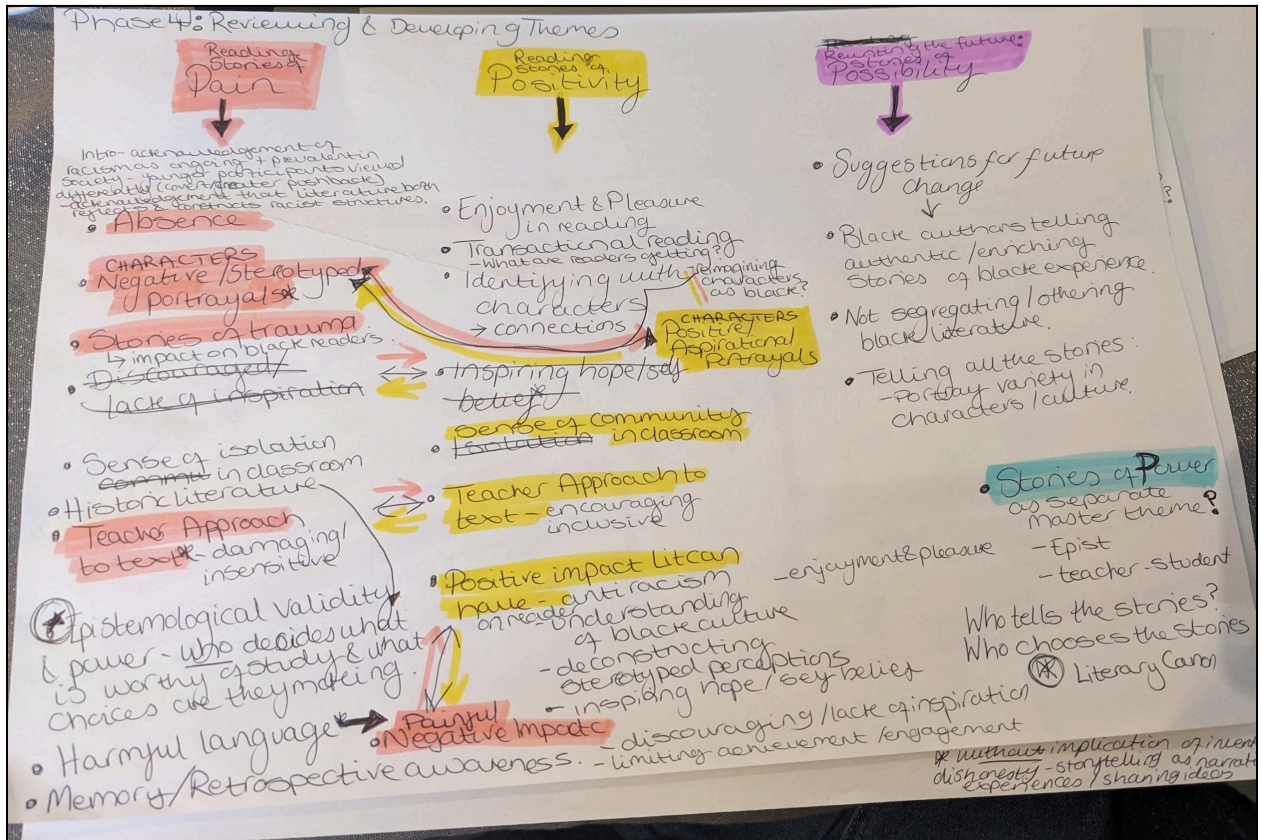
Appendix 20. Extract from Planning Notes from Phase 5: Refining, Defining & Naming Themes

	Reading Stories of the Past	Reading Stories of Pain	Reading Stories of Positivity	Reading Stories of Power	Writing Stories of Future Possibility - what changes would participants like to see in school literature?
Overarching Themes					
Sub-Themes	Historic Literature - Absence of black characters. -Racism in historic literature is an authentic portrayal of society. - Racist language & stories of slavery, dehumanisation & discrimination.	Black Characters: Victimised, Stereotyped or Absent	Black Characters: Authentic, Aspirational, Relatable	Epistemological Validity - which texts are considered valid for study n UK schools?	Black Authors telling Black Stories
	Memories of Stories & Classroom Experiences - what do participants remember from childhood reading, hw might memories have been affected by emotional response and what has changed in perspectives over time?	Damaging Teacher Approaches to Literature	InclusiveTeacher Approaches to Literature	Student Voice - are students views listened to in the classroom? - What do participants choose to read outside of school literature?	Listen & Learn From Black Students - psychological impact of text on students should be prioritised
		Sense of Being Othered in the Classroom	Sense of Community in the Classroom		Black Stories Matter - Literature should portray a variety of black characters and culture. - Integrating literature focused on black culture and characters into the standard curriculum choices, not as a standalone / add on topic

Literature of Past & Pain

Black Characters: Victimised, Stereotyped or Absent	Racism as a theme of literature / Historic Literature	Damaging Teacher Approaches to Literature	Sense of Isolation or Othering in the Classroom
1. Strong negative emotions related to texts	11. Emotional upset from reading about historic racism in literature - parent had to support. Suggestion that society has improved?	8. Texts assumed racial inequality as the norm / no discussion of presentation / treatment of black characters in classroom.	6. Isolated in sschool as only black pupil. No support from school staff/saw teachers as aligned with racist abusers.
V / S 14.Texts with negative portrayals of black characters are dehumanising. Powerfully negative emotional reactions to texts.	26. historical literature exploring racism is dangerous as it minimises current racism (allowing people to dismiss racism as a historic problem which no longer exists)	9. Focus on inequality among white characters but not racial discrimination	27. Uncomfortable/ upsetting experience for black students to discuss race and racism in class setting (especially in predominantly white class) (p.14;l.18)
15. Engagement with literature requires relatability to evoke interest for readers - this will get worse over time with lack of representation (p.9;l.13-15)	12.Texts encouraging racist language, injustice of child punished for using language taught in text	15. Problem of racist language in texts continues in present day. Teachers are not listening to black students' opinions about texts.	1. SC Positioned in the minority in their class. White peers do not understand experiences.
17. Negative emotions (sadness/disappointment associated with lack of diverse representation in school literature (p.10;l.18-20)	13. texts encouraging anti-social/problematic behaviours. Racism in society means that racism in texts is dangerous.	17. Literature chiices in school are antiquated/lack value/quality.	2. SC Racism is encouraged in school. Black students segregated / isolated.
31. Saw literature featuring black experiences in school as something to be endured not enjoyed (p.15;l.9-12)	7. Pressure of exam study reduces enjoyment of literature	18. Lack of diverse choices in school despite vast choice of texts available. Repetitive choices without thought for other options.	3. SC Black students segregated / isolated.
15. Physical reaction to racism. Explores difficulty for students to identify/process/express the impact of negative portrayals of black characters	20. Discusses racism as a social product and literature as a tool for perpetuating racism and racist stereotypes.	16. Feels teacher rushed exploration of racial inequality - suggestion that teacher felt uncomfortable discussing race? Or teacher prioritising deadlines/content over moral discussions?	4. SC Black students segregated / isolated. No hope for inclusion in the future.
4. Black absence was assumed as the status quo, including by black students. - Sought out books independently due to personal literary passion.	29. Pain created by racism explored in texts / racist portrayals. Black readers have a personal connection to descriptions of racism. Racism is ongoing and prevalent, not historic	17. Topic of racism is avoided by majorty of white teachers in the school	10. SC Black students segregated / isolated.
6. Unaware of lack of representation while primary school age. Not consciously affected in childhood.	10. Books with black characters often fcus on trauma so it is enjoyable to read a book which is about a black females holistic life experiences Queenie) (p.7;l.14-17)	18. Black students perceive avoidance of racism topic by teachers as sign of ignorance. of real world issues	27. Felt scrutinised /associated with the racist language - by other students' discomfort

Appendix 21. Ethical Application & Approval

Initial Approval

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School of Psychology Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION LETTER

For research involving human participants
BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

Reviewer: Please complete sections in **blue** | **Student:** Please complete/read sections in **orange**

</div>

Details	
Reviewer:	**Candan Ertubey**
Supervisor:	**Helena Bunn**
Student:	**Hannah Gilson**
Course:	**Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology**
Title of proposed study:	An exploration of Black students' experiences of representation of Black culture and characters in school literature through the lens of Positive Psychology.

Checklist (Optional)			
	YES	NO	N/A

Concerns regarding study aims (e.g., ethically/morally questionable, unsuitable topic area for level of study, etc.)	☒	☐	☐
Detailed account of participants, including inclusion and exclusion criteria	☐	☒	☐
Concerns regarding participants/target sample	☐	☐	☐
Detailed account of recruitment strategy	☐	☒	☐
Concerns regarding recruitment strategy	☐	☐	☐
All relevant study materials attached (e.g., freely available questionnaires, interview schedules, tests, etc.)	☒	☐	☐
Study materials (e.g., questionnaires, tests, etc.) are appropriate for target sample	☐x	☐	☐
Clear and detailed outline of data collection	☐	☒	☐
Data collection appropriate for target sample	☐	☐	☐
If deception being used, rationale provided, and appropriate steps followed to communicate study aims at a later point	☐	☒	☐
If data collection is not anonymous, appropriate steps taken at later stages to ensure participant anonymity (e.g., data analysis, dissemination, etc.) – anonymisation, pseudonymisation	☐	☒	☐
Concerns regarding data storage (e.g., location, type of data, etc.)	☐	☒	☐
Concerns regarding data sharing (e.g., who will have access and how)	☐	☒	☐
Concerns regarding data retention (e.g., unspecified length of time, unclear why data will be retained/who will have access/where stored)	☐	☒	☐
If required, General Risk Assessment form attached	☐	☐	☐
Any physical/psychological risks/burdens to participants have been sufficiently considered and appropriate attempts will be made to minimise	☐	☐	☐
Any physical/psychological risks to the researcher have been sufficiently considered and appropriate attempts will be made to minimise	☐	☐	☐
If required, Country-Specific Risk Assessment form attached	☐	☐	☐

If required, a DBS or equivalent certificate number/information provided	☐	☐	☒
If required, permissions from recruiting organisations attached (e.g., school, charity organisation, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
All relevant information included in the participant information sheet (PIS)	☒	☐	☐
Information in the PIS is study specific	☒	☐	☐
Language used in the PIS is appropriate for the target audience	☒	☐	☐
All issues specific to the study are covered in the consent form	☒	☐	☐
Language used in the consent form is appropriate for the target audience	☒	☐	☐
All necessary information included in the participant debrief sheet	☒	☐	☐
Language used in the debrief sheet is appropriate for the target audience	☒	☐	☐
Study advertisement included	☒	☐	☐
Content of study advertisement is appropriate (e.g., researcher's personal contact details are not shared, appropriate language/visual material used, etc.)	☐	☒	☐

Decision options

APPROVED	Ethics approval for the above-named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice), to the date it is submitted for assessment.
APPROVED - BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES	In this circumstance, the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made **before** the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box at the end of this form once all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to the supervisor. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records. **Minor amendments guidance:** typically involve clarifying/amending information presented to participants (e.g., in the PIS, instructions), further

	detailing of how data will be securely handled/stored, and/or ensuring consistency in information presented across materials.
NOT APPROVED - MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED	In this circumstance, a revised ethics application **must** be submitted and approved **before** any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application. **Major amendments guidance:** typically insufficient information has been provided, insufficient consideration given to several key aspects, there are serious concerns regarding any aspect of the project, and/or serious concerns in the candidate's ability to ethically, safely and sensitively execute the study.

Decision on the above-named proposed research study

Please indicate the decision:	**APPROVED - MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES**

Minor amendments

Please clearly detail the amendments the student is required to make

3.6. There is mention of recruitment of younger than 16 yrs old. If that is the case what would be the process to secure this is done? Also, as there is a need for parent consent for pupils age between 16-18 yrs old, can you please create a parent consent form derived from PIS.

02/03/23 Amendments
- I have removed the possibility of recruitment of anyone younger than 16 years old.
- I have created an additional parent consent form derived from the PIS (see Appendix D)

Please make sure researcher contact details on participant facing documents are their university email address.
02/03/23 Amendments
- Please see Appendices B-E for documents amended with university email address.

Major amendments

Please clearly detail the amendments the student is required to make

Assessment of risk to researcher

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?	YES ☒	NO ☐
	If no, please request resubmission with an **adequate risk assessment.**	

If the proposed research could expose the <u>researcher</u> to any kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard, please rate the degree of risk:

HIGH	Please **do not approve a high-risk** application. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not be approved on this basis. If unsure, please refer to the Chair of Ethics.	☐
MEDIUM	Approve but include appropriate recommendations in the below box.	☐
LOW	Approve and if necessary, include any recommendations in the below box.	☒

Reviewer recommendations in relation to risk (if any):	

Reviewer's signature

Reviewer: (Typed name to act as signature)	**Dr. C**andan Ertubey
Date:	**27/02/2023**

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Ethics Committee

RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE

For the researcher and participants involved in the above-named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UEL's Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard.

Confirmation of minor amendments
(Student to complete)

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data

Student name: (Typed name to act as signature)	Hannah Gilson
Student number:	U2190380
Date:	02/03/2023

Amendments Approval

Student: (Typed name to act as signature)	Hannah Gilson
Date:	20/06/23

Reviewer's decision		
Amendment(s) approved:	**YES** ☐X	**NO** ☐
Comments:	Please ensure that you gain written confirmation from schools, organisations etc. supporting with recruitment and these are submitted as separate amendment requests. Please also ensure that the approved changes appear in all study materials to participants. For example, the option to be contacted again at the data analysis stage (how this is not compulsory) and the purpose of this, will need to be included in the PIS and consent form (e.g., consent to provide contact details and to be contacted).	
Reviewer: (Typed name to act as signature)	Trishna Patel	
Date:	29/06/2023	

Appendix 22. Research Approval from Placement County Council

Sent: Tuesday, 14 March 2023, 09:46
To: Hannah GILSON <u2190380@uel.ac.uk>
Subject: Approved: Research application to ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Hi Hannah,

Your research application has been approved by the ▮▮▮▮▮▮ management, however, one director emphasized that it would be equally important for you to gain permission from each individual school, FE and HE college principal/director to agree to their students taking part in this research.

With reference to insurance certificates, I don't think it essential for your application to provide any evidence of insurance because you will not be engaging with ▮▮▮taff. However, it may be worth mentioning to your university that other universities have provided ▮▮▮ evidence of the following types of insurance if/when relevant to their research approach:

- Public Liability (accident on university premises)
- Products Liability (defective product/service claims)
- Employers' Liability (Covers employer against claims from workers)
- Official's Indemnity (covers employer in an instance of employee negligence)
- Libel and Slander (covers university against libel/slander claims)

Please remember to send your final report to ▮▮▮ sign-off at the end of the project, as agreed to in your application.
'I confirm that I will send a copy of the finished study to the ▮▮▮ Research Governance Lead for the Approval Group to sign off the project.'

I wish you well with your research.

Best regards,

Appendix 23. Data Management Plan & Approval

UEL Data Management Plan

Completed plans <u>must</u> be sent to researchdata@uel.ac.uk for review

If you are bidding for funding from an external body, complete the Data Management Plan required by the funder (if specified).

Research data is defined as information or material captured or created during the course of research, and which underpins, tests, or validates the content of the final research output. The nature of it can vary greatly according to discipline. It is often empirical or statistical, but also includes material such as drafts, prototypes, and multimedia objects that underpin creative or 'non-traditional' outputs. Research data is often digital, but includes a wide range of paper-based and other physical objects.

Administrative Data	
PI/Researcher	**Hannah Gilson** **Student Number: U2190380**
PI/Researcher ID (e.g. ORCiD)	https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4503-1049
PI/Researcher email	U2190380@uel.ac.uk
Research Title	An exploration of Black students' experiences of representation of Black culture and characters in school literature through the lens of positive psychology.
Project ID	N/A
Research start date and duration	January 2023 - April 2024

Research Description	This research aims to explore Black students' experiences of Black culture and characters in literature in the classroom, with a particular focus on how these experience may relate to aspects of positive psychology theories. It employs a fully qualitative methodology, including narrative and interview data-gathering techniques and a Reflexive Thematic Analysis method to explore experiences of young people themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). The goal will be to interpret the experiences they share, through the application of a positive psychology framework, identify commonalities, construct themes and rich descriptions which seek to shed light on potential consequences of these experiences for the psychological flourishing of those young people. The intention for the research is that it will provide educators and curriculum designers with the opportunity to hear the voices of this group of young people, each experts of their own individual experience, to deepen their understanding of the power of literary representation and potentially to design a more culturally responsive literature curriculum.
Funder	N/A
Grant Reference Number (Post-award)	
Date of first version (of DMP)	07/02/23
Date of last update (of DMP)	As above
Related Policies	e.g. Research Data Management Policy
Does this research follow on from previous research? If so, provide details	No
Data Collection	

What data will you collect or create?	➢ The first stage of data collection will be collecting signed consent forms from each participant,these will include personal data of their name, age, email address and signature. Additionally participants aged 16-18 will have an extended consent form which will collect personal data from the parent/guardian of their name and signature. This personal data forms will be stored in a separate area of OneDrive to the anonymised research data and so cannot be connected. ➢ First will be an original piece of creative writing (referred to as CW) produced independently by each participant, on the research topic, based on a brief stem as stimulus for ideas. This is estimated to be approximately 800 words although this will vary significantly between participants. This data will be collected in a Microsoft Word doc (file format .docx; approximately 40KB). Any personal or identifiable data will be removed from the CW data as soon as it is received. ➢ Second will be semi-structured interviews transcript data (referred to as Interview). Interviews will take place on the Microsoft Teams video-conferencing platform and will last approximately between 30-60 minutes. This data will first take the form of videos (file format .mpeg; approximately 600MB) and the Teams transcription document (file format .docx; approximately 60KB). Once these have been manually checked and edited by the researcher, each transcript will be saved as a Microsoft Word doc (file format .docx approximately 60KB) in my OneDrive account and the videos will be destroyed. Any personal or identifiable data will be removed from the Interview data during the transcription process. ➢ Each of these word documents(for the CW and Interview data) will be printed out to produce hard copies for use in data analysis. These hard copies will only include anonymised data and will have no identifiers of participants.
How will the data be collected or created?	➢ The creative writing data will be produced by the participants, on the research topic. Participants are given a brief stem as a stimulus for creative writing, in the third person and are asked to spend between 10 and 20 minutes continuing the story. ➢ The second data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, with the same participants. Interviews will be conducted and recorded remotely using Microsoft Teams installed on the interviewer's UEL-managed laptop. Each interview will be recorded - these recordings will be stored in a password protected UEL OneDrive and only

	viewed by the researcher. Electronic transcripts will be created by the researcher after two weeks have passed since the interview (giving the participant the opportunity to withdraw their data should they choose - see section on **Ethical Issues)**. Through the transcription process, real names and any personal identifiable data will be removed and replaced with pseudonyms. Once transcriptions these have been created and checked for accuracy (by the researcher), all recordings will be destroyed. There will be no further record of the link between participants' personal data and their responses to the research. ➢ Recordings will be stored using the File name and convention: Project code- interviewer initials-participant number-data type-date.docx For example, the first participant's data will be labelled: PosPsychLit-HG-Participant01-CW-27Jan23.docx PosPsychLit-HG-Particpant01-Interview-27Jan23.docx
Documentation and Metadata	
What documentation and metadata will accompany the data?	I will collect and store participant's consent forms. There documents will be stored using the File name and convention: Project code- -participant number-data type-date.docx For example, the first participant's consent form will be labelled: PosPsychLit-Participant01-Consent-20Jan23.docx. I will also create a table in a separate Word document, to record which data / research documents have been collected from each participant. （table below） This will be stored in a separate folder from the primary research data, so that participant names cannot be linked to their data. This document will also be stored in my password encrypted UEL One Drive Account. I will assign pseudonyms to each item of participant and as soon as interviews are transcribed the videos will be deleted so there will be

Participant Name	Participant Number	Information Sheet Shared?	Consent Form Received?	CW Data Received?	Interview completed?	Debrief Sheet Shared?

	no connection between participant identifiers and CW data/interview transcripts. Detailed descriptions of methodology will be created and each step of the method will be documented, as part of my thesis write-up. All this data will be created and stored as Word documents (file format .docx; approximately 40KB each) and saved in my UEL OneDrive, using my personal laptop. As this methodology is a qualitative, reflexive study the research cannot be replicated since it is situated and contextual, therefore no data needs to be made available for reuse by others.
Ethics and Intellectual Property	
Identify any ethical issues and how these will be managed	1) I will need to ensure that my data use for my research complies with GDPR laws and confidentiality. This is an ethical issue as my participants will be from a vulnerable population, discussing a topic which may raise sensitive issues, relating to ethnicity and issues of racism. Therefore confidentiality will be a priority throughout the project. Anonymising voices and video content will not be feasible, so I will de-identify upon transcription. Interview recordings will need to be handled securely, so access will be restricted to the PI and supervisor, stored on UEL-managed services and deleted after transcripts have been checked. I have completed training both through my university and local authority work placement on meeting GDPR requirements to support me with this. Through my participant information sheet (which will be shared and discussed with each participant before they submit their written consent to the project), I have specified what data they will be asked to share and how this data will be used and stored, including how it will be protected, therefore participants who submit consent forms will be giving informed consent for my plans for collection and storage of data,, as well as for sharing and archiving research data in the future. I have sought to ensure that a minimal amount of data is collected, only asking participants to share their name, age (to ensure they meet the study requirements), an email

	address (to be able to contact them and receive their data submissions). All data will be stored within the EU. Following guidance from the INformation Commisioner's Office, I have established a process for ensuring an adequate level of anonymisation for the primary research data, by removing participants real names or any other identifiable comments they may make. TO do this, I have considered the following factors, which the ICO advise researchers to take into account: -there is very low likelihood of re-identification being attempted regarding this project; - with the change of names, there is very low likelihood the reidentification would be successful; - the anonymisation techniques which are available to for me to use as a solo researcher is only thorough, manual anonymisation; - for the purposes of my research, the quality of the data will not be affected by the anonymisation process and will still meet the needs of my research project using the anonymised information. I have taken precautions to ensure that anonymisation is thorough by making sure that this process is completed as soon as I begin transcribing video data (2 weeks after data collection). Each participant will be asked to choose their own pseudonym and will be guided to ensure it is dissimilar enough to their real name not to allow them to be identified through it. I will then take responsibility for manually anonymising and double-checking that all personal identifiers have been removed from the data texts. I will not need to keep any record following this point which reconnects participants' research data with their personal identifiable data, since they will no longer be able to withdraw their CW and Interview data from the project. However, in order to ensure ethical validity and goodwill, the participants will be informed (both in writing through the Participant Information Sheet and discussion) that they can choose to withdraw the transcript of the interview they participated in, provided that this request is made within 2 weeks of the data being collected, since after this time data analysis stage will begin. Once this 2 week period is completed, I will delete my record of

	For further information on control of ethical issues, please see the ethical application and risk assessment for this research project.
Identify any copyright and Intellectual Property Rights issues and how these will be managed	Participants will own the rights to their creative texts which they create during this process and will be able to do what they like with the text after submitting a copy to the research data. Prior to creating this text, participants will be made fully aware of the planned use of their CW data within the research project and that they will have up to two weeks to withdraw their written text, if they wish to withdraw it.
	Another issue in terms of intellectual property and copyright is through asking participants to produce a creative writing texts creates the potential for plagiarism. I have controlled for this issue by explaining the importance of the work being original in the Participant Information sheet which will be read by participants prior to commencement of the research and will further stress/explain this to them in our initial meeting to discuss the project. Furthermore the task sheet requires participants to sign to confirm that the work is entirely original.
	Regarding the semi-structured interview data, participants will be made fully aware of the planned use of the words they share before commencing the interview and so they will have full understanding that the researcher is the rightful owner of the intellectual property of the transcript data.
Storage and Backup	
How will the data be stored and backed up during the research?	The data will primarily be stored on my UEL password protected One Drive. For back-up I will at regular intervals (weekly during the data collection stage) download the data documents and save a copy in my password protected file in the hard drive of my personal, password encrypted laptop, to which only I have access.
	For the data analysis stage I will need to print these documents, producing physical data. All physical data will only include the participant pseudonyms and no identifiers of actual identity. This will be stored in a labelled folder in my lockable home office and will not be taken outside of this setting.

	At the end of the data analysis period, all physical data will be destroyed securely.
How will you manage access and security?	Only I and my Director of Studies will require access to the data upon request (until the thesis is completed) and this will only be shared with her post-anonymisation, via screen-sharing in Teams or OneDrive secure-links. Consent forms will remain as E-Docs and will not be viewed by anyone except the researcher. I will ensure that files are only stored in encrypted-devices, with password protected files and will not share or write down the password. Physical copies of anonymised data will not be taken out of my lockable home office and will not be taken out of this setting. If they data needs to be accessed by my Director of Studies, she will do this using the e-copies of the data.
Data Sharing	
How will you share the data?	After the final thesis document has been produced, it will be shared, along with all the data that has been selected to be included in the final thesis with my university tutors, colleagues and placement service colleagues, as well as anyone else who expresses interest in the topic (this is likely to include educators, those working in publishing/literature and educational psychologists). My thesis will be shared and stored in the UEL Research Repository. After I have completed my qualification at UEL, it is likely that I will edit and adapt the text into a much shorter article, including significantly less data, with the hopes of disseminating it widely through relevant academic journals.
Are any restrictions on data sharing required?	As soon as the data has been anonymised, there need be no restrictions on the data.
Selection and Preservation	
Which data are of long-term value and should be retained,	The data of long term value will be that which contributes directly to the final thesis and will be included. Due to the reflexive and positioned nature of the thesis, the data will not be able to be reused

shared, and/or preserved?	by other researchers and there cannot be attempts to replicate this research, therefore the primary data will not be retained or archived.
What is the long-term preservation plan for the data?	See above - the only data to be retained past the end of the project will be that which is included in the final thesis. In keeping with GDPR, once the final thesis has been completed and marked all other data, including meta-data, consent forms, CW and interview transcript data will be destroyed. Anonymised transcripts, thematic codes, and consent forms will be stored on the PI's UEL OneDrive for 5 years and backed up on SharePoint, after which they will be reviewed for further retention or deletion. Consent forms will be retained for one year after the project end to allow the PI to share results with participants as outlined in the Participant Information Sheet.
Responsibilities and Resources	
Who will be responsible for data management?	I, the primary researcher will have responsibility for the data management, overseen by my research supervisor for guidance only.
What resources will you require to deliver your plan?	No additional resources are required beyond what UEL typically provides.
Review	
	Please send your plan to researchdata@uel.ac.uk **We will review within 5 working days and request further information or amendments as required before signing**

Date: 07/02/2023	Reviewer name: Joshua Fallon Assistant Librarian RDM

Guidance

Brief information to help answer each section is below. Aim to be specific and concise.

For assistance in writing your data management plan, or with research data management more generally, please contact: **researchdata@uel.ac.uk**

Administrative Data

Related Policies

List any other relevant funder, institutional, departmental or group policies on data management, data sharing and data security. Some of the information you give in the remainder of the DMP will be determined by the content of other policies. If so, point/link to them here.

Data collection

Describe the data aspects of your research, how you will capture/generate them, the file formats you are using and why. Mention your reasons for choosing particular data standards and approaches. Note the likely volume of data to be created.

Documentation and Metadata

What metadata will be created to describe the data? Consider what other documentation is needed to enable reuse. This may include information on the methodology used to collect the data, analytical and procedural information, definitions of variables, the format and file type of the data and software used to collect and/or process the data. How will this be captured and recorded?

Ethics and Intellectual Property

Detail any ethical and privacy issues, including the consent of participants. Explain the copyright/IPR and whether there are any data licensing issues – either for data you are reusing, or your data which you will make available to others.

Storage and Backup

Give a rough idea of data volume. Say where and on what media you will store data, and how they will be backed-up. Mention security measures to protect data which are sensitive or valuable. Who will have access to the data during the project and how will this be controlled?

Data Sharing

Note who would be interested in your data, and describe how you will make them available (with any restrictions). Detail any reasons not to share, as well as embargo periods or if you want time to exploit your data for publishing.

Selection and Preservation

Consider what data are worth selecting for long-term access and preservation. Say where you intend to deposit the data, such as in UEL's data repository (https://repository.uel.ac.uk) or a subject repository. How long should data be retained?

Appendix 24. Reflecting on Some of the Literature Referenced by Participants

Appendix 24. SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Engaged pertinent experiences shared in dataset - Diverse participant group - range of experiences, backgrounds, locations, ages - Enriched by story completion data gathering - Reflexive Thematic Analysis methodology supported nuanced and critical reflection throughout the process - Ethical considerations were prioritised throughout - Findings were well-supported by academic literature base and aligned well with Positive Psychology theory	- Only 3 participants were students at the time of interviews - Smaller participant group than planned - Story completion activity was not engaged with fully and only gathered two very short pieces of data. - Degree of participation - could this have been increased to enhance the level of collaboration? - Did not adopt an intersectional lens or investigate how other identity aspects (gender / sexuality / class) affected experiences. - Also the extent to which each of these intersectional identities were portrayed in literature (e.g. the most frequent characters mentioned by participants were both male - Crooks and Caliban. Would be interesting in future what this conveys about Black identity for both females and males). - Post-study reflection concluded that some elements of the interview schedule would have benefited from more careful scrutiny as some questions may have introduced bias and influenced the participants' responses.
Opportunities	**Threats**
- Creating a tool to support teachers in making culturally responsive text choices - further promotion of The R.E.A.D.E.R. tool amongst teachers of literature - Contribution to anti-racism through promoting the voices and views of Black students - Wide dissemination will increase awareness of the significance of representation in school literature	- Limited school budgets/financial crisis make it difficult for schools to invest in new texts - Teachers are time-limited and have ever-increasing demands on their workload - introducing new texts / thinking / critical approaches requires substantial time, effort, cognitive load. - Potentially requires specialised training to fully embed anti-racist literature teaching.