**I: = Interviewer (Interviewer in bold)**

R: = Respondent [name]

**I: So, [name of interviewee], just to let you know, and it's all on the consent forms, but the study we're doing on black and minority ethnic teachers involves interviewing people. We use pseudonyms for any interviews we use. It's confidential. If, at some stage, you think, "I wish I hadn't done that interview," you're very welcome to contact us and we can remove it from the study. If you think of one thing and think, "Oh God, I should never have said that," just contact us and say, "Look, could you delete that bit from the interview?" Is that okay?**

R: Yes, no problem.

**I: Did you want to ask me any questions first?**

R: No, I'm good.

**I: So could I just get you to give me a little bit of background to where you grew up, where you went to school.**

R: Born in [borough] so I've been there my whole life barring six months when I was in [area in England] when I was doing voluntary work in [area in England], [area in England]. I've literally lived in [area in England] my whole life.

**I: Did you have any experiences growing up that helped shape a particular perspective on diversity, that helped shape you wanting to become a teacher?**

R: My dad opened (unclear 00:01:41) Supplementary School in [borough] so my dad was instrumental in me being interested in teaching and also two teachers that I had when I was growing up, both black women that had a massive impact on my learning and made me realise that I had a love for teaching. I wanted to have an impact on other children like they had on me.

**I: When you say they had an impact upon you, that was different from other teachers' impacts on you?**

R: Oh yes, massively different in terms of they were very... at the time I didn't like it, obviously. They were very firm on me and had really, really high expectations for me, which they didn't leave me alone until I had met what they deemed I was capable of. In the long run it was very beneficial to me.

**I: So was that a high school teacher or primary?**

R: One of them was Miss [name]. That was Year 4 and Year 5 in primary. The other one was Miss [name] and that was Years 9, 10 and 11 in English.

**I: So are you a primary or a secondary teacher?**

R: I am primary trained. The first two years I taught in primary. However, now I'm teaching secondary in a pupil referral unit.

**I: You're in a pupil referral unit? Okay. So working with those students, is there anything from your background that drew you to those students or that kind of schooling?**

R: I've always wanted to help the most vulnerable children I know I can teach and the children that were coming up at my previous school. I guess, to put it nicely, they were quite boring. I was a Year 6 teacher and the class that I had, I'd trained with them but for my NQT year I left because the school didn't tell me they were offering me a job and so I went and found a job and got one. The class that I was going up with, the class that I had finished the year with in Year 4 were the most challenging class in the school. They had some really challenging characters but I loved working with them. When I left, four children from that class were sent into pupil referral units. So when I went back to that school in the middle of my NQT, well two thirds of the way through my NQT year, I made them bring all the children back from the PRU. I then taught them for the rest of Year 5 and then I saw them out through Year 6. But those were the children that I wanted to work with more than anything, the challenging children.

When I looked at the classes coming up, I kind of just thought, "Yes, that's a bit boring." I look for jobs in the PRU, I found this one, a job at [name] Primary School in [borough] so I had both job offers on the table and in the end I chose this one.

**I: So what's the kind of breakdown of the students at the pupil referral unit?**

R: It's majority Asian because we're in [borough]. It's the biggest Bangladeshi population outside of Bangladesh. But we do still get quite a few white children and black children here as well.

**I: How about gender breakdown?**

R: Majority male but when we get females, they are challenging. They are very challenging but it's majority male. It doesn't always feel that way just because some of the females that have been here in the past, they're not here at the moment, when they're creating issues, it's always like there is ten of them when there's only two.

**I: So how many students are there at the pupil referral?**

R: In my school now there are four different sites. I work in the third place and that's the key stage three site, that is Year 7 to 9. The maximum amount of children on roll is meant to be 24 children but (unclear 00:05:54) a few more than 24.

**I: So the students that come to you, do they tend to stay with you permanently or do they stay with you permanently or do they transition back to the schools?**

R: This isn't a permanent position. The key stage four building is a permanent position. When they come here, the goal is reintegration. On average I'd say eight to twelve weeks a child is here. Some children come in and it's get them out. They'll come in and we try to give them two or three weeks because obviously you get some schools with zero tolerance on certain things. When they come here, they've made a mistake, something has gone wrong and you can see that they're out of place here. Get them into a new school before they're out for too long. It's not beneficial for them. Some children come here and then we're trying to sort out EHCPs and other things so it drags out and they end up being there for three months. Then they end up being there for six months to a year. So it all depends. The average is eight to twelve weeks but it all depends because some children come on [s.l. RIGs 00:06:56], some children are permanently excluded, some children are managed moved.

It depends on the process going on around them, social work, YOT workers, police, everything. That can sometimes make things longer as well.

**I: Does that have an impact upon how you build relationships with the young people, different from when you were working in a school?**

R: It's very different. I do miss the pastoral long term with a class, seeing how they grow over the course of a year, or in my case, the course of three years. But at the same time, it is nice when you are able to make a difference with a child in the space of eight to twelve weeks, where you can see they're starting to look at things differently or think about things differently and behave differently from how they initially were. You don't necessarily get to have that same quality of bond that you have at primary but you are able to have higher points because of the type of children that they are. When you are able to get through to them, it's really a nice moment.

**I: I've done a little bit of work around alternative provision. One of the things that struck me a little bit sometimes was that huge amounts of really good work was done in either the PRU or in the alternative provision but the student went back into exactly the same environment. The school hadn't changed whilst the student had.**

R: Yes, you are preaching to the choir. I've seen that on numerous occasions. There is a child that's returned back to us recently who was initially on a [s.l. RIG 00:08:36]. So that means they come to us for a period of time and they go back. I pleaded with the mother to not send her back, to fill in the papers for a managed move because the child needed a fresh start elsewhere. They didn't want to listen, that's fine. Nothing I can legally do. They went back and it was an absolute disaster. That's not the only time it's happened. There are also schools that they'll call us or message us and say, "This child is doing x, y and z," and we're like, "Okay, if you give me your strategy for x, y and z. Have you used those?" "No." That definitely does happen. Some children that go to new schools, then those new schools straight away, rather than giving them a fresh chance, they straight away try to push their buttons to see how they react because they feel like that's the best way to have a measure of whether a child has changed, to get on to them as soon as they walk through the door, which is obviously not an effective way to trial things. But yes, it definitely does happen.

**I: As you say, the choir. So do you find that your minority ethnic status helps you to relate to some of the students or have a sense of their background and the issues they're facing at school?**

R: Definitely. We all know that the vast majority of children that are labelled as challenging tend to end up being black boys or boys from ethnic minority groups because the Euro centric curriculum doesn't facilitate for them. There is no representation within the curriculum. There is no representation within, or there is very poor levels of representation within leadership across the majority of schools in this country so things stick out. Then because members of staff can't relate to those children, the things they may be going through, they just get labelled with naughty or problematic which then creates its own issues. So it does help. Me being the way I am does help. Being from an ethnic minority does help. My primary school class I had before literally I had them at the end of Year 4, even though at the start of Year 4 I had another Year 4 class, I was around them anyway. I had them for the last part of Year 5 and I had them for all of Year 6.

If you take me out of those periods, the other two thirds of Year 4 and the other two thirds of Year 5, they went through four teachers because the teachers just couldn't handle the class. They weren't able to create a positive bond between them and the children that were challenging, which meant that they lost control of the class. It was bedlam. It does help.

**I: Does it also put extra pressure on you to be a role model?**

R: I don't feel like it puts pressure on me but I feel like... are you talking just about ethnic minority teachers?

**I: Well you as being a black male role model.**

R: It doesn't put any pressure on me at all but at the same time, I must say it's because I enjoy working with those types of children and I've noticed that black men as a whole, or ethnic minority men, sorry, as a whole, definitely get pigeon holed into working with those style of children, even if that's not what they want to do. Obviously I've been in schools for a long time so I know quite a few ethnic minority male teachers. One of them that I'm quite close with a year or two ago I was really annoyed at the fact that he was consistently getting challenging classes year after year and actually wanted a "easier" class where he could really focus on the academia of the class. He feels like he wasn't getting the chance to teach in that kind of setting. He's got a new job. He's got a new job at a private school so he's laughing but I've seen how it can create a pressure on ethnic minority male teachers.

**I: So he's a loss to the state education system then?**

R: Yes, definitely. He's an amazing teacher.

**I: As you may have picked up from my accent, I spent a lot of time in Australia. I once interviewed an aboriginal male teacher in a community. He said to me that there was one issue where he clashed with some parents in the community. They said to him, "You've got to make a decision. Are you a teacher or are you aboriginal?"**

R: Wow, that's an absolutely disgraceful comment.

**I: I know. He said this was from the aboriginal community where they felt like he was being lost to them and that he was defending the school too much. I don't know, do those tensions exist between where people try to divide you or divide others?**

R: I don't think so. No. I haven't witnessed it. That's the way it makes me feel actually. I haven't witnessed that actually happen. I can't speak about everybody. I haven't seen the system try to make an ethnic minority male choose between ethnic minority or be the future. I haven't witnessed that.

**I: Can I ask a little bit about your initial teacher education experience, when you decided to become a teacher? What was it like? Where did you do your teacher education and what was that like?**

R: [University], boring.

**I: At the [university] it would have been alright.**

R: Yes, boring. Fortunately, I did the School Direct and I was based in schools for the vast majority of it but when I was at university, I was very bored. I missed being in class. I don't feel like it was very... there was little to no representation, just like the curriculum in general. It was very, very much geared towards maths, English and reading, phonics. They really didn't do anything on how to teach topics or key or anything like that.

**I: Anything about like culture and how to support diversity in schools?**

R: They might have had something really small on it. I feel like we covered it very, very, very lightly but it was, for me personally, nothing beneficial. I had been working in schools for four years before I went on to my course so I've been in schools for eight years.

**I: For how many years?**

R: Eight years. This is my fourth year. I'm coming to the end of my fourth year of teaching. I was a one to one and a TA. I was a one to one with the most challenging child in the school. Then I was a one to one with the next most challenging child in the school, which was that one that ended up moving on to an SEN school which (unclear 00:16:22) which was nice. So I ended up having the new labelled most challenging child in the school and was the TA in the most challenging class in the school. Then I saw out that year and then left to go to another school where I was a HLTA but this was a very nice school even though, again, I was in the most challenging class. But they're challenging class was an absolute cake walk. What day (unclear 00:16:48)? Really? Is that it? I was a TA in that class and then I used to teach the second most challenging class P.E. because the teacher couldn't handle them. But that was fun. I loved that class. Then I went into teaching.

**I: Okay. Did anything change about your views of education over that period or did you...?**

R: Oh yes, the system is broken. It's absolutely terrible. It's one of the least adaptive systems in this country.

**I: In what way is it broken?**

R: Everything about the way the educational system is run now is exactly the same as how it was run when it was the Victorian times, which is disgraceful.

**I: So could you give me some examples?**

R: Just the whole you need to be... it's just the whole one shoe... we're still applying the one shoe should fit all approach and anybody that doesn't conform to that, anyone that's not able to wear that shoe then it's a problem for them already but on top of you not wearing that shoe, you're also providing any other issues, you're labelled, you're put into this group, you're put out of schools, etc. Unfortunately, it's the ethnic minority males that get the majority of that in terms of young boys. Everybody does still encounter those same problems but we know where the majority of people that go through that come from.

**I: The phrase gets banded around, institutional racism. Do you see that in evidence or within that system or is it just something that's...?**

R: Yes, definitely. It makes me laugh because all schools, great British values, the buzz word of having an inclusive curriculum but I'm still yet to be in a school here I've learnt anything about any Asian or brown scientists or famous people saying things, maybe Pan Asian. Generally speaking, if I see anything about black people, it's either 1) in October so I don't count it because I don't believe it should be black history month because it should be included in general. Or it's slavery. So in my last school, the only time children learnt anything about black people was if they were doing slavery in Year 5, Mohammed Ali in Year 6 or black history month. That was all it was. So you've got that aspect of institutional racism, in just having this very Euro centric white curriculum for all and then you're looking at the representation of staff. Generally speaking, when you're seeing ethnic minority staff, they're generally capped at about teacher level.

You do get some schools where you will find a head or a deputy but the vast majority of us, when we walk into a school, if we see a black head, we always still have that same, "Oh my gosh, the head is black," reaction which is a problem. [Laughter] That shouldn't be the reaction. We're in 2019 and that reaction is still going so that lets you know the situation already. I feel that a lot of black teachers are kind of capped at that whole middle management. It seems to be they get to that and then you're trying to look through... you can see what you want but the glass ceiling is this.

**I: Some people have said to me that the black head teachers tend to only get their jobs in the really challenging schools anyway. It's a bit like you said before about the challenging classrooms.**

R: I agree with that. There are situations where it's hard for you to win but it's like here, you can have a headship but the school has got to be crap.

**I: So that then increases the chances of "failure". So you get put in charge of a challenging school that then is deemed to be a failing school and you get responsibility for that.**

R: Yes.

**I: So there is an issue around the retention of black minority ethnic teachers. A) Why do you think that is and B) what do you think can be done about it?**

R: In a very uncocky way, I know exactly why it happens. It's because we get pigeon holed into behaviour. I know I work in a people referral unit. I know I love working with challenging children but that's me. I literally am in that pigeon hole but I've jumped into it. But I would like to believe that I'm making very good progression in my short time in teaching. But they get pigeon holed into dealing with challenging classes and challenging behaviours and it's exhausting. I personally have a lot of energy and I live for it so it keeps me (unclear 00:22:00). I enjoy what I do. I wake up every morning and I'm happy to go into work but there are a lot of people that see that they're constantly getting those challenging classes year after year after year or they're working in a challenging school so there is always their own problems year after year after year. It's draining. So I can completely understand why, after one to five years, they're just like, "I've had enough." They're constantly being given those same classes that nobody else wants to deal with but they're not being given any sort of opportunity for progression to move up because dealing with those kind of classes, it's going to be harder for you to be a literacy coordinator or to be a numeracy coordinator or for you to be an arts coordinator, science coordinator, phased leaders, etc.

So there is a lot of effort and work that goes into dealing with the "challenging" classes. When that's consistently happening, you feel like you're not progressing anywhere and you don't feel like there's a way for you to go anywhere apart from just continue to go in that sideways trajectory, it's draining. I'm not surprised why the retention of black teachers or ethnic minority teachers is so low.

**I: Antonina, who is working on the project with me, and I have been invited to come and talk to people, I don't know who they are exactly but they're in the cabinet office. One of their remits is to look at this issue of the retention of minority ethnic teachers. What do you think we should tell them in relation to how they could start developing some kind of supportive framework or some kind of expectations they should have of schools? It would be nice if we could take some advice to them.**

R: Well the joke is, all the things that they need, they say they have which is an inclusive curriculum. So that's the first thing. I personally was deeply angered when I saw all of the things that I was told to teach at one of my previous schools. Again, as I said to you, they were kind of learning about black children with slavery, Mohammed Ali and black history month, the curriculum does need to be inclusive. There needs to be a really legitimate... there needs to be a push in... I hate when a protective group is given preferential treatment over something because we shouldn't be. We should just all be treated exactly the same. However, we live in the real world. Unfortunately, that is not the case. So there actually needs to be a nationwide push for the professional growth of ethnic minority teachers, whether it's training courses that are specific to ethnic minority teachers that gives them the opportunity for them to get their middle leadership qualifications or their senior leadership qualifications.

Unfortunately, given how things are at the moment, there might need to be schools that adopt or areas that adopt a specific role for ethnic minority teachers in senior leadership or in those situations because again, most of those challenging children, you're looking at the parents, when they come in and talk to the school, they're generally being spoken to by white middle class people, generally male, talking to them with no ability to relate to their situation, anything that they're going through which then creates a rift between the parent and the school which then generally will make the risk between the child and school worse. It's just a vicious cycle. There needs to be a nationwide push in terms of getting more ethnic minority teachers into senior management. I feel like at this moment in time, middle management is something that's quite realistic for a lot of ethnic minority teachers but there is not enough in senior management at all in schools across the board.

So there should be something nationally done about that or maybe some sort of bursary or grant provided to ethnic minority teachers for some of the payment of those courses. So yes, the curriculum, the courses and possibly creating actual specific roles that go to a member of an ethnic minority group in schools in a senior management role.

**I: That's great. So what about you, what are your ambitions for the future? Would you like a senior position?**

R: Mine are lofty.

**I: I love lofty ambitions.**

R: I'd like to open my own free school that wouldn't be focused primarily on academia. Yes, there would of course be academic pushes within the school but also about learning social skills, learning things like budgeting, learning things like day to day life skills, letting children... academia is not for every person, every child, every adult, it's not. Unfortunately, the system we have at the moment has children that have to go through thirteen years of education or at least eleven years of education before they give them other options other than maths, English and science, before they're shown about apprenticeships and skilled trades and everything else, before they're given opportunities. There is not enough schools that offer enough opportunities for mentoring, actual skilled professionals and parents, etc. The school that I would envision would obviously do your normal academia that would be an actual hand written curriculum that is representative of all of the world, not just... I don't want to just have a curriculum that's geared only towards black people.

It needs to represent all whilst also making sure that mentoring is offered from early, also showing the development of actual life skills and the counselling of children as well as trying to introduce other skills that children may actually want to be interested in from younger so they've got something to actually go and gear towards, rather than just learning for the sake of learning and not actually seeing the purpose of it, which is what creates a lot of problems. So that's going to take a while but I'm hoping to open a school with that kind of vision.

**I: So do you have a sense of when that might be?**

R: I'm aiming to try and get into the assistant head teacher role within the next year. My school that I'm in right now are growing. I know that if they do get the new building they're looking for, I should be able to go into the senior management team for that. But at the same time, I'm going to give them another year so I don't... there is nothing concrete that I'm going to be [s.l. for another 00:28:54] anyway. I would like to be a deputy head within the next three years and then hopefully a head within the next five or six.

**I: That's fantastic. So you've got no plans to leave the system then?**

R: Unfortunately, no. I'm not going to be able to change it unless I'm in it.

**I: What do you mean unfortunately? It's great that you want to stay and change it, I think. [Laughter] That's brilliant. [name of interviewee], I have really enjoyed this interview. Is there anything you want to ask me or is there anything that you were thinking I would ask you that I haven't asked?**

R: Not really, no.

**I: Anything you think I should really know?**

R: No. I feel like I got most of my points across and what I think needs to be done. Yes, I feel like I have.

**I: Thanks ever so much. I do hope that somewhere down the track I get a chance to meet you. So thank you for this. I'll send you an email reminder now about those forms, if you don't mind.**

R: Yes, no problem.

**I: Okay, well enjoy the rest of your afternoon.**

R: Thank you.

**I: Talk to you soon. Bye, bye.**

R: Thank you, bye.