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

R: = Respondent [name]

**I: I just want to say that I don’t want it to be like firing questions at you. I treat it as a co-construction of knowledge. But I was thinking before we start discussing the issue, can you introduce yourself in terms of what’s your current position, what subject you’re teaching because I don’t know much about you except for Teach First.**

R: So I’m a Teach First participant. I’m about to complete my first year. I’m teaching English at a secondary school so the ages I’m teaching are 11 to 16. I can’t remember, did you ask me something else?

**I: No, that’s fine. So this is your first placement obviously and you hadn’t had any teaching experience before.**

R: So before Teach First, I worked as an English as a foreign language teacher for four to five years. Previously to working in the secondary school I was actually working in a [country] secondary school just outside of [city] for about three years. During summer I worked in summer schools based in the UK. So I’m based at certain private schools around the country. So I’ve had teaching experience but not secondary English. So now my focus is English language and English literature so it’s quite different in some respects.

**I: Again to put this in a wider background, can you tell me about your background, where you grew up and maybe what was your experience like with ethnic diversity and possibly disadvantage in your own schooling?**

R: So I actually moved to Britain when I was about 2.5-3 years old. Initially we were in [area in England] so we were initially in an ethnically diverse area up until I was seven years old. Then we moved to a part of [area in England] which was predominantly white. After that we then moved to a place called Lincoln and that was even more predominantly white than the previous area and that’s where I went to secondary school. I went to university at [name of university]. So I did my bachelor’s degree in philosophy and then I did my master’s degree in myth literature and the unconsciousness. Then for a few years after that I worked in a theatre in [area in England]. That was very diverse, those years of my life. Then afterwards I moved to [area in England]. Where I was staying, it wasn’t diverse but now where I’m living, it’s not far from a diverse area. I started the Teach First programme with the [university] in June 2019. Since coming to this school, this placement, there is no diversity really. I think there are a handful of students and staff who are from the BAME minority groups.

**I: I guess we’ll be mainly talking about your experience in this school then. Usually I ask teachers to reflect about their placement and then NQT years. But just before getting to that, I wanted to ask you about deciding to be a teacher, why you decided to go into teaching.**

R: So one of the big reasons I went into teaching English as a foreign language is actually because I wanted to also travel at the same time. I wanted a career change. So the theatre where I was working, there was not much funding for me to have a full time job there so then I decided I wanted to do teaching. It was something I’d thought about for a couple of years. So I moved to [country]. Initially my plan was to stay there for a year but I actually ended up loving teaching. I really enjoyed it. I had a lot of fun. I stayed in the school for three years and then decided, because with the CELTA qualification, I’m not entitled to the same salary as a teacher who has that qualification of being a secondary school teacher. So during the summer I don’t get paid which is one of the reasons why I was working in summer schools. So I decided if I’m working in a secondary school anyway then it’s a good idea to get the qualification because that also improves my chances of getting jobs and even my income will go up.

Whereas I was stuck in that my salary wasn’t going to really get much higher and my future opportunities were limited. So that’s the biggest reason why I decided to come back to the UK to do this course.

**I: I mean Teach First, as far as I understand it, it’s happening in schools right?**

R: Yes.

**I: So can you tell me … what you started talking about, asking them where to place yourself and all those things. I found it very interesting.**

R: So one of the reasons I asked them specifically to be placed in a diverse area is because I grew up in an area where out of 1,500 students, five of us were BAME. That’s a very difficult situation to grow up in as a teenager. What I didn’t want to happen was to start teaching in a school with a similar sort of ratio of predominantly white students to BAME because I knew that some things would start happening, like instances of racism and the way you’re spoken to by certain members of staff and also other students. I feel like I’ve been through that. I didn’t want to have the responsibility of training to be a secondary teacher and also having to deal with that side of things again. I did ask them that. I honestly feel like Teach First completely ignored my requests, which is something that I felt more when I started talking to other BAME Teach First participants in the [are in England] who’d asked the same but they were placed in predominantly white areas anyway. So when they gave me this placement, I thought, “Okay, it’s in [area in England]. I have friends here so I will try it. I will start and I will try it.”

Throughout this academic year I did speak to one of my mentors that the organisation assigned to us about this. I felt like again, I wasn’t really being listened to. So when I raised the issue of racism… I really like my mentor. I don’t think he’s a bad person. It’s just he said to me, “But really, it’s the only way to fight racism is if these kids and if these other adults see somebody who is from BAME.” I feel like that should have been my choice. I don’t feel like they had the right to make that choice on my behalf which is effectively what they did. So not only is it very difficult to be placed in a disadvantaged school where you’re learning on the job, that’s an added layer, an added challenge to that. It was something that really made me quite angry, if I’m honest.

**I: So that’s my understanding as well that Teach First usually places teachers in disadvantaged schools. So in your case it’s a disadvantaged white British intake … what about staff?**

R: So it’s quite strange with the staff. A couple of the staff members are fine, they speak to me like I’m an equal but I’ve noticed that there are significant members of staff who if I’m with another teacher or with another member of staff and they’re talking to me, they won’t look at me. They’ll only look at the person next to me. Things like the deputy head of the school has, several times, spelt my name wrong in emails. He’s spelt them wrong in five different ways. Now when I send an email, my name is clearly there. It’s not that I think that’s necessarily being actively malicious but I think these things add up. When someone cannot even be bothered to learn your name, that’s quite disrespectful I think, at a very basic level.

**I: There is this idea we also use critical race theory in this research and there is this idea about this microaggression which people from particular backgrounds experience more or less but I completely relate to that.**

R: I think it’s not acceptable. I mean we do have a lot of white students in the school but we have some students who have come from Poland or who have come from Romania and I’ve noticed the same thing with them. So there is one student we also have, her parents are from Yemen but she grew up in Sheffield. She is a girl in Year 8. I was talking to the head of Year 8 and the head of Year 8 said to me that she was Indian and she’s not. She’s from Yemen. Yemen is a completely different country. So there are all these little things that build up all the time. I don’t know if this is the kind of thing you wanted me to talk about. There is another member of staff who said that the only people – she’s white – who can dance hip-hop are people who are very skinny. She comes out with comments and it’s really problematic. So she’s teaching kids these stereotypes. If I call her up on it, I try to do it in a respectful way but she completely ignores me. I honestly feel like I’m not listened to in that school at all. I am treated differently to a lot of the members of staff there but not by everybody but by a significant proportion I would say, yes definitely.

**I: What about other teachers from, I just use minority ethnic because some people have problems with BAME so there’s all this… are there any other teachers from minority backgrounds?**

R: Apparently there are but I don’t know them. Two members of staff, so there is one teacher, he’s white but he’s from Ireland so he has an Irish accent. I know he might not come under that category but I would say he’s part of being a minority in that school because he’s not English. There are a couple of other members of staff but when you look at them, they look white and they don’t have an accent so you couldn’t tell. But there are a couple but I’ve not really had a chance to talk to them about this experience.

**I: I don’t know your background, I don’t want to assume, can you tell me from which ethnic background are you?**

R: So my mum is from Iran and my dad is Punjabi. So they’re Indian Punjabi but they… so I was born in Pakistan so Pakistani, Punjabi and Iranian is my background.

**I: And you said that even when you were growing up you didn’t have a lot of experience with teachers from minority backgrounds. How was representation at that time?**

R: This question somebody asked me a few weeks ago and I really had to think about it. I don’t think I remember ever having a teacher who was not white even at university. I did not have a teacher who was not white. I had teachers who were from abroad but they were all white. That’s actually, considering, that’s actually quite shocking I think but I think that’s also the nature of my subject which was philosophy. So philosophy in this country is predominantly a white male subject.

**I: You told me that you enjoyed teaching before, after you started have your ideas about the teaching profession shifted?**

R: Absolutely. I mean don’t get me wrong, [country] is also quite racist but I have not felt welcome in this school at all. I think it’s disgusting that people don’t try and pronounce names that aren’t English. It’s left such a bad taste in my mouth. If I had not had teaching experience before this, I would have quit this programme if I’m honest. Now I’m just not enjoying the teaching process at all because it’s so stressful. It’s not just about how I’m being spoken to. It’s about how I see the kids being spoken to. So now what’s happened is that at lunch time I’ll have a lot of the kids who are not just brown or black, I have a lot of kids who they’re white but their families came from Romania or from other countries. They will come and sit in my classroom and they will tell me the things that they say they don’t feel they can talk to the other teachers about and it’s all related to racism. All of it is related to racism. They don’t feel like anybody is listening to them. It’s not that I think that there are teachers there who don’t but I think representation is so important for these kids to say… I remember when I went round that school, we had a couple of days we would go there, just be shown around.

The looks on some of those kids faces, they were so happy that I was going to be a teacher there from September. It’s the representation thing. That’s what that was. To be honest, they don’t know if I’m going to be a good teacher or a bad teacher. It’s just that sense of relief.

**I: How was it with kids in the year groups you were teaching?**

R: I mean to be honest, the kids aren’t the problem. Most of the kids aren’t a problem. They might say something out of ignorance because they don’t know. That’s very different than it being maliciously racist. However, there have been several occasions in the school. There was one occasion one of my students who is white… I’m going to tell you exactly what she said. She called another girl a dirty fucking Paki. She said she was going to rip the rag off her head. I had to jump in between these two girls. There was no follow-up after that. There was no follow-up about what happened. How did I feel about the fact that I had a student in my class, clearly she’s learnt this from the adults in her life, who has very racist, questionable views, no follow-up, nothing.

**I: That was reported to the leadership team.**

R: Yes. So apparently, I don’t know if this is true but I was told that if there is an incidence of homophobia, racism, anything like this, they are obliged to report it to the council. Somebody told me in [name of council], although I can’t verify this because I have no evidence of this but I was told that no such complaint or no such report was ever issued to the council about this happening. So I think that pretty much tells you how little regard they have for not just the members of staff but also their students.

**I: That’s quite interesting. What’s clearly showing is that teachers from minority groups, so say non-white British because I was not able to disaggregate, tend to work in diverse schools. I use EAL as a proxy for diversity. Of course it’s problematic but that’s the best we have. Of course I’m looking for interview explanations about that. Do teachers choose to go and teach in those schools or it just happens so because maybe the majority of teachers from minority backgrounds already live in those areas. I know the teachers don’t like to travel very far. So it would be interesting to hear your views on that. Obviously you, from the beginning, wanted to teach in a diverse school.**

R: Yes. I think because I was going to travel back to England anyway and I think because I asked if Liverpool was an option, that it’s kind of reflective of [area in England], [area in England] that it is predominantly white. Because it’s a deprived area, I think that might be one of the main reasons why I was put there. However, I did say that I would much rather move or travel to [area in England] and go to a diverse school than go to a predominantly white school. But that experience isn’t just against BAME kids. Some of the stuff that happens to the immigrant kids who look white but who have come from Poland, from Romania, it’s absolutely disgusting because they have almost the same level of discrimination and bullying that BAME groups have. I’m actually really horrified how little the school has done to support those kids if I’m honest, absolutely disgusted. But I think that that’s the main reason they put me in that school.

But I also actually think that Teach First, it’s almost like filling a quota. This school doesn’t have many BAME staff so why don’t we put this person here. It’s just filling that quota. I honestly feel that but again, that’s just what I think. I don’t have any evidence of that whatsoever.

**I: You said that your mentor said that it’s very important to have BAME staff in schools to address racism. I think that’s quite a big load to put on somebody, especially at the beginning of their teaching career.**

R: He’s white. I said to him I don’t understand why he feels like he can say that to me. I feel like that should have been a question posed to us, “We’re going to place you in these schools and there will be the added challenge of there being racist views or attitudes. Are you prepared to deal with that as well as having to acclimatise to teaching the curriculum in a British secondary school?” That was never asked. I think that’s a problem.

**I: I know also last year Teach First announced very widely that they had recruited their most diverse cohort of teachers to date. I wonder if you had any initial orientations or anything around those issues at all.**

R: I think because I’m [area in England], it’s not the same as the London cohort for example. I noticed that a lot of the… so we’ve got a group, BAME Teach First group and the majority of people in that group are based down south. But in the [area in England] there weren’t that many of us. When I talk about the cohort, I don’t mean just the English teachers. I’m talking across the board. When we have our conferences, it’s something that is very noticeable. There’s only a handful of people from BAME backgrounds. So they say that but…

**I: But it means to date, meaning maybe two years ago there was just 1% of those trainees maybe, now it’s 10% or 5%.**

R: Possibly, yes.

**I: Representation is something that comes up quite a lot in all interviews. So far I’ve found a bigger difference – that’s why I was so excited to talk to you – between teachers who are just starting to teach and teachers who have been in the profession for many, many years. I think that probably retention factors, job satisfaction is quite different for those two sets of teachers. So I wanted to ask you, I don’t know if you’re planning to continue with Teach First or not and what would keep you teaching. What would be the most important factor for you after teaching for one year of course which was probably a very challenging year to be honest, the lockdown.**

R: I’m so tired if I’m honest. After this year I’m so tired. So I am going to continue with Teach First only because I need my PGCE. With the situation, the COVID-19 situation, initially I had pushed for a transfer. They’ve told me they can’t give me that transfer because of the situation. They were reluctant to give me that transfer anyway. Because I’ve only got a year left, I’m just going to finish it. The thing is, I have to think about my future and what I need to get out of this programme. I’ve already done a year so I may as well finish it.

**I: So at the same school?**

R: Yes, unfortunately I will be in the same school. I suppose I take some consolation in the fact that some of the kids say they finally feel like they have somewhere to sit where they can talk about these experiences and not be shut down. So I understand that because when I was at school, I would have loved to have had a teacher who was BAME just so that I could talk to them about this. So it’s been very hard. If I had a choice, I wouldn’t continue with Teach First. I recently filled a survey in for them and I would not recommend them at all. I don’t think that they have protected… I mean there are participants who have had much worse experiences than me and they’ve not protected them. I will speak to a couple of them and see if they’d be interested in being interviewed by you as well.

**I: That would be great, yes. So I wondered is there anything that could improve your job satisfaction in the second year of Teach First at all? What would be the most important thing?**

R: So for me, I was supposed to have weekly mentoring sessions with the head of English. That didn’t happen. So I’ve not been trained. I need to be trained. I’ve never done this before and I feel like I’ve been left to teach these kids without any real guidance. So more training, more mentoring sessions and just an environment that is not toxic because our work environment at our school is toxic. There’s a high staff turnover. Something that’s really interesting is that it’s the more qualified members of staff who are quitting their jobs. Last year in the school they went through… four English teachers left in one year. This year, three English teachers have left because of the conditions. So if we remove the racial element from that for a moment, the work environment is toxic. There is no cohesion in the department. There is very little support. There is clearly a favouritism that happens. There is no clear communication. They change the rules at the last minute and don’t tell us and then we get into trouble for not knowing what the new rules are.

The entire school environment would have to change. The only reason I’m going to continue with teaching after next year is because I’ve worked in other schools and I know this is not typical of every school. If I’m honest, that is the only thing that’s getting me through this.

**I: So I wondered, when you talk about a toxic environment, do you mean it’s the leadership team? Is it within the department or in the wider…?**

R: I would say in the wider school but I’ve noticed that some departments, they work together very well. I think that our English department is particularly bad as well. So one of the things that I take issue with is we have a very consistent approach to lesson planning. So for example, if I have a top set English class, I’m expected to teach the same content in a very similar way to a lower ability group. Have you heard of the Do Nows, which are the five questions at the beginning of the class? It’s supposed to be retrieval. Some of those tasks are too difficult for my lower ability class so I changed them because my job as a teacher is to encourage these kids not to take their confidence away by giving them things that are too difficult for them to answer. I get penalised for changing it whilst being told at the same time that I have to change my lesson so it suits my class. So it’s a mixed message. You get penalised for trying to do the best thing for our kids because it doesn’t fit an idea. When Ofsted came, it was like a completely different school. It wasn’t the school experience that is indicative of every day.

Everything is about show in this school. It’s superficial. What looks good, what’s fashionable over what is working and what is helping the kids. For me, that’s a problem, especially in teaching.

**I: Is it an outstanding school?**

R: No. It requires improvement. But when I read the preliminary Ofsted report, it said that there are no cases of bullying in the school and there are no cases of racism. That’s not true.

**I: I wonder, they collect the data from parents, don’t they, or through their observations and I wonder who answers those questionnaires. Probably white British parents engage more with Ofsted than minority ethnic parents.**

R: I think so. There are parents evenings. There is a girl, I don’t teach her but her parents came over to say thank you to me for looking after her and I’m not her teacher. When something like that happens, the other members of staff who teach her feel resentful because they don’t… it’s very complicated and it shouldn’t be, it really shouldn’t be. But I do think that often a lot of the parents, what they’ve said is they’re not listened to by the school. Their concerns are dismissed. The school doesn’t do anything. I would say nine times out of ten they’re right.

**I: Do you feel you are able to start those conversations at all about a multicultural capital in this school?**

R: No. So we had to pick books to include in the curriculum next year. I said, “We don’t have enough diversity represented in the literature we look at.” So for example, we have a lot of kids who are, not a lot but we’ve got some kids who are refugees. They’ve come from Syria. We’ve got kids who have come from… when they come from Poland or they come from Romania and nobody has an idea about their culture, about the language they speak. So I said that I felt that we needed to have something that was inclusive. So these kids, when they read these books they see themselves reflected but it’s also an opportunity to teach each other and to learn from them. But the emphasis… you know the dialogue of white working class boys are the most disadvantaged, I think that that kind of language is problematic because what about the other kids who don’t fit that criteria who are struggling and who aren’t doing well because the system is failing them? It completely discounts them.

Our school pushes that kind of rhetoric. I’m opposed to that rhetoric because it’s not just white working class boys who are struggling in this country at all, especially in schools like ours. They are so disadvantaged these kids, it’s unbelievable. So yes, I take issue with that, I really do.

**I: It feels like dialogue about race and ethnicity within schools is something very important for minority ethnic teachers and not just in this study I’m doing but there is a lot of research about that from the US. What do you think generally, I mean what is the most important retention factor for teachers from non-white British backgrounds?**

R: For me, I would say that it’s just having a supportive work environment where concerns are actually listened to. If there is an issue, that people talk about it but they talk about it without the pre-conceived idea that they are right and somebody else is wrong. So I think there has to be openness of dialogue. I think this is something that I would apply to beyond race. So we can talk about it in terms of sexuality. We can talk about it in terms of people who come from different countries who aren’t part of the BAME, who look white but they have different cultural traditions. We need to talk about this. We need to be open about it. We need to understand that just because we have these differences it doesn’t mean that we’re not British or we’re not trying to be part of the same community. But how can we understand each other if we’re not willing to talk to each other and listen? I think for me, that’s the biggest thing. So there is a lack of supportive environment. There is a clear discomfort about the issue of race when we talk about it because everybody gets so defensive.

So for example, if somebody says something and I say, “That’s quite a racist attitude because…” and then I explain it, often I don’t get the opportunity to explain why it’s offensive because I’m met with a very defensive response which is, “I’m not racist.” It’s like, “Well actually, you don’t get to decide that. I’m the one who will tell you if what you’re doing is racist or not because I’m the one on the other end.” Just like if I’m saying something and a gay person says to me, “That’s offensive,” I can’t then say, “No, you’re wrong.” I have to accept that I’ve said something that is inappropriate. This is how we learn, isn’t it? I don’t think that really exists in a lot of schools that I’ve seen. It just doesn’t seem to exist. That’s a problem. We’re not listening to each other, we’re just not.

**I: You say that there is a very high turnover in the school you’re at now and lots of, like you say, probably experienced white British teachers are leaving. Do you know their reasons for leaving?**

R: So when I’ve spoken to some of them, it’s because the environment is toxic. You’re expected to do much more than you’ve signed up to do in this job which I know is part of being a teacher but there’s no respect. There is very little respect. There isn’t even… if somebody is more experienced then surely they know how to do their job. But there is a lot of micromanaging, there is a lot of microaggression. It’s not just because of racial problems at all. It’s just a very badly run school.

**I: So can I ask you, what’s your plan for the years after Teach First, if you have any? Would you change something in terms of where you’re looking to teach, based on your current experiences?**

R: So there was the private school… so in [country] they’ve offered me my job back so that’s one option, depending on the situation. To be honest, I’m going to see how I feel at the end of next year because I think a part of me just feels like if it doesn’t get better, I don’t know that I can maintain a career in teaching when it’s affecting me so negatively in terms of my mental health. So I think it will very much depend on that. I would like to continue teaching for a couple more years. I think it’s very likely that I will not stay in teaching for the rest of my life. I’d probably be more likely to want to teach in a grammar school or a private school because I feel like a glorified babysitter. I just don’t feel like I’m teaching a lot of content because of the structure of the school and the way behaviour is not dealt with appropriately at all. So at the moment, I feel incredibly disheartened. I feel like I don’t want to stay in teaching for more than a couple more years.

However, I’m hoping it changes because I was loving teaching. I came here and now I just can’t… there are some days I dread going into school. It’s not the kids. It’s the staff. That’s a problem for me.

**I: During the lockdown, did that make it worse? Did it make it better? Face to face communication sometimes exacerbates things.**

R: Yes. It’s better because I don’t have to see these people very much and everything has been email. Everything is through writing so I know that there is a paper trail. There are a couple of members of staff, before the lockdown I had to say to them, “I’m not willing to communicate with you unless it’s in writing at this point because it’s so inappropriate.” So there is that extra layer of protection. I’ve been heavily in communication with my trade union rep because of certain things. So in some respects it’s been better. I do miss being in the classroom, being around the kids. I do worry about them. So in terms of the kids, I want to be in the classroom teaching them but at the same time, I’ve got less stress from the adults at the moment so it’s a bit of a complicated situation.

**I: Yes, definitely. Well lots of studies do say that teachers don’t necessarily flee disadvantaged schools because of the disadvantaged children. It’s other issues which are there.**

R: Definitely.

**I: I mean again, although I can’t be 100% certain and it’s a very small effect but I did find, in quantitative analysis, that… I mean we know generally that retention is worse among minority ethnic teachers, especially NQTs outside of [area in England]. The quant analysis suggests that minority teachers who are currently teaching or taught last year, tend to teach in schools with less effective management and leadership. That was very interesting for me because I would imagine that if you’re not fleeing poor children, maybe then you’re fleeing ineffective management.**

R: Yes. I would agree with that.

**I: When you talk about [country] and liking to teach there or private grammar schools, what do you think was different? Is it the accountability pressures which state schools in England have to face? What is it that makes teaching more enjoyable in those schools?**

R: So the way those schools were run were much better. Behaviour is dealt with in a consistent manner. Whilst there are sometimes issues of communication, I found those working environments to be more supportive but the ones that I’ve taught in before, so I can’t talk about it in general. Just having the freedom and being respected enough… so in [country] I was teaching English as a foreign language but they gave me more freedom to design creative lessons. Our exam results were amazing. They completely went up. None of our kids, in two years, failed their English exam. I don’t think it’s because we were amazing teachers. I think it’s also because we changed, we adapted the content to suit their needs. So it wasn’t a one size fits all. It was looking at these kids, thinking, “Right, these are their strengths. These are their weaknesses. Let’s make this work for them.” So it was more about achieving the goal without it fitting a particular model. Does that make sense?

**I: Yes, it does. So having a little bit more autonomy, isn’t it, which is very important I suppose.**

R: I think so. I think also they trust us that we know what we’re doing when we teach. So that was my experience before which is why I know that this school is not like every school. But I told Teach First, if this had been my first experience, I would have quit. It’s no surprise that some people are leaving the teaching profession when we have environments like this one.

**I: Especially very early in your teaching career I guess.**

R: Definitely. It was interesting though, with Teach First I noticed that… because I’m [age]. There was a group of us who were I’d say about 27 and older and you end up hanging out together because we’re not 21. No one parties as much maybe. Our priorities change because we’re a little bit older. It was interesting to see the ones who were very, very young who don’t know that they can say no to certain requests and say, “This is not appropriate,” because you’re still working out, I think once you come straight from university, what your boundaries are, what is expected of you. What you’re covered by in terms of your rights, how are you protected. There is a big difference between the two groups in that because we’d worked before and we knew certain situations aren’t okay and we say no. It was very clear that Teach First preferred the very young students or participants who wouldn’t say no as much. Those of us who would say no, we were seen as, I’d say, troublemakers almost.

That was interesting too. I think not having that experience of working in other places, for some of those participants will have been detrimental to them in some respects too.

**I: I mean that’s why maybe early career retention is so bad because like you say, maybe you have some kind of life experience and resilience to fall on whereas if you just come out of university you’re thrown into this without any support.**

R: Yes, I think so because some of those participants, I had to talk to a couple and say, “You don’t have to do that. They can’t ask you that,” but they don’t know. How can they know? There is no transparency between Teach First the programme. For example, they have a contract with the school. We never get a copy of that contract with the school and so we don’t know when the school breaches that contract. That’s a problem. They do that purposefully to keep us in a state of confusion almost. There are many problems with this programme definitely but I think that is another big issue. A lot of the participants, especially the younger ones, they quit the programme within a few months.

**I: I see. Well and that also shows because I think for you, Teach First schools have to do returns for school workforce censors unlike for teachers who are on placements via university, on PGCEs, maybe that also exacerbates the bad retention in early career teachers. Okay, well that’s been so interesting. Just the last question, I wanted to ask you, do you think teachers who teach in diverse disadvantaged schools, whether minority teachers or not, do you think they need specific training?**

R: Do you mean BAME teachers need extra training?

**I: Not necessarily BAME because I think there is still only a small proportion of BAME but so many white teachers teach in disadvantaged schools and quit. I wondered if you have any thoughts on teachers, if there should be any specific training to prepare teachers to teach in disadvantaged diverse schools.**

R: I think that we need to have training about the kids that we’re teaching and the backgrounds they come from and the culture. So for example, if we talk about disadvantaged kids, I know that the students we have who are from Yemen have got a different kind of context from which they’ll approach school to somebody who is white and English. I think we need to actually consider that. So when it comes to diversity training, I think that should be compulsory for everybody because I think often when we ourselves don’t face a particular kind of discrimination or ignorance or racist or intolerant attitude, we don’t always recognise it. I think that that has to be made compulsory for all of us because sometimes there are things that some of the white teachers say to their kids and I’m just horrified. One of the trainee teachers said to an Asian boy, you know teenagers, they argue about punishment when you punish them when they do something wrong. That’s what they do. They’re teenagers and they’re pushing the boundaries.

The teacher said, “I don’t negotiate with terrorists,” to this Asian kid. Everybody thought it was funny apart from a few of us. So I think that points to the fact that maybe that didn’t come from a racist place at all but we definitely need to be taught how to speak to these kids. We need to be taught what is appropriate, what’s not appropriate. That really shocked me. Then there was another incident where one of the teacher trainees said, she said to one of the boys, “If I was your parent, I would make you adopted.” This kid had been adopted and she didn’t know. That’s when she felt bad, when she found out he’d been adopted. I don’t think that we should ever say that to anybody. So maybe not only racism, I think it must be compulsory that we are trained how to talk to these kids. We should be trained about differences, whether they’re racial, cultural, religious, sexual. That needs to be compulsory. I don’t understand why it’s optional. Why is it optional? Because it could be one remark that we think is nothing but actually the impact is massive. So I think that should happen.

I think when it comes to BAME teachers, maybe not just BAME but there should be something, somebody whose role it is to chase up that person’s wellbeing, “How are you coping? What are the struggles? What can we do about it?” I don’t think I’ve seen much of that at all.

**I: You mean not necessarily as part of Teach First teachers but as a general thing**

R: I think so. Maybe not every day but let’s say every half term let’s have some time dedicated, let’s have a look what’s happening. How do we protect each other? How do we make it a safe place not just for the kids but for the teachers? How do we address the fact that there does seem to be a divide between certain BAME members of staff and some of the white English members of staff? There is a divide. The question is why. We need to remove that. I think that kind of thing needs to be compulsory if I’m honest because I don’t see it changing. I just don’t see it changing at all.

**I: I really like that, I mean especially after talking to teachers for this project. I mean it does seem like, on reflection, teachers do experience racism although some might disregard it or disregard at the beginning of their career but just having that mentor from the same background, I just don’t feel that you have to explain things because you both lived through part of that experience. Whereas maybe if you talk to a head teacher, I mean you have to explain so much that in a way it just makes you small.**

R: Tired.

**I: Yes, and tired.**

R: It’s little things. Trying to say someone’s name. Okay, I get that some of our names might be a little bit difficult to pronounce but try. That’s a big thing. I don’t even see that all the time. I always make the kids correct me if I get their names wrong. I make them correct me. I might get it wrong a few times but I’ll always try. That’s a little thing but it’s not a little thing for the kids. It’s a massive thing for us.

**I: As they say, if kids know how to say and read the name Tchaikovsky, they should be able to read other people’s names.**

R: I think it’s indicative of the British mentality. I do think it’s not just a racial thing. In my experience, and I’ve lived in so many parts of Britain, I just think that we have created a culture of people who just are not willing to engage with anything that’s different.

**I: I wonder if school is a harder place because it’s such a traditional institution. We know that 89% of teachers are from white British background and probably middle class with specific background, being in top sets and going to good universities. It is difficult but I think just highlighting those issues might bring about some kind of change I hope.**

R: I hope so, especially now because I think things will get worse before they get better.

**I: But I liked your point about mentoring which I think might be…**

R: Yes. Thank you.

**I: No, thank you. I really enjoyed speaking to you. I know it’s been already an hour so I don’t want to keep you for much longer but if you don’t mind, I’ll send you an email when we put together that online event where we will talk to our participants about our findings, our interpretations and maybe get feedback from everybody else. I think especially help with recommendations will be important because none of us are teachers on the team. I am from an immigrant background but the other two are white British so that’s why we thought it’s so important to include that element into our research design.**

R: But I think it’s a very important thing that you’re doing. When I read it, I was like I definitely want to be a part of it. I’ll definitely be interested in the workshop as well.

**I: Thank you very much. If you know somebody, I would be interested to have a conversation with them.**

R: I will. I will do it in the BAME teachers group. I’ll do it now because I think it will be… it’s just a relief that somebody is actually looking at this.

**I: Well thanks so much for pointing that out because I also felt nobody looked at it although some people were criticising me saying, “What are you going to say new which we don’t know?” We heard a lot about racism already and that’s not changing but maybe we should keep talking about that anyway.**

R: Yes, I think so. I think we have a problem, we talk about it, we find solutions. We might get it wrong a few times but this is the way to do it. It’s the way to deal with problems. I find it so funny that the way we teach the kids in school, which is, “No. You have a problem, use your words.” Let’s find a solution is something I don’t often see in adults. So no, I think it’s brilliant. I’ll definitely do that now. Thank you.

**I: Great. Thank you so much. Have a nice day.**

R: You too. Take care.

**I: You too. Bye.**

R: Bye