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

R: = Respondent [name]

**I: So I was wondering, [name of interviewee], do you mind telling me a little bit about how long you’ve been teaching for, about where you are in your career, what subject you are teaching?**

R: Yes, no problem. So this is my NQT year so this is my first year of teaching. I teach physical education secondary school based in [area in England].

**I: Can I also ask you about your background, where you grew up and maybe when you were growing up what was your experience like with disadvantage and diversity because that’s the main topic of this research.**

R: So in terms of schooling, I’m from [borough] which is [area in England]. I went to a primary school in the heart of [borough] which was quite mixed at the time. I then moved to a secondary school which was also in [borough] as well, an all girls school. It was called [name]. That was a very interesting experience being a girls school. It was predominantly black or BAME predominantly. I do only actually recall having one or two white members in my actual form group so it was disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of us received free school meals as well. When I initially started as well it was primarily white teachers. Our headteacher was a black female who actually did, I don’t know what sort of project it was but she got a lot of teachers over from Jamaica who started to teach within the school and that definitely changed the whole experience I think in terms of their relation with us, even how to discipline was a very different stance. They were a lot stricter but they had a very different method of doing it.

I felt like they definitely got a better response out of me. It was a very high achieving school. I did very well there. I felt like I was supported as well. So me personally, I was on free school meals for quite a while. Mum was single. I lived in a single parent household. I eventually did come off free school meals but also played sport which was my big thing, which is why I teach P.E. now. A lot of things were not free so that did actually stop a lot of things that I wanted to do because it was generally somewhere that required you to travel and my mum doesn’t drive so that was a barrier, quite a big barrier for me. Also you had to pay, equipment, training fees, all of those sorts of things.

**I: [name of interviewee], I also would like to ask you, I mean before we get into your teaching experience, about the beginning of your teaching story and about wanting to become a teacher and a little bit about your teacher training. Do you remember anything about wanting to become a teacher, anything you remember as interesting?**

R: Yes, most definitely. I knew I wanted to become a P.E. teacher around 14 years of age so Year 9. I had a very good experience with P.E. My P.E. teachers were fantastic which, very interestingly, they were predominantly white and it is a very white field, specifically that subject. But they were very passionate about their subject. It’s a subject that I thought was… I don’t know. A lot of people don’t value it as much as I value it in the sense where it was one where you could be practically able and academically able. It went together very well. So they inspired me. They always said to me, “You’d make a great P.E. teacher,” so that was my starting point. So with that I took GCSE P.E. in school and then I also went on to take A Level P.E. in school as well. The advice from that was to go on and do a sport science degree which I went and did at [university]. Then upon completion I applied to go on to my PGCE straight after finishing and unfortunately I didn’t get on. So that was 2011, it would have been the start of that academic year. I didn’t get on to the course.

That was quite deflating because I just thought maybe it wasn’t meant to be. Then I applied the following academic year to get on to a GTP, so that’s a graduate teacher programme where you’re paid and you work…

**I: At school.**

R: I didn’t get on to that. So that was 2012 and I just thought, “Okay. Again, it doesn’t seem like it’s meant to be.” 2013 I reapplied. Why didn’t I get on it? That was to do with a reference came in late. By the time the reference had come through, the places that I wanted to go to were all full. So during that gap, actually I remember, so 2012 I started my master’s part time in sports science so I did that over two years, taking me over to 2014. I applied again. It was a late application. This was also a SCITT programme. It’s slightly different because it doesn’t go through a university. So it’s linked to a university but you don’t go through them. You apply directly to the school. So I remember going there for that interview. I didn’t get on to it. The feedback primarily was teaching was strong but my interview was weak which I’ve always found very interesting because for me, you’re here to teach. If you’re a good teacher, I’d forgive someone on the basis of their interview as long as you didn’t completely mess it up. One thing that was continuously fed back to me is that I wasn’t selling myself well.

So when I finally got on to the course, which was 2016, September, I started at [university], by the first half term I dropped out. One of the main reasons was my first placement, I was really unhappy there. It wasn’t the teaching environment that was for me. I didn’t reach out for any help because my experience of uni is that most of the lecturers are not very helpful or I’d say understanding of our backgrounds. I didn’t feel like I could express why I just wanted to drop out so I just dropped out and I deferred. That was 2016. I returned in 2018 to [university] again on a deferred place. I actually only returned because I couldn’t defer again, now or never. Even that year, it was a very rocky start. As much as everybody says you’re a good teacher, I didn’t believe that I could be a good teacher.

**I: Was that because of placements again or lack of support within the university itself?**

R: I think definitely lack of support because for the best part of it we had an initial tutor. So the original person who I started with in 2016, he left at quite short notice over the summer for 2018. So we had someone who stood in place but as a class we weren’t very happy. So then we didn’t have anybody. Basically we didn’t have anybody right up until December. There was lots of people coming in and out delivering one-off sessions. Again, it hit the point when I was like, “I think I’m going to quit this.” Everybody was unhappy. I was very unhappy. The placement that I went into as well, it was a lovely school but my mentor, half term, I don’t know what it is about the half term, she just didn’t come back. I was just like, “I don’t have a university mentor. I don’t (unclear 00:09:15) mentor,” and it was like everything was working against me. I didn’t think this was meant to happen. So there was another teacher who just had to fill in with her place and she said she was happy to mentor me through that time. It was very interesting because even though she hadn’t mentored before, her experience of teaching was, she’d been teaching for many years but I didn’t actually like the way she taught.

It’s really hard because there are a lot of teachers who teach who don’t want to teach. Certain comments that they make, as a trainee it’s very hard for you to say, “I don’t agree with it.” You just go along with it because they’re the people writing your reports.

**I: Do you mean by comments, do you mean comments about students?**

R: Comments about students. That teacher openly said to me they don’t like children. For me, if you don’t like children, you are definitely in the wrong job. Stayed there that long, I can’t imagine what pupils would have experienced under someone who doesn’t like children. So I completed that placement. I built very good relationships because it was very similar to my school setting. So it had a lot of Muslim students in it. It was a girls school as well, very small, very community… it was lovely. The children were absolutely lovely. It was just a nice place to be. It was just very unfortunate that their provision for school was very minimal but they loved it and they were very passionate about it which definitely kept me going through that. Then I moved on to my second placement which was an absolute nightmare. It was a mixed school. It was a community school but the behaviour… as a trainee teacher, I know you need to get a balance of things but…

**I: They like to do those contrasting placements.**

R: I think it was not the fit for me. Again, they didn’t have a school uniform which I found very interesting because I think what is very clear then is the social economic differences when you don’t have a uniform. You can just see the class divide. It has potential. The students again were lovely but the leadership, the behaviour management, it wasn’t there. That was a real struggle to the point where even though that was my second and should have been final placement, I was going to leave. One day it was just such a bad day I said, “That’s it, I can’t take it anymore,” and I packed up my stuff and left. It was very fortunate that another school said they were happy to take me. So there was another student there on my course which incidentally actually is someone I’d studied with my undergrad. Well slightly older but I knew him from [university]. It was really good because then there was someone there that I knew. He helped me out in terms of getting used to that school. It was a lovely school, primarily Muslim because most of the placements are [area in England] based.

So again, it was a mixed school which provided a very unique experience of teaching boys and girls. In terms of the support, I had a black female mentor. I think again, that made a very big difference because there is a level of understanding there. I can’t really put it into words but that was there, very supportive. They gave me everything that I needed so that I could actually finish the course. Then applying for jobs, that was quite knocking because I didn’t get my job until my fourth interview. It was very frustrating because the three that I had previously, again, teaching is good, interview problems. So the fourth one I went to, I got the job. It’s a mixed school in [area in England]. It’s been a turbulent NQT year because again, it’s an environment where the children are absolutely lovely but there’s just certain practices that it doesn’t sit well with me. When you come in as a new teacher, there’s not much you can really say, there’s not much you can really do. My department itself is very supportive but there’s just certain practices within physical education that seem to just be everywhere.

**I: Can you tell me a little bit more about that, [name of interviewee], because actually you’re the first P.E. teacher I’m interviewing. I don’t have a point of reference.**

R: So one of our first practices is the changing in silence. For me, I’m just like, “This is one opportunity for them to not be in a classroom environment.” Don’t get me wrong, they don’t need to be shouting. But to enforce someone, it’s a hard thing to do in a changing room but to enforce that I just think it’s a pointless thing. It’s very hard to actually accomplish. Then also the sports that we deliver, they’re western sports. I think for me, everything needs to be culturally relevant. We know there has been the whole drive with decolonising the curriculum. I think it is very white. It’s white teachers. It’s white in terms of the curriculum. That is something that is a barrier for me because it’s not how I would like to teach. Another practice that they do is fitness testing. That is probably the most heart breaking thing that I’ve had to do because children were crying from doing that test. It was designed for athletes. It’s called a bleep test. I don’t know if it’s one you’re familiar with. You run a distance of 20 metres and you have to get there before the beep and the beep speeds up. But the problem with our school is if you don’t meet a certain level, you’re then required to do the test again.

So I have to try and push them to at least get them to the basic level so that they don’t have to do the test. But for some of the Year 7s in particular, it was the first time they’d done the test. They were crying. One almost had an asthma attack. They pushed her exhaustion. That doesn’t sit right with me. I don’t agree with it. I don’t see the purpose of it. It’s not educative. We’re not training soldiers. That is probably one of my biggest things that I don’t support. I haven’t said in terms of school because it seems like it’s a practice session. What they actually used to do is make them come to a fitness club if they didn’t reach that minimum level. We now realise they can’t enforce that which is a plus but I had to be the one to actually write the letter and say, “Well your child didn’t make the minimum level. We recommend that they come to one of these clubs.” As a parent, that’s not a letter I would like to receive because you’re implying that my child is unfit, unhealthy, obese, all those things. I just don’t think it’s the right message that we’re giving to them and it will make them hate it. There’s so many stories of adults who probably the worst subject they’ll say is their P.E. lesson, forced out into the rain. We do P.E. in the rain. Hailstones came down, we were still out there doing it.

Again, I wouldn’t do it. I do believe a little bit of rain but we’ve been outside in the pouring rain, I’ll come in and I’m soaked right through. You’ve got students who are in t-shirt and shorts. That’s also another thing. Some of them can’t afford to buy the jogging bottoms and the jumper. I feel sorry for them because they’re out, they’re shivering, they’re cold. Again, I’m contributing to them hating P.E. That’s not why I’m here to teach. It’s not what I believe in. So I did actually intend to leave my school but again, our deadline… so most schools, the final deadline for quitting is actually 31 May. Our contract is 24 March. At that date, it literally was roughly I think one week into lockdown. I just had to weigh up right then but that wouldn’t have been a wise thing to do because they may have left me out of the contract earlier because of our current situation and then I would be out of a job and I didn’t know what the situation would be like for getting a job for next year. So by default I’ve had to stay. But I do intend to look for another school, to leave at Christmas.

**I: Can I ask you also a little bit more about this school you are in now? So you say that it’s good with kids. Can you tell me your observations about things like staff diversity, staff retention in that school, conversations about things like multicultural capital, curriculum, the type of leadership you have. All those things seem to be quite important for teachers as well.**

R: Yes, definitely. In terms of diversity, it is majority white. If there is 120 staff, I would say there’s probably about 20 to 30. The majority are not teaching. So I’m the only black P.E. teacher. There are seven of us that are actually teachers, two female. But P.E. is predominantly male anyway. So two females but yes, I’m the only black teacher there. Straight away I observed they didn’t actually acknowledge black history week, black history month, zero acknowledgement of it. I don’t really see there’s any acknowledgement of any other culture either, anything that they celebrate. The conversations are not there. I think there’s a very strong leadership. The head is a female head. In senior leadership there is one black member so it’s predominantly white again. There’s no conversations on decolonising, considering other things added into the curriculum. There’s never been any mention of that. Our focus throughout the entire year has been on grammar.

**I: How is your intake? Is it quite diverse in terms of students?**

R: Quite diverse and actually one of the most, considering its location, a lot of people think (unclear 00:21:14) but it’s actually one of the most disadvantaged schools.

**I: It’s a common theme obviously. We know from statistics as well that 85% of teachers are white British. I mean as far as leadership, I don’t know, 99.5 or something. But I wanted to tell you what I’m finding in analysis of school workforce about where minority teachers work. So the workplace is strongly correlated with EAL, the presence of EAL students which I interpret as diversity because we don’t have our ethnicity data publicly available, and** [area in England] **of course. But we don’t know why. Do teachers choose to go to those schools? Do you have any views on that? Some teachers told me that because of their placements during PGCE and maybe initial experience, they might consciously look for schools which are quite diverse. What’s your view on that?**

R: I totally understand what you mean because there is this understanding that there is a certain type of teacher that picks the diverse school to say they’ve worked in a diverse school, a bit like a tick box exercise. It wouldn’t seem that you would be a strong teacher because with diverseness people associate bad behaviour. Me personally, I wanted to be in a school based in my… I actually wanted to be in a school in my borough. But most teachers stay in the schools in my borough. It’s very, very hard to get a job within the borough. For example, my mum’s worked in her same school for seventeen years. They just don’t leave because of the environment that they work in. I don’t know because I can’t speak for them but it is one that I would want to work in just because I know that when you’re actually working within your community, you’ve got a better understanding of the children. It is quite a poor borough. But the borough that I am actually based in, on the flip side of it would be seen as quite a wealthy borough but within the actually school it is one of the most disadvantaged schools in there.

**I: So your staff retention is quite good?**

R: Yes. There’s teachers who have been in there for 26 years. The shortest I’ve come across from conversations with people is about eight years.

**I: Why do you think this is? It’s quite unusual to have such good retention I guess in these times.**

R: It’s true but that’s the retention of white staff though. For me, like I said to you, mine would have been one year and I would have been out of there because I know that wasn’t the environment for me.

**I: In your current school, what aspect of the school environment is the most important for your job satisfaction?**

R: For me, I observe how other teachers deal with pupils and their behaviour policy. That is a big thing. But again, because of my lack of experience, I would say this job, it was like this in my fourth interview. I’m like, “They’ve offered me a job. There’s only so much that you see from an interview.” It’s not a bad school. It’s just again, the policies don’t align with my ethics.

**I: Do you think for white British teachers, what’s the most important for their job satisfaction if you have any views on that?**

R: Well some of them, because of the length of time they’ve been there, they become very expensive. In the current times in terms of schools and budgets, a lot of them feel like there is nowhere they could move and at least improve their salary. If they’re looking for a match, it will just be to move closer to home. One thing I have observed is that most of the teachers actually don’t live within a close proximity of the schools that they work in but that is largely due to buying houses outside of [area in England] but obviously keeping the [area in England] wage. I definitely think that’s a contributory factor. If you’re comfortable in an environment, some people have the approach that if it’s not broken, why fix it.

**I: What would be the most important retention factor for you? If they wanted to keep you and not let you go in January, what would need to change?**

R: It would be the practice because the money is not the thing. You can go somewhere else and get money. Teachers aren’t the best paid job. I’ve been in better paid jobs to be fair but I’m not in it because of that. I’m in it because I actually love teaching. I want to get the best out of children. So I definitely would be looking at what is your behaviour policy, how do you discipline pupils. That would be what I would want to see change.

**I: Would you go work outside of** [area in England] **or would you look in** [area in England]**?**

R: I definitely wouldn’t leave [area in England]. My heart is here. The disadvantaged children need to see people who look like them, who understand their struggles and who have achieved things through just hard work, to be totally honest. I wouldn’t even say opportunity. It’s just hard work.

**I: What you describe in your teacher training seemed like a bit of a struggle. Did you still continue to want to be a teacher through all those experiences?**

R: It’s been in my… I think as well my experience of being at school with certain teachers made it a very horrible experience. I wanted to leave education at 16, not because I dislike education because I’m doing a PhD now. I actually love learning. But just the school systems and how it works, it just didn’t align with me. So I know there are certain morals that I just had from a very young age that I’ve kept. My thing is equity is at the heart of my belief. We’re not doing it within the English schooling system. There’s very many schools who are actually, I’d say, getting it right but considering my status as a teacher, there is minimal say that I can have but I aspire to be a head teacher in a [area in England] school.

**I: So no plans to leave teaching at this point for you? I know I said 40 minutes, do you have a bit of time still?**

R: Yes.

**I: I was just wondering also, what seems to be coming out of the interviews so far is that there is also the subject issue and doing the PhD you look into I suppose identities and intersecting inequalities and so on. I know that you run a [name] network. I was just wondering if you have any views or reflections on the subject itself and minority teacher within this specific field. It’s interesting that many teachers told me so far, I don’t know, it wasn’t something that I was specifically asking them about, that actually as far as progression into leadership, they seem to always say, “P.E. teachers seem to be becoming leaders,” which was quite interesting to me. So did you have anything to say about that?**

R: Yes. It is very true. So one member in our department is the deputy head. All of the staff members actually have an additional role in our department. I think it’s because you form very different relationships with the pupils because you’re not classroom based. There is also then that level of respect and discipline is very different. I do think that is a large factor for why they go into leadership roles because if you can handle a class of say 30 outside with dangerous instruments like javelins, I think you should be able to handle… but it’s just deciding if it’s the pastoral route you want to go down or going up into just senior leadership or head of department roles as well.

**I: Well it seemed to be the one teacher who had been teaching for many, many years, I think she said something like 20 years and she was herself on the senior leadership team. She found that it was easier for her as a minority ethnic teacher to go down the pastoral route as well. But I know that some people might not like it. Would you consider going…?**

R: That’s definitely the route I want to go down. Again, I think a lot more minority staff, if you’re not careful you can be pigeon holed into that. If that’s your choice then… but again, people want to progress. But when you think about it, pastoral is about your relationship with the students. Minorities that are generally going into that role, it’s the relationships that you’re building, it’s just very different. I think that is key to why generally we do well.

**I: As a P.E. teacher yourself, I guess you said that you’re prone to develop those relationships. Is there some kind of subject hierarchy within schools that you would say there is more respect? I would imagine maths and English but I’m not a teacher so I don’t know.**

R: P.E. is bottom of the pile. This lockdown has shown that even more so. So for example, I’ll tell you I haven’t actually been asked to set any work. When I did come up with my own idea for a project which I created for key stage three and they were happy with it, I then found out it was optional. For me, I was just like, “Well P.E. is actually a compulsory subject. I get that we’re at home. I get that you can’t do the physical element of it but we should still be trying to keep the educative element of it as best as we can from home. So for me, the fact that you’ve offered something as optional, it speaks enough volumes for me.” P.E. has always been at the bottom but I do largely think because a lot of people don’t actually see why it is educative and that has been done by teachers unfortunately. P.E. teachers have made it that a lot of them have contributed to it. That’s been an area of my research. It’s been very interesting to see those academics who have been talking about this, people associate P.E. with sport and it’s not the same thing because there is no education in sport. Sport is whatever team game that you play but if you look at P.E. that is what the focus is. So it’s not got that value.

At any opportunity they will cut… so towards the end of, that was term three we were in, sometimes I’d turn out my Year 11 group, I had nine and usually I’d have 28. Where has the rest gone? They’ve been pulled out for interventions in this subject, that subject. But say I had a GCSE student, could I pull them out of maths so that they could come and have an intervention in P.E.? No way. But you have to remember each student has a value. So for me, maths had no value for me but GCSE P.E. did for the field that I wanted to go down but you still had to do it. Unfortunately, we are just at the bottom of the pile.

**I: Of course interesting. Finally, and probably we’ll talk about this more later but I just wanted to ask you, of course we want to say something based on that, some messages about teacher retention in disadvantaged schools, specifically minority ethnic teachers. That’s what this research is about. I mean especially I guess you have access to other teachers who are part of your network, maybe it’s easier for you to say something about P.E. teachers specifically. Do we need to provide any special training for teachers who work in disadvantaged schools or not? So I just wanted to get your final reflections on that.**

R: So the final reflections on why they’re leaving?

**I: Yes, and what could be done to enhance retention. Especially, I’m very interested from your point of view because you’re NQT at the beginning of your teaching career.**

R: Well I know that for sure if I wasn’t as passionate about my subject as I was, the experiences that I had during my training would have made me not even bother to go into teaching. I think the training element is very key. Our new tutor that came to us at the start of January, she has a very different approach. She, interestingly, did her PhD in America. So her whole stance aligned with what I did. I think you met her as well. It’s the lady who co-founded [name] with me. So she definitely kept me in there at this moment in time and she supported me throughout this year because there have been moments when I’ve said, “I’ll just leave,” but it is just the passion. I know why I’m there so that has kept me there, if that makes sense. I just think if I had a different motive for being there, I would have done but I firmly believe that students need more of us in the school but I do think the schools need to actually listen to us. I don’t feel like there’s any acknowledgement. Even with this current situation, the fact that black members have been shown to have higher death rates from COVID, it would be interesting to see how this approach is going to be taken by head teachers because for me, I’m a minority within that school but have they factored that in?

Do you consider that because that’s your minority staff? I think as well, how do you introduce staff into a school environment? I think that is very key. The community sense is not in our school and that definitely has an impact. So the closest member of staff that I have is another black member of staff out of my department who also started the same time as me but she’s not an NQT. That’s been very key for me staying sane there because the conversations I’d have with her are not the conversations I’d have with anyone in my department. So that’s another thing, we build relationships. So I have relationships with my team because one thing I do do is talk to anybody to be honest. I do try to engage with all staff members. However, I would say I’m closer to her. I’m closer to the premises staff as well. I greet the cleaning staff. I greet the kitchen staff. That’s something that I just observe about in our school. Teachers greet other teachers but they forget about everybody else who makes up the school and I find that very interesting. Again, those areas of staff that I’m talking about, those are where, primarily, the minority staff are based. They are the cleaners. They are the cooks. They are premises. They’re not the teachers.

But regardless of their status, we have common ground. I think that that is the key. We need to have conversations. We need to have better understanding but we also need to be able to share them without any fear of a reprisal or any token gestures because I don’t want to be given a role because of my colour or because you think that because of where I come from I should be in that role. I want to do it on my own merit. No token gestures for me. That was something I was very conscious of because I did think whether that role was given to me, not to fill the quota but to try and balance out the diversity in that team.

**I: Although still probably that’s needed given the intake of your school.**

R: Yes.

**I: Curiously, you didn’t say anything in your interview about the workload. Reviewing the DfE retention crisis papers and their own research about why teachers are leaving, workload seems to be the key issue whereas I’m not necessarily finding that in the interview. Why is that?**

R: Because with P.E., one expectation that you just know is that you will be there after school because you have to run clubs. You’re sometimes expected to be there before school. I was never under any illusion that I would work potentially extra hours than others because that just comes with the role. So I think with our school, we actually get to pick when we have our planning time. We get free lessons off timetable. We also get department time. Obviously my timetable is reduced as an NQT. I wasn’t given a GCSE or a BTEC class in my first year which in comparison to one of my friends, he was given three GCSE classes. So I know he’s been struggling because it’s a ridiculous amount of work to put on as an NQT as well. GCSE is a higher level. That’s a lot of students futures that you have on your hands. I think that shouldn’t be your focus in your first year. It’s just getting used to being within a school environment, developing a practice, developing as a teacher. The support that I’ve had within my department, that’s one thing I cannot knock. I had a very good mentor.

He always checked in if anything was too much. He came into my lessons weekly. That was optional but he came in every week and consistently has provided feedback. So I think workload has not been an issue for me. I’ve managed to balance it alongside my studies.

**I: Doing your PhD. It seems to me that sometimes having a good mentor or senior leaders who can balance workload, maybe that’s not the biggest thing. You seem to say that the retention is quite good in your school so maybe that has to do with people managing workload or maybe after you are a teacher for ten years you just know how to do it.**

R: Yes, definitely.

**I: Well thank you so much. I know it’s a lot to ask in the lockdown. I mean someone has been chasing to interview me so I totally understand. I totally understand how difficult it is to find time.**

R: It’s just worked in favour to be honest. It was the first year review for my PhD so that’s why I said after the 18th because it was on Monday. Now that’s gone, there’s a bit more…

**I: Have you…?**

**[End of Recording]**