Understanding black academic attainment
Policy and discourse, educational aspirations and resistance

Cecile Wright*

Abstract
This article is a contribution to the ongoing issue and debate concerning the performance of black children in British schools. The issue of under-performing black students is longstanding and persistent. There has been a lack of political will to rectify the matter. On the contrary, the inculcation of neo-liberal education policies with their emphasis on competition and choice is exacerbating existing inequalities. It is argued that an understanding of inequalities can be enhanced by intersectional analysis. The post-school experience of black students indicates a desire to transform their relative school failure through the use of wider community resources. A case study reveals the attempts of black students to move beyond their negative school experience. Critical social capital in the black community can foster a proactive approach in access to post-school education.

Keywords: black students, neo-liberalism, educational desire, community

Introduction
The presence of black and minority ethnic children within the British education system has been viewed as an “educational problem and a threat to the educational standards of the White community” (Osler, 1997 p. 18). Black and minority students entered an education system over 50 years ago that was biased by social class but which then became racially biased (Tomlinson, 2008). This paper is concerned with understanding the continued inequalities of school experiences and outcomes of African Caribbean (hereafter “black”) students. It has three parts. The first discusses the issues of low attainment at school and explores the policy response and context relating to the educational outcome of black children. The second part discusses the theoretical framework concerned with ‘embodied intersectionality’ of race, gender and social class in making sense of the role of education in the (re)production of inequality and the narrative struggle relating to the materiality of educational experience. The third part asks: “why, despite the context of endemic, race, gender and class inequality,
is there a persistent expression of educational aspiration and optimism among black students?” This is akin to what Mirza (2006) describes as “educational urgency”. This is examined through a case study of black students permanently excluded from school who during post-compulsory schooling were able to adapt, survive and succeed in spite of their negative experience. In essence, it examines education as a “transformative mantel” (Mirza, 2006).

**Background: School attainment, policy discourse and contexts**

The enduring inequalities experienced by black students in schools in England have been extensively documented (Coard, 1971; Rampton, 1981; Swann, 1985; Eggleston, 1986; Gillborn & Gipps, 1996; Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Wright et al., 2000; Wright, 2010; Wright, 2012; Mocombe and Tomlin, forthcoming). The literature shows that black students attain persistently lower outcomes at age 16 than their white peers. Recent reviews of research indicate that black children commenced their schooling with high ability and show themselves to be capable students but, as they get older, their achievements decline (see Wright, 1987a; Archer et al., 2007; Rhamie, 2007). Although black students persistently achieve lower outcomes at age 16, in 2007 their outcomes were slightly higher than those of children of Pakistani origin (DEF, 2012). The variation in educational achievement (particularly for black male students) is also linked to high exclusion (or suspension) rates (Wright et al., 2010).

What are the explanations and responses to the plight of black students within the British education system? Wright argues, “Within general educational discourse black children’s schooling experiences and underperformance have been ascribed to, inter alia, deficits, cultural differences and family practices…. Moreover, the discourse in Britain concerning black children as a problem to be managed is also reflected historically and contemporaneously through social policy. For example, social policy initiatives employed to respond to black children in British schools have taken the form of assimilation to the current ‘colour blind’ approaches which have entailed the erasure of ‘race’ from policy...” (Wright, 2010, p. 306). Further, Tomlinson has argued “Although there have been some positive legislative and policy developments, particularly the use of civil law and human rights legislation to penalise racial discrimination, the education system over the past 50 years has developed within a socio-political context in which there has been a lack of political will to ensure that all groups were fairly and equitably treated”.

In relation to the evident continuing discrimination and racial inequality prevalent in education, and more widely in contemporary British society, attention is drawn to the neoliberal and management directions of policy within the education sphere (Ball, 2008; Tomlinson, 2008).

Neoliberalism is a theory of practices that suggests that the well-being of people is best served by freeing individuals’ entrepreneurship from regulation and state interventions within a framework of private property rights, free markets and free trade (see Harvey, 2007). The role of the state is to create this framework. In addition, if
markets, i.e. competition, do not exist then they must be created, if necessary, by the state. State interventions should be minimal. Individualism should be paramount and forms of social solidarity minimised. This is coupled with an emphasis on ‘freedom’, the essentials of which are free enterprise and private ownership. In practical terms, the state should be used to privatise utilities and industries, curb trade union power, reduce public spending especially on welfare, reduce taxation, sell off public housing, deregulate the financial sector and deregulate labour laws.

In the UK it was the Conservative government elected in 1979 that began the process of neoliberal reform. This included reform of the education system. This was part of a long-term process of ‘modernising’, i.e. dismantling the welfare state. The aim was to extend the ideal of personal responsibility and cut back on the role of the state. After 30 years of neoliberal policy it has proved difficult to dismantle public sector education. For example, it took a Labour government in 2003 to succeed in introducing payment (tuition fees) for access to higher education. In general terms, a culture of entrepreneurialism, managerialism, financial accountability and productivity has been imposed on schools (e.g. see Ball, 2008). The role of the local state (local education authorities: LEAs) has been reduced and market principles – especially competition – have been introduced. The attempt by the present Coalition government (Taylor, 2012) to persuade/force/direct/bribe all schools to be free of LEAs and become ‘academies’ (i.e. semi-privatised schools) often sponsored by private business is a move along the path of competition between schools and ‘freeing’ them from the state. Education is thus becoming a competitive enterprise.

Accompanying this is the concept of ‘choice’, i.e. the right of parents to choose the school they want for their child. In practice, this means that those parents with greater financial and cultural capital are far more likely to receive their choice of school than others. Hence, white middle-class parents are more likely to reinforce their own educational advantage while black parents and children are disadvantaged (e.g. Weeks-Bernard, 2007). Thus a market orientation based on ‘choice’ and competition leads to the exacerbation of class and racial inequalities with the elites not contemplating the state education system for their children. It was the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) that intensified notions of choice, competition between schools and reduced LEA influence. From this date onwards, individuals would be blamed for low attainment along with ‘failing schools’ and certain ethnic minority students, i.e. black students. The introduction of state set tests (SATs) and league tables increased the competition. As a result, a hierarchy was created between more and less desirable schools, the latter being disproportionately attended by black and minority ethnic students.

At the school level, the selection and separation of students is part of the neoliberal agenda (see e.g. Gillborn, 2010). This is based on the supposed natural differences in intelligence. In UK schools this results in students being placed in particular sets across the curriculum. This leads to disproportionate numbers of black students being placed in lower sets (see e.g. Gillborn, 2010).
Neoliberal education policy as applied to British education has resulted in schools and universities becoming competitive enterprises with parents/students competing for the ‘best’ institutions (Weeks-Bernard, 2007). It has led to greater class and ethnic segregation. The system is increasingly driven by market forces, competition and group self-interest.

**Intersectionality, educational inequality and resilience**

This section explores the theory of intersectionality and social locations alongside a discussion of social action in relation to the black communities’ political mobilisation around racial inequality in education. In the main, intersectional analysis was created by black feminists as an attempt to counter work by feminists to “homogenize women’s situations” (Yuval-Davis, 2011). It developed as an integrated analysis of interlocking systems of oppression and specifically the intersection of gender, race and social class in the lives of black women. In essence, the approach examines the ways in which race, gender, class and so on intersect to affect social behaviour or people’s lives. The term “intersectionality” was introduced by Crenshaw in a discussion of black women’s employment (Crenshaw, 1989). As mentioned, there was increasing use of the concept in feminist work on how women are simultaneously positioned as women and as black working class and so on. This was an attempt to avoid individuals being reduced to one category at a time and therefore to treat social positions as relational, since “multiple positioning constitutes everyday life” (Yuval-Davis, 2011). It is important to note intersecting dimensions of race, class and gender can result in privileges or penalties depending on their positioning. Gender is racialised, race is gendered. What it is to be a working-class white male is very different from what it is to be a working-class black male. Moreover, black and minority groups have experienced patterns of discrimination irrespective of social class and gender.

Yuval-Davis (2011) raises questions about intersectional analysis’ lack of influence on stratification theory. In particular, she sees intersectionality as a proxy for stratification theory and vice versa. She explains, “stratification – or social stratification, relates to the differential hierarchical locations of individuals and groupings of people on society’s grids of power” (p. 12). In her analysis she outlines the essence of the key stratification theories in relation to intersectionality. For example, as she explains, social power in Marxist terms varies according to the access people have to the means of production. Weberian approaches to stratification relate people’s access to status, power and economic resources. In effect, the struggle for status and a closing of ranks by superior status groups was as important as market domination. However, for Bourdieu there is no sharp differentiation between stratification levels in a hierarchy as there is an emphasis on consumption relating to cultural and social capital; “Class boundaries become linguistic constructions” (p. 15). For Yuval-Davis, Bourdieu’s work can be seen as intersectional analysis in that men and women interact to produce, for example, male domination.
With regard to debates concerning the nature of the relationship between the power structure and education (Arnot, 2002), an intersectional stratification approach can assist in framing our understanding of this nature. Bourdieu’s (1986) theoretical framework is primarily concerned with the ways in which social and educational inequalities can be understood as contextually produced, within and across social fields, through interactions between the “habitus” and forms of resource, or “capital” (economic, social and symbolic).

The application of Bourdieu’s concepts/notions of capital to education has highlighted how social class inequalities are produced within schooling and post-compulsory education. For example, money and economic forms of capital are invariably important to the reproduction of educational inequalities as they can be utilised to purchase various forms of advantage and mobility (or deployed to protect against risks, costs and fixity (Archer et al., 2007). Social capital indicates forms of social participation and connection such as membership of networks, groups, communities, facilities and so on. Cultural capital refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups, credentials used by employers and elite groups as a way to unfairly and arbitrarily screen out some individuals and subordinate groups from privileged jobs and social positions. In essence, in the use of Bourdieu’s analysis attention has been brought to bear on how middle classes generate and defend their privileged positions thanks to their possessions and deployment of dominant, symbolically legitimated, forms of economic, cultural and social capital which they use to successfully negotiate educational markets (see Ball, 2008, p. 26).

As mentioned, the application of Bourdieu’s concepts of capital to education has been formulated with reference to white communities, and hence caution needs to be taken when extending these notions to black communities. It is recognised that caution should be applied to extending Bourdieu’s theoretical contributions to understanding of the achievement of black boys and girls – who often appear to ‘overcome’ classed inequalities (Archer et al., 2007).

For example, it follows that the issue of the low school attainment of black students is at odds with their post-compulsory school experience. According to this view, black students with GCSE results around or below the national median are more likely to go on to higher education than white students with similar results (NEP, 2010a, p. 15). Bourdieu’s emphasis on cultural capital as the source of educational success for middle-class children has its limitations. Halsey et al. (1980) found that material factors were far more significant than cultural ones in working-class educational failure. Whilst this factor may be true to an extent for some black families, their quest for a better life through the education system is paramount irrespective of their class. In the discussion of the experiences of the long established black/Caribbean community in Britain it should also be noted that considerable debate has taken place with regard to how the black community has engaged with and responded to inequalities
of ‘race’ particularly in relation to education (Goulbourne, 2002). The remainder of this paper applies an intersectional stratification theoretical consideration to a case study which examines how young black people manage, survive and transform school ‘failure’ through requisite resources and opportunities made available via social capital facilitated through institutional relationships such as family, kin and community-based organisations.

The study

The issues referred to above were highlighted in a study of young black people’s post-compulsory school experiences. The research was documented over a two-year period and combined quantitative data with qualitative interviewing. The data upon which the article is based include 100 narrative interviews conducted with 33 young people (21 male, 12 female) between the ages of 14 and 19 who had experienced permanent school exclusion [1]. The young people were drawn from those residents in Nottingham and London who had been excluded from both state and independent schools. The young people were interviewed on a maximum of three occasions over a period of two years. Participants were asked to talk about various aspects of three themes: their view on self-following exclusion, sources of support and coping strategies for transforming school exclusion and their views on current personal circumstances and ambitions for the future. Additional data are provided from over 60 interviews with contacts nominated by the young people, including community and social workers, mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings and friends.

Traditionally, these young people are often described as hard to reach (Merton, 1998). Thus a snowballing sample method was used to access the young people for the study. These included contacts with African Caribbean community groups, black organisations, supplementary schools and the black church. The nature of this snowballing process meant that it was impossible to secure an equal number of young people in terms of gender and age. Meetings with the young people were conducted in varied locations including their homes, university and community venues.

Integral to the research design was the desire to both engage and empower the young people. In this vein, the use of visual methods was valuable in the following respects. Firstly, we anticipated that traditional one-to-one interviewing would not necessarily be the best way to carry out the research with the young excluded people because they are likely to have experienced many interview situations where the aim was to prove their responsibility for the exclusion. After considering other methods, visual research methods, namely participant photography, were chosen to place the young people at the centre of the research process.

The empowerment of the research participants was at the core of the research design so further discussion of the efficacy of the status of the researcher within the research process is required. This form of reflexive thinking accords with black feminist researchers’ concerns with understanding the intersection of race, class, gender
and age in the research process (Hooks, 1989; Reynolds, 2005). Our experiences as black female, middle-class researchers interviewing young black females and males, in essence our ‘insider/outside’ status, meant that we were attentive to how gender, race, class and age status impacts on the research process and interactions with the young people. For instance, whereas our racial and gender ascription minimised our outsider status in our interaction with the young women, our age and assumed class affiliation may have been taken as sources of potential domination. As a result of our occupations, during the interviews we were perceived to be middle-class because it was felt by the young people that we had access to certain information and resources to which they had restricted access. Some of the working-class young people sought our opinion about social and educational aspects of further and higher education. They also asked for advice on career matters!

**Findings**

The paper focuses on the ways in which young black people resist and work to transform their negative school experience. Building on the notion of ‘grassroots’ civic citizenship, it identifies how agency, individual response, resistance and challenge are linked to the requisite resources and opportunities made available through social capital facilitated through institutional relationships such as the family, kin and community-based organisations. Employing an intersectional stratification analysis offers new insights about black students’ educational aspirations, and the circumstances within their lives that inform their educational experiences/attainment of post-compulsory schooling.

**Identity formation and ‘educational desire’**

A key theme arising from the study was how the young black people having been labelled as ‘failing’ transformed this label into a desire to have a positive educational outcome. Thomson et al. (2002) explain young people’s diverse reactions to significant turning points in growing up. This is captured by the idea of ‘critical moments’. An equally apt analytical framework to capture the perceptions of change as a cause/effect or catalyst-to structure and/or agency is the notion of recovery and redemption or what Harding (2010) refers to as the “turnaround narrative”. In his study of adolescent boys living in black neighbourhoods in the US context, Harding (2010) explains the narrative of “recovery and redemption” as denoting someone of humble origins who achieves success through hard work and ingenuity. This is considered to be a widespread American idea. It involves recovery from a setback or personal failure. Key elements of the “turnaround narrative” include recognising previous errors – addiction or street crime; getting away from people or places that contribute to past problems; participating in schooling, churches or community programmes; becoming economically independent through work; gaining a family; recognising the importance of gaining educational qualifications to make a turnaround. In es-
sence, the “turnaround narrative” is about making a change in one’s life and having the desire to change. Certainly the findings of this study highlighted how the young people became engaged in pursuing the turnaround narrative. The desire for change, overcoming adversity and possibilities for success are highlighted in the comments of Leon, Lucinda and Keenan [2]:

I want a decent job ... and anything that pays ... then look for an office job when I get a bit older and wear a suit and tie and everything ... it’s not like I’m dumb ... I’ve got plans. I got ideas for the future (Leon).

I’ve done my work experience and I’m doing Business and Finance now ... I want to go to university and study a degree in Business and Finance. Then hopefully get a job like in Financial Services or an accountant or something in that area (Lucinda).
I need to go back to college, go to school and don’t get kicked out. It’s not good in the long run ... it’s hard to find a decent job without qualifications (Keenan).

The young black people’s narratives are suffused with notions of culture, individual agency, familial/community responsibility, subjectivity and becoming. Their narratives suggest why, despite low attainment at age 16, young black people participate disproportionally more in higher education. Overlooking the differential outcomes of ethnic minorities in education, the drive for social progression through educational attainment is demonstrated by the fact that while ethnic minority communities account for 8% of 18–24-year-olds in Britain, they make up almost twice this proportion of university entrants (Shiner and Modood, 2002, p. 210). The National Equality Panel found that those from minority ethnic groups with GCSE results around or below the national median are more likely to go on to higher education than white British pupils with similar results (2010a: 15). Building on the idea that working-class university students seek to better the occupational position of their parents, Mirza argues that for members of the black community this “educational urgency” is a racialised process (2006, p. 144). Reflecting on findings from her study of second-generation young Caribbean working-class women, she suggests that while on the surface they wanted to climb the career ladder and were seeking academic success by gaining qualifications, as she dug deeper she found their motivation was not simply driven by a desire for educational credentials but “educational urgency”, a desire to succeed against the odds and forge new identities that were grounded in a refusal to be quantified as failures (2006, p. 144). In this sense, education was a “transformative mantel” (Mirza, 2006, p. 143).

The role of family and parenting in models of success
Studies have highlighted the influence of families in transitions. For instance, Ball and Maguire’s (2000) studies of post-16 youth in new urban economies found how important the influence of families was in offering and generating resources for iden-
tity formation. Within Britain the black family is stereotyped as lacking the values which are likely to achieve educational success (Fordham, 1998; Reynolds, 2006). Contrary to black parental cultural capital being a barrier to educational success, the critical race theory perspective, particularly the work of Yosso (2005) and Carter (2003) suggests that, instead of positioning the culture of young black people and their family’s engagement as being in opposition to educational success or lacking the dominant cultural capital necessary for academic success, theoretical space should be made for a different set of values and behaviour to coexist. Rollock et al.’s (2011) “Educational Strategies of the Black Middle Class” study in the UK examines the educational perspectives, strategies and experiences of Black Caribbean heritage middle-class families as they attempt to navigate their children’s success through the education system. Black middle-class parents in the study were active in supporting their children’s education outside school. They draw on their social networks, often with other black middle-class professionals, in order to provide children with positive representations of black people, and obtain practical help and advice (Vincent et al., 2011, p. 6). They enrol their children in a range of extra-curricular activities or tutoring. Activities include music, sport, dance, drama, black mentoring and youth organisations (Vincent et al., 2011, p. 5). Notably, extracurricular activities have been identified as interventions with some demonstrable impact on the aspirations, attitudes and behaviours of children in relation to academic attainment and participation (Cummings et al., 2012, p. 4).

The findings in this research resound with the Rollock et al. (2011) study. The young black people unanimously agreed that they had received support from their parents. This support included advice about how to tackle racism and how to succeed in their education. The young people asserted that the strategies fostered a ‘sense of belonging’ and served as a powerful driving force for educational aspirations and participation.

“They (the family) kept me up and encouraged me a lot ... they were always there for me and from the beginning they believed in me” (Tony).

Below, David recalls how his father had sought legal advice after he was excluded:

...because he cared and wanted to help me out of the situation... (David).

Many of the young people had reported that the negative educational experiences and the endeavour to forge success and the family support later offered had led to an improvement in familial relationships:

She (the mother) believed in me. I think it might have brought us closer together closer because she actually believed me and trusted me ... showed me how to cope ... I was happy that she believed me. I was glad that she was there to support me (Nelson).
My mum was helping me, she’s there all the time for me, she was pushing me like ‘you need to get back into another school or centre or something at least to carry on your education’ and she did help me … I had good support from my family (Miranda).

Thus parents were considered to have played a role in steering their children towards successful academic success through the employment of various strategies including the effective capitalisation of the social capital they had developed through their family network. Moreover, the mothers were observed to be at the forefront of everything. Reay (2000) posits that mothers’ emotional support of their children’s academic success transfers to educational and social prestige. According to Ball and Maguire (2000), class and economic factors might affect mothers’ ability to “divert their emotional involvement into generating academic profit for their children”.

**Community solidarity, grassroots citizenship and their possibilities**

Historically, in the UK urban black communities have been critical sites for black-Caribbean individuals forging a politics of struggle and resistance (Goulborne, 1989). The critical mass of black Caribbeans in these urban spaces facilitated political organising and protest. It is argued that the community bonds in these urban spaces/ neighbourhoods created spaces for the development of day-to-day strategies and networks of survival and self-reliance (Reynolds, 2008). Through such urban spaces social solidarity was formed. The historically successful role and impact of community-led initiatives in shaping the transitional experience of young people (Wright et al., 2010) were a recurring theme in the interviews with many of the black young men in this study. A particular theme was their concern about the limited social and economic opportunities they faced as part of their everyday lives and also the restrictions placed on their ambitions and expectations for economic success and inter-generational social mobility. Building on the theme of community solidarity, the findings suggested that the young people engaged with community-based organisations which facilitated a work ethos, attitudes of self-worth and black identity. As the remarks by Peter suggest:

... the ISSP, they giving me help as well ... they like keeping off the streets like ... more constructive things to do like more positive things in my mind (Peter).

A recurring theme in the young black men’s narratives was their encounters with black professionals, as exemplified by attempts to challenge negative images of black masculinity by positive self-identity. This was done by encouraging black boys away from the symbols of negative stereotypes and providing them with emotional and educational support. This was predicated on seemingly unconditional mutual respect, as this comment asserts:
...it made me do a lot of thinking for myself, it made me self-conscious and not so arro-
gant ... because there are two paths for me in the situation that I was in ... I had to decide
which one I had to take, and I took a lot of stick but was given a lot of advice, suggestions
... (James).

The black professionals in the study highlighted the pivotal role of community-based
organisations in achieving a sense of inclusion within the young black men. Further,
this was seen as a prerequisite for achieving success. The black professionals did this
by attempting to provide the opportunities denied the young men by education and
other mainstream organisations:

I just have a team that is trying to support the young people for what they have been through
and supposed to get and have been denied of, and try to do the best we can do within the
parameters and move the boundaries and knock the door hard and move the doors off the
hinges to make changes (Youth Advocate Manager, ISSP, London).

Any gaps in society, try and help plug those (Community Development Officer, Nottingham).

Moreover, Reynolds (2008) suggests that localised community programmes such
those offered by black community organisations, churches etc. play a pivotal role in
ameliorating the effects of the social exclusion of young black people. It should be
recognised that despite the apparent problems associated with black locality, such
as for example poverty or limited social mobility, these spaces hold intrinsic values
in the lives of young people.

Broadly speaking, the community-based organisations highlight the impact of
community, cultural, social and capital on the young black people’s attempts to
achieve progress. In particular, the evidence demonstrates how community-based
organisations in black communities provide the young people with critical social cap-
it in the form of connections to community-based organisations. It is observed that
organisations’ work with the young people includes fostering a pro-active approach to
accessing educational opportunities, strategies for social progress, activities devoted
to developing a constructive racial and cultural identity and a focus on achieving
success through personal transformation (Wright et al., 2010).

Conclusion
This paper began by examining the “enduring inequalities experienced by black
students in England”. The permeation of educational policy by neoliberal theory will
undoubtedly enhance inequalities in educational provision and outcome as it has
in UK society as a whole over the last 30 years (Harvey, 2007). Under the guise of
freedom of choice the white flight towards ‘better’ schools is leaving black families
with only one choice – their local school (Weekes-Bernard, 2007). It can be argued
that black children are being viewed as an ‘educational problem’ and a threat to the educational standards of the white community. Hence, we are witnessing increasing educational segregation.

The use of intersectionality to explore issues underlying racial inequality in education has revealed the interfacing of social identities – race, gender, class – and the increasing structural inequality. Neoliberal education policies tend to reinforce Bourdieu’s notions on how middle classes – predominantly white middle classes – enhance their privileged positions in education through their access to economic, social and cultural capital. These are the assets that disproportionately benefit white middle-class families in an educational marketplace increasingly based on competition and choice.

The paper has also shown that, despite the unequal outcomes between white and black students in schooling, black students are disproportionately more likely to go on to higher education. This suggests that the inequalities in access to cultural and economic capital do not determine access to higher education. Black families have long persisted in their endeavours to improve their livelihoods via the education system.

The case study highlights the desire of black students to transform their negative school experiences. For the ‘black community’ educational attainment can be seen as a proxy for social mobility and a counter to the structural inequality embedded in the education system.

The present trends in the UK education system will pose serious challenges for the black community in its attempts to counter this inequality. Although the British state has legislated against racial discrimination the state has done little in recent years to develop fairness and equity for black and minority ethnic students in education. The education system has not actively sought to provide a fair and equal education for all. Indeed, population segregation by area results in segregated education. This is allied to growing media and political hostility to ‘multiculturalism’ (see e.g. Tomlinson, 2008). Further, black males are predominately demonised as the main elements in gun and drug culture and crime (Wright 2010). The attempts by teachers and LEAs to develop a more equitable system has been replaced by competition between schools (Taylor, 2012). Multicultural, anti-racist education now appears to be in the past as the market decides what schools will teach and who their students will be.

The increase in the market of ‘faith’ schools (i.e. schools of predominately one religion) further exacerbates segregation. In addition, the increased labelling of schools as ‘failing schools’ with its agenda of closing them and re-opening them as ‘academies’ is occurring under the guise of ‘increasing standards’ (e.g. Taylor, 2012). In practice, there is likely to be more selection and exclusion of pupils on grounds of behaviour. This has for many years disproportionately affected black students (Wright, 2012).

A market-based system driven by an ideological commitment to consumer demand will result in more private sector involvement. Such a system based on group interest inevitably benefits those parents most able to use their resources to gain access to the
‘best’ schools for their children (Weeks-Bernard, 2007). In such a system, the principles of addressing inequality, black educational underperformance and ‘education for all’ are likely to be unimportant. The resilience of the black communities in supporting children deemed to have failed in the school system will be a major challenge.

Notes
1 The findings are drawn in a study funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, “Overcoming school exclusion and achieving successful youth transitions within African Caribbean Communities, 2003–2005”.
2 All the names of the interviewees are pseudonyms.

*Cecile Wright* is Professor of Sociology, Independent Researcher and honorary lecturer, at the School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham, UK. Her research focus is on race, ethnicity, gender and social class, youth, education and postcolonial theory.
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