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Transitions: Exploring Aspirations of BME Muslim Youth Exiting Compulsory Education

Abstract

This paper presents insights from a qualitative case study in Glasgow, Scotland, using semi-structured paired interviews to explore the aspirations of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Muslim young people labelled by policy as requiring More Choices, More Chances (2006) as they prepare to leave compulsory education. The young people were identified by their schools and affiliated agencies as having the propensity to fall out of education, employment and training upon exiting compulsory education, therefore requiring support to transition from compulsory education to a positive destination of further or higher education, employment or training. The study found that five of the eleven young people perceived themselves to be treated differently to other students in school, where they were overlooked, ignored, discriminated against and offered limited support with studies and transition. Three young people spoke of conflict and miscommunication, but were supported with their studies and transition and were not aware of any discrimination from their teachers. Three students chose not to answer questions. This paper adds to evidence by Stevenson et al (2016) study in England that though the Muslim population is diverse and there is no single Muslim 'experience', that the young Muslims faced similar challenges of 'othering' in Scotland.

Keywords: Transitions, Identity, Youth Policy, Ethnicity, Religion, Schools

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Introduction

Certain groups of BME young people such as African-Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi, have been identified as having a higher propensity to fall out of education, employment or training across the UK (Field, 2003; Hayward et al 2008; Smeaton et al, 2010), in Scotland (Netto et al, 2011) and in Glasgow (Baird and Collins, 2010). With the introduction of children and young people policies to close the attainment gap and improve post compulsory education choices, it is interesting that the identified ethnic minority group is still being cited as 'at risk' (Conrad, 2005) and 'disaffected' by schools and agencies in research and policy literature (Field, 2003; Hayward et al, 2008; Smeaton et al, 2010; Baird and Collins, 2010; Netto et al, 2011). Yet, despite the detailed information collected by the Local Authorities and other governmental bodies (Powney et al, 1998), there is limited understanding of the cultural identity and needs of the BME Muslim young people who are labelled as disengaged and disaffected by policies such as More Choices, More Chances (2006).

By drawing on insights from the interviews with the BME Muslim young people through their experiences, the author sought to explore their experiences in the context of three schools and a youth work organisation in Glasgow to better understand the social factors which may lead to less than average educational attainment and affect the pathway taken out of compulsory education, and the policy strategies deployed to assist the young people.

Literature on BME Muslim young people's transitions, identities and youth policy was reviewed. The Methods section discussed why case study was chosen as a methodology, and semi-structured paired interviews as the data collection tool, before moving onto discuss the analysis of the data and the themes which emerged from this process. Salient quotes were used to evidence the findings in the next two sections, before we move to the discussion section and conclusion, where the author makes recommendations and future directions for potential research.

Literature Review

Transitions

This article seeks to better understand what it means to be labelled as a BME Muslim young person requiring 'more choices, more chances' (MCMC) (Scottish

Government, 2006) in Glasgow, Scotland. It draws on insights from qualitative interviews with the young people on their perceptions of the support they received as they transitioned out of compulsory education. Raffe (2008, 2) defines the transition process as a system which includes education, training, organisation of labour markets as well as social welfare systems and families, which shape transitions across institutional and structural factors by young people as they travel out of compulsory education.

Cassidy et al (2006) state that there is increasing recognition among practitioners and policymakers of BME young people being particularly vulnerable in transition from compulsory education to the outside world, and where the SEU (2005) acknowledges that there is a lack of data about the experiences of BME young people. Cassidy et al (2006, 3) concur that more research is necessary 'if interventions are to be sensitive to differences between young people from BME and White backgrounds but also between young people from different minority ethnic groups.' This highlights the need for further research to better understand the cultural backgrounds of BME people who are Muslims, so that schools, agencies and national and local governments can tailor interventions that can bring in more effective policy and practice outcomes, and a successful transition for the individual young person.

If a young person is perceived as an outsider or is aware of the inequality they are facing, it can be argued that it can lead to the transition across secondary school being difficult (Demack et al, 2000; Caulfield, Hill and Shelton, 2005; Shah, 2008). In the context of making decisions of which route to take upon leaving compulsory education, Ball et al (2000, 24) suggest this 'choice' is neither rational or a neutral individual process.

'Identity is socially and culturally 'located' in time and space and inflected by rejection, displacement and desire. Post-16 'choices' are bound up with the expression and suppression of identities.'

(Ball et al., 2000, 24)

Archer (2002, 362) asserts that choices are 'bound up with identities, embedded in tacit/common-sense notions of 'what is appropriate for people like us/me' that can be specifically racialised, gendered and classed (Ball et al., 2000). Choice can be used as a site of resistance and the enactment of identities; thus, notions of 'choice' can

be contested as part of racialised gender relations.’ This paper’s aim is to tap into the identity aspect of post 16 choices, as the young people prepared, or were prepared to make the transition onto a positive destination.

This initial examination of literature suggested that it would be useful to examine Black Minority Ethnic (BME) young people transitions. Young people from BME backgrounds, especially from Pakistani, African-Caribbean, Bangladeshi origins, are being identified by their schools and affiliated agencies as falling into the category of being in need of ‘More Choices, More Chances’ (2006). This policy category identifies the young person as requiring additional support to transition from school to education, employment or training (Hayward et al, 2008; Smeaton et al, 2010; Baird and Collins, 2010; Netto et al, 2011). Yet, the scarcity of evidence of young people from BME Muslim communities, especially of transitions, suggests a gap in knowledge.

Aspirations of BME Young People

There is growing research evidence which indicates BME children have a tendency to have higher aspirations than their majority ethnic peers, predominantly in the case of those who have moved to the UK from abroad (Strand, 2007), with Shah, Dwyer and Modood (2010) stating that regardless of socio-economic background (including those of Pakistani origin), have higher than average educational aspirations than their mainstream peers.

Modood (2004) suggests ethnic groups such as Chinese and Indian, go onto perform better at schools where the same level of disadvantages persist such as poverty, social class, yet the young people are able to choose a route into higher education. However there is evidence that ethnic groups for example Bangladeshi, African Caribbean, and Pakistani heritage are performing more poorly against their peers in schools, where their socio-economic background is suggested as one of a set of complex indicators to lower educational attainment (Shah et al, 2008; Netto et al, 2011; Deuchar and Graham, 2012). This is reiterated by Smeaton et al (2010) who state that the issues leading to young people being labelled as having the potential to go onto negative destinations emerge when they are children, early in their school journey and share the Innovation Unit’s definition:

‘Parts of our schools system can match the best anywhere in the world but overall our school system is not world class. It systematically fails certain groups of children: children from poor backgrounds, looked after children, children excluded from school, children from certain ethnic groups’,

Smeaton et al, 2010, 5

The children from ethnic groups are then identified as Afro-Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi by Smeaton et al (2010), with Osler and Starkey (2005, 196) going further to state that the young people are not given the same opportunities as the main student population ‘and are often poorly served by their schools’.

Hayward et al (2008, 18) discuss the groupings of young people categorised as NEET to suggest young people from the ethnic minority groups (Afro-Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) are identified as failing to go onto positive destinations once they have left school. This indicates that there is growing evidence that certain groups of BME children grow into young people who are disadvantaged at school (Smeaton et al, 2010), and do not go onto a positive destination of education, employment or training once they leave school.

This is an opportunity to explore the experiences of the young people as they transition out of compulsory education by asking the young people about their experiences of support during the transition period.

Identity of BME Muslim Young People

This paper is placed in the context of literature and empirical research that has examined different aspects of identity in the context of minority groups living in the UK (eg. Archer, 2001, 2002; Basit, 1997; Dwyer, 2000; Dwyer, Shah, & Sanghera, 2008; Haque & Bell, 2001; Ramji, 2007; Shah, Dwyer, & Modood, 2010; in Franceschelli’s (2013) study on South Asian Young British Muslims: Identity, Habitus and the Family Field. The research studies have mostly been concerned with specific aspects of the identity of young people. The educational aspirations of young British Muslims is explored by the literature (Archer, 2001; Basit, 1997, 2012) together with the issue of underachieving Pakistani and Bangladeshi young people (Haque & Bell, 2001), whereas Dwyer (2000) and Ramji (2007) focus on the negotiation and construction of gender identities, with Fincher (2011, 905) stating that ‘the identities of young people, including students, are influenced by their institutional contexts...’

The formation of identities is shaped by the interplay between the cultural demands of individuals or communities and the social-economic conditions they inhabit (Barth, 1969; Creese et al, 2006). Coburn and Wallace (2011, 11), add to this argument and assert that youth work offers space which contributes to the 'explorations of identity...where complex historical, cultural and biographical constructs are experienced, critiqued and developed' in accordance to youth policy. Coburn and Wallace (2011, 63) call into question as to what extent young people are able to act as agents in forming their own lives (Green, 2010).

More Choices, More Chances (2006)

Disaffection and disengagement from education are factors which have been interpreted and used as explanations for youth policy to categorise young people as requiring additional support, using instruments such as risk matrices by the local authorities, schools and agencies. The More Choices, More Chances (2006) policy is put into practice as the young people are in the last six months of compulsory secondary education, ensuring that they are assigned guidance support either through an activity coach or careers guidance to help them plan a positive destination upon leaving compulsory education. Policy recommends the schools work actively with the youth work sector and the local authority and its delivery partners in accordance with Curriculum for Excellence (2004) policy and strategy from the Scottish Government which states a priority for engaging with 'young people to facilitate their personal, social and educational development and enable them to gain a voice, influence and a place in society (Scottish Government, 2004, 1).

Youthlink Scotland is the national agency for youth work in Scotland. Coburn and Wallace (2011, 2) assert that the 'incorporating a focus on policy priorities ... youth work is emphasised as a powerful process that enables young people to achieve their full potential.'

Youth policies propose remedies that imply the problem of falling out of education, employment and training lies in the deficits of the target population who, without the necessary or right sort of knowledge and skills, are unable to take advantages of the opportunities said to exist to make the transition.

This article is therefore an opportunity to understand the young person's perspectives, and to engage in conversations with them in order to understand the

cultural nuances of their experiences of transitions by exploring the person's experiences of school as they prepare to leave (or have left) compulsory education.

This rationale has theoretical and practical relevance and will explore the aspirations of the young people, to assist them to transition onto positive destinations as per guidelines outlined in the Scottish Government policies such as Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC, 2008), MCMC (2006) and Curriculum for Excellence (2004) and Opportunities for All (2012), as they exit compulsory education.

In order to understand the impact of the increasing emphasis of both economic as well as education policy 'on the role of networks and trust in facilitating the informal transmission of skills and knowledge' (Field, 2003, 210), the author agrees with Roberts (2003) that it is impossible to explain what is occurring elsewhere until the substructure of young people's lives has been analysed properly, leading to the next section which discusses why a case study approach was taken.

Methods

Although this is a small scale study, its originality rests on understanding the experiences of BME Muslim young people who are labelled as disadvantaged and in need of support as they prepare to exit compulsory education, in formal and informal educational settings within the wider institutional and social environment, in order to inform policy and practice.

Lincoln and Denzin's (2000, 3) definition of 'situatedness' of qualitative research, led me to adopt a qualitative case study approach to explore policy implementation through observations and interviews with the young people, to enable the portrayal of the issue under examination in all 'its personal and social complexity' (Stake, 1988, 256).

Young people of BME origin, labelled by their school and youth work organisation as requiring additional support to transition onto a positive destination, in the last six months of compulsory education and up to twelve months out of compulsory education were chosen by the school and youth work organisation as the sample to take part in the study as the policy enactment of Opportunities for All (2012), More Choices More Chances (2006) was examined. This was due to a lack of access to

the research field over a protracted period until an intervention by the Scottish Education Minister and local council officials from the Education department negotiated with the schools to enable access (Oates and Riaz, 2016).

In a semi-structured interview style was used where the interviewer shared the framework of themes to be explored with the participants, which focused on gathering data from six main areas: education; home and family; after school activities; ethnicity and culture; access to information and services and future plans and aspirations. Semi-structured interviewing is a very flexible technique for small-scale research (Fielding, 1995; Mason, 2002; May, 2001; Patton, 2002).

A paired interview technique as ascribed by Lewis and Ritchie (2003, p193) where an interview is conducted with two or three participants at once, who may know each other, or may be recruited as strangers was used. Paired interviews and triads can be an effective hybrid of in-depth interviews and group discussions, useful for example for in-depth discussion among people who knew each other well. More commonality between participants was likely to be necessary to avoid the process becoming a collection of interviews. (Mayall, 2000; Miller et al, 2015).

The three schools had difficulty matching the sampling criteria exactly as some of the young people who had been identified for the research did not come to the school on the day the interviews were scheduled, even though they had been made aware of the research and had agreed to take part, resulting in a smaller number of interviews taking place.

Eleven young people of BME and Muslim origin, labelled by their school and youth work organisation as requiring additional support to transition onto a positive destination, in the last six months of compulsory education and up to twelve months out of compulsory education, were chosen by their schools and youth work organisation as the sample to take part in the study. However three of the young people gave limited responses during the interview process. Pseudonyms were used to protect the research participants', schools and youth work centre's identity where the interviews took place. Information sheets, consent forms were discussed with all participants, assuring them that as a researcher the author was bound by ethical standards set by the research institute, and that the research participant could withdraw their consent for their data to be used at any point of the research study.

(Table 1: The Research Participants – to be inserted here)

A process of line by line coding was used to analyse the transcribed interviews, where the concept of 'habitus' defined as a socially organised scheme of dispositions and structures that shape 'thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions' (Bourdieu, 1990a, 55) used as the criteria for themes to emerge around the literature themes of transitions, aspirations, identity and policy, or if there were dispositions or actions which stood out for other reasons and required separate categories.

The two key themes which emerged from the analysis were 'Transitions: The Building of Support, Trust and Rapport', and 'Support and Guidance from Teachers and Agencies'. The author will present these themes drawing on salient quotations from the young people.

It is not the author's intention to generalise from the findings but to instead develop a deeper understanding of the aspirations of the identified group of young people in the school context (Cohen et al, 2000, 103; Guba and Lincoln, 1981, 62). The next section moves to explore the findings in more detail. It firstly explores the aspirations of the young people. The young people go onto discuss the support they received from school staff responsible for guidance and support as the young people prepare to transition out of compulsory education.

Transitions: The Building of Support, Trust and Rapport

The young people discuss the support they receive as they are on the cusp of leaving compulsory education or as they try to progress onto a positive destination. Although similar responses are found in youth and education literature, the findings are specific due to the young people already being labelled as requiring support and from an ethnic minority background and add to the literature (Field, 2003; Ord, 2007; Coburn, 2011).

The young people share their aspirations and the routes they will take to gain qualifications or experience.

'I want to get a training course in it as well. I already have an agent for the extras but I want to get when I'm older an agent for proper acting, obviously, because I can't be an extra for the rest of my life. So that is pretty much what I have planned now, but... I'm going to get a job first, work up some money and get a name for myself before I do it, so it will be easier for me.'

Junaid, Young Person (Hawthorne)

Junaid (Hawthorne) spoke about wanting to go into acting as a career and the steps he needed to take to make that happen. He was aware of the precarious nature of his potential career, and was willing to take on other work to support himself until he reached his goal.

Umair said:

‘Subject that I am most comfortable with right now is business, so I am going to do business at university.’

Umair, Young Person (Hawthorne)

Umair is considering a business degree at university but had not thought further ahead than that.

‘I used to think of being a doctor but obviously not anymore, I’m not interested anymore.... I grew up and that. I was finding all the stuff too hard.....I’ve thought of other things and like that, but I just don’t know which one to go for right now. Hmmm, being like something to do with computers and that or cars really, like that kind of stuff...We have a class were they tell us to research our job, to help us out and like, where to go for help, how we go and meet the career advisors and all that...’

Anas, Young Person (Hawthorne)

Anas (Hawthorne) shares his aspirations for the future, talking about how he once wanted to be a doctor but changing track as he felt it ‘was too hard’ and is considering computing or cars and shares that there are classes, where time is set aside to plan ahead for life once school finishes. The young men had given thought to the pathways they wished to take upon leaving compulsory education.

Both Junaid and Umair agreed with Anas, when I asked if they received support or guidance from their teachers on the type of destinations they should chose or need help to transition onto, with Anas saying:

‘We have a class were they tell us to research our job, to help us out and like, where to go for help, how we go and meet the career advisors and all that...Obviously everyone has struggled but at the top of my head, I can’t think of anything, but the support has always been here.’

Anas, Young Person (Hawthorne)

'I spoke to my mum about it...Hopefully a mechanic, an engineer, fixing cars and that. I think that gives opportunities cos you can go to college, you can go for apprenticeships or you can go uni.'

Shiraz, Young Person (Mandela High)

Shiraz (Mandela High) discussed his aspirations to become a mechanic and the different routes he could take into the field. He shared that he had support from his mother (who was training to be a nurse) in helping guide his decision, and shook his head (to indicate 'no') when I asked if he had received any support in the school or other agency.

'I'm trying to study a lot this year. Cos these 2 years are important and my dad said you better study hard. I want to go to uni to study more. I just want to get a nice job, not like be a bin man or something.'

Ali, Young person (MEn)

Ali speaks of the importance of studying hard to attain good grades in his chosen subjects, with his father encouraging him to get a 'nice job' in comparison to being a 'bin man' which could be a reference to a desk job which is indoors to outdoor, physical work, as is seen as being more prestigious in this comment.

'Short term is to get a part time job. From there going onto a bigger job, earn some money and study more. If you study, you get a job, start my own business or something.'

Iftikar, Young Person (MEn)

Iftikar spoke of working part time and studying, to get a well-paid job, eventually becoming self-employed and running his own business. Both Ali and Iftikar appear to understand the importance of qualifications as a 'tool' to help them progress once they leave compulsory education.

Zara spoke of her aspirations to get into college to do a beauty course. She smiled as she shared the journey with me.

'How do I see myself? A beautician. Make-up is my life. I want to be a really good make-up artist and do a beautician course. You know how you get those 5 day Asian make up courses and all that- for that you need the money. And you need the certificate. Even if I get into a NC Make up course at least I've got the certificate to say I've done a wee bit of make-up, put me in. But for that I need to get into college. If I do get into a make-up course, I will be over the moon.'

Zara, Young Person (MEn)

This is an interesting quote where Zara is actively looking at different ways to gain the practical experience to get onto a course. She goes on to share that she uses YouTube video tutorials to practice different make up techniques.

'I watch YouTube tutorials in my spare time. I sit down on YouTube and type in anything and watch them and some of them do tutorials on how they [the make-up artists] got there.'

Zara, Young Person (MEn)

Zara connected strongly to the stories and journeys told by the make-up artists.

'Some of these young make-up artists are just amazing. If they can do it, then I can do it. Then you pure build up your confidence. I can do this, I can get there. So it's quite good.'

Zara, Young Person (MEn)

Zara has used the internet channel to support her by maintaining her enthusiasm, and confidence until a place at college for her chosen course becomes available.

Fiza has had issues transitioning from school to a positive destination of her choice, due to the lack of places at college, where she is hoping to take her Highers.

'I was like looking at an accounting course. I was thinking of doing that even if it takes me 2 or 3 years to get to uni. I want to start off at the bottom, and get myself to the top... (laughs) it's one of those lines from a rapper song...'

Fiza, Young Person (MEn)

Again Fiza has a clear idea of the route she wishes to take to meet her aspirations, despite the fact that it will take her longer due to alternative route she is considering.

All the young people aside from Anum (Brookes), who asked not to answer the question about her school experiences and plans when she leaves school,

'Is it ok, if I don't answer that question.'

Anum, Young Person (Brookes)

Shoaib talks of 'going to university to do law' and Abdullah's ambition to join the police force,

'... I as a person, want to finish school then college then university and then we can get a good job when we finish university when I got qualification...Police officer'

Abdullah, Young Person (Mandela)

They discuss the steps they will need to take in order to reach their goals. The aspirations cover a wide spectrum from the creative arts such as hospitality, music and drama, to joining the police, accountancy and becoming self-employed.

The data strongly indicates that the research participants are not unaware or disinterested or powerless or have low aspirations in how they wish to shape their future destinations as youth policy and literature (Shah et al, 2008; Netto et al, 2011; Deuchar and Graham, 2012) has indicated, and do not leave all the responsibility to their careers advisor. Many of the young people in the study taking the initiative and researching what options were available to them and deciding if the options were achievable, and what steps to take to reach that particular goal (Strand, 2007; Shah, Dwyer and Modood, 2010). This also ties into wider literature where McKendrick et al (2007) who through their data analysis found no evidence of young people from deprived communities of either disengagement or disaffection, but highlighted that further research was required on the gaps between skills and aspirations of different young people in their study. These studies have concluded disaffection within the school begins early if inequalities are not perceived to have been dealt with in the best possible way. They argue that a preference for one group of pupils can lead to disengagement. Yet the findings in this study suggest a different perspective.

There is an increased awareness by the young person of being treated differently to the main student population in their year group, and could heighten their awareness of not being equal to 'others' and a full citizen of the school, regardless of what policy may say. According to Bhopal (2010) and the findings of this study, this raised 'awareness' can be the precursor to disaffection and disengagement. This consciousness could be used as a catalyst for change and to inform policy and practice.

The manner in which the young people pro-actively plan their aspirations for the future fits into Morrow's (1999, 757) analysis of the young people as 'social actors

who shape and influence their own environments', and this becomes more evident as they leave compulsory education and are either directed by their school staff, youth workers, parents, peers or self-direct onto pathways on leaving schools. Basit (1997b, 432) found that regardless of her research participants' family backgrounds being working class, the young Muslim women aspired to careers which were 'unambiguously middle class' and to upward social mobility.

Support and Guidance from Teachers and Agencies

This section reminds us of the aim of Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2004) which is to promote and encourage positive learning environments and one approach that is suggested is through inclusion and equality. This approach is to encourage an environment where all children and young people are being treated equally, where there is an ethos of mutual respect and appreciation of the differences that exist and to embrace these. It is focussed on removing barriers to learning and discrimination and encourages an environment where equality is endorsed. This will be explored firstly by asking the young people of the support they received in planning their transitions.

'It's like some teachers are really nice to you. It's like my guidance teacher, she was really nice. And stuff like that. She took care of us and told us what to do, help make our choices and she took care of us, and she let us have a laugh sometimes, and sometimes we had to work. She gave a lot of support.'

Iftikar, Young Person (MEn)

Iftikar mentions his guidance teacher and indicates the care, support and guidance she provided, as well as being approachable, and can be interpreted as a nurturing relationship. Ali talks about his 'go to teachers', teachers he trusts if he has a problem.

'There were a few teachers who were my go to teachers. If I want to talk to them personally, they like help me and guide me and stuff. I really like that because, most of the teachers at Brookes don't help me, only a few. If I have a problem, I go to the teachers I trust.'

Ali, Young Person (MEn)

Ali shares the trust he has built up with a small group of teachers and who he goes to for guidance. Iftikar speaks of 'racist' teachers and incidents and shares the powerlessness and disenfranchisement he feels due to not being listened to,

because of his ethnicity and his age. He perceives the lack of support in class subjects such as English and Maths from his teachers is due to his ethnicity.

'It's just like the teachers were being racist and making racist comments and obviously we can't do anything. As we're [not clear] and we're underestimated as being young and like [unclear] and I'm a Pakistani. I am a Scottish Pakistani, and I was raised up. Everywhere you go there is racism and we're underestimated again – you drop out and don't feel like doing anything really. Some teachers are quite good, but when it comes to your main teachers like your English and Maths and teachers you have to keep on for a long time, it's kinda the way they put you under pressure. They don't give you like no extra support or any [unclear].'

Iftikar, Young Person (MEn)

Iftikar (MEn) feels excluded from opportunities he perceives the mainstream student population receiving. He also perceives them receiving more support and guidance to his detriment.

'They don't treat us like the Scottish White people, they like give them more chances, more ideas, they give more support to them. They see us one time and that's us left. The other people, they will see them every 2 or 3 weeks, they give them more chances than us lot.'

Iftikar, Young Person (MEn)

Iftikar feels he is being penalised for being a Muslim and latent 'anger' is directed at him because of the Lee Rigby murder in England and other events carried out by terrorists. He goes onto describe an event which led to him being suspended from the school. He points a finger at one of his teachers who had him suspended from school, trying to justify why the teacher took that course of action.

'...I think, I think its cause of the race. Like what happened down in London, just cause we were Muslims and apparently they were Muslims, all these attackings and stuff and 9/11 and stuff.....'

Iftikar (MEn)

Zara and Fiza (MEn) talk about not being given the choice to choose subjects which they wanted and how this has impacted on the types of qualification or training courses they can apply for, and the lack of voice or agency in the decision-making process.

'Even now, they chose subjects for younger people innit, they chose it for them. Even if its subjects they don't want to do, they chose it for them.'

One of the questions the author asks the young people is if they think there are any barriers to them being able to achieve better 'outcomes' when they leave school to go onto 'positive destinations'. Junaid (Hawthorne) is very thoughtful in his reply

'I wouldn't really know. There are always going to be barriers in life. No matter what you do, there is always going to be something blocking you. You can either just turn around, go around it, go up it, or turn around, it's going to take time, no matter what.... It will take time, but you can do it, so until I actually do that, I can't honestly answer that question.'

Junaid, Young Person (Hawthorne)

Anas and Umair are also perplexed and feel the onus should be on them as individuals to try harder and they hadn't come across anything 'as yet'. The author felt she put the young people at Hawthorne in a conundrum, as they indicated they had no experience of what these barriers may be, and indeed if there were barriers Junaid discussed strategies to deal with them.

The Muslim young people from MEn and Shiraz from Mandela High consistently suggest it is their religion that results in the difference in the way they perceive they are treated in comparison to the majority ethnic school population.

One young person Iftikar (MEn) speaks on a few occasions about his belief that it is because he is a Scottish Pakistani and Muslim that causes this difference in treatment, where he feels he is treated badly and not given any worth as a student in the school. Whereas Shiraz (Mandela High) stated that although he has matured he was still treated like 'messabout' by one of his teachers.

Shiraz shares his trajectory through school, and how he has made positive changes to stop fighting, and aspirations for when he transitions out of compulsory education. He indicates the positive effect of being treated like an adult in the school, but he goes onto say his year head teacher still makes him feel like an immature boy.

'Sometimes teachers that don't have faith. Someone like example my year head, is like, he thinks I'm going to mess about cos as like because from 4th to 1st year I was a messabout but after that I fully changed, but after that he still thinks I'm still immature boy...'

He also shares his tumultuous relationship with year head teacher, who he says refuses to acknowledge him as growing up and being more responsible, telling

Shiraz to 'go away' when Shiraz tries to speak to him. This causes Shiraz to feel frustrated and upset and say that he 'hates' him. A sense of powerlessness is perceived by Shiraz in trying to get his teacher to acknowledge him as 'of worth'.

The author asks Shiraz how that makes him feel and if he has tried to speak to his teacher.

'Low again. It feels like uncomfortable, sometimes the only person I can go to and speak to in my school is my PSE teacher, my pastoral care teacher. Mr Johnson.... Tried, but....you have to bond a trust with a teacher first and Gordon help that. All Gordon goes is 'go away, go away'. It's funny though....Yeah that one. Don't like him, hate him...Punch him'

Shiraz perceives this lack of relationship with his year head teacher as one of conflict, where he tries unsuccessfully to gather respect from his teacher but is told to go away on every occasion further reinforcing Shiraz's feelings of low self-esteem based on his past behaviour.

There are instances that the young people used the word 'racist' in their interactions with their teachers to illustrate their point, the author interprets this as the young people perceiving themselves to being 'othered'; not feeling valued or respected; and not treated as an equal within the class structure with their peers, and worryingly racial and religious discrimination.

However, Shiraz, Fiza, Zara, Iftikar and Ali feel they were mainly unsupported with their learning needs. Iftikar had asked for help from his senior teacher in charge of all the classes in his school year, for support:

'Yeah, once I did [ask for support], then of course my year head, well she just kinda goes you're talking a load of garbage and to give you extra work and stuff. And off course you can't argue with them and then they accuse you of being this and that. Then they phone your parents up and get you in trouble, they write up a bad report, and it affects if you get into college or not. They [the colleges] always look at your report.'

Iftikar, Young Person (MEn)

Iftikar said he was rebuffed and where he said he was told that continuing to push for support might lead to parental involvement and a bad annual report. It is this threat of contacting his parents and the report and how it will negatively impact his future choices, leading to non-acceptance into college that highlights the lack of power the young person feels in planning for his future. When he attempted to take the initiative

to improve his chances, it backfired, further reinforcing his perception of not being supported by the teachers to do well.

In this research study, there are indications that the young people from Mandela and MEn do not perceive schools as positive learning environments, and that they perceive they are not treated equally, with respect or where a sense of inclusivity is nurtured. The data has also highlighted that some of the young people who are labelled as disaffected, at-risk or needing more support, can lead to being poorly served by their schools and lower teacher expectations due to their ethnicity and socio-economic background (Osler and Starkey, 2005; Rhamie, 2007; Rollock, 2007).

They also discuss their experiences with their guidance teachers which vary from school to school. Shiraz indicates he has received no support at Mandela High, and Abdullah does not talk about support, but an idea of the route to take to meet his aspiration of becoming a police officer. Shiraz discussed his options with his mother, and Ali's father told Ali to work hard at school to gain the appropriate qualifications, in order to go onto university. However, the young men from Hawthorne Academy felt they were given adequate support, similar to the others in their cohort.

This indicates that in this research study, the young people from MEn and Mandela High did not receive a tailored, standard or consistent levels of support as highlighted in MCMC policy, to enable the young people to make informed decisions or have discussions with their assigned teacher mentors of the direction they wish to take upon leaving school.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) (Scot Government, 2008) is threaded through all existing policy, practice, strategy and legislation affecting children, young people and their families. The aim is for every child to be supported and given a voice so they can be respected for who they are and included in their community. In the context of feeling included in their school community, five of the young people in my research study felt strongly that they weren't listened to, had little respect from their teachers, and when asking for help to improve their learning, were threatened with a phone call to a parent and a 'bad report' in one instance. This is also evidenced by Meighan and Harber (2007, 238) where the unequal relationship between teacher and pupil is described as a 'dependence relationship in which once

person is dominant and the other or others dependent' highlighting an authoritarian stance, which Hargreaves (2017, 4) goes onto discuss pupils feeling fear in the classroom which impacted on their concentration and silenced the pupils' voices. Both Hargreaves (2017) and Harber (2015) discuss the lack of opportunity for pupils to be listened to in the school, which has also been evidence by Ord (2007). This is hardly an approach which can be described as supportive and nurturing or providing a young person with the best possible experiences and opportunities to succeed and gain from their learning. This indicates that the policy aims and objectives are not being translated into action.

Discussion

This study adds to this body of literature offering important insights to the responses and interventions for MCMC labelled young people. The young people attending Hawthorne High were more confident and more engaged, receiving support and had greater awareness of the available support to transition out of compulsory education. Whereas the young people in both Brookes and Mandela High did not convey receiving support, and in some cases stating that they were overlooked whilst their fellow students were given extra support. The young people from the youth work organisations perceived receiving very little help, but strongly felt that the main student population was favoured over them, gaining the majority of the support to transition onto positive destinations.

According to the young people from Brookes Academy, Mandela High and MEn, they perceived themselves to be treated differently to other students in school, where they were overlooked, ignored, offered limited support in the class subject and guidance in the transition process, and where they were discriminated against by their teachers. The young people perceived this difference to be due to their different ethnic and religious background, whereas the young people in Hawthorne said that there was some conflict and miscommunication, but the support was there in the class and choosing pathways out of compulsory education. They were not aware of any discrimination from their teachers.

The data has clearly demonstrated that five of the young people perceived themselves to be treated both differently and unfairly to the majority student population when they were discussing support and guidance from their teachers and

where this awareness leads to them feeling further marginalised and alienated from the school culture (Ali, 2008). The data also raises a pertinent question of whether Osler and Starkey (2005) are correct in stating that once labelled, the young people will be poorly served by their schools which has been evidenced in emerging research (Kidd and Jamieson, 2011; Stevenson et al, 2017).

Unfortunately the findings in the research highlighted that the young people perceived they were not being treated equally, instances of racial and religious discrimination, and where the lack of mutual respect and appreciation of differences were evident in how the young people perceived their school and teachers.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) (Scot Government, 2008) is a strategy that proposes providing children with the best possible experiences and opportunities in order for them to achieve success and be able to gain from what they learn. The aim is for every child to be supported and given a voice so they can be respected for who they are and included in their community. This support should come from various professionals in the child's life, including teachers, social workers etc. The research study showed this was evidenced in the study, where there were occasions the young people wished to say something, their voices were oppressed in a variety of ways. They were talked over, ignored or threatened with sanctions (Ahmed 2009). Opportunities for All (Scottish Government, 2012), which includes the More Choices, More Chances strategy, is the government's policy to encourage local authorities and other partners to undertake a comprehensive range of measures to ensure that the post-16 system centres on supporting those at risk of disengaging and those who have already become disengaged. In a review undertaken by Sosu and Ellis (2014), they found very little research on these policies and insufficient data, evaluation or evidence to build useful practical knowledge of what works and how this impacts on the young people repeatedly identified through policy and research literature as perceived to have problematic transitions into positive destinations upon leaving school.

Conclusion

The argument for clearer policy language which will be interpreted consistently across all organisations which are involved with children and young people is necessary to work towards achieving a more successful and flourishing Scotland and

its people. The findings presented here suggest there is a need for better Scottish Government, local government and school understanding of the ways in which policies and the need to actualise policies such as Getting It Right For Every Child (2008) to fulfil each young person's full potential are operationalised within the local context of the school. In addition, it seems clear that guidance and cultural awareness training should be implicit in the teacher's repertoire of tools, to ensure that they are able to support all young people and particularly those identified as BME MCMC onto positive destinations. Coburn (2011) also strongly suggests that youth work principles should be considered in wider policies such as Getting It Right For Every Child (2008) and Curriculum for Excellence (2004) which can reflect the potential of youth workers and youth work in schools to better help engage MCMC young people onto positive destinations and improve the ethos of a school as a whole.

A picture is emerging from literature that Muslim communities, both within Scotland and across Britain, report experiencing incidences of religious discrimination and racial discrimination, supporting arguments of a 'double burden' of race and ethnicity as well as the religious identity (Jayaweera and Choudhury 2008; Davidson, Liinpa, McBride and Virdee, 2018). The Scottish Government published 'The Race Equality Framework' (2016) with an accompanying action plan to tackle racism in education, public sector, housing, yet, there was no mention of religious discrimination in either of the policy documents as a potential barrier to Muslims living in Scotland.

It has been over 10 years since the implementation of the Scottish Government youth policies starting with Curriculum for Excellence to close the attainment gap. The attainment gap is still as relevant as ever, where it is still the young people from backgrounds impacted by their social class, gender, ethnicity, disability who are falling behind. By focusing on one identified group (BME Muslim) with the young people identified as MCMC, my research adds to the literature on policy and practice and the need for research on the backgrounds and identities of the young people labelled as requiring additional support in order to transition onto a positive destination.

The findings presented here suggest there is a need for better Scottish Government, local government and school understanding of the ways in which policies and the

need to actualise policies such as Getting It Right for Every Child (2008) to fulfil each young person's full potential are operationalised within the local context of the school. The findings highlight the young people do not feel they are listened to, valued, feeling powerless and have a weak sense of belonging to their schools and are discriminated against. Youth policy needs to reflect young people's voices, where they are listened to, where issues of belonging and feelings of powerlessness are addressed.

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