

Your Leadership Matters

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**Empowering
Educators of the
Global Majority
and Allies**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nadine Bernard, CEO of Aspiring Heads and Headteacher of a primary school, is a passionate advocate for diversity in education. Once recognised as the youngest Black Headteacher in England, she is focused on creating pathways for Black educators to step into leadership roles. Through Aspiring Heads, she has developed programmes that provide mentorship, training and support for Black teachers, helping them navigate the challenges of school leadership.

A peer said: 'Nadine's drive, dedication and passion for education is infectious. She is a trailblazer in the community helping to support professionals within the education system in positions of leadership to reach their full potential despite having to break through barriers of inequality. Nadine is a role model to educational leaders from ethnic minorities wanting to break the glass ceiling.'

Beyond her professional life, Nadine is a wife and mother to three boys, balancing her family commitments with her dedication to making a difference in education. Her efforts have earned her recognition, including being named one of the Women To Watch in 2022, winning the Excellent in Education Award in 2023 and most recently winning Best Mentor of the Year at the FUTURE ED Awards 2024. Nadine was also shortlisted for the Precious Awards 2024 for Outstanding Women in Public Sector followed by two further nominations in 2025 for Role Model of the Year and the Women of Heart Awards.

FOREWORD

At a time when systemic racism globally has been thrust into sharp relief, and Black lives strive to matter, the role of education leadership has never been more critical. Educators and those who lead them are tasked with navigating a landscape that – while in some ways is both complex and dynamic – has remained, on issues of race, stubbornly fixed. The resistance by the establishment to name systemic racism and anti-Black discrimination as contributory factors to the lack of progression and the attrition rates of Black, Asian and other Global Majority leaders through the UK education system is unconscionable.

Leaders of whatever background and their allies who have done the necessary inwardly focused work to transform themselves individually must be the ones at the forefront of radical system change. Part of that change is to reframe critical discourses about leadership, the social construct of race, and position themselves within the conversation. Leaders who are unequivocal about who they are and their purpose will be capable of looking back and in-depth at their roots and the foundations of the systems they are a part of. The resilience required comes from being able to extract from your past what is needed to reimagine and reset the future.

The personal narratives of educational leaders are not only legitimate but, in the case of the Global Majority, are a critical part of their professional identity. When those narratives embrace the full extent of their humanity by bringing in from the margins who they are as cultural, physical, intellectual, spiritual, tribal and ancestral human beings, real transformation can begin. For leaders who identify collectively as people of the Global Majority, there is a process of decolonising their narratives that (a) only they can do and (b) forges the bond that connects them to other people from the Global Majority. Leadership at its best is a collective endeavour that is in part tied to group membership, so the groups with which leaders identify are crucial to their internalised sense of efficacy and agency.

It matters how people are categorised and labelled; it matters more how people choose to label themselves. It is because of what Du Bois describes as ‘double consciousness’, ‘always seeing oneself through the eyes of others’, ‘measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity’ (Du Bois, 1903), that I chose to bring to prominence the term and the concept Global Majority.

Global Majority is a constructivist term that recognises that there is one human race that originated in Africa. The term Global Majority includes those different groups of people who identify as African, Black, Asian, Brown, mixed heritage, Arab, are indigenous to the global south and are routinely racialised and minoritised as ‘ethnic minorities’.

This is approximately 85 per cent of the numerical majority on the planet. The minoritisation of the Global Majority is a form of colonisation, which we categorically reject, along with the subordinate status of ‘ethnic minority’.

At some point, you must move from Mercator’s to Peters’ projection for a more accurate worldview.

This book is a timely and accessible contribution to an ongoing conversation about the importance of personal narrative and professional identity. It offers readers not just a theory but actionable insights into how individuals’ stories can add value to how they lead. Whether you are an aspiring school principal, a teacher leader or a policymaker, the ideas presented here will resonate with anyone who believes that leadership is not just about authority or titles but about empowering others, fostering collaboration, and creating environments where all students can thrive.

The author of this book brings experience, knowledge and passion to the topic. She speaks to the critical need for leaders who are not only skilled in management but also deeply committed to the principles of equity, inclusion and social justice. As you read through the chapters, you will encounter perspectives that expand your understanding of what it means to lead in education – perspectives that highlight the importance of emotional intelligence, community engagement and a forward-thinking mindset.

Allyship that feels like accomplices speaks to a relationship where allies are prepared to go on their own journey of self-discovery and reflection. Critically, as they journey towards being an accomplice, what becomes a key indicator of their commitment is what personally they are prepared to give up.

Above all, this book reminds us that the future of education depends on the leaders who are willing to chart a new course. These leaders must be bold enough to embrace change, but grounded enough to understand that true transformation begins with them. Colleagues, students, teachers, families and communities are fellow travellers. The stories and insights shared here will inspire and challenge you to think differently about just how much your leadership matters, the additionality that you bring as a person from the Global Majority, and its potential to shape the future of education.

Rosemary Campbell-Stephens MBE
24 November 2024

Rosemary Campbell-Stephens is an international speaker, author and consultant on leadership and decolonising system change.

Reference

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You all make the challenging work that I do so much easier.

Thank you. I will forever be grateful.

INTRODUCTION

We are currently living in an era where racism and discrimination still remains prevalent. Many statistics prove that we still have a long way to go as a society before we have a truly inclusive country that reflects the children, young people and adults it serves. Research and data has shown that teachers from ethnic minority backgrounds are significantly less likely to be promoted to leadership with currently only 418 (4.9%) Deputies and 434 (3.8%) Headteachers of Black, Asian and Ethnic Minorities compared to 15,817 (90.8%) white Deputies and 19,221 (92.5%) white Headteachers (Department for Education, 2022). The need for proactive action to redress this issue is clear.

In order for change to happen we know that there are numerous layers of work to be done and one aspect of this work is to effectively support Global Majority aspiring leaders with stepping into these leadership positions and feeling the ability to thrive.

Aspiring Heads, a Community Interest Company tackling racial inequalities in leadership positions, has been at the forefront of developing aspiring Global Majority leaders and has already enabled a number of individuals to develop their confidence, skills and knowledge to take that leap into a progressive role. Find out more at www.aspiringheads.com.

Within an education system where Global Majorities continue to feel the impact of racism, it is evermore important to inspire and empower these individuals to still work towards leadership and anchor a hope for positive change.

Through the use of this book, aspiring leaders will be able to generate a number of well-tested strategies drawn from personal experiences to help them navigate their journey towards their desired leadership positions. Their journey through this book will also affirm their self worth and understand the powers they actually possess even when faced with the most challenging circumstances. It will equip them with the necessary mindset to position themselves for the greatest success and practical steps that can be easily implemented to secure impact.

White counterparts will be able to use the perspectives shared in this book to generate a greater understanding of the lived experiences of Global Majority individuals to then help shape their actions to bring about greater positive change for marginalised ethnic groups. It can also be used to help reflect on personal practices and how their relations within their role helps to hinder or promote the promotion of the Global Majority.

Within each chapter, there will be a personal story of empowerment from an individual from the Global Majority and also a reflection piece from individuals who have put allyship into action.

My hope for all readers is that they find challenge and meaningful reflection alongside inspiration and practical steps for progress.



‘Learn & Lead, then Lead & Learn’

Photo credit: Richard Haynes

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MAKE THE MOVES

PART 1: THE THREE YEAR CYCLE - TAKE THE LEAD ON YOUR JOURNEY

You have to be open minded enough to believe that whatever life throws at you, you can overcome. (David Goggins, 2018)

Now you are in the driver seat. You know your personal history, you have worked through any trauma and have a good understanding of self with a positive outlook to move forward – so you are truly ready to accelerate on your leadership journey!

Which direction will you go? Are you clear on where you want your final destination to be? Do you have the right equipment in your car should you get a flat tyre or break down at any point? Do you have warm blankets in the boot and bottles of water ready should you need them? Are your screen wipers working well should it start to rain and do you have an ice scraper should your vehicle windows frost over? Have you filled up the petrol tank and know where to top up when necessary?

The key message from this metaphor is to BE PREPARED! Know what you are aiming for and have the right resources to help and support you along the way. No one else can do this journey for you but you. Being clear about what you are aiming for will help to better inform your decisions.

As Ann Palmer, an exceptional Leadership Coach, once said to me, ‘We need to be leading education, not asking for permission’. This reminded me that it is important for us to own our paths and we can only do this with intention.

From the age of 12, I knew I wanted to be a teacher and by the age of 18, I had made a firm decision that I wanted to become a Headteacher. By the age of 31 I had achieved my goal and was considered the youngest Black Headteacher in the UK. Now, how did I achieve that?

Whilst striving for Headship, I was intentional with all that I did throughout my career. I did not rely on ‘chance’ or the plans ‘others’ were making for me. I made my own decisions and carved out the journey I wanted to go on. Of course, things did not always go as planned but my focus on what I wanted to achieve did not shift and I was relentless at all stages of my career which helped me to pivot and get back on track whenever I needed to.

A key approach that I used was the ‘professional growth three year cycle!’ This describes the process of managing my career in a way that keeps me on a good momentum for growth and development.

Here are the key actions that can support career progress as part of the professional growth three year cycle:

Year 1: Start a new position. Embrace the challenges and opportunities of a new environment. Use fresh energy and enthusiasm to exude a positive attitude and open mind to possibilities. Listen well. Ask insightful questions and seek out knowledge to gain a strong understanding of culture, systems and expectations. Embrace new learning. Build relationships and foster collaboration. Identify problems and proactively consider potential solutions. Share ideas and where appropriate, implement new ways of working. Look for ways to step outside your comfort zone and ‘shake things up’ if needed. Challenge is necessary for us all! Celebrate any short term wins.

Year 2: Build on learning from the previous year. Review accomplishments: what went well and what was learnt. Identify areas for improvement and build upon existing strengths. Review and refine any decisions from the previous year and, through the process of evaluation, decide what needs to be maintained, improved or changed to solidify success and gain the best outcome. Continue to learn and ensure knowledge is up to date. Strengthen relationships. Nurture the relationships with colleagues, students and other stakeholders. Also forge new connections. Appreciate the impact of your work and consider ways to ensure approaches and impact are sustainable. Anticipate and prepare for potential challenges but continue to embrace all the learning they may bring. Maintain a proactive approach!

Year 3: Start the year with strong assurance of your position in the school. Be forward thinking and think about potential successors. Seek to mentor and coach those less experienced to strengthen the growth and development of those who want to follow in your footsteps. Continuously seek to improve existing systems and processes to ensure long-term success and a smooth handover to potential successors. Ensure systems are robust and can function effectively without your presence. Look at opportunities to expand responsibilities further. Maintain a professional network and increase your visibility for potential opportunities. By the end of the year be ready to secure a progressive role within your organisation or within another that you can start your next three year cycle in. Alternatively, do something to enhance your professional development further such as completing a NPQ, Master’s or alternative developmental pathway.

Now I think it would be irresponsible for me to suggest that you must follow this rule religiously as there can always be personal circumstances where less or more than three years may feel like the best choice, but the key point is to ensure you do not remain

on a sailing boat that just floats and has no direction. Be intentional about growth and development. Three years can give you enough time to learn the key elements of a role, apply the learning, consolidate and have an impact. Less than three years often does not give you enough time to go through all of these elements and longer than three years can create comfortability as there is a risk of just sticking to what feels 'easy' resulting in limited personal and professional growth.

What are you waiting for??? Let's do this! Let's grow!

Our professional development cannot rely upon others.

Waiting to hear of someone's approval may never come and why wait anyway? Use your ability to reflect on your development and potential next steps. Ask questions of others to learn about different opportunities. Lean in towards those actions that will move you forward on your journey.

For those managing and leading those from the Global Majority, open a dialogue to discuss their hopes and long term goals. Signpost to opportunities within and outside your organisation where appropriate. Create forums of support and guidance. Help to extend their network by introducing them to different individuals. Offer to provide them with a coach or mentor to support their journey. Do not bypass, overlook or assume they are ok. Where you see their potential, tell them! Where you see gaps in their knowledge and skills, consider training opportunities and enable them to access them. Look for ways to help widen their pathways.

Sadly, those from the Global Majority races can find themselves in environments where there is a lack of appreciation and value for their contributions to their role by those who disregard their potential and hinder their progress. We could call them 'meanies', which is a kind word, but we know a better term would be 'oppressors'. They knock down rather than build up. They overlook rather than uphold. They enable racism rather than proactively dismantle it.

We from the Global Majority recognise the oppressors but we must remember that oppressors do not have control over our own personal actions and the mindset we decide to have. We can still take the necessary steps to move ourselves forward on our journeys.

External barriers must not become our internal barriers.

Keep going!

Reflective Questions 3.1

- 1 Are you just floating or sailing without a clear direction?
 - 2 What 'move' will you take to move yourself or someone else forward on their career pathway?
 - 3 What else can you do to take greater control of your professional journey?
-

PART 2: COMFORTABLE VS UNCOMFORTABLE - NO GOAL COMES EASY

What would you do if you weren't afraid? (Sheryl Sandberg, 2013)

Everyone appreciates comfort! It can make us feel safe, secure and stable. Comfortability at times is a good thing but it can also make us stagnant if we become complacent.

So how are you going to make sure you do not settle within your comfort zone?

Fear

Fear is often one of the greatest barriers to moving ahead in life. Fear of the unknown can cripple people from having a go and taking a risk. Fear can also cloud our minds with thoughts that are not actually true, such as 'I am not good enough'. When we give fear power, we often miss out on opportunities. When we miss out on opportunities, we miss out on further learning. When we miss out on learning, we miss out on developing new knowledge and skills. Without new knowledge and skills, we miss out on potential future success and achievements.

The best way to tackle fear is to realise it is a natural occurring feeling that can raise its head. Even the most successful people feel fear at certain times in their lives. However, it is what we do with fear that makes the difference. We can choose to cradle and entertain it or we can recognise it for what it is – a normal feeling – and know that we have the power to still step forward anyway.

Fear should not dictate our actions.

The more you practise 'feeling fear and doing it anyway', the more confident you become. I call this 'confidence through action'. Just like a toddler taking step by step, the more they step, the more confident they become. Even when things don't go to plan, as humans, we are often left with a sense of personal achievement that we gave it a go. The inner frustration often arises when we feel the fear and don't go for it. This is when we are left with the feeling of the unknown. Don't regret inaction.

When Being Uncomfortable was Not by Choice

Sometimes we can end up being uncomfortable without personal choice. This experience can feel totally different to when you have chosen to move by choice into an uncomfortable space or situation. When you have shifted out of your comfort zone into discomfort by choice, there is still a sense of control and feeling of acceptance of the discomfort, however, when it has not been as a result of personal choice, this can startle us and make us feel out of place and out of control.

When I was repositioned by a CEO into a school and role I had not asked to be in, this was very unwanted and extremely uncomfortable. It moved me out of a school I was

familiar with to a school I knew very little about. At the time, the environment was very hostile and I found myself within a bullish culture that demonstrated little regard for my well-being. This state of discomfort was unwelcome so I still had to adapt and learn how to navigate through, which I am pleased to say I did. By the time I left this school, I was a well established leader, highly respected by others and had made massive strides in my own professional development and the development of the school.

It is important to acknowledge that moving into a space of being uncomfortable can at times be chosen and at other times be a result of something completely out of our control. No matter how you get there, there is always a possibility for growth and success, so don't lose hope.

White Spaces - Comfortable?

The concept of 'white spaces' highlights the experiences of individuals from the Global Majority navigating environments primarily dominated by whiteness. I hear some say 'well what would they expect in England?!' My response ... a room filled mainly with white people is not a problem but it is important to acknowledge the possible impact it may have on the 'Global Majority' who are seen as a minority and 'less than'. This can often be exacerbated through the lack of representation which can manifest in other various ways.

For example:

- Visual representation: walls adorned with mostly white faces, posters and decorations reinforce the feeling of 'otherness' for non-white individuals.
- Culture exclusion: catering that doesn't cater to diverse dietary needs or preferences sends a message of insensitivity and lack of inclusion.
- Knowledge production: a curriculum solely focused on white perspectives marginalises non-white voices and fails to provide a more holistic understanding of the world.
- Power dynamics: when governing bodies or leadership positions are predominately white, it creates an imbalance of power and can perpetuate systemic biases.

These 'white spaces' can lead to feelings of isolation, alienation and a sense of not belonging.

As a non-white in these spaces, it is important to anchor an inner self conviction that you do belong and have every right to be within the space although the organisation has not yet fostered one of representation and inclusivity. There are 'white spaced' organisations that are on a journey of diversifying their teams and are taking steps to make the needed changes, however, this will take time, especially when trying to adapt the representation of a workforce. Although I state this, we must also note that creating inclusive displays, diversifying the menu offer or taking action to make the curriculum inclusive, can happen sooner rather than later.

Most importantly, as a Global Majority, it is important that we do not look to the organisation for validation. We have to develop a strong sense of self-worth, even when others do not see it. Reframing our thinking and building a positive association with discomfort is not necessarily a bad thing. Feeling uncomfortable is not an emotion we naturally welcome but does offer an opportunity for immense personal growth. Here are some examples:

- Learning how to galvanise strength when feeling uncomfortable.
- Developing strategies to reframe our thinking from a place of insecurity to a place of boldness and courage.
- Learning how to express your opinions and needs confidently and respectfully, even in uncomfortable situations.
- Using your unique strengths, experiences and perspectives to add value to the organisation.
- Developing assertive communication skills and learning how to express your opinions and needs confidently and respectfully, even in uncomfortable situations.

So three key reminders!

- 1 Embrace the learning throughout the process.
- 2 Remember the value you add.
- 3 The type of environment you find yourself in does not define your worth.

Patricia Lamour MBE once reminded me that our human design is not the problem but rather the default of the system.

Taking Risks

Settling for what is familiar to us is incredibly easy. If I didn't take any risks throughout my professional journey, I would not be where I am today. One particular risk that I took was applying for a position that was traditionally not the next professional step. Within the primary sector, you would often progress from Assistant Headship, to Deputy Headship and then to Headship. When I was an Assistant Headteacher, I decided to take the risk and apply for Headship. This was a massive leap but I felt confident to take this risk. What was there to lose?! I applied for the Headship and got to the third and final stage of the interview process. I did not get the Headship but I was offered the Deputy Head position which was also vacant at that time. Within eight months of starting my Deputy Head role, I was offered a Headship within the academy trust I was working in. My risk and bravery to attempt something that was not the norm, led me to securing my first Headship. This was a massive achievement because I was willing to not follow the status quo. Even if I had remained as a Deputy Head, the entire experience was a win-win as I

did not get the job I originally applied for at first but I did secure a progressive position which was my main ambition.

Status Quo

A Black, young, female Headteacher with coloured braids (when I choose!) leading a school was and is still uncommon to see, but uncommon does not mean it is not possible. If I had based the vision I had for myself on seeing many people who looked like me in positions of Headship, I definitely would not have stepped into the role. It is so easy to accept the external messaging of what a Headteacher should look like, so we must remember that the rules of possibility are only based on what a collective number of people agreed or previously allowed to happen.

Rules can be helpful but they can also be limiting.

Stepping out of the rule, pushing boundaries and doing something that has never been done before, can be uncomfortable at first, but once you create the new 'rule', there will be others who will be so glad you did. Sometimes, the most significant progress comes from those who dare to defy convention and chart their own path.

Mindset

Our minds are powerful places. Before we take action, it is our minds that encourage us to act or not to act. Subconsciously our minds will be filled with lots of information and this is why it is so important to be intentional with what we allow to consume and 'take hold' of our minds. If we allow our mind to be absorbed with anxiety, then it will; if we allow our mind to be filled with joyous thoughts, then it will. Imagine a tea bag that is left in a cup of water for a long time, the water will become much more entrenched or 'flavoured' with the taste of the tea bag. This is the same with our minds. The longer we leave a thought to fester, the more it will entrench our minds and mental state. When we repeatedly tell ourselves that we can't, then we probably won't; but if we repeatedly tell ourselves that we can even when we are feeling like we can't, eventually our minds will shift and what we once thought we couldn't do, we will find ourselves doing. If you find yourself struggling to break free from negative patterns of thoughts, seeking further support is key.

Accountability

When trying to shift from a comfortable state to uncomfortable positions in order to support your journey of growth and professional development, having an accountability partner can be very helpful. Someone who will listen to your ambitions, support you

in deciding on your next best actions and then monitor your progress by reflecting back the promises you have made to yourself. An accountability partner can be anyone: a family member, a friend or a colleague. Stepping from comfort into a place of discomfort is not easy! But it is certainly possible.

Reflective Questions 3.2

- 1 How has your mindset impacted the decisions you have made for yourself?
- 2 Knowing what you know now, is there anything you would do differently?
- 3 How can you challenge the status quo?

PART 3: FINDING AND BUILDING COMMUNITY - GO WHERE YOU ARE VALUED

Education or training will only have transforming effects if they take place in a culture of dominant discourse around challenging racism. (Reena Bhavnani, 2001)

When leading a school, one of my key aims is to establish a family and community feel for every stakeholder – children, parents, staff and governors. Family and community is centred around love and togetherness. That may sound too sentimental for some but we must never underestimate the need for both. Where there is love, there is respect. Where there is togetherness, there is unity. Having respect for those we engage with and being unified to achieve a goal and vision is fundamental for true success. I must just mention that this does not mean there won't be disagreements and differences along the way about how to achieve the vision, but one thing that is upheld throughout is respect and a sense that 'we are all in this together'. In spaces where there is very little respect and no shared vision, it can become a very hostile and miserable environment for those who are part of it.

The sad thing about some schools is that they remain like factories, inputting and outputting the children and young people with very little care for their whole being. We have leaders who have very little care for their staff and little regard for their personal needs. 'Work, work, work' is the key message which often leaves children and staff rushing out the building at the first opportunity. Treating individuals as cogs in a machine can lead to disengagement, low morale, and even burnout. It fails to recognise the unique needs and potential of each person. Work is obviously not a bad thing but we know that people are forever commenting on trying to find work-life balance with very little success, therefore it is so important that we are able to enjoy our moments whilst working.

I met someone once who said 'there is no such thing as work-life balance because whatever we end up doing work wise becomes our life, so we must enjoy it'. If educators and learners find purpose and fulfilment in their roles, it benefits everyone within

the school community. This doesn't mean work should be effortless, but it should be meaningful and rewarding.

Undervalued + overworked = leave

This leads me to say 'IF YOU ARE NOT HAPPY AT YOUR CURRENT PLACE OF WORK AND DON'T FEEL SAFE, RESPECTED OR VALUED, AND DO NOT SHARE THE SAME VISION AND VALUES, DO NOT STAY'. Was that loud and clear? We must not waste our lives being somewhere which does not value our worth. We must value our life and not live most of it within an environment that hinders our ability to find joy and thrive.

When we are not led well, we can become resentful, aggrieved and stressed. This is not our opportunity to wallow in pity, it is our opportunity to take charge of our life and reposition ourselves to a place that aligns with our values and not only takes us on but takes care of the person we are. A place that is able to acknowledge the valuable contribution that we bring to the school community in order to achieve the agreed vision.

There was a time in my career when I was extremely unhappy about my work situation and I felt as if I was stuck. My mentor at the time said 'the world is big'. At the time I struggled to fully digest this comment. The situation I was in felt so big at the time that I could not see the massive world around me. I felt like I had very few options and in the darkest hour I would even convince myself that my career was over and I would not be able to find a school that would value the contribution I could bring. What a massive lie to myself was that!

I want you to remember that the world is big. There is always a way out of a challenging situation. There is always another school looking for a person just like you. You just need to take the needed steps to go out and seek it. Further guidance and support from a mentor, family or friends may be required, but please never lose hope.

Must I Assimilate?

When trying to be part of a community, it is possible to fall into the trap of assimilation or 'code switching'. Assimilation, the process of abandoning one's own culture and customs and adopting another, in my view is one of the core principles of colonialism. For centuries, cultures and customs not in line with the British have been intentionally devalued and seen as 'less than'. The most upsetting reality is knowing that some from the Global Majority feel the need to assimilate in order to be accepted and 'belong'.

Code switching is another term used to describe how individuals from the Global Majority races consciously or unconsciously can 'change' in order to feel accepted. Code switching is again a method those from the Global Majority races may find themselves doing especially within white dominated spaces.

I remember meeting a Black girl who spent the majority of her education within white dominated spaces. She boasted that she now knows how to 'work the system' and be successful in life. Following this, she impersonated how she would interact with her white friends and potential colleagues and then modelled how she could then switch back to reflect her personal cultural heritage. This ability brought her increased confidence in

her ability to navigate a successful life in the United Kingdom. Being able to ‘fit in’ to different cultures meant a greater chance of acceptance and ‘success’.

But the question is ... is this ‘success’?

Being adaptable can be a great strength, but adapting for the purpose of seeking acceptance can also be referred to as ‘selling out’. Selling out is a terminology used to describe someone who gave up their authentic self to join another group of people for personal gain. To put it bluntly, those from the Global Majority races should not need to ‘sell out’ in order to progress their careers!

Britain is a country that boasts about being a diverse country. Diversity has to be combined with inclusivity, and inclusivity has to welcome authenticity.

I suppose it could be argued that assimilating and code switching is not forced on anyone, but we must consider why many Black and Brown people feel the need to do this, especially if they want to progress their careers. The larger issue is the systemic bias that creates pressure for ‘minorities’ to assimilate or code switch to succeed. This is inherently problematic and unfair.

Instead of individuals needing to adapt solely for acceptance, the focus should be on dismantling these unjust systems. This requires challenging dominant norms, promoting inclusion and creating pathways for success that don’t necessitate conforming to a single cultural standard.

Current Realities

Imagine people saying the following:

‘We promote diversity and people from all faiths are welcome but please note that having time to pray is not permitted.’

‘We love culture days but please remember on normal days, you must not wear any cultural attire as it is not part of the staff dress code.’

‘We welcome teachers from all parts of the world such as France, New Zealand, Canada and Australia but if you are from an African nation and have an African accent, this is probably not the school for you because the children won’t be able to understand you.’

Would these statements be acceptable? I am guessing that you will probably say no, but yet these examples are currently lived experiences.

The current reality ...

- ‘Acceptance’ is measured.
- ‘Acceptance’ has boundaries.
- ‘Acceptance’ has terms and conditions.

Britain, in its broadest meaning, has an ideal. A view of what is right, perfect and acceptable. This is ultimately the reason for the existence of discrimination and prejudices. On a much more local level, when a group of leaders come together with a fixed perspective

on what is right, perfect and acceptable, this can orchestrate the culture of an organisation. This is why non-diverse organisations can become ‘stuck’ in their ways as they literally struggle to see any other possibilities and gain any differing perspectives.

Our levels of acceptance can often be influenced by biases and stereotypical views.

For example: six white men sitting around a table are probably talking business. Six Black men sitting around a table are probably up to no good. Six Asian men sitting around a table are probably terrorists.

INSANE, INSANE, INSANE – yet we live in a world where certain actions and behaviours are viewed through a different lens depending on particular characteristics.

Self-Surveillance

This can lead to unhealthy self-surveillance where those from the Global Majority find themselves consciously and unconsciously self-monitoring their daily actions, daily decision making and daily use of language with the hope to minimise negative judgements from others. This can lead to stress, anxiety and perfectionism.

What Now?

To become a true reflection of community, we as a collective group of all races, need to actively challenge our views and perceptions of who we may be less familiar with. We have to acknowledge and respect the differences of cultures and customs that we may be less accustomed to. We have to take time to understand and celebrate the differences and appreciate the traditional pathways of others. This is essential for creating a space where everyone feels valued and respected, contributing their unique perspectives and strengths. When you have a group of people from different diverse groups, it presents an opportunity for collaborative effort to build an inclusive community. I truly believe greater inclusivity would reduce the number of sickness days off work – less stress, less anxiety and less overthinking, plus we know there are so many more benefits.

Building an inclusive community is necessary and immensely rewarding. It requires continuous effort, open communication, and a willingness to unlearn, learn and grow.

As a member of the Global Majority, you have to take time to assess whether you are actually bringing your authentic self to work.

Person A: Let's consider the pub.

Person B: What's the pub got to do with it?

Person A: Well, possibly a lot. What happens after work every Friday?

Person B: Everyone goes to the pub. It's a way to unwind at the end of the week.

Person A: But what about those who don't like to go to the pub?

Person B: Well, they just don't come.

Person A: Have you ever considered why they don't like to go to the pub?

It is so easy to get on and do what the majority of people want to do, but that may not align with all cultural practices. When Professor Paul Miller leads the Aspiring Heads sessions, he has used the analogy of the 'pub after work routine' to explain how cultural practices can at times lead to exclusion of others. As we aim to build community, we know that not everyone will like everything, so we need to take time to consider the cultural differences and think about varied opportunities to ensure all cultural groups are reflected in 'common practice'.

Networking

I find that networking is not spoken about enough in education. Collaborative learning yes, but not the skill of connecting with others from different schools, different boroughs, different positions and different experiences. The education system can be quite insular and competitive, and not enough time is provided for staff teams and leadership to build meaningful relationships with those working outside their school or trust.

When finding and building community, we have to make an effort and create time. We need to outstretch our arms, link arms and walk together. Networking can enrich our lives as we discover new people and learn about their experiences. Through this learning experience, you may discover ways to support and help each other, building on each other's strengths and providing further opportunities for growth and development.

Being a person from the Global Majority, I have found networking most useful on my career path. From simply sending a short message on X (formerly Twitter) or LinkedIn, I have built lifelong professional relationships that have benefited me and the other person in various ways.

Networking enables you to take a lead on building your own community outside your main working institution. This network becomes even more vital when your current place of work is not a healthy place to be.

I urge you to be proactive with building connections with a wide range of individuals and joining communities where you are valued and respected. They can possibly be the ones to lift you up when you are down or open opportunities that would not have easily come your way.

Community is strength and being part of a community is wise, so if you are still in search of a community that is accepting of your authentic self, keep searching because you will surely find it.

Allyship

When those from the Global Majority races are feeling displaced, mistreated or discriminated against, allyship is key. Allyship has certainly supported my journey so far and although we know it should not be needed, living in a world of unequal levels of privilege, it is definitely a powerful tool of support.

Allyship refers to a person who is in a much more privileged position, advocating for those less privileged.

White people are in a great position to be allies for non-white people.

There are five crucial aspects of being an ally:

- 1 **Understanding.** You must take time to educate yourself and understand the challenges and experiences faced by the group of people you are hoping to support. You need to be fully aware and acknowledge the systemic barriers and take time to listen to personal stories and experiences.
- 2 **Action.** You cannot be an ally by saying it. It is reflected in action and not just any action – genuine action. Action for your own personal glorification is not allyship. Taking concrete action to dismantle oppressive systems and create positive change is action.
- 3 **Humility.** You need to be comfortable with accepting that you won't always get it right and that you will never fully understand the experience of those who have been marginalised. When mistakes are made, you will need to be willing to learn from them and apologise.
- 4 **Solidarity.** Allyship comes with being visible. Attending events, creating partnerships, creating opportunities to connect and support. Being present and standing alongside those less privileged.
- 5 **Lifelong learning.** Allyship is not a 'one off' moment in life. It is a commitment to progressive action for justice which takes ongoing learning, reflection and growth. You have to continually challenge your biases and remain aware of presenting issues so that you are able to adapt your approach if and when needed.

As I reflect on my career, I am eternally grateful for the allies I've had who have advocated for me and used their position of privilege to address issues which could have potentially negatively impacted me. From my experience, allies do not seek public recognition or a pat on the back. They are proactive even when no one is looking. They are willing to 'give up' personal gains to promote and secure racial justice. They recognise the issues of injustice and seek ways to 'open doors' and provide opportunities for the Global Majority who would otherwise be left unnoticed.

Reflective Questions 3.3

- 1 What does being valued and respected feel like and look like to you?
 - 2 Does your current place or work have any specific cultural preferences and how can this be challenged to promote inclusivity for all?
 - 3 What are the benefits of allyship? How can your position of privilege provide support for others?
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— Empowering Stories —

Sufian Sadiq, Director of Talent & Teaching School at Chiltern Learning Trust, Ofsted Inspector, Fellow and Board Member of the Chartered College of Teaching

Navigating the challenges of being a minority in the education sector is never easy. When I took on my role as a Director in a multi academy trust (MAT), I hadn't fully anticipated the profound sense of isolation that would follow. The initial elation of securing the position quickly faded as I realised just how rare it was to see leaders who looked like me within the multi academy trust leadership teams. This became even more pronounced as I led a teaching school and worked in initial teacher training (ITT). Though I'm often perceived as a bold and confident individual, the solitude that came with my new position was unexpectedly challenging.

You think you've reached your dream destination, that you've secured the ideal role – only for it to feel, at times, more like a nightmare. There's an unspoken assumption that you're in the room as a 'token' effort to address diversity, putting you at an immediate disadvantage compared to your peers. This perception – that you're there to fill a quota rather than to fulfil a role – is a tough reality to confront. Navigating subtle racism as a senior leader is uniquely complex; it's easier to address these issues when they come from superiors in earlier stages of one's career. But facing this from a range of stakeholders, while holding a position of authority, is a far more nuanced struggle.

I often speak about the intellectual dismissiveness inherent in certain prejudiced dialogues. I quickly sensed that my intelligence was under question, and the narrative around me suggested I was someone who could speak lots, but often that skill and excellence in speaking would be spoken of disparagingly. Despite leading one of the largest teacher development organisations in the country, with exemplary outcomes and standards, the way the sector as a whole struggled to acknowledge the intellectual value add I bring, was surprising. My accomplishments in building partnerships, leading an organisation, and driving growth were seldom acknowledged, not as the work of a capable leader, but instead with throwaway comments labelling me as a mere 'salesman'. As someone who had long derived fulfilment from pupil success, team achievements and impactful results, I suddenly found myself searching for belonging in a sector seemingly unprepared to fully recognise my strengths and potential.

That realisation brought an unexpected light into my journey. I understood that I needed to be my own advocate, to create a positive narrative about myself if the system wouldn't. If the system wasn't ready to embrace me, I would persist and make my presence known. I spoke up, stood proud of who I was, and challenged those who couldn't – or wouldn't – see me for my true capabilities. I was fortunate to receive unwavering support from my CEO and Deputy CEO, whose allyship empowered me to confront the system with the reassurance that they had my back.

In my development work, I realised that following the traditional path wasn't necessary for me. As an outsider, I embraced this perspective, and it allowed for a level of

creativity and innovation that set our work apart from that of other organisations. Blocking out the negativity, protecting my mental health, and seeking constructive feedback only from those genuinely invested in my growth became essential practices for me. While my entry into the MAT leadership world was challenging, acknowledging my own strengths, finding confidence in my identity, and celebrating my achievements have ultimately liberated me as a leader in a space where I remain a minority.

I've discovered within myself an inner champion, a voice that cheers me on with resilience and pride, reminding me that I am here, capable, and making a difference.

Allyship in Action

Liz Robinson, CEO, Big Education

What does allyship mean to me?

My journey to being an ally began early in my leadership career. Having worked exclusively in highly culturally diverse schools, I learnt deeply about the richness and opportunities of learning with and from others whose lived experiences and family histories were different to my own. I passionately modelled explicit work to embody a celebratory approach to diversity of experience, with students and their families.

Did this make me an ally?

Well, the painful truth that I realised was that it did not. True allyship requires intentionality and needs to be focused on leadership and power as well as community.

Understanding the intersectional challenges and opportunities experienced by Global Majority colleagues has been critical to me in that journey. Good will and my own firmly non-racist position is not the same as working in explicitly anti-racist ways.

It was personally challenging for me to recognise this, particularly as someone with many protected characteristics myself, and as someone who has always worked for and championed equality.

Really listening in to, and understanding, was the first stage for me. Working with incredible humans, like Nadine Bernard, and Andi Silvain, Headteacher at School 360, who have supported me on that journey, has been amazing. I am grateful for the shared learning – a journey which continues.

What this means for me now is my active leadership in putting anti-racism on the agenda wherever I can, and using my positions of influence to be an active agitator for change. For example, I continue to make sure it is on our agenda for action at the Queen Street Group of multi-academy trusts, influencing hundreds of schools and leaders, and ensuring it is not left to the single woman of colour who is represented in that group. It means I highlighted the issue of under-representation within school leadership in my recently published paper, 'What else, what next, what if?' (Robinson, 2024), about the future of leadership development in England. I am seeking out the places and space to further this work.

I am so aware of the burden that can, by default, be placed on those leaders of colour to be the ones raising awareness of these issues and seeking change. I hope I never leave colleagues in that position.

I'm sure there is more and better I can do. I'm still learning and hope my friends and colleagues will continue to help me be the best ally I can be as I play an intentional and active role.

Further Learning & Resources

Hutchinson, P. (2020) *Everyone Versus Racism: A Letter to My Children*. HarperCollins.

Kendi, I.X. (2019) *How to Be an Antiracist*. Vintage.

Lewis-Egonu, D. (ed.) (2024) *You Are Not Alone: 14 Stories from Education by Leaders for Race Equality*. Routledge.

Oluinka, K. and Onanda, C. (2024) *Black in Schools: The Black Teacher's Guide for Surviving the Classroom*. Corwin UK.