

Research Briefing N° 78

The Educational Strategies of the Black Middle Classes

This research interviewed 62 Black Caribbean-origin parents, all in managerial/professional occupations, about their thoughts, priorities, strategies and experiences with regard to their children's education.

Key words: Black Caribbean; families; education; aspirations; strategies; race; social class; middle class; professional; racism

Key findings

Findings from this study are of particular interest to those working in education (school or university level), and anyone interested in social change, 'race', and the emerging Black middle classes.



Concerned and actively involved in education

- Black middle class parents prioritise education and are actively involved in their children's schooling.
- They use a range of strategies, including their class resources (e.g. accessing professional networks, carrying out detailed research, initiating meetings with teachers and tutors) to support their children through the education system.

Discomfort with the label 'middle class'

- The term 'middle class' tends to provoke discomfort amongst Black middle class parents. They often prefer to identify themselves as 'professional', rather than 'middle class'.

Black middle classes and racism

- Racism is a reality in the lives of Black middle class families. Parents recognise it as less overt than when they were children but nonetheless pervasive in more subtle and coded forms (more hidden/less overt ways) affecting both them and their children.
- Black middle class parents are vigilant and work to protect their children from incidents of racism at school.

White society's denial of racism

- The Black middle classes seldom make explicit mention of racism as a barrier to their children's educational success, even if there is evidence for it. Experience tells them that the term 'racism' is

likely to be met with resistance and antagonism by teachers, tutors and school staff.

Aspirations for Black middle class children

- Educational achievement is seen as a key means of both supporting their children to be socially mobile and, it is hoped, acting as a possible barrier against racism in their children's future.

What we did

The research took place between June 2009 and June 2011. It was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The impetus for the research was to find out more about the emerging Black middle classes, and challenge the idea that the Black Caribbean population in England is all working class. In order to do this, we conducted 77 interviews with 62 Black Caribbean-origin adults in professional/managerial occupations.

How we did it

All the 62 respondents had children between the ages of 8 and 18 (an age range that spans key decision-making points in the English education system). Thirteen fathers were included in our sample. We re-interviewed 15 of the original 62

parents, giving us a total of 77 in-depth interviews.

Our interviews included questions about their experiences of the education system, their aspirations for their children's futures and how their experiences are shaped by race and social class.

All the parents were in professional or managerial jobs; that is their occupations were within the top two categories of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) – the eight point scale used to measure class location in UK social science. They live mainly in London and the south-east, but we also included parents from elsewhere across England. Parents volunteered to speak to us, responding to adverts that we placed in professional publications.

Further information

The project has been written about in a variety of publications, for example:

Academic journals

Rollock, N., Vincent, C., Gillborn D. & Ball, S. (2013). 'Middle class by profession': Class status and identification amongst the Black middle classes. *Ethnicities* 13, 3: 253-275.

Vincent, C., Ball, S., Rollock, N. & Gillborn, D. (2013). Three generations of racism. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (Special Issue on Education and Social Mobility), 34, 5/6: 929-946.

Book chapter

Vincent, C., Rollock, N., Ball, S. & Gillborn D. (2012). 'The educational strategies of the Black middle classes'. In Richter, M. & Andresen, S. (eds) *The Politicization of Parenthood: Shifting private and public responsibilities in education and child rearing*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp139-152.

Report

Vincent, C., Rollock, N., Ball, S. & Gillborn, D. (2011). *The Educational Strategies of the Black Middle Classes: Project summary*. London: Institute of Education.

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