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6. Intersectionality, Anti-Racism and Initial Teacher Education: In conversation with Dr Khadija Mohammed, University of the West of Scotland.

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Khadija Mohammed is a prominent Anti-Racist activist in Scotland. She is a multi-award-winning scholar elected as the first Muslim woman of colour to hold the post of convenor of the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) since 2022.

The interview started with how Khadija's intersectional Pakistani heritage, Scottish nationality, multilingualism, and Islamic faith have played a vital role in shaping and reshaping her professional identity and, consequently, her teaching practices and leadership activities. For example, she discussed 'fitting in' with her fellow white colleagues and her feelings of isolation as the only woman of colour in her school teaching life, accompanied by comments from fellow white teachers that Khadija "shouldn't be teaching in a mainstream school-[but]-surely fit better in English as an additional language (EAL) base." Next, talked about her work in the initial teacher education (ITE) sector, where she moved away from teaching "safe things" like culturally responsive pedagogy to providing an "intersectional space" embedding critical pedagogical practices. However, her professional journey relied on continuous spells of explanations and justifications to colleagues about "why it is important to talk about race."

In relation to her decades-long leadership activities, I asked Khadija how school leaders can embed intersectionality in their schools. In answering this question, Khadija indicated two key points, first, school leaders to question their practices and policies, as she said:

In what ways do leadership practices consider the nuance of intersectionality and the impact of this? For example, do school policies and practices recognise and address the multiple layers of disadvantage young people experience? So, applying an Anti-Racist lens will support school leaders to consider how, for example, ethnicity intersects with disability, faith, gender and social class, LGBTQI identities.

Second, Khadija emphasised more representation of Black and minority ethnic (BME) teachers in the workforce:

We need to recruit more BME teachers for a more representative teaching profession. The Scottish Government has set a target that by 2030, at least 4% of our teachers will be from a BME background. Applying an intersectional lens will help identify the different layers of disadvantage that BME teachers experience regarding recruitment, retention, and progression.

Finally, I asked what one key message she would recommend for strengthening the ITE sector. Khadija replied:

Effective implementation of the National Anti-Racism framework for ITE (Mohammed, 2023b) will support teacher educators in developing their racial literacy. They are then better positioned to apply a strong Anti-Racist lens to both pedagogy and curriculum.

However, Khadija, believes:

To embark on this Anti-Racist journey, we need to be bold enough to deal with the discomfort of racism. We also need to be mindful of “no problem here” discourse, as it is even more important to enact this framework where there is little to no diversity in ITE.

Further reading

Advance HE (2021) The Anti-Racist Curriculum Project Guide. Available at:
<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/anti-racist-curriculum-project/project-guide>

Mohammed, K. (2023) The National Anti-Racism framework for Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Available at:
https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_934784_smx.pdf