

00:00:01 Claire

Welcome to the Repair-Ed podcast where we reflect on education and reimagine equitable futures. I'm Claire Neaves, a researcher who worked in education in the city of Bristol in the South West of England for over 15 years. In each episode, I'll talk to educators and thinkers about current injustices in our schooling system and their ideas for creating fairer educational futures. This podcast forms part of Repair-Ed: a 5-year project, funded by UKRI to examine educational inequality in Bristol's primary schools.

00:00:35 Claire

Welcome to another episode of the Repair-Ed podcast. My guests today are Sakina Jafri and Domini Choudhury. We'll be discussing the experiences of South Asian teachers.

00:00:46 Claire

Hi both, let's start off with a bit of an introduction to who you are and what you do. We'll start with Sakina.

00:00:52 Sakina

Thank you for having me today. As you said, my name is Sakina Jafri, and I'm a researcher at the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. And I've just completed my PhD, a study called Living Identities, which explored the experiences and pedagogies of South Asian heritage primary teachers in London.

00:01:14 Sakina

But before I was a researcher, I was a teacher in Pakistan in the United States and in England. And that journey across three different education systems is really where this research began that I'm going to talk about today.

00:01:28 Claire

Brilliant, thanks.

00:01:29 Claire

And how about you, Domini?

00:01:30 Domini

Yeah, hi. Thank you for having me on the podcast.

00:01:35 Domini

So I have been an educator in the UK for 26 years. I've been a senior leader in schools for over 20 years, all the way up to acting head teacher covering a range of schools in

London and in Bristol. I trained as an English teacher originally but the thing that I started to do some years ago is I developed a real passion for anti-racist education and training.

00:02:03 Domini

And what I do now is, I stepped down from a senior leadership role and set up my own company and I go around the country sort of delivering training to schools and multi-academy trusts and local authorities and other settings. I've done some with the NHS as well and also sitting on a number of equity steering groups in the region, the Southwest region as well. So I just do a lot of anti-racist and EDI work in general because I also identify as disabled and so I like to look at the intersectionality of some of these issues.

00:02:41 Claire

Brilliant, thank you. Thanks both and welcome.

00:02:44 Claire

Sakina, your research explored the experiences of South Asian heritage teachers in London. Can you share some of the specific issues that came up in the research?

00:02:55 Sakina

Absolutely. I think my research started like the core question was that what is it actually like to be a South Asian heritage teacher in London primary schools and not the statistics and not the recruitment targets and the retention issue, but their actual lived experience based on their intersecting identities.

00:03:16 Sakina

And that's what fueled the study. I had to just give you a little bit of context. I had 17 teachers, all female from primary schools across 12 different London boroughs. And my research had interviews, three rounds of interviews.

00:03:33 Sakina

I had a participatory method where they talked about their timeline, the highs and lows of their journeys, and then I had observations as well.

00:03:42 Sakina

Some of the issues that came up are not surprising, but the first one was... We already know that, like Domini said, she's interested in the intersecting identities. Like we know that individuals, no matter what their ethnicity is, no matter where they're from, they have intersecting identities and they're different variables that have an impact.

00:04:06 Sakina

And just with the ease with which these teachers embrace their plural identities, and it wasn't just one or the other, but it was all of them. And they were completely at ease with them. That was the first thing that came out.

00:04:20 Sakina

The second thing that came out was something that we already know through research and through our lived experiences, that there are barriers that exist within the institutions and especially the educational systems, even in a city like London, even in a year like 2026.

00:04:38 Sakina

But these teachers did not, the focus was not on the barriers. The focus was again on their identities and how did they mobilize these identities.

00:04:48 Sakina

And then the final part, which was the most important part, was how these teachers use their identities to have their own agency to impact the students in the classroom and to have transformative pedagogical practices. So they really use their identities as pedagogical expertise, which came across which has not really been looked at in research.

00:05:14 Claire

Great. That's really interesting. And it's so, it's so interesting that your participants were all female. I think, you know, primary school teaching, especially is a female dominated profession. And that I guess that in itself is a finding as well that all the people who came forward to participate were women.

00:05:34 Claire

But I love what you were talking about with the teachers using their own agency. We spoke to a teacher on this podcast about talking about justice in the classroom and it was exactly that. It was thinking about how to address some of those issues and we'll get on to talking a bit more about reparative action later on.

00:05:57 Claire

I think that'll be really interesting. And I think it's really, it's great how much overlap there is between your work.

00:06:02 Claire

I could see Domini nodding along when you were sharing some of that. And Domini, your LinkedIn header caught my eye actually. It says "belonging isn't about fitting in, it's about being fully seen in your authenticity and still invited to stay." And I think that

Sakina, what you said about those teachers embracing the plurality of their identity really chimed with that. But Domini, it got me wondering about your, how does your experience as a teacher shape the work that you do now? All of that amazing EDI and anti-racist work.

00:06:37 Domini

I think it is actually what drives me. I was just on the radio this morning talking about that because actually working with young people is what puts the fire in my belly. And despite everything that's going on in the world at the moment and there is a lot of negativity, what I get out of the passion for social justice that comes from young people from that next generation is just incredible. And when I talk to them about the work that I'm doing, they always want to engage, they don't want to stop, they want to carry on talking, they want to know.

00:07:19 Domini

And I think that in particular, for me, as someone of South Asian identity, I'm half Bangladeshi and Bengali, actually, I would say, and half Chinese. I can see Sakina laughing there because actually, to me, it's very important to identify as Bengali and not Bangladeshi, the difference between ethnicity and nationality. And this is something like as just a little example of what so many in my community don't even understand.

00:07:52 Domini

And I think it is so important that we are doing this work in with South Asian communities, which is why I've set up South Asian Heritage Month in Bristol as well, founding that movement here.

00:08:08 Domini

So it hasn't been happening properly on the scale, but young people have told me, young people of South Asian heritage in Bristol have told me they feel unrepresented, unheard, uncelebrated. And also that they don't even feel that their parents and their family really talk about being South Asian and what that means and that identity and the history.

00:08:34 Domini

I'll give you an example of a school in London that I did some work with where the school is, has like 98% of students of Bangladeshi heritage and 75% of staff. And I went to do some work with them with a team of people supporting another organisation and I was just really surprised at how little they knew of our heritage and of our background of the impact of colonialism, the legacy that it left, but also not just the sort of deficit view of it, but also all the achievements and celebrations of the people from our ethnic

group, Bengalis, and what we've achieved over the centuries. They have no knowledge of it.

00:09:27 Domini

And in fact, what was really surprising to me is I actually made two grown adult males cry. They cried after meeting with me because, and they were high flying middle leaders in the school, but they had never really thought about that stuff before. They'd grown up in communities and families where just not talked about, and just not embraced and not thought of. And so when I started telling them about all the things that our ancestors have achieved the contributions they've made to the world, they became really emotional about it, And it was really powerful to see.

00:10:13 Domini

So I just, I did ask a lot of my relatives, why is this the case? Why do we not know our history? Why do we not understand the legacy of colonialism in the Indian subcontinent? You know, what's going on here? And I learned that from my relatives that have been educated back home, that not, my generation, that the way history is taught in Bangladesh is very Eurocentric.

00:10:43 Domini

It is the British curriculum, but they don't go into their history that much. They don't go back into looking at all the brilliant things that have happened pre-British colonization, really. They don't really do that. So that's why then, I was astonished.

00:11:05 Claire

Yeah, and I think that really illustrates the power in celebration because so often when global history is brought into the curriculum in England particularly, it's such a deficit narrative. It's talking about, you know, all of the ways in which the British Empire and England have caused harm, but without really naming it as harm, just this kind of amorphous thing that somehow happened that caused a huge amount of distress and still has lasting legacies today.

00:11:38 Claire

So it's really great to hear you talking about some of that celebration.

00:11:43 Claire

And Sakina, I wonder if we could come back to you because I saw you kind of nodding all the time through what Dominie was saying. So what resonated with you there?

00:11:52 Sakina

I think the question would be the shorter question would be like, what did not resonate? Right? Because again, as somebody who moved to England five years ago from the US and somebody who had visited because I have family here, I would come here in the summer and somebody who is a South Asian, having grown up in Pakistan, whose grandparents moved because of the partition, lost their homes, lost everything. These are things that I was aware of.

00:12:19 Sakina

But moving to London in 2020 and then having these conversations with these teachers, that importance of the difference between Bengali and Bangladesh, like that matters. It's, you're not Bangladeshi, you're Bengali, like, and I'm not talking to you, Domini, but like these teachers who were saying, and I had, like I said earlier, I had 17 teachers. And between these 17 teachers, they defined their identity in 13 different ways.

00:12:48 Sakina

And that's the beauty of it. It matters what word you use and when you use it. And are you putting Bengali before British? Are you putting British after Bengali? Like all of those things matter, right?

00:13:00 Sakina

And just like Domini was saying, in my research, having my own experience and my own histories, I was not expecting the partition to come up as heavily as it did. Because I had three generations of teachers. The youngest teacher was 25, the oldest teacher was 62.

00:13:18 Sakina

And so these generation of teachers were raised by different kinds of parents, were raised in different times. Some of these teachers have never been to South Asia. Some of these teachers moved here as adults and some of these teachers were born here. And in all their narratives and all their stories, the partition of 1947 kept coming up again and again and again. And the way that it came up was if whether they were taught in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan or India, because it's a very white colonial curriculum even today, they weren't taught about what the South Asians did.

00:14:00 Sakina

And if they grew up here, that was exactly the same case. It's a very Eurocentric curriculum. They are not taught about the other side of what the British Empire did, right?

00:14:11 Sakina

Even today, when I started teaching in London, I was shocked at the lack of the other side when I was teaching the British Empire to my 5th graders, sorry, year five. And so I think that comes across.

00:14:27 Sakina

And this other thing that comes across is what Domini was touching upon is the temporality and how the collective histories matter. When I started out with my research, I really wanted to focus on the individual because the individual stories are so nuanced and so complex.

00:14:44 Sakina

If we start looking at patterns between teachers who identify as Bengali and teachers who identify as Pakistani or teachers who identify as Sri Lankan is very, very different. So I wanted them to be independent, not a broad brush of, oh, you're all South Asian. But it became, as I sat with their stories, it became more and more evident that the collective histories could not be ignored.

00:15:08 Sakina

And 75, 80 years later, these teachers in their classrooms are trying to, like I said earlier, use their identity to bring in insight, to bring in agency and pedagogical purposes. They're saying like our grandfathers were in the Imperial Army. Nobody talks about that. Nobody talks about the fact that my mother as a nine-year-old was in, slept in Victoria Station for two weeks with her little sister. Nobody talks about that.

00:15:39 Sakina

And especially in the current context of what's happening within the country and globally, the way that we are, the South Asians are perceived as the other. And by default, then we're perceived as the problem. That's what we need to move away from. We need to acknowledge and hear, this is the work in spite of all of that.

00:15:58 Sakina

These teachers, in spite of all the educational policies, in spite of all the shortages, whether state schools or independent schools, are doing this work every single day. But we're not talking about it. So we need to talk about it.

00:16:12 Sakina

We need to say, and even for them, sometimes they don't realize that they're doing this work. It's that importance of saying, acknowledging that you are heard and it's what you said was on Domini's LinkedIn. It's the authenticity and that belonging of saying, I see you, exist.

00:16:30 Claire

Yeah, and that let's, you know, you said how important it is to talk about it. So let's talk about it. You know, what kind of reparative work are teachers in classrooms doing to kind of change the narrative?

00:16:43 Claire

And because I know, you know, that's what you've written about, Sakina, and Domini, you're engaging in that on a wider scale with things like South Asian Heritage Month. Do you want to kind of kick off by telling us a bit more about that?

00:16:57 Domini

Yeah, I think I agree with what Sakina said about how it's got to be both. It's really important to teach about the history and, you know, what has happened and to present a global view of history and the narratives. It's not just a one-sided view.

00:17:20 Domini

So it's important when I talk about empire and I talk about colonization and so on that I do present how things like, for example, I talk about the Bengal famine and the fact it's the worst famine the world ever experienced and then the lasting effects of that afterwards and how it changed things at a cellular level on the Indian subcontinent, and the health issues that have arisen as a result, for people of the Indian subcontinent because of that famine.

00:17:52 Domini

And so I talk about it because it doesn't get spoken about, when we talk about partition and we talk about empire, it's a very sanitized view of it.

00:18:02 Domini

So I make sure that the work that I do with teachers and the work I do with schools is looking at things from the global perspective.

00:18:14 Domini

But at the same time as I want to talk about that, I absolutely think we have to talk about celebration and achievements and so introducing people to the fantastic things that people of South Asian Heritage have done, have contributed to society.

00:18:34 Domini

It's more important than ever, and I think that personally, with all the hate out there now, it's something that we really have to keep pushing. So I do that.

00:18:46 Domini

I talk about my father being one of the group of people that came from Bangladesh and set up the curry houses in East London and along Brick Lane, and that became known as the curry mile and then they all established those curry houses and then him and his friends then spread out around the country and opened up the first curry houses, Indian restaurants in the country wherever they landed. And so I like to talk about that.

00:19:16 Domini

My mum came from a Commonwealth country to work for the NHS, and in fact the NHS just wouldn't exist without people like my mum and other South Asians and Africans and Caribbeans as well, and I think it's really important that not just young people, but everyone hears that narrative and hears about the contributions that global majority people have made to British society, past and present.

00:19:52 Domini

So I think that, that's why I've set up South Asian Heritage Month in Bristol. That's why it's so important. So I need that message to be got out. And now more than ever, one of the things we're doing for South Asian Heritage Month is we've got a team of filmmakers who are making short oral histories, bite-sized histories of South Asians that have contributed to our region from the past because actually some of my South Asian friends here, they're like Sakina was saying, their parents actually fought in the war or their grandparents, or soldiers or pilots in the war for Britain and we don't know about that, but their children and their grandchildren are here in Bristol, and they've got photos, artifacts. So we're capturing those stories, but also more recent South Asians who've made a significant contribution, you know, as well.

00:20:52 Domini

And it's things like there's a statue that sits right outside City Hall in Bristol, and I only discovered it by accident, and it's of a gentleman who was so well known in the Indian continent at the time of Queen Victoria and highly respected and regarded around the world for his view on women's rights and was invited over to Britain to talk to Parliament and government about his, progressive women's rights, and he's actually Bengali, obviously it was India back then, but his ethnic origin is that he is Bengali, and he's buried in Bristol because he unfortunately got sick when he was visiting here and he died. And so he got buried here and then there was a statue put in front of our city hall to honour him. And everyone walked past that, has walked past that for God knows how long, decades, and not understood. And South Asians, Bangladeshis, Bengali families have walked past it and not looked and not understood the significance of that statue, not just to Bristol, but to the whole world.

00:22:11 Domini

And it's things like that, really matter and why we're doing South Asian Heritage Month.

00:22:17 Claire

Brilliant, thank you. Yeah, I know the statue you mean and it's right there in the centre. It should be celebrated and I think by the time this podcast goes out, the events for Heritage Month will have happened and you know, it'd be great to catch up and find out how that all went.

00:22:39 Claire

Sakina, let's sort of think back to the classroom. So, you mentioned teachers exercising their agency. So what kind of things are going on in the classroom to shift some of these narratives?

00:22:53 Sakina

So I think one of the things that came up from their stories was that these teachers were trying to create the classrooms that they didn't have. And no matter how old these teachers were, that's something that kept coming up again and again and again.

00:23:09 Sakina

And these teachers, it was fascinating that these teachers who are 42 and 47 and 32, when they were sharing their stories, it was almost like they're like 8 and 9 back in their primary schools, because the way that they were talking about what they wanted to create for their students brought them back to what they had missed in their own classrooms.

00:23:34 Sakina

Because in primary schools is when these teachers realized for the first time that they weren't white. Teachers said things like, school was a struggle. All I wanted was to be blonde and white. There were no teachers of colour in their schools.

00:23:50 Sakina

And what that does is, and what it means for the students today is that it carries both conscious and unconscious consequences for how students understand belonging and opportunity and power. So what these teachers did was that they not only survived their own schooling within this country, but they transformed it into pedagogical purpose.

00:24:15 Sakina

And they really, really actively work on reimagining the classroom as a space of belonging, authenticity, and hope. And they did this by a few different things.

00:24:26 Sakina

So we were talking about South Asian Heritage Month, and as important as these months are, and sometimes in certain schools they are, you only talk about South

Asians during South Asian Heritage Month. You only talk about the contributions of Black people during Black History Month. And these teachers very clearly said, that I talk about different cultures all around the year. I don't just talk about Black people in Black History Month.

00:24:52 Sakina

They also brought in books where South Asians and other...I'm going to call them global majority because that's what the numbers say. They're not minorities, but they will bring in authors from global majority.

00:25:06 Sakina

They will bring in characters from the global majority, not as tokenistic as the child who is always suffering and is at the other in society, but as living their regular lives, just like they are in other books.

00:25:19 Sakina

They talk about celebrating different cultures throughout, asking the parents to come in. Because again, in a place like London, we have so much diversity in terms of cultures, in terms of ethnicity, in terms of socioeconomic classes, and all of them intersect. So these teachers celebrated that.

00:25:37 Sakina

A teacher is something as small as a teacher saying, in my math problems. Like I have different names, I just don't have Mary and Sarah and John. I have different names from different cultures and those things matter.

00:25:51 Sakina

Teachers who had disabilities, they talked about the fact that as students they struggled. And as teachers, they continue to struggle because they're not recognized. Teachers would say that, I had one teacher, she said that, we harp and go on and on and on about inclusion in classrooms for students, but there's no inclusion for teachers with disabilities. So how in the world am I supposed to make sure that I make students feel included when I'm not included at all in policy or in practice?

00:26:24 Sakina

Some of them said that my lived experience and my identity helps me to have these restorative conversations, helps me to understand what it feels like when a child comes into the classroom and doesn't know what a Christmas cracker is.

00:26:41 Sakina

So little things like that, may not stand out to somebody else, but because of these teachers' own experiences in the schools where they felt like outsiders, every single day they're doing little and big things to make sure that they feel included, the students feel included.

00:26:56 Claire

Yeah, great. And I wondered, Domini, you taught in Bristol, so it'd be interesting to get your take on that where, you know, I guess we're always hearing how diverse Bristol is, but it's a very divided city. Different schools will have very, very different demographics. So, do you have any sense of what the kind of experience and barriers for South Asian children are in the city?

00:27:25 Domini

Yeah, firstly, I always say diversity is not the same as inclusion. And Bristol is very diverse, it is not that inclusive, it is very segregated. I think the Runnymede Trust actually said in 2017 it's the most segregated city in the country and I feel quite strongly that might be the case. And there are lots of things that have led to that and socio-economic factors are part of that legacy of history in Bristol as part of that as well.

00:28:04 Domini

But I think in terms of South Asian children, there has been a sizable cohort of South Asian heritage families in Bristol. But they've been, I think, predominantly from one or two communities. It's been predominantly the Pakistani community. They've been here a really long time in Bristol. But then more recently, we've seen a massive influx of people from other South Asian communities. So the Bangladeshi community is growing in Bristol, but it's still quite small. But we have many more Sri Lankans now.

00:28:44 Domini

We have a significant number of people from India because of Brexit and the fact that so many Europeans that were working in the hospital industry, the care sector and the engineering industry left after Brexit and I live very close to where those sectors are. I literally witnessed the area around me become more visibly diverse because of bringing in workers from the Indian subcontinent and other Asian countries and African nations as well. So visible diversity has rapidly changed, I think, in Bristol, in certain parts of Bristol.

00:29:27 Domini

We also became a city of sanctuary. So we've taken quite a significant number of refugees and asylum seekers. We now have quite a sizable Afghani population and Afghanistan is part of South Asia as well.

00:29:40 Domini

So, and it's brilliant. Absolutely love it. That's what I love about Bristol. And it has its challenges, real challenges then, because at the scale at which visible diversity has occurred, some communities that have been very traditionally non-diverse and very homogenous have struggled with that. And it's caused tensions and so on. that is something that's ongoing.

00:30:10 Domini

The work that I do and have done for some time now is looking at whole school systems and processes. Because for me, that's the only way that you can create culture change. So I know and I respect that some schools feel they have to start somewhere. And so, they might just do the few lessons on black history during Black History Month or something or shoehorn in a topic for one unit of work, but I don't, I don't feel that is effective.

00:30:48 Domini

And so the work that I encourage schools to do is a much more embedded in their school improvement. It's looking at the whole school, looking at every part of the school, like things like the hidden curriculum, looking at policies, looking at recruitment practices, and then looking at the actual curriculum as well.

00:31:07 Domini

And, and yes, a lot of schools need to start with representation. I get that. And that is sort of the easier thing to chew off initially is diversifying your curriculum and having more representative images and texts and stories. Yes. But what I like to see a school who's really committed to this work move towards is actually decolonizing the curriculum. But that takes a huge amount of racial literacy.

00:31:36 Domini

It's not something that a school can achieve at the beginning and it's a journey. I always talk about this work being a marathon, not a sprint and because that's what culture change is. You can't change a culture overnight and you can't fight against centuries of narrative just overnight like that, I like to, if we get there with a school, is look at, start to look at, how knowledge is constructed, in Western society, the link between knowledge and power, who holds the power in deciding what knowledge we transmit to students, That's the kind of work that I think will effect long-term change, but I think it's really problematic. A lot of schools, because you've got the national curriculum to follow, you have directives from the DfE.

00:32:36 Domini

And now in the most recent curriculum review that came out, there is reference to creating, that schools from 2028 must have a curriculum that is representative of the

diversity of Britain. But it really, that's it. That's all it says. It's just that's the extent to which the DfE are committed to this work. It's okay, a bit of representation in your curriculum, which strikes me as a bit tokenistic really.

00:33:04 Domini

But also even that alone, I don't think many schools are equipped to do that, you see, and they will completely take a misstep, could end up being really offensive actually, without realising you.

00:33:19 Domini

And because the other thing I talk about is it's all very well having a really diverse and representative curriculum, but do the teachers have the skills and confidence to deliver that?

00:33:31 Domini

Because children will ask questions and they ask very honest and very blunt questions. And if a teacher hasn't had any racial literacy training, they don't know how to handle that. That can go really wrong then.

00:33:49 Claire

Absolutely. I think we've all experienced in the classroom those questions from, even primary school age children that are so insightful and, really catch you off guard sometimes with, the depth of what they're asking. So it's so important to, as you say, have teachers who are prepared for that.

00:34:10 Claire

I think in what you're both saying, I really hear the reparative work that, is being done and needs to be done. And I think, Domini, I particularly hear that tension of, we know that tokenistic representation isn't good enough, but some schools aren't even there yet. So it's that sort of double-edged sword of, do we push for representation first, knowing that might be the first step, but even it feels, it doesn't feel right sometimes to advocate for things that we know aren't good enough.

00:34:49 Claire

And I think probably thinking about the future is a good way to move on to our final question, which is the same for all the guests on our podcast. And that's what would a just education system look like to you? We'll start with Sakina.

00:35:07 Sakina

Such a simple question, right, for all your guests to end this with.

00:35:13 Sakina

I think it requires work on different levels. And like Domini said before was that it takes, it's a marathon, it's not a sprint. And it requires work from a lot of us at different levels. And it just, it's not just up to the South Asians. We need allies as well. So it's not work that only we should take on.

00:35:35 Sakina

But I think in terms of specifics, imagining like a just future for education, I think thinking about my most current role as a researcher, I think what's really, really important is that we focus on things that are not researched. We focus not on grand gestures and just numbers, but we look at what is honest and what is authentic and communicating that because it matters that in the research world, in universities, what is being said.

00:36:08 Sakina

And then how are we articulating that to the policymakers? How are we articulating that to DfE? Because it matters because they will go back and say, oh, this is a policy paper that came out of this study out of Cambridge or so on or so forth.

00:36:22 Sakina

But, so it's very, very important that we're very careful in what we are researching and how we're communicating that research.

00:36:29 Sakina

I think in terms of policy, we really need to move away from numerical diversity targets. Inclusion is not just about who is in the room. It's about whether the room changes to accommodate them, whether they feel like they actually belong authentically in that space or not.

00:36:50 Sakina

And it must explicitly address, I think that as a country, England needs to name institutional whiteness as a structural issue. We cannot dance around that. We cannot. It's 2026. We're moving towards a world where it's needed more than ever. It was always needed, but it's needed more than ever now, especially for the young people that we are raising, that we're bringing into this world. And we have to name it because that institutional whiteness is not just inequity as an individual or it's not a cultural problem or an individual problem. It's an institutional and structural problem.

00:37:31 Sakina

I think the one thing that we talk a lot about in this country is teacher retention and how schools have to address this and SLT has to address it and we forget about teacher education. I think we really need to think about overhauling our initial teacher education

and the way that it looks like in this country. And who is in that room? Who are the teacher educators? How are we teaching them?

00:37:56 Sakina

Domini brought up the importance of racial literacy. It's missing in our initial teacher education, so we're actually doing a disservice to our young teachers who are coming in who are not equipped to have these conversations with the students. And it's not fair of us to expect as a society that they will, after like nine months of teacher training where they did not talk about this at all, that they will be able to handle these tough conversations with their students.

00:38:22 Sakina

And I think the final aspect when it comes to schools is that it's a constant reflective process. It's not a one time that I've done this, I've done equity, I've done diversity, I've done inclusion. It's a process that we all go through. It's a process that teachers are going through. It's a process that the senior leadership team is going through. And we need to have that open space of maintaining that culture of saying, yes, what I said today, I maybe will not say like five years later because I've learned something differently.

00:38:52 Sakina

And instead of blaming, I think the important thing for me to remember, spaces that I'm in is not to just place the blame, but to say, what am I doing differently? What is in my realm of control? And how am I positioning it? How am I speaking about it? I think that really, really matters. And that goes back to celebrating the different identities and celebrating the intersecting variables that come in to form one's identity.

00:39:20 Sakina

Sorry, that was a very long-winded answer.

00:39:23 Claire

No, that was great. I think it's really interesting. And lots of that chimes with the other answers to this question that we've had on the podcast before.

00:39:31 Claire

And particularly thinking about ITT, initial teacher training, we've talked about how there's an overrepresentation actually of global majority teachers entering teacher training. And then, you know, that dips as we go through. So something is going wrong at that very first point. And I think you're right, who are the educators at that point is a really, really important question and something that we should be exploring.

00:40:01 Claire

Domini, what are your thoughts on a just education system?

00:40:06 Domini

I just want to pick up on that point about teacher retention because I am an associate researcher for the University of Bristol as well. I've been engaging in some kind of pedagogical research and That's one area, that's what I've been looking at actually is the teacher retention issue, global majority teacher retention. And you're absolutely right, all the statistics show that coming into the profession isn't the issue. It is the retention. And certainly in the region I'm in, that's what I've been looking at really closely as well is I know that for a fact that huge numbers of global majority teachers leave the profession. And I'm one of them, essentially. And why do we then leave? And also don't make it into senior middle leadership, senior leadership, you know, there's some kind of barrier there.

00:41:03 Domini

I recently actually met with the DfE, their teacher recruitment arm, because they have now written a policy around teacher recruitment that's effective from September and they're trying to put some work together on addressing it and they wanted to meet with someone around the lack of global majority teachers and I was really straight with the people that I met with about the experiences of myself and people, colleagues and for me it comes back to how do we make it fairer and more just?

00:41:42 Domini

I think actually the way that we recruit teachers into and certainly into middle leadership and senior leadership roles has to fundamentally shift, right? Because what we do is we rely really heavily on evidencing the experience you've already had to become a middle or senior leader rather than the potential that someone has and how well they align with, say, the value of the organisation, but we look at experience.

00:42:12 Domini

But myself, I was somebody really disadvantaged by that. I didn't have the experiences that some of my peers had, and early on in my career, those experiences weren't available to me. And, whereas sadly, I think there is still a bit too much nepotism that happens in the teaching profession, whether we like to admit it or not. And actually some of my colleagues who aren't from global majority backgrounds had experiences and opportunities that I just didn't have. So then when I go up for a middle leader or senior leader position, that's what I'm up against. I'm already at a disadvantage.

00:42:56 Domini

So I'm really proud that the school, the last school I was a senior leader at, we actually, our statistics on a global majority recruitment into leadership outshines any other

school in the city. And it's because we were very intentional about it and very intentional about the way in which we not only recruited but retained global majority staff and moved them up the career ladder. And I think that's really important. That's one way to address the issue of what a just education system looks like and a representative education system.

00:43:35 Domini

For me, the other big thing, I suppose, the final thing I'm going to say, it's about the truth. It's about telling the truth and the truth in terms of our history, in terms of, you know, that's reflected in our curriculum and in terms of the narratives and telling the whole picture. My favourite quote is the one by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie about the danger of the single story and that is exactly it. There's too much of that in the British education system. It's just the single story and we need to move away from that in our education system. It needs to be a global education.

00:44:19 Domini

I went to see David Olusoga last night here in Bristol and he talked about the cup of tea, which I knew a lot about already, the British history and the British obsession with tea, but it's absolutely, he really showed everyone there the global nature of tea, and how everything is interconnected and you can't drink a cup of tea and not understand that history, and not understand the history of colonization and what has happened in order for us to have tea as our favourite drink in this country.

00:44:57 Domini

But a lot of people don't know that stuff, and everything's like that. The world is interconnected. It has been for centuries. As much as there are people who don't like that idea, that's how it is.

00:45:10 Domini

And I think that unfortunately we don't really talk about that enough in schools. The children themselves don't fully understand how global everything is and how we are part of one part of a massive ecosystem.

00:45:27 Domini

And that's the truth that I think the authenticity, the authenticity or authentic is the first word of my business. The first, that's what the A stands for in my business because I really believe that is what the education system needs to be as really authentic.

00:45:44 Claire

Brilliant. Thank you so much.

00:45:46 Claire

And I love that you both, your answers were so expansive, but they drew out some really, really practical things that people can explore doing to make things more equitable and to make education more just.

00:45:59 Claire

And thank you so much for being here today and sharing your experiences, your research, your work. It's been great chatting with both of you.

00:46:07 Claire

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