



how is race relevant to training FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS?

GILL FRIGERIO, Associate Professor at the University of Warwick's Centre for Lifelong Learning, shares headline findings from a research project that looked at the experiences of BAME students undertaking career development programmes at Warwick.

In a labour market where Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people experience structural disadvantage and an education system with clear gaps in attainment, career development practitioners are in a pivotal position. Working with all stakeholders – students, institutions and employers – we are uniquely placed to advocate, challenge, support and enable. How able are we as a profession to do this?

[We recognise that 'BAME' as a term conflates a wide variety of different experiences and we use it with some trepidation. We also note there is no consensus on language and that many of the students we spoke to used this term themselves. We think this needs further discussion, along with the wider issues that language represents.]

EXAMINING THE PROFESSION

We began our exploration from a couple of different angles. First, how representative are we? The presence, and experience, of careers professionals from differing backgrounds is undoubtedly linked to our ability to engage and work effectively in this area and engage with clients of colour. And second, how well is the profession as a whole able to work skilfully and effectively in ways that address some of the barriers our clients may experience? This relates to both the theoretical basis for our practice and the way in which the majority of white practitioners learn to practice in ways which challenge racism.

The first question is hard to answer, as there is no data source that provides a breakdown by ethnicity of the career development profession, or higher education practitioners as a subset. Professional bodies have not thus far been collecting this data. However, we know that higher education has a problem attracting, retaining and promoting BAME staff and this extends to professional services as a whole.

LISTENING TO EXPERIENCES

In line with this, participation in our Career Education, Information and Guidance in Higher Education (CEIGHE) programme from minoritized staff is slightly lower than the UK population might lead us to expect. Hearing the specific experiences of BAME practitioners underlined the importance of this as the lack of representation, particularly in senior positions, was repeatedly mentioned. On the flipside, our research participants spoke of how their shared ethnicity with some clients completely reframed student engagement and allowed for distinctive niches to be developed. This was a refreshing alternative to the focus on barriers and deficits that can bedevil careers provision, gained by listening to the experiences of minoritized practitioners in their working lives and as students of career development.

DEVELOPING ANTI-RACIST PEDAGOGY

Drawing on interviews with current and recent students, and having reviewed progression data and relevant literature, we conclude that there is a need to take culture, race and racism seriously on career development professional training programmes. The nuance in our data shows the importance of viewing race as one of a range of intersecting identities. Whilst our students often appreciated being enabled to extend their work to consider race, we propose further consideration of change to both pedagogy and curriculum to be more intentionally anti-racist. We can explicitly require a critique of the traditions of career development theory to explore how they might be relevant to the widest possible client groups. We can also ensure we diversify our materials and readings to make sure we are including a range of scholarly and practitioner voices. This extends to the case studies and sample resources we use – where this has been done over recent years, students have noticed and appreciated it.

By modelling this on our courses we know that all practitioners (not just minoritized ones) can include it in their practice too. Next steps include creating ways to discuss this with all practitioners, so we can really fulfil that potential leverage we claim for our sector. Race has to be seen as relevant to all of us to do that.



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