



Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

Centering Equity in Supporting Muslim Students: Part III

Considerations and Practices Toward Religious Diversity

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Center Announcer: Welcome to the Great Lakes Equity Center Equity Spotlight podcast. This podcast series will highlight organizations and individuals in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana for working to advance equitable practices within school systems. This is the sixth episode in the Centering Equity in Educator Effectiveness podcast series. Each episode in this series will focus on demonstrating equitable practices and curriculum, instruction or the learning environment.

Center Host: This is the third of a three-part series with Dr. Muhammad Khalifa. We will continue discussing centering equity and culturally responsive and sustaining learning environments for Muslim students. In parts I and II of this series, Dr. Khalifa provided a summary of the complex global history of the experience of Muslims, and stressed the importance of grounding equity work for Muslims in an understanding of the diverse and varied lived experiences Muslim students bring to the classroom. In part three, we will discuss ways that schools can and should engage in students' communities.

Center Host: You know, I read an article that you had written called "*Understand and Advocate for Communities First.*" It appeared in, um, *Parents and Schools* in April of last year, so April, 2015. Um, in that article you presented two models, uh, for school-to-community relationships, um, that might help educators become knowledgeable about and advocate for community based interests. Um, and I know that, you know, throughout this interview you've talked to us a lot about, um, as you said extending anti-oppressive work into communities, um, the two models that were presented in that article, have you, have you sort of described them here already, or are there um, could you maybe, uh, describe to us or give us a little-an overview of what those models look like?

Dr. Khalifa: Let me, let me just clear up a couple of assumptions about this article. One assumption, so advocacy is-is-is clear in both of the models that I mentioned in that paper, [Center Host: Mmm-hmm.] advocating for community, uh, based goals. And one thing that I think, uh, school leaders and school districts don't understand is that in order to be culturally responsive, and in order to advocate for community based goals that you have to be well, well versed in each of the cultures that you deal with. And I don't agree with that. I do think that it is to the benefit of school leaders, eh, and district leaders to be immersed in the-in the communities that they serve. I do. Um, however, as long as you are willing to put structures in place that will allow for this then neither herself or himself does not have to be the actual person doing the work. But the-the structure of the school has to do so, and so, one example that

I write about uh, is-uh, is-uh, is-uh man, his name is, uh, Joe Dulin, I write about him in a lot of my work, he was in Ann Arbor he passed away several years ago. Uh, he was a great model, I'm so happy that he shared over the course of a number of years his legacy and his work with me. Uh, and he allowed me to see how he served community, and, uh, so, uh, in that particular community he talked, uh, about an incident that happened and, um, and I've cited it in some of my work where, uh, individuals were five-five African American boys got some attention and were accused of stealing uh-a man's possessions, uh, at a local park. And they were arrested, they were all underage, and they were arrested, uh, and the man-nothing was stolen from him, obviously. I think he mentioned race or something like that, but to-to make a long story short, um, they were arrested, they were questioned, no Miranda rights were read, uh, they were dealing with minors and they were, they weren't dealt with. And so, the Black community in this particular town erupted, and the Black community, uh, staged several protests, and several um, uh, uh sit ins and dialogues that fought for the rights of these children who have been sort of oppressed in this incidents, in this incident by police, uh, who were called to the scene and immediately just accepted the version of what happened that-from this elderly, White gentleman. Uh, he had misplaced some of his own things and I think, just accused these Black boys of stealing them. And so the community came, and so Joe was at the forefront of those protests, not even as the school principal, now, again whether or not Joe was uh, up to date on the latest hip hop fad, and whether he owned the latest lingo of young Black boys- none of that really mattered, as much as number one giving them a space to do whoever they – so, it's interesting. When we say that we want to create a space for all, for all people such as Muslims and African Americans and Indigenous – what we really mean is we want them to come into a school space, we want them to change who they are in order for them to be successful. We claim on the front end that it's about academics and how they achieve, but on the back end though, we really absolutely expect for them to change their appearance, how they talk, how they dress and everything else in order for them to comfortably be in school spaces. And one of the things that Joe did is that he a) created/allowed this space to exist, he said look, "if they're not here, I can't help them", and that's, that's very true. What does a kid sagging his pants or wearing a hat have to do with him passing a math test? Not really much. And so, and then 2), uh, one of the things-what Joe did is he got out in the community and whatever was important to the community, he aligned himself with that. He did not co-opt their struggle. He was a part of the struggle. He aligned himself with that and he would go and advocate for whatever was important to the community that he was serving and I think that this central role of advocacy is, is one of the key ingredients. And in one model it showed at the very beginning. [Center Host: Mmm-hmm.] And-and he did that also but then another model, which is the example that I just cited for you with the kids being arrested in a local pool, it shows up in the middle, so he kinda established the rapport with them, he knew what the issues were, he had his finger on the pulse so when an issue popped up he was right there. So obviously when a man like this comes to the school and he says, "Look I need to keep your kid for a few hours after school," it's not a fight with parents. They completely trusted him and entrusted him with their children. And so, um, there are other models as well, but if-if the rapport with the community is there, if the advocacy for community base-cause for example, I never see, I'm not saying it didn't happen, but I've never- I'm here in the Twin Cities, I've never seen a school principal go advocate for uh, the-these-these young Somali boys and youth that have been-been-been increasingly caught up in this terrorism business here in the Twin Cities. It's become like a major problem, I've never seen, an administrator – and see at some point, all administrators are going to have to decide: Do I want to make sure that my job is 100% secure? Or do I want to advocate for what in my heart of hearts, I believe is right so these young men are not being

well-mentored, uh, some of them, uh I have been called up, they are already disaffected in school, and then, there's even a bit of entrapment going on, too, in many cases across the country. And so, where are the school leaders? I'm not gonna get political about what's going on there because it's a very complex situation, uh, and again I'm not Somalian- it's probably best for a Somalian to speak about this. But my question is the school leader, uh, prepared? Where are the school leaders advocating for the guidance, or for the rights, for the protections of the people in the community that are served here in the Twin Cities? Uh, go out to Minneapolis- resources are moving out of some areas, prices are becoming, uh, uh, homes are becoming far out of the reach of Black families that were situated there. Where are the school leaders on this issue? And-and around the area of St. Paul, which is being gentrified as well, uh, where are the school leaders? I-I'm here and I don't see where the school leaders are at advocating for community-based causes, and in every city- now migrant workers, there's a migrant workforce here, and people are being expatriated out of the country in ways that are not healthy for families – where are the school leaders on that issue? So we're-we're living in a political world and forced to remain silent as school leaders, and as policy makers. Well, we're not really silent, we're just taking a position and sometimes, not always, but sometimes our silence is siding with oppression. And so therefore we have to center this role of advocacy because as you remain silent, you're advocating, but you just may not be advocating for the right thing.

Center Host: Yep. That is powerful, Dr. Khalifa. Thank you so much for sharing all that, all of that. Um, I, you know, I suspect that there are different pressures that might, um, contribute to school leaders silencing, staying silent, and I really appreciate your example of a school leader who didn't. Those are all of the questions that I had for you today. Are there any, you know, any final thoughts that you'd like to share with us and our listeners, um...

Dr. Khalifa: No, I would just like to re-emphasize that um, anti-Muslim bigotry, I- I- if they leave with nothing else, they need to understand that anti-Muslim bigotry is virtually unchecked and when a kid makes a clock and takes it to school and then is accused of being a terrorist, when leading contenders for the oval office-presidential candidates- suggest that we have to have identification cards, my-my-my- I have uncles that fought in Vietnam and Korea and my grandfather was a WWII vet, and my family name, before my father changed it, was Davis. And it's because Jefferson Davis, leader of the Confederates, owned some of my ancestors, okay? And so for you to suggest now that I have to get an identification card, because I am American-Muslim, just – and – and I'm an academic and that bothers me, just imagine the impact that, that has on Muslim children in the school, who are virtually defenseless, they don't have a defense to that. When – when, when uh, these kinds of things operate in the news, um, and this discourse makes it way, uh, into classrooms and into schools these, these things are indefensible and it puts the principal in a very, very awkward and very painful place. And so the most important thing I would say for school leaders and for educators to-to-to keep aware of is that, uh, bigotry changes shape quickly um, it uh, it's difficult to recognize at some point but it's not for Muslim students, um, supremacy of some groups is not always in the same place and if you're not doing anything about anti-Muslim, this is the most important thing and I'm working my way up to this. If you're not doing anything right now, in your school building about anti-Muslim bigotry and anti-Muslim bias, then you are a part of the problem. And there's no other way around that.

Center Host: Alright, well, thank you so much for, um, speaking with us today.

Dr. Khalifa: I'm happy and excited and happy and thankful and appreciative that you all are doing this kind of work.

Center Host: Alright, thank you so much.

Dr. Khalifa: Yes, thanks. You, too. Bye-bye.

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