

in conversation

Achieving Excellence: Weaving together Student Achievement, Equity, and Well-Being

In Conversation with Kahontakwas Diane Longboat, Nouman Ashraf, and Carl James

As we move toward realizing the promise of *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, I am pleased and gratified to see the innovative work being done in districts and in schools across the province. Living as we do in one of the world's most diverse jurisdictions, it is clear that your efforts are having a significant impact on the lives of Ontario children, youth, their families and their communities and are also serving as a model of excellence for the world.

In support of that work, this issue of *In Conversation* features Kahontakwas Diane Longboat, Nouman Ashraf, and Carl James, three thought leaders who recognize the deep and inseparable connections between and among student achievement, equity, and well-being. They are profoundly committed to building and deepening our understanding about their relevance in the context of education and about how they can serve as powerful levers to strengthen community and enrich society as a whole.

Each of these leaders brings a unique perspective to the conversation. Yet, I am struck by the common threads that run through all of their ideas and advice which inspire us to broaden and renew our own vision of education. These engaging

conversations motivate us to re-examine our relationships within and outside school walls. They remind us to expand our understanding of children and youth and the personal stories that inform their lives. More importantly, they call on us to acknowledge ourselves as deep and continuous learners.

In this essential role as learning leaders, our capacity to ask questions, to reflect on our own biases and assumptions, to admit that we don't always have the answers, and to become authentic listeners, becomes a necessary asset.

Leadership requires courage and the ability to step outside of our own comfort zone. These informative and inspiring interviews provide us with many practical approaches to finding this courage within ourselves to discover and act on a new depth in the teaching, learning, and leading process. I believe you will find this issue as engaging and challenging as I have, and hope that you will consider how these valuable insights can inform your own professional practice.

Bruce Rodrigues
Deputy Minister of Education



A Reader's Guide

We have organized this issue of *In Conversation* so that you can choose from a variety of entry points to access the content of the three featured interviews. We begin with 12 specific themes that provide a sampling of ideas that emerged as common in the conversations and then connect each of these themes directly to the interview transcripts. In this way, you have several options for interacting with this edition of *In Conversation*. You can:

- Read it as a whole from start to finish.
- Read all 12 themes and concepts as an introduction to the three interviews and then decide to read them in the order of your preference.
- Scan the 12 themes and concepts, and select those themes that are of greatest interest to you to read first. Then follow the hyperlinks to questions in all three interviews that are relevant to these themes.

Regardless of the approach you take, we encourage you to use what you have read as a springboard for reflection, further research, and/or subsequent dialogue about leadership that weaves together student achievement, equity and well-being in meaningful and impactful ways. Work on your own, with a colleague or with a group of colleagues and tailor to your individual needs, interests and/or contexts.

Part A: Themes and Concepts

Themes and Concepts provides snapshots of ideas that draw on selected comments of the three interview subjects. For deeper reading, you will find a list of numbered questions included in margin boxes for each theme, that refer to comments made by the interview subjects on that particular theme. The 12 themes and concepts are:

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Part B: The Conversations

The Conversations feature the slightly edited and condensed transcripts of the three in-depth interviews in the following order:

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Conversation with Carl James	25

Each of these leaders has a unique story to tell and offers distinct perspectives on student achievement, equity, and well-being and how their interrelatedness informs the student experience as a whole learner.

Part A: Themes and Concepts

Recognizing Diversity as an Intrinsic Feature of Community Life

Diversity is part of the fabric of everyday life. Even in a community where diversity is not evident, there exists diversity among families and neighbourhoods, among histories, lived realities and faiths. If we were going to live in an unfamiliar culture, we would have to learn cultural and spiritual protocols and practices in order to respect and honour them and in turn become comfortable in that new setting. The question then, is not whether there is diversity, because diversity exists in every context. The real question is, “What we are doing with it?” We may be trying to wish it away, we may be simply tolerating it, or, we may be engaging with it as an integral part of our day-to-day process and seeking ways for it to enrich our work and our lives.

Diane Longboat: Q 2, 6, 7

Nouman Ashraf: Q 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8

Carl James: Q 1, 2, 10, 13

Making Connections with Student Achievement

Achievement is informed by students’ backgrounds, and the aspirations and interests they bring with them to school. On one hand, this prior knowledge and experience may be of great benefit. On the other hand, it may actually cause students to feel anxious about or resistant to some of our teaching approaches and what we expect them to learn. While we understand that we need to be sensitive to and aware of unique differences among students, our human tendency to be drawn to people who are like ourselves can often become an obstacle. When our teaching doesn’t resonate with our students, there may be a tendency to start labelling students’ behaviours in negative ways rather than stopping to consider that it may in fact be our behaviours that need to change. We also need to keep in mind that achievement is not only about cognitive skills and their application. It is also about the development

of character and altruism which are central to creating classrooms, schools, and communities that value, reflect, and draw on diversity.

Diane Longboat: Q 2, 3, 5, 7, 8

Nouman Ashraf: Q 6, 11

Carl James: Q 1, 2, 4, 6, 7

Making Connections with Equity

Equity is a condition of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for their individual differences. Equity acknowledges that we should not do the same thing for every student. Equity levels the playing field so that all children and youth have what they need to thrive at school. It advocates for the unique treatment of unique people. Equity is also about addressing and taking action to remove systemic barriers to achievement. It is about democracy in education. Students should not have to choose between getting a first-class education and retaining their culture, language and heritage. They should be able to enter, achieve, and graduate from a system without sacrificing their identity and self-esteem. They should experience a system which respects and nurtures their uniqueness and in which their self-confidence, their hope, and their sense of meaning in life can thrive.

Diane Longboat: Q 1, 3, 5, 8

Nouman Ashraf: Q 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 11

Carl James: Q 4, 6, 7, 9

Making Connections with Well-Being

Well-being is inextricably linked with both equity and achievement. Children who are hungry will not be able to learn well. Educators who are angry or upset will not teach well. Leaders who feel they have no power to make a difference will not be effective

in supporting teaching and learning. Cognitive, emotional, social, physical and cultural well-being is an essential foundation for success. If students feel that they are “other” or “less than,” they are likely to have difficulty thriving and succeeding. They may believe, even unconsciously, that “achievement is for someone else, someone different than me.” Every child and youth needs to come into the school and have a sense of belonging, a sense of being recognized and supported. Every school and every school system needs to uphold these values.

Diane Longboat: Q 2, 5, 11

Nouman Ashraf: Q 1, 6, 9, 11

Carl James: Q 1, 4, 7

Knowing our Children and Youth

When we interact with children and youth, we interact with the entirety of who they are, even if we do not always realize it. The children we see in front of us have a whole story – where they come from, who their parents are, the communities in which they live, the life experiences that influence their perspectives, their personal aspirations and their disappointments, their dreams and their fears, their gifts, and their struggles. They may be living in poverty. They may be members of a racialized group. They may be dealing with trauma or experiencing anxiety or mental health concerns. If we are to truly support students, we cannot rely on pre-conceived notions based on race, gender, and country of origin or other factors. We need to get to know the real person. We need to listen honestly and sincerely. We need to be curious. We need to show that we care and be committed to meeting students where they truly are as a first and essential step toward empowering them and moving them forward.

Diane Longboat: Q 3, 5, 6

Nouman Ashraf: Q 9, 10, 13

Carl James: Q 3, 4, 6

Knowing Ourselves

Just as fish don't know they are wet, we don't recognize our own unconscious biases, beliefs, and perspectives. They are largely invisible to us and can have a negative impact, not only on ourselves as leaders, but also on those we lead. Introspection and self-awareness are necessary if we are to be successful, engaged and empowered leaders. We need to reflect on what drives us, what motivates us and what we care about, and how and why others may differ from us including their values and beliefs. We often need to leave the safety of our expert stance in order to do this and instead ask questions with a beginner's mindset. Imagine how much greater our impact would be if we were aware of our own biases and preferences and had tools to mitigate any negative effects. We would certainly have the capacity to create school and system cultures in which participants are not limited by the culture but rather, feel free to bring their full selves to the endeavour.

Diane Longboat: Q 1, 6, 9, 12

Nouman Ashraf: Q 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10

Carl James: Q 1, 5, 12, 14

Creating the Inclusive School

In order to have a sense of belonging, children and youth need to see themselves reflected in every aspect of school life and the learning environment. They should not feel the need to hide any part of themselves, their identity or their uniqueness in order to gain acceptance. This begins with the physical school setting. What we see on the school grounds and in the school must reflect the cultures and the cultural teachings of our diverse society. It includes what we see in the curriculum. For example, are students left with the impression that Canada is only 150 years old? It includes the ways in which we integrate students' interests and backgrounds in how we teach mathematics, science and other subjects. It includes the diversity of staff in all roles and at all levels in the school and system. Such diversity matters in all schools and systems including in those communities where diversity may

not be evident or visible. It matters because our children and youth need to see how we function effectively in a world of diversity.

Diane Longboat: Q 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10

Nouman Ashraf: Q 1, 7

Carl James: Q 6, 7, 8, 12

Empowering the Educator

In recognizing that culture is not static, educators and all school staff need to acknowledge that their information about students may be incomplete and that reaching students where they are is constant and ongoing work. They need to develop comfort with sometimes being wrong and with corrective action. In order to understand students, educators and all school staff need to be a part of the school community. In the classroom, the empowered educator must engage with courage and curiosity, and understand that competence involves more than simply ticking off boxes on a standard checklist. The most powerful tool educators have for leveraging and empowering diversity is their personal self and their capacity to approach teaching with a learner's mindset. Educators must be problem solvers but more importantly they must be healers. They must meet students where they are and ensure that their interactions result in elevating and empowering all students.

Diane Longboat: Q 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12

Nouman Ashraf: Q 2, 4, 7, 11, 16

Carl James: Q 6, 12, 17

Elevating the School Leader

Leadership is about the courage, capacity, curiosity and commitment to working with, learning from, and giving voice to those across lines of difference. Authentic leaders see themselves as enablers of the progress of others, and see others as being the vehicle through which organizational purpose

is fulfilled. This entails taking into account the complexities and complications of diversity. It requires recognizing, understanding, and interrupting inequities. It means accepting that while we endeavour to create safe space, conflict and instability are inevitable. An effective and courageous leader will engage with conflict and use it as a vehicle for building relationships and for community growth.

Leadership requires examining school policies and structures that cannot be applied equitably, and therefore may disadvantage some students, families, or staff members. It includes accepting the importance of the school leader as a role model for others. It calls on the school leader to dedicate time to explicitly help others learn how to effectively engage in dialogue in the process of creating a culturally responsive school and culturally responsive classrooms. It demands that we are willing to feel uncomfortable as we face constant change.

Diane Longboat: Q 6, 8, 9, 10

Nouman Ashraf: Q 1, 2, 7, 11

Carl James: Q 2, 5, 9, 11, 12, 17

Strengthening Community Relationships

Building community relationships involves creating conditions in which all participants in the community not only feel welcome, but also are physically present. For example, we may need to be more thoughtful and persistent in finding new ways to ensure that a diverse group of people participates in school councils. We should not be surprised if we hold a meeting or event on a holy day and find that families for whom this observance is important feel excluded. Similarly, at the district level, relationship building is not only about community engagement and involvement, but also about sharing power within the school system. At both school and system levels, consideration should be given to moving meetings out into the community, and to creating space on the agenda for open community dialogue and relationship building. We have to enter new

territory with each other even if we make mistakes along the way.

Diane Longboat: Q 6, 7, 8, 10, 11

Nouman Ashraf: Q 12

Carl James: Q 6, 10, 11, 13

Challenging the Dominant Perspective

In a diverse society, we need to become acutely aware of the ways in which the dominant culture, approach, and perspective exert a powerful, and often invisible, influence both within the classroom and across the wider community. We must explore how the dominant culture has shaped the Canada we now live in. At the system level, we need to identify and examine biases about what is valued, where power lies, whose voices are present, and whose voices we need to hear. We further need to identify and address the systemic barriers that stand in the way of change and improvement. In the classroom, we need to be mindful of the experiences of students so that we teach in a way that genuinely resonates and reflects their backgrounds and identities.

Diane Longboat: Q 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9

Nouman Ashraf: Q 13, 14

Carl James: Q 8, 9, 15

Observing and Assessing

In order to be useful, formal data gathering must move beyond the system level and take place at the school level. From an equity perspective, we must ensure that the data we collect reflect multiple dimensions of student achievement such as the intersections between gender, class, race, ethnicity, ability, and language. Our measurement of progress must move beyond academic achievement to include qualities such as integrity, empathy, kindness, and caring. In this way we act on the assumption that we measure what matters to us and also to those we serve. At a personal level, we should consider more intuitive forms of feedback such as the quality of learning experiences which can powerfully inform our practice. For example, as leaders in conversation with educators and educators in conversation with students, we need to dig deeper. We need to learn about who feels a sense of belonging, who is being served, who is being left behind and, equally important, what concrete steps we can take together to address any concerns that emerge.

Diane Longboat: Q 2, 11

Nouman Ashraf: Q 9, 10, 15

Carl James: Q 3, 16, 17

A Terminology Note

- The **Ontario Ministry of Education** uses the term “Indigenous,” formerly “Aboriginal,” to refer to people who identify as First Nation, Métis or Inuit. Indigenous peoples are the original occupants of this land, with inherent rights to self-determination. Treaty rights to land, resources and self-government distinguish Indigenous peoples from other equity-seeking groups.
- “Racialized” is the process by which societies construct races as real, different and unequal in ways that matter to economic, political and social life. Recognizing that race is a social construct, the **Ontario Human Rights Commission** describes people as a “racialized person” or “racialized group” instead of the more outdated and inaccurate terms “racial minority,” “visible minority,” “person of colour,” or “non-White.”
- “White” is a racial classification, used mostly for people of European descent.

For an extensive glossary of terms refer to the ***Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*** (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014)

Part B: The Conversations

Conversation with Kahontakwas Diane Longboat



Kahontakwas (Gah-hon-dah-gwas) Diane Longboat, Turtle Clan, Mohawk Nation, Six Nations Grand River Territory, M.Ed., is an educator, traditional teacher and healer. She has taught and lectured internationally and in Canada and the United States.

Her work at the Chiefs of Ontario and Assembly of First Nations is best known for policy and law. She is currently the Senior Project Manager for Guiding Directions at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto and Education Advisor to the Premier of Ontario and to the Ontario Minister of Education.

1. What led you to your focus on student achievement, equity, and well-being?

I was taught at home until the age of 8 and it was from my mother that I developed a love of learning. My brothers and I spent a lot of time on the land in my father's fields and bush. It was during the early time spent on the land that we all fell in love with creation, the seasons, the changing light, the movement of the animals, the changing gardens, and the freedom of discovery.

I was then taught by local Indigenous teachers throughout elementary school at Six Nations and I value the experience of having been with teachers who knew our families and our challenges. They knew our community and its values. They knew the cultural context from which we came.

When I came to Toronto for high school, our family was coming to live in the city for the very first time, and we felt deeply the impact of being away from community. It soon became very clear to me that being self-identified as an Indigenous person was not going to be an advantage.

I went through the high school system knowing that if I was going to build my character and build my cultural knowledge, build my spiritual understanding of being a Mohawk woman, I would need to accomplish that outside the school system. Nothing in the school system existed that affirmed

First Nation history, culture, languages, or the contributions of our people. By necessity, I made connections to the various Elders and Healers of our Nations and began to learn about the culture, the language, the ceremonies, and the traditional teachings of our people. So there were two parallel paths that I had to take for my education.

These formative experiences have influenced my view of educational equity in significant ways. And so, when I speak about educational equity today, I don't think that our children entering the provincial education system should have to make a decision about getting a first-class education versus keeping their cultures, languages, and heritages intact. I believe that when you enter a provincial education system you should be able to have solid learning experiences and graduate without sacrificing your identity and self-esteem.

2. Although we use the terms student achievement, equity, and well-being in education contexts, they may be described differently from Indigenous perspectives.

Yes, they are. I understand that these are terms used by the Ministry of Education with specific meaning for Ontario learners. First Nation and Métis peoples and Inuit will offer differing perspectives that reflect their relationship to the land, to their cultures, to their respective histories, and to their languages.

This is an important question because creating space for a deeper dialogue on the meanings of those terms is a challenge we now face.

My personal belief is that equity is educational democracy. First Nation learners benefit from culturally based education to achieve to their fullest potential, and system change is required to achieve this goal. Those gifted First Nation learners who would benefit from enriched learning opportunities should be encouraged and provided with enrichment. Wraparound social safety nets are needed in the school system to ensure equity. We can no longer silo health, education, mental health, or social services. Instead, we must integrate those services to make the investment in future generations. The world is changing and the needs of our children are the best reflection of the systems change we need to be mindful of for the next ten years.

Understanding the journey of reconciliation with First Nation, Métis peoples, and Inuit is an essential dimension of opening the dialogue about their perspectives on student achievement, equity, and well-being. Learn about Ontario's commitment to reconciliation in [*The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples*](#)

Indigenous educator **Gordon Martell** (2018) draws on *nêhiyaw* (plains Cree) epistemology to posit that *kisêwâtisiwin* (~kindness) is the root of equity. He writes, "While equity requires extraordinary empathy and the knowledge and courage to act on it, *kisêwâtisiwin* creates the conditions for equity by emphasizing individual acts (agency) that provide the practice that characterizes the community (interdependence)." In brief, he says, equity can be summed up as "acts of kindness," calling everyone with the capacity for positive human interactions to see themselves as integral to the pursuit of equity.

Education has been described by some of our writers as the "New Buffalo"—a means of ensuring the thriving of First Nations life in a modern context. First Nations have always seen value in education as a tool, with specialized skills and increased capacities that can be used to revitalize our communities. Education is an individual pursuit with a collective consciousness as we revitalize and build First Nations to enable our youth to carry pride for the accomplishments of our people. Indigenous knowledge systems are key to the evolution of education for all Ontarians.

Well-being is really all about balance of body, mind, and spirit, having a sense of belonging, finding meaning in life, making a contribution to the present generation, and laying a pathway for the development of future generations. By looking at the gifts that every single child brings into the classroom, we can target and develop those gifts and make sure that every child thrives in a learning environment that speaks to the child's way of learning as well as to the child's language and identity, spiritual life, and strengths.

Achievement is growth that involves the assessment of cognitive skills and their application and it is also about the development of character and altruism. I think about the importance of that objective not only for our own children as First Nation, Métis peoples, and Inuit, but also for all the newcomers who are here – all of the immigrant children, all of the learners from rich cultures who come from their countries of birth to live in Canada. We need to look at how we can celebrate all cultures and build the character of every child, honour faith traditions, and honour the languages the children are speaking at home. We need to make our education system one where we truly value diversity and ensure that the evidence of this principle is underway in classrooms every day. We also need to embrace change boldly and examine the provincial education system where there are embedded values and perspectives that create bias, and be willing to collaborate on change.

In my view, we can no longer accommodate differences or modify systems, curriculum, or assessment. We need to look beyond that to new paradigms such as culturally-based curriculum,

heritage language acquisition for fluency, and critical thinking within the context of social justice.

Charlene Bearhead, the first education lead for the National Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) at the University of Manitoba, represents one voice of many who are working to foster well-being of our students. In clips posted at <https://thelearningexchange.ca/projects/conversations-about-well-being/> she talks about creating positive learning environments, integrating learning across the curriculum, supporting educators and staff in schools, and valuing diverse perspectives. Charlene asks viewers to think about the value of looking after their spirituality and the connection between what children are learning in school and what they are learning in the home and community.

3. How can we begin to integrate Indigenous perspectives into what we do in schools?

I think we have to start in the school parking lot and then look inwards. On arrival at the school, we need to ask, “What is there on the property that reflects an honouring of Indigenous cultures?” You see, place identification is extremely important. The external physical appearance of the school helps you to see yourself as part of the school system and represents an honouring of your identity from the perspective of a nation of people. Next, we should ask, “What do you see when you enter the front door of the school? Are there photographs or pieces of art on the walls that reflect and honour the history of this country both pre-Confederation and post-Confederation? Who are the Indigenous heroes and Indigenous leaders who have contributed to the history of this land?”

Then, as we think about staffing a school, are there Indigenous staff members in the office greeting families who have come to attend meetings? Is there an Indigenous guidance counsellor or a social worker on-site or who is assigned to provide support in the school on a regular basis? Are there First Nation or Métis or Inuit educators in the school? Is the principal or superintendent a member of a

First Nation, Métis or Inuit community? With this objective in mind, Ontario needs a strategy that is dedicated to recruiting First Nation and Métis peoples and Inuit to work across the system. Once Indigenous staff members are present in the system, we need to provide them with opportunities to become principals, superintendents, and directors of education. Without this representation on staff we risk the consequences of cultural appropriation, we inhibit cultural safety, and we put student graduation in jeopardy.

Ontario’s Education Equity Action Plan, (2017) is the province’s roadmap to identifying and eliminating discriminatory practices, systemic barriers and bias from schools and classrooms to support the potential for all students to succeed ... This roadmap includes action steps that support achievement and well-being of Indigenous students and promote understanding about First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures, histories, perspectives and contributions in schools.

4. Can you explain what you mean by cultural appropriation?

Cultural appropriation happens when someone, not of our ancestry, jumps into our culture and uses our traditional knowledge systems and ceremonies in a way that suits their own interests, without having earned those ceremonies or having understood the meaning of those ceremonies. There’s a whole element of spiritual power that goes with ceremony that is a lifelong learning process. Appropriation also involves taking credit for the knowledge without acknowledging the source of the knowledge. Teaching Indigenous content involves perspective. The teacher must locate oneself. Are you teaching “about” a topic or are you teaching from experience “within” the culture?

There is always a risk of cultural appropriation when we step out of our own culture and comfort zone. That’s where the partnership with First Nation, and Métis and Inuit people becomes very important. This is why the need for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit educators has never been greater. We need established opportunities to work together on

curriculum. As we work together on a whole range of educational innovations but when it comes to the classroom and preparing educators to do their best work there, we have not spent enough time understanding the daily needs of the educators of First Nation, Inuit and Métis children.

Comfort with treaty curriculum and residential school curriculum is essential for all students' learning, as are Indigenous languages. Just as important is the pedagogy in the classroom with creative opportunities for students to show their best learning styles.

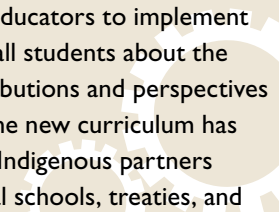
5. In addition to expanding the number of educators in the school system who are First Nation, Métis peoples, and Inuit there is a need to build the confidence of educators who now have Indigenous students in their classrooms. How should we do this?

We have some of the most gifted educators in the country working here in Ontario. I believe that with some targeted guidance and support and experience in working with First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners and their families, they can be world-class leaders in bringing culturally-based education into Ontario's schools.

One of the things we need to do as First Nation people is to offer more professional learning opportunities for educators and leaders to visit our communities and interact with our educators, in our settings. Additional qualifications programs or short courses offered by school districts in partnership with universities and other qualified providers about Indigenous histories, cultures, contributions, and perspectives will go a long way to supporting the educators of our children and youth.

If I were going into an unfamiliar culture, I would have to learn their cultural and spiritual protocols and some of the language in order to respect and honour them. As First Nations, we can teach so that our colleagues understand our children once they move from federal schools into the provincial school system.

In addition to formal programs, schools can invite Elders and ceremonial leaders to spend time in our classrooms to support educators and learners in developing this knowledge. Another effective way of communicating culture is for educators to take their students on field trips to engage in land-based learning. Learning together in an experiential setting can be a most cherished educational experience. I believe that there is specific knowledge that educators require if they are going to be change makers in the classroom and truly mentor First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners. Educators need to know about the view of history held by First Nation and Métis peoples and Inuit from Indigenous perspectives. The oral history of our peoples may differ from what we find written in history books and educators deserve the right to hear history from our viewpoints.



Ontario is empowering educators to implement a revised curriculum for all students about the histories, cultures, contributions and perspectives of Indigenous peoples. The new curriculum has been co-developed with Indigenous partners and focuses on residential schools, treaties, and Indigenous peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada. ***First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Connections: Scope and Sequence of Expectations*** is a resource document designed to assist teachers with incorporating First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives into the classroom by highlighting where there are opportunities for students to explore themes, ideas, and topics related to Indigenous peoples in Canada in every subject area from Kindergarten to Grade 8.

Educators also need to learn about the sources of historical and intergenerational trauma. They need to have a repertoire of strategies and tools for use in the classroom when something triggers a response in a child. I am mindful of a report from the ***Children's Mental Health Ontario Group*** that stated that as many as one in five children and youth in Ontario will experience some form of mental health challenges. In addition, the data explained that almost half of Ontario youth miss school because of anxiety and that while 40 per cent of youth within

this group sought help for their mental health, only half found the help they needed.

Unequal City: The Hidden Divide among Toronto's Children and Youth draws on the Statistics Canada 2016 Census and other new data sources to describe the level, distribution and depth of poverty among Toronto children, youth, and their families. Key findings show that more than one in four children under 18 years of age (26.3 per cent) live in poverty in the city of Toronto. This is the highest rate among large urban areas in Canada. Poverty is the reality and is most evident among newcomers, and First Nations, Métis people and Inuit in the city. In fact, Indigenous families with children in the city of Toronto experience an extremely high poverty rate of 84 per cent. Furthermore, children in racialized families are more than twice as likely to be living in poverty compared to children in non-racialized families (25.3 per cent compared to 11.4 per cent) in the Toronto region.

Some Notable Facts from the **Children's Mental Health Ontario Group** regarding Equity:

- Black youth are significantly under-represented in mental health and treatment-oriented services and overrepresented in containment-focused facilities.
- First Nation youth die by suicide about 5 to 6 times more often than Indigenous youth.
- LGBTQ youth face approximately 14 times the risk of suicide and substance abuse than heterosexual peers.
- Youth living in the lowest-income neighbourhoods had the highest rates of suicide, emergency department visits for deliberate self-harm, acute care mental health service use, and treated prevalence of schizophrenia.

Educators then need to be aware that these are children entering their classrooms. They need to ask themselves questions that include, "How do I deal with historical trauma? How do I deal with intergenerational trauma? How do I as an educator deal with refugees and newcomers who are fleeing war and genocide? How does emotional trauma affect learning?"

The Trauma-Informed Schools research project established by the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) resulted in *Trauma-Informed Schools* (2016). This research used community-driven and culture-based methods to bring to light findings that ultimately contribute to a better understanding and implementation strategy for trauma-informed approaches, and foster trauma-informed school environments and practices. The findings in this research project address the educational needs of students as well as the broader social determinants of trauma that impact negative school outcomes for Indigenous students.

Child well-being is a critical piece demanding attention at every level of educational leadership because we can talk about equity, and we can talk about achievement, and we can talk about curriculum refresh, and all the things that are coming forward as innovations in the school system. But the critical piece for educators is this: know that when that child walks into the classroom you are dealing with a human being who has an incredible wealth of family life history. It is experience that originates in their cultures, their languages, their faith traditions, their families, and their communities. I call it cultural capital.

Educators welcome every child into the classroom to learn. Great teaching evolves from knowing the strengths and interests of the child and developing a vision of everything that the child can become and achieve in life. We cannot focus only on academic excellence. We must look at well-being because it is the foundation for cultivating academic excellence, the foundation for optimal physical development, as well as, the foundation for social and emotional well-being. Well-being is the source of identity, self-esteem, pride, and meaning in life.

This then is the area in which educators need to be supported for their own learning. From our perspective as First Nations, I believe that having authentic relationships with First Nation educators in communities is so valuable to all staff across the school system. There is no course that can teach

what they can offer from the professional life experience of living and teaching in community. Their knowledge is based on lived experience and authentic relationships with our peoples.

John Hattie (2009) in his landmark book, *Visible Learning: a Synthesis of 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* argues that “the major source (fifty per cent) of variance in student’s achievement is what the student brings to school.”

6. Trust seems to be an essential dimension of what you are suggesting. How can educators and school leaders earn the trust of Indigenous students, families, and communities?

That’s a really complex and multi-faceted question with not enough time to fully examine it here. But let me say that we, as First Nations, carry ancestral wounding and emotional pain from genocide and war and government oppression. If one’s First Nations community was host to a residential school, there are degrees of trauma that people have experienced that are yet undocumented. There is a lot more work to do with those particular communities, because the intensity of the genocide was so pervasive and multi-generational.

The trust issue, then, is immense. I do believe, however, that when school systems reach out in an open and equitable way as partners to First Nations, they are going to get a positive response. I also believe that there has to be an openness and a willingness to develop relationships in a deeper way than we have done before with true measurable actions that benefit First Nation learners. This is because of the importance of our children and youth in this country. We have to go into uncharted territory with one another. We have to take chances.

One important strategy that comes to mind is a recommendation to hold some school board meetings in First Nation communities. Why

wouldn’t we hold some meetings outside of the school board office in various communities with our education partners? Another recommendation is to include time on the agenda for open discussion with community members to model the school board’s role as provider of a service to all communities. In other words, we need to look at how the system can be more visible, be more present, be more welcoming and be more open to First Nation communities input in the work boards do on behalf of Indigenous students and their families.

I also think that school boards need an ombudsman whose role would be to provide objective support when issues arise that are very tense. The position would provide an opportunity for someone to examine issues impartially and identify opportunities for resolution and peace-making and at the same time for relationship building.

7. What concrete steps can we take to build those relationships with the community?

I think that having the Indigenous Education Liaison Officers working at the school board is a good step, but it’s not the whole step. There needs to be a policy directive from the school board that addresses relationships and outreach with Indigenous partners.

I believe the relationship starts with leadership meeting leadership. What this means is the Director of Education, the Chair of the school board, and trustees meet with Chief and Council and community education leaders. Together they take time to learn about their neighbours, take time to be in the community, and take time to participate in First Nation community events just as we go to events in the city.

There is a quote I love from Harvard professor Jerome Bruner (1996). In *The Culture of Education*, he says that “culture shapes the mind ... it provides us with the toolkit by which we construct not only our worlds but our very conception of ourselves and our powers.” Culture activates the learner’s cognitive and linguistic tools determined by community socialisation.

The process related to opening doors to learn about each other cannot be a wish list any longer or a respectful waiting for the other to make the first move. Relationship building has to be a systems policy with an active outreach component. For example, the policy can be co-designed so that First Nations feel they have a standing report on the school board agenda. This would ensure that there was an opportunity for trustees to talk about some of the concerns that are arising in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities such as the opioid crisis or other social concerns that are impacting education.

Creating and nurturing partnership and hearing community voices are essential to the quality of education that is going to be offered to our children and youth in districts across the province.

The Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework clarifies the roles and relationships of the ministry, school boards, and schools in their efforts to help First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students achieve their educational goals and close the gap in academic achievement with their Indigenous counterparts. The four principles who underpin the framework are:

1. Excellence and Accountability
2. Equity and Respect for Diversity
3. Inclusiveness, Cooperation, and Shared Responsibility
4. Respect for Constitutional and Treaty Rights.

As stated in **Multi-year Strategic Planning: A Guide for School Board Trustees** (2017), “It is important to note that building and maintaining stakeholder relationships is not as simple as hosting an open meeting and expecting that people will come. Those who feel marginalized or disengaged may not attend these meetings because they may feel unwelcome or disempowered ... Relationship building takes thoughtful and sustained effort.”

8. How do we encourage educators to recognize and disrupt colonial structures and perspectives?

There is an entire self-reflective process that all of us need to go through as a first step. We need to look at ourselves individually and collectively in terms of our own attitudes and where we are positioned in terms of our own privilege. I don't think we have ever done that as a system.

We tend to focus on content in the curriculum and say we're de-colonizing education because of changes we make to the content of the curriculum. And yet, the only way we will truly de-colonize education is to de-colonize ourselves. I say this with all due respect for every culture of every student who comes into our school system in this province. We need to de-colonize our own biases towards newcomers, immigrants, and racialized groups and, as Indigenous peoples, we need to de-colonize our attitudes about Canadians.

We all have work to do. I was recently reading a thesis published by Anne Milne (2013) entitled **Colouring in the White Spaces: Reclaiming Cultural Identity in Whitestream Schools**. The overarching goal of Milne's study, which took place in New Zealand, was to make learning equitable for Indigenous and minoritized learners. There are parallels to our context in Toronto, where half of the population is now non-white. According to Milne's theory, Toronto is a whitestream system. Questions we need to ask ourselves include: If we are a whitestream system, what is the impact it will have on teaching, learning, and leading? How does a whitestream school system imagine itself as helping every student to reclaim their cultural identity, to value their heritage languages, and to build their own identity within that school system?

As for how we can support educators, William Demmert devised a rubric for cultural-based education (CBE). I like his rubrics because they deal with the whole child – the child's social, emotional, mental, and cognitive capacity as well as building identity and spiritual capacity. This is one example of the kinds of resources that are out there to support cultural-based education that we need to bring into our mainstream thinking. There is more work to be done in this area.

The *Indigenous Culture-Based Education (CBE) Continuum* (Demmert & Towner, 2003) was formulated to report on the influences of CBE on academic performance. *Indigenous Culture-Based Education Rubrics* (Demmert, 2014) was developed to enable schools and programs to measure CBE levels, identify and set goals for advancing CBE levels, and identify relationships among the level of CBE, student academic performance, and the general well-being of students.

9. How do you respond to those who say, “We don’t have an Indigenous population in this school and community and so there isn’t really any work to be done.”?

I ask them to have an open heart and not to short-change their Canadian students. If students don’t know about Indigenous, pre-colonial histories of traditional times and the historical foundation of Canada from Indigenous perspectives, they will never fully be a Canadian citizen in this country. They will be limited in their capacity to be treaty partners.

There is a lot of denial, a lot of dispossession and oppression in history, but we have to learn from our failures. Unless we do, we will continue to make the same mistakes in the future. This is what reconciliation is all about. It is not about how many brown faces there are in a classroom that constitute a need for change in curriculum or pedagogy. It is about creating capacity for every Canadian student to understand what it means to be Canadian. What does being Canadian mean? It means you are a treaty partner as long as you live in these homelands and share in the resources of the homelands of Indigenous Nations.

10. What are some strategies we can use to overcome the barriers to the reconciliation you describe?

I think reconciliation is really about relationships and the sharing of power in the school system. People don’t normally talk about reconciliation as power, but I think there is a definite power differential. One important example of this is the Indigenous Education Advisory Councils that are associated with the district school boards. In this role, as is often the case as First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples, we are advisors, not decision makers and yet our dollars in tuition agreements fund school systems both in programming and in capital.

There is so much to be said about Indigenous Education Advisory Councils constructed so that they are standing committees of boards of education. If this were the case, there would be an increase in opportunities to provide guidance, engage in co-planning, and collectively set priorities. We would be able to take a robust stance in planning an innovative, character-building, critical thinking, anti-oppression, social justice system of learning for all students including First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners. Indigenous knowledges systems in science, mathematics, history and environmental studies, for example, can do much to enrich the school system.

Relationship building, first of all, at the school board level, at the school level and the teacher level is critical. There’s some good reference material to support this work. [The Alaska Native Knowledge Network](#) has developed resources that include booklets describing culturally responsive school boards, culturally responsive schools, and culturally responsive classrooms. There are some principles and frameworks that help us to envision what culturally responsive settings look like. The learnings from First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education are strong frameworks that support education as a whole.

In the 2017-18 school year, all district school boards must have a dedicated Indigenous Education Board Lead, who is accountable for the implementation of the **Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework**. This includes establishing and strengthening connections with Indigenous communities, partners, and organizations through formal relationships such as Indigenous Education Advisory Councils (IEACs). The Lead works closely with senior system leaders and IEACs to implement the framework, as per the Board Action Plan (BAP) on Indigenous Education. BAPs must be developed and authorized by the board's IEAC at the planning, implementation and final reporting phases to ensure community voices are an integral component of education.

II. As we move forward with this work, how do we measure our progress?

I think we need to look at the **First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework** (2014). One might assume from the title that the framework is strictly focused on mental health. It is not. It is one of the finest frameworks that has ever been developed and has been vetted nationally among First Nation organizations and Health Canada, Traditional Teachers and Elders, and health staff members in First Nations as well as provincial health authorities.

This is a community development framework that has at its core a set of values which are a sense of belonging, a sense of meaning in life, a sense of purpose in life, and a sense of hope. I think those values are vitally important for the work that is ahead for us collectively.

Every student needs to come into the school feeling a sense of belonging, and every school needs to uphold those prime values. As a human family, we are coming into a time and a place where things are changing in the world. Yes, we have to be aware of

global trends but we also have to be aware of our country, our land, our values, and the things that we hold most dear. This has a lot to do with character development, and so I think we need to include character development and universal values as an additional primary area of focus.

We need to use some of the rubrics that are available to assess the extent to which our classrooms, our schools, and our systems are healthy. Use them to help us define what a healthy classroom and school look like. Schools and classrooms are situated in a community context. What does a healthy community look like and what does a healthy school district look like?

I think we have to measure more than just the academic aspects. We have to find ways to measure altruism. We have to find ways to measure kindness. We have to find ways to measure innovative, creative, and critical thinking. We will measure what we value. If we value this kind of development in young people, we are going to find ways to measure it. For me, this is part of the open discussion we need to have in using rubrics across many different fields. From this discussion we need to begin a process of identifying what we can apply and from there begin to renew our vision of what we value in education in Ontario.

12. What advice would you have for educators in all roles on where to start this process?

As a school leader, I think it's so important to begin with a self-reflective tool for bias. Organizations are pushing for cultural competency training. I think that cultural competency training is an essential first step but it is only a step to create awareness. Behavioural change and a shift in decision-making is a necessary outcome yet to be achieved.

In every school the principal is the curriculum leader and it's up to the principal to set the standard for relationship building with First Nation parents and students and communities. Of course it's going to take time to build that relationship because people will be skeptical, but as time goes on,

the ability for parents and families to have that open conversation with the school is going to be so healthy.

In support of that, as I mentioned, I think the first step at the district level would be the development of an Indigenous Education Co-Planning and Priorities Council as a standing committee of the board. I think that's a concrete signal to First Nations that we're in business now to really talk about and tackle these issues and help one another.

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A Closing Thought from Kahontakwas (Diane) Longboat:

I want to say how grateful I am for this conversation. Every time the voice of First Nation grandmothers, parents, school leaders, and educators have the opportunity to be heard in any context, I think it's so important to share our hopes and our dreams for our children in the school system. And the work of the current government in terms of equity, and well-being, and culturally-based education is absolutely the way we need to go.

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Conversation with Nouman Ashraf



Nouman Ashraf is Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream within the Organizational Behavior area at the Rotman School of Management. He possesses a broad range of professional, academic and research interests, with a specialized focus on enabling inclusive leadership practices within organization life. For the last decade and a half, he has held progressively senior roles at the University of Toronto including Director, Anti-Racism & Cultural Diversity Office.

He is the Academic Director of the Ontario Supervisory Officer Executive Leadership Program as well as Canada's Outstanding Principals™ in partnership with The Learning Partnership. Furthermore, he is a recognized thought leader in governance and leadership and has taught thousands of directors in the national Rotman program on Not for Profit Governance in partnership with the Institute for Corporate Directors since its inception in 2007.

Winner of numerous teaching awards, Nouman teaches Emancipatory Leadership within the OMNIUM Global Executive MBA Program, Leading Social Innovation within the 2 and 3 Year MBA programs, and Leading across Differences within the Rotman Commerce Program. His previous consulting engagements include the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, United Way Toronto and York Region, and numerous post-secondary and healthcare institutions.

At lunch time, he can be found at Massey College within the University of Toronto, where he mentors exceptional post-graduate students in his capacity as Senior Fellow.

I. What led you to your focus on equity, well-being, and achievement?

One starting point was when I was working in organizational consulting. Early on in this context when I noticed many people, even leaders, felt that a part of themselves had to be hidden for them to be fully accepted in the organization. It was obvious

to me but not to them. And when I would probe a little, I would uncover remarkable stories of resilience, incredible anecdotes of creative thinking, and unbelievable track records of accomplishment that they wouldn't share. And so, for me the "aha" was that the environment or context within which people thrive is just as important as understanding what they do.

That essentially led me to the beginnings of what I think of today as emancipatory leadership. It's the idea that leaders do great things for themselves, their organizations, and their stakeholders. They do this not because they don't have strong preferences or biases but in spite of these biases. This includes biases that they hold about themselves.

Imagine how much more effective, impactful, and engaging leaders might be if three conditions were in effect. First, they have some self-awareness about their own strong preferences and biases. Second, they have tools or coaching to mitigate the impact of these strong preferences and biases. Third, they can help to create and sustain an organizational culture in which everyone feels free to bring their fuller selves to the endeavour.

I feel deeply that society loses out on a lot when we self-censor, when we feel the need to extricate part of our experience, part of our learning, part of our values. Of course the intent is often noble. The intent is to fit in, to enable organizational alignment or whatever the case may be. Ultimately, the potential of the organization is not fully realized because a lot remains on the editing room floor.

“... the Emancipatory Leadership Framework aims to wrestle the question of diversity away from simply being about responding to external demands and conditions and aims to locate it within the essential leadership compass of organizational actors. While ambitious, the need for such realignment has never been more urgent, given the way in which greater transparency and accountability have become the normative expectations from all segments of the organization and society alike.”

~ Source: **Emancipatory Leadership: A Framework for Understanding Exclusion in Organizational Decision-Making** (Ashraf, 2010)

2. What is the relationship between emancipatory leadership and equity-based leadership?

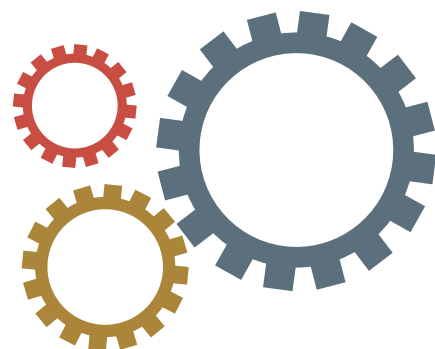
For me these are mere labels to capture good or effective leadership. As I think of leadership I would start with a definition which comes from **Gianpiero Petriglieri** a scholar at INSEAD (an acronym that stands for Institut européen d'administration des affaires or European Institute of Business Administration) which is located outside Paris, France. He says that “leadership is the courage, curiosity, capacity, and commitment to working with, learning from and giving voice to the ‘other.’”

What I love about this definition is that it recognizes first and foremost that any act of leadership is an act of courage. It is stepping outside of that with which we are most familiar and that with which we are most comfortable.

Secondly, it's about the curiosity that must inhabit a leader to understand who it is they are leading and in what context their leadership is situated.

Thirdly, it's about the capacity to lead across differences. This is something we don't actually talk about a lot. We need to enable capacity to lead effectively across differences, especially today as the demographics of our communities are shifting at a rapid pace.

Finally, it's a commitment that we follow through on the promissory note that we offer to every learner in education; namely, we will treat you with respect, integrity and honour. So what's this about? It's about working “with.” And if there is no intent around collaboration, equity-based leadership is just jargon.



“I do take issue with this idea of leadership as the ability to get others to do things that they wouldn’t otherwise have done. That’s a traditional definition. And I think we’d be a lot better off with a definition of leadership as having the courage, commitment, ability, and the trust to articulate, embody, and help realize the story of possibility – for a group of people, at a point in time. That is closer to what leaders really do. First you need to have the courage to do something. You need commitment. You can’t just do it for a day or two. You do need some skills, but you also need to be entrusted. It is something that comes from within and is also grounded in some group at a certain point in time. If you want to be ‘a leader’ you are no one’s leader.”

~ Source: **The New Leadership** (Petriglieri, 2018)

3. What you are saying essentially is that effective leadership is of necessity equity-based leadership.

One hundred per cent. It’s about working with and learning from. The learning from dimension refers to this: we don’t actually put our frame of reference or knowledge above that of others. As Petriglieri says, it’s about giving voice to the other and that is absolutely pivotal.

To me, diversity is a fact of the human experience. The question is not, “What do we think about diversity?” The question is, “What are we doing with it? Are we simply tolerating it?” If that’s the case, we are certainly setting the bar far too low. “Are we engaging it in a way that actually allows for people to feel valued? Are we leveraging it, so we actually find ways in which we would learn from each other and about each other and through each other?”

4. How can leaders work toward this mindset and way of being?

This begins with the notion of “self as instrument.” The most important instrument that we have for engaging with, leveraging, and empowering diversity is our self. Leaders need to move away from the notion of having a reference sheet or checklist where they can just check off boxes to feel that they are competent. Instead, I like the idea of cultural fluency, which builds on the metaphor of language. As we think about language, we think about the fact that we all speak the languages of people with whom we have attachment – our parents, our communities, our caregivers, whoever.

So cultural fluency has to begin with an attachment to culture and understanding the power of culture. When we understand how culture influences us and others, and gain cultural skills through deeper dialogue and exploration, we move into the realm of cultural understanding. Then, through deliberate practice we develop cultural skill. The sweet spot or the intersection of this is cultural fluency. I think that leaders need to see the “self as instrument;” that is, themselves as being the key instrument of practice in cultural fluency.

And, by the way, everyone has culture – everyone, everyone, everyone. It’s not just about the exotic. It’s about everyone.

“Self as instrument has been my mantra around leadership development for a while ... When we think about ourselves as being education leaders across school systems we often think about resources that are external to us. We think about our board’s resources. We think about our staff. We think about other physical tangible assets that we have within our systems. Often times, I find that one of the most important and the primary instrument we have for change, for enabling equity, for enabling achievement and well-being, is our self.”

~ Source: Ashraf, 2018

Cultural fluency is a three-part process:

1. It begins with **cultural awareness**. Culture is deeply impactful and it affects the way in which we see ourselves in the world. Most of the time the impact of culture is unconscious.
2. The next part is **cultural understanding**. Different people will have the exact same experiences but will process them differently. What I mean by this is “one size fits no one.”
3. Lastly, it’s about **cultural skill** which is the ability, the flexibility, the effortlessness that we need to navigate across various forms of being, seeing, and leading.

The overlap between awareness, understanding, and skill is cultural fluency.

~ Source: Ashraf, 2018

5. How do we build cultural fluency?

It begins first with introspection. Self-awareness is the first tool. We need to ask ourselves, “What makes me go?” “What motivates me?” We need to observe, understand how others are either similar or different, and then go one step further and ask ourselves, “Why?” The curiosity part is really important. We should not feel embarrassed, ashamed, reticent, or afraid to ask those questions in a way that can really and truly be engaging and enlightening.

A starting point is when leaders feel they understand that they themselves are affected by culture and that others are affected differently by culture. We all live in the same world, but we do not have the same experiences of living in the same world. That to me is where the awareness related to culture happens.

6. From this leadership perspective, how do you view the intersections of student achievement, equity, and well-being?

What I am advocating for is the unique treatment of unique people. What this means is that we need

to understand that equity isn’t necessarily about addressing deficits in learning. Instead it’s about acknowledging and removing systemic barriers to achievement.

Nouman advocates for unique treatment of unique people. In the 2016-17 provincial engagements about well-being, paying attention to self and spirit – a positive sense of personal identity (e.g., cultural, linguistic, religious, racial, gender, or spiritual identity) and self-worth and an optimistic and hopeful view of life – was the most frequently referenced as a contributor to well-being. For more, see the **What We Heard report**.

We can’t speak about one without acknowledging and understanding the other. We can’t teach someone who doesn’t have the requisite conditions for well-being. We can’t expect that a hungry child can learn as effectively as a well-fed child. We can’t be effective as educators if we are angry. We can’t lead in a school or at the system level if we feel we have no power or agency to bring about change and improvement.

All these things are about well-being. We cannot speak about achievement if we don’t understand and acknowledge and do something to address the systemic injustices. These inequities are barriers that exclude many of our learners and for that matter our educators as well.

So student achievement, equity, and well-being are mutually connected, reinforcing, integrated, and largely inseparable. As simplistic as it sounds, I would say again that it begins with self-awareness. And asking ourselves, “Who are my teachers? Who has influenced me? What were those key moments when I felt engaged in the classroom?”

Talk to educators and if they are honest they will say the following: “When I first landed in the classroom I began to mirror and replicate the tactics and the teaching styles of those educators who had made the greatest impact on me as a learner.” This is a process of imprinting.

Over time, because of cognitive efficiency, we begin to reproduce these things mindlessly. Guess what happens to students whose experiences are different than our own? We are not resonating with them. So what do we start doing? We start labelling their behaviours in negative ways as opposed to being curious about what we might be doing that is not making a connection with them.

This is a phenomenon in organizational behaviour and psychology that we call homophily which theorizes that we are drawn to people of like experiences. Over time, as educators, we have students for whom our methods and approaches do not resonate and we tend to create barriers to their success. This is not because we are intentionally discriminating. Instead, it's because we're not challenging the imprinting which is the basis of our teaching beliefs and philosophy. Critical pedagogy is about acknowledging that we create barriers to their success not because we are malicious, but because we are unaware that we are exhibiting behaviours of homophily. Critical pedagogy is about bringing the phenomenon of homophily in to our purview and actively working to overcome this phenomenon.

In a [New York Times article](#), Aaron Retica writes, "In the 1950s, sociologists coined the term "homophily" – love of the same – to explain our inexorable tendency to link up with one another in ways that confirm rather than test our core beliefs. Those who liked Ike [Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower, U.S. President], in other words, liked each other ..." He concludes, "So much for 'opposites attract.'"

Cognitive efficiency is best explained by understanding our thinking; i.e., the complex interaction between System 1 or fast thinking and System 2 or slow thinking as described by Daniel Kahneman (2011) in *Thinking Fast and Slow* as [reviewed in The New York Times](#). For more see [Ideas Into Action: Exploring the "Cognitive" Personal Leadership Resources \(PLRs\) – Problem-Solving Expertise, Role-Specific Knowledge & Systems Thinking](#).

7. What advice would you give educators and leaders to counteract this pattern of imprinting?

It begins with adopting the beginner mindset. We must move away from expert to a mindset of a beginner, which is to say that every day I come in to a classroom, or a school or a district office eager to learn something new. This is what I refer to as the education leader's stance.

I believe that stance is about three things: how do I think about myself, how do I think about the other, and how do I think about the task at hand. I would advocate that the stance of an authentic emancipatory leader is one in which they see themselves as being the enablers of the progress of others within their realm of influence.

8. What structures do we need in order to support this?

At the organizational level, I would ask, "How much time do we dedicate to teaching people to dialogue? How do we teach them how to engage with the other, but have an awareness that every belief, every construct, every idea is based on assumptions? How do we give them the capacity to decipher what those beliefs, ideas, and frames are?"

These are the kinds of skills and abilities that not only have to be taught but also have to be practiced. Adam Grant (2016), professor of organizational behaviour at Wharton School of Business, in his book *The Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World*, cites management scholar Karl Weick to make the point that when you engage in dialogue, you should "argue like you're right, and listen like you're wrong." This is the kind of capacity that we need to engender.

When people say, "this school doesn't represent me," instead of resorting to a defensive stance, we need to lean in. We need to probe further. We need to engage them in a conversation and ask, "Tell me more. Tell me about the experience. Tell me what we're failing at. Tell me how you feel. Tell me how we make you think. Tell me how we make you behave." In other words, we need to find out how people are experiencing us as educators and leaders.

What advice do I have? Risk your jobs daily. I really mean that. Get out of your comfort zone. If you were to come to my office, the first thing you would see is a wall of cards on which students have written their comments and feedback. The reason I have it right there as you open the door is because it's a reminder to me that I am here for that purpose – to get evidence of how my work impacts the learning of others.

In 'What Self-Awareness Really Is (and How to Cultivate It),' researcher Tasha Eurich (2018) reports that, "self-awareness is a truly rare quality" and points out that only 10 per cent – 15 per cent of the people in the research she co-led actually fit the criteria; i.e., they have internal self-awareness and external self-awareness.

Internal self-awareness represents how clearly we see our own values, passions, aspirations, fit with our environment, reactions (including thoughts, feelings, behaviors, strengths, and weaknesses), and impact on others.

External self-awareness means understanding how other people view us, in terms of those same factors listed above. People who know how others see them are more skilled at showing empathy and taking others' perspectives.

Eurich cautions that "when it comes to internal and external self-awareness, it's tempting to value one over the other." In her view, "leaders must actively work on both seeing themselves clearly and getting feedback to understand how others see them. The highly self-aware people we interviewed were actively focused on balancing the scale."

9. How do we measure our progress as educators and leaders in realizing the vision you have for our work?

I'll speak in three dimensions: the first dimension is personal, the second one is interpersonal and the third one is organizational.

At the personal level, I measure what I am consuming. What are my dominant streams of information, of insight, of education? What am I reading? Who am I sitting with?

At the interpersonal level, I reflect on who I am interacting with and in what context and in what capacity. To me, the best predictor of the success of individuals is the level of curiosity of the five people they spend the most time with. Empathy emerges as essential. We have to go beyond cognitive empathy to behavioural empathy.

This happens when we, figuratively speaking, walk a mile in somebody else's shoes. It's when we actually sit down and have meals with them. It's when we truly make time to be with colleagues because we know they are going through something difficult. We help them work through a potential solution and we listen. Interpersonally, the most important thing we can ask honestly and sincerely are these two words: "What else?"

At the organizational level, what do we measure? In my view, we need to measure more than the inputs. We need to assess the outcomes. It's not how many programs we put together or how many books we have given out. Instead, it's how people who come to us with a certain mindset, with a certain view, with a certain competence level, and leave our classes or our schools or our organizations feeling elevated and empowered. We can assess engagement and empowerment by directly asking, "How do you feel you belong?" because belonging is at the centre of the intersections of achievement, equity, and well-being.

Our stories represent people and their names. If you were to ask me to tell you how I would describe an inclusive learning organization, I would say that it's one in which everyone's story matters – and I do mean everyone's story. I use the term story deliberately. It's not everyone's issue. It's not everyone's problem. It's not everyone's agenda. Instead, it's a story. In sum, it's how we construct those three things: self, other, and task. Those three things are our stories.

10. Are there particular barriers we need to keep in mind?

Well, I would imagine that fish don't know they're wet. What I mean by that is, sometimes, incredibly well-meaning individuals, people who are in roles of responsibility, can't see the shortcomings of their methodologies partly because they are so focused on their intent.

The only way that we can break through this impasse is by actively seeking feedback on how we are making an impact on others. Now people may believe that actively seeking feedback is difficult and emotionally laborious. I beg to differ. I've developed a low-cost method of collecting feedback on a regular basis. At the end of each of my classes at Rotman, I ask my students to answer three questions on a sticky note: "What was the highlight for you?", "What would you want more of?", and "What would you change?"

This means that I don't have to wait until the end of the term, 16 weeks later, to get evaluations on my teaching. I get 70 of them every single class. Although it's just a small window into my teaching, it does keep me honest and grounded in what I am doing well and what I need to change or modify.

"Introspection doesn't always improve self-awareness ... Self-awareness isn't one truth. It's a delicate balance of two distinct, even competing, viewpoints."

Source: 'What Self-Awareness Really Is (and How to Cultivate It)' (Eurich, 2018)

11. Inevitably then, this is where modelling becomes important – whether you are an educator in a classroom or the formal leader of a school or system.

Absolutely. It goes back to simple things like knowing the names of your students. Do you know why knowing your students' names matters? It's because a name is the beginning of a person's story. If we don't know the character's name in the story, how can we

relate to the story? A name celebrates a person's sense of being and so we acknowledge that the day has not been the same when that person is absent. Whether we are aware of it or not, we all want to be present and be a part of the story in the school.

It is our role as educators and leaders to build the learners' capacity to contribute to the story. That can never happen if the learner feels that they are "less than." This is my point as it relates to achievement and equity and if you sense that you are "other" because of your well-being, then that's the third dimension. If you feel that you don't belong or that you are not good enough, or that the goal is out of reach, then you are not part of the story. You have actually precluded yourself from being in that story.

We may think, "That's a story of somebody else." That story is for people coming from another neighbourhood. You think to yourself, "I'm not that. That's a story for someone who is a six-two, tall, athletic person. I'm not that. That's a story for the smart kids. I'm not that." Therein lies the challenge for educators and leaders – how to engage and empower students so they feel they are in the story of the school.

12. It seems to me that there is a role for families and the school community in addressing this challenge. How then do we reach out more broadly, and make the community part of the story?

I think we have to embrace the notion of universal design which is to say, how do we create conditions under which all of the various elements of society not only feel welcomed but are physically present?

If we are holding an event at a time that, for example, conflicts with a holy day, on a Friday evening, is it any wonder that some people are not at the event; for instance, the students or parents, for whom that observance is the highlight of their week? Is it any wonder that these students feel less than when they come to school on Monday morning and everyone is talking about the amazing concert on Friday night where all those who were there felt a strong sense of community? Do you think those who couldn't be there share that feeling?

The messaging that is often given as a rationale is: “Well, if we paid attention to everyone’s requests we would never find the right times in the year to meet.” This is unacceptable and, in my view, makes matters worse. That kind of a response is nonsense and it is not borne out in evidence. In fact, for me it signifies cowardice and is the exact opposite of the courage we expect of leaders. I reject out of hand the notion that somehow we have a choice of whether to accommodate or not. Furthermore, we might accommodate out of legal obligation but that’s not leadership. It is mere compliance and it is heartless compliance. No one wants their needs to be taken into consideration as an act of charity. In fact, everyone wants to be engaged as equal members of society in which we contribute.

“Universal design is not a new phenomenon. It’s a phenomenon that comes to us around accessibility ... I want to extend this idea as it pertains to achievement and equity ... I am advocating for an approach to an inclusive design, a universal design, a design-based approach to leadership in which we put at the centre of our universe not only the metrics to which we actually teach but also to the experience of those whose voices are often ignored, marginalized, and not resonant.”

~ Source: Ashraf, 2018

13. How do we wake up people to this mindset you are describing, especially those who don’t see that there is a problem?

Before we can have an awakening, we must be conscious of what our duty of care obligation is as educators. Quite simply, the educator’s duty of care obligation is to care. This means that we meet people where they are and by the time our teaching, learning and leading relationship has ended they leave us feeling engaged and inspired.

So for those who deny that there’s a problem, give me evidence that you are meeting people where they are. Make it more than your best attempt to

meet them where they truly are. When I say meet them where they are, I mean from the perspective of the one we’re looking to engage, not from our own perspective. If I look at this process from my own perspective, it means that I am always meeting my own criteria and tasks as I have defined them. Using ourselves as reference points is futile. We need external validation for our work to be meaningful, authentic, and valued.

That’s really the purpose behind my practice with the sticky notes – it means that I eat my own cooking. It’s a practice that has been a revelation for me because you can’t stay curious if you don’t have feedback. It’s as simple as that.

To illustrate, draw a circle in the palm of your hand. Use it as a reminder tomorrow morning – look at that circle, something new and different in your hand – to talk to students and staff and families with whom you’ve never had a conversation. Have a conversation with them. That is your first task tomorrow. Understand the story.

14. How does this relate to curriculum and the cultural biases or preferences that may be reflected in it?

It’s simple. It’s asking the question, “Whose voices are not present in these narratives?” Start there. What comes to mind is the advice of community organizer **Peter Block** whose most widely known book is *Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used*. His work is focused on bringing change into the world through consent and connectedness rather than through mandate and force. He has one quote that I believe should be posted in every single room where people meet and discuss education policy, program, and practice. It’s, “Who do we need in the room for something different to happen out there in the world?”

I don’t interpret this to mean, who we need to be physically in the room. Instead, it’s whose voices, whose stories, whose needs, whose aspirations, whose exasperations, whose sense of disenfranchisement do we need to recognise, so that something different will happen out there in the world. It’s what keeps us honest.

In *A Conversation with Peter Block*, Peter shares his belief that culture change must start with small groups. “Relationship and connectedness are the pre-condition for change. Every meeting, every process, every training program has to get people connected first ... So small groups are an essential building block to any future you want to create...

... Why would you ever line people up in rows, unless you wanted to alienate them from each other? And why would you be in a U-shaped room running a training program when everyone is blind to one third of the room? That's not connection. That's receptivity. “I know and you don't.” The antidote is small groups in circles, because there's no place to hide and everybody's voice gets heard.

15. You have mentioned feedback, data, and measurement. At the school level, what kinds of data matter most?

I actually think that when it comes to feedback there has to be an overlap between both the analytical stuff and the intuitive stuff.

The analytical stuff are things that talk about achievement and results – graduation rates and test scores. The intuitive stuff is about the quality of the experience people have had. Again, if we were to have a frank conversation with educators and asked them who they think is being left behind in the classroom, in the hallways, in the school yard, in the gymnasium and why that is, in a moment of truthfulness, the response might be, “I just don't know how to get through to them.”

What is missing for me is the next step. Probe further and invite them to “Tell me more. Give me some examples. What should I change in what I am doing? Who can help?” I think in education we tend to believe that our work at a system level is about problem-solving. We need to reframe it so that an educator's purpose is about healing. Educators

and formal leaders need to refocus less on solutions and more on healing.

I am not, by the way, denying the prevalence of real issues, such as physiological and mental health and other issues. That said, as educators and leaders, we have tremendous control and influence and we need to exercise it.

16. It seems that – just as you have said about students – this requires a huge sense of self-efficacy and a sense of personal confidence on the part of educators and leaders.

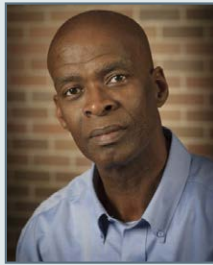
I don't believe that teaching and leading in educational contexts are suited to those who don't seek fulfillment in the process of helping students learn and flourish. It is my belief that if we don't seek the fulfillment that flows from engaging and empowering learners, if we don't look back day after day on our efforts in classrooms and schools and say, “that was a tough class or those were difficult conversations but I learned a lot as an educator and as a leader,” then you're in the wrong game. The power we seek as educators and the influence we chase, must be the power and the influence to do well and it must always be measured by the ones we're looking to teach and to lead.

“ A Closing Thought from Nouman Ashraf:

Never accept mediocrity when excellence is within reach and never chase perfection when you've got excellence within reach. Education is not about seeking perfection and it's not about settling for mediocrity either.

I'm reminded of a story in which the novice teacher came to the seasoned teacher and said, “Master, I'm feeling very discouraged. What should I do?” And she said to the educator, “Go and give others courage.” So I want to say this to you sincerely that sometimes we feel like we're imposters in the classroom. Sometimes we are not feeling 100 per cent but when we actually help others up their game, guess what happens? It ups our own game.

Conversation with Dr. Carl James



Dr. Carl James currently holds the Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community and Diaspora at York University where he is also the Affirmative Action, Equity and Inclusivity Officer. He teaches in the Faculty of Education and in the Graduate Programs in Sociology and Social Work, and in the past (1997 – 2012) in the Department of Education at Uppsala University, Sweden. His research interests include examining how issues of equity, access, inclusivity, and social justice are taken up in educational institutions and in relation to the educational, occupational, and career experiences and ambitions of racialized and marginalized youth. Dr. James is nationally and internationally recognized for his work on race and racialization through which he seeks to address and move us beyond the essentializing and homogenizing notions and representations of racialized people that account for their situation in society. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, he is one of six Education Advisors to the Minister of Education and Premier of Ontario.

1. What led you to your current focus on equity and ethnically and racially diverse communities?

I was a young immigrant myself and while going to university, I worked in an area of Toronto where many of the youth were immigrants. Essentially, I was experiencing what they were experiencing.

There was a lot of discussion at that time about the cultural adjustments these youngsters were having to make and how this was contributing to their difficulties in school and their general underachievement. So I began looking at those issues, considering how race might have been a factor, and the whole notion of equity, inclusivity, and well-being of students and young people.

That remains my focus today. It's a focus on the question of how we are included in society and, by "we," I mean Canadians generally. How does the national discourse include us, and what impact does this have on some of the experiences and outcomes we have as Canadians?

2. How has this background influenced your view of education leadership?

It has led me to believe that leaders need to pay attention to social justice, pay attention to the historical realities of various groups, pay attention to the intersectionality in identities, and pay attention to how people come to hold perspectives based

on the particular kinds of experiences they have. This also means recognizing the biases we bring to our own personal understanding of the world, and respecting and paying attention to differences in terms of both perspective and identity.

We can't simply dismiss these differences or wish them away. We need to engage with and embrace these differences. Diversity is an absolutely critical factor in any society and in any context. So the leader should be aware of that and facilitate a way forward.

We don't need to achieve absolute unity. People are going to take different paths and have different ideas. The leader needs to recognize those differences and work out a way in which we can go forward with respect for everyone sitting at the table.

The Oxford Dictionary defines intersectionality as "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise." According to Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined the term "intersectionality," it is a framework for conceptualizing a person, group of people, or social problem as affected by a number of discriminations and disadvantages. It takes into account people's overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of prejudices that they face. Check out this [TED talk by Kimberlé Crenshaw](#) (2016) to learn more.

All staff who connect with students have a role to play and an opportunity to make an impact on their students' well-being and experience at school. Every interaction in the classroom, the hallways, on the bus, in the cafeteria, in the school yard, in the community is an opportunity to make a difference. This [video](#) prompts thinking about the role and opportunity we all have to make a difference in students' lives.

3. How does this relate to our work in schools and in the classroom?

In the classroom, as I always say, you need to know the student who is sitting in front of you. What I mean by this is knowing students, not as we imagine them to be because of the construct we have from the media or from things we've read or observed, or who they truly are.

This involves making the effort to truly understand students – through observation, through conversations, through learning about their experiences and identities, and by understanding their perspectives. It also means recognizing that students come to us from parents and caregivers, from a community, from significant others who have influenced their ideas. When we interact with students, we interact with all these things. Of course, we will get to know students through their work, their assignments and so on, but we will only understand our students fully by committing to getting to know them as unique individuals.

4. How does knowing your students connect with their achievement and well-being?

For me, teaching and leading means building relationships with students. This involves understanding the cultural capital students bring to the classroom. It's what Yosso calls "community cultural wealth." It's about understanding students' individual hopes and needs, and interests. As an educator or a leader, we use this understanding to facilitate and support their work, their achievement and their well-being.

We need to recognize, as part of this, that students' prior knowledge – what they have learned previously, or what they bring from their family or community – can actually conflict with and hinder their new learning. If we understand that, then we're better able to understand the source of students' resistance, ease their anxieties, and reassure them that learning new things does not necessarily mean throwing out everything from the past. Again, this all depends on our relationship with and our knowledge of the student.

In [Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth](#) Yosso (2005)

"conceptualizes community cultural wealth as a critical race theory (CRT) challenge to traditional interpretations of cultural capital. In contrast CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Colour as places full of cultural poverty or disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged ... (Solórzano & Solórzano, 1995; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997; Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005). These forms of capital draw on the knowledges Students of Colour bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom. This CRT approach to education involves a commitment to develop schools that acknowledge the multiple strengths of Communities of Colour in order to serve a larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice."

5. Moving beyond the classroom, how can the school leader facilitate this work at the whole-school level?

As I said previously, leaders must be ready and willing to work and live with difference. In fact, they have to be comfortable with difference. Leaders have to understand and come to terms with how we enable and support differences in students' learning. However, they also need to understand that, despite our desire to create a safe space in the

school environment, the space is not always going to be safe. Conflict and instability are features of any learning context.

So we have to find a way to work through that and to have students and colleagues see conflict as something we all engage and work with as a community of learners.

6. You are suggesting that differences are not a barrier, but that they actually add richness.

Absolutely. You know one of the richest things in the classroom is how these differences represent the diversities in our communities, in the nation, and in the world. If we don't enable and support those different voices then we might be destroying the richness of the learning that can take place. We don't want to do that.

“Students must be ... allowed the resource of the teacher's expert knowledge, while being helped to acknowledge their own 'expertness' as well.”

~ Source: *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (Delpit, 1995). See also *Multiplication is for White People: Raising Expectations for Other People's Education* (Delpit, 2012)

7. What is the connection between equity and inclusion?

In order to have a truly inclusive school, I think we need to start by looking at the books we use to construct Canadian history, for example. If we're going to construct Canadian history in an inclusive school, we start with Indigenous people and Turtle Island. We have to start with, “This country wasn't an empty space when people from Europe and elsewhere arrived.”

More generally, it means that there must be curriculum, and resources, that speak to every student sitting in the classroom. Even in math or sciences, an inclusive school would have curriculum in which every student can see something about themselves or their experiences reflected.

We also see diversity of educators in that inclusive school. Even in a school that is 99 per cent White, there should be Indigenous or racialized educator there. We need them there, because it's a part of being inclusive. Because what we want to have students think about is how everyone, with their different experiences, will bring a different kind of interpretation of the world, and differences in how they came to their knowledge.

So whether the student population is diverse or not, we want to give them a chance to be exposed to different experiences, we want to build a richer group of students, and a richer intellectual discourse in our society generally.

“Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone.”

~ Source: *Meeting Equity Fair and Square* (Dei, 2006)

8. Can these varied perspectives be reflected in all curriculum, for example, in math and science?

Yes. We need to think about how to relate the subject content with students' interests. Math is an interesting one, because we might see it as one of those subjects that cannot be made relevant to a particular cultural group. However, in teaching a math problem, educators might notice that there are students who are interested in hockey, or other students who are interested in basketball, or others who are interested in the arts. These interests can be used to create analogies with complicated math concepts.

The point is that we must use the experiences of the students sitting in front of us. Educators shouldn't assume students have a particular interest because of their cultural backgrounds. That might not be the case. We also need to know how our students learn so that we can adapt our teaching to their styles of learning. We can only know that when we know the students.

Students do appreciate examples that resonate with them and respond to ideas and knowledge that has meaning for them. This in turn moves us toward building a relationship between the students and their educators.

“Understanding how the structures privilege some and harm others and the types of leadership necessary to work toward mitigating, this then becomes necessary learning to lead for all ... Excellent leaders can articulate who are the students in their schools, who is over/under-represented, identify which voices have been missing from the school or system in creating solutions.”

~ Source: **Leaders Must Consider Equity In Order To Serve All Students** (Chanicka, 2018)

“Regardless of their racial and ethnic background, educators can be successful in teaching across racial and ethnic differences if they develop the knowledge and skills to do so (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Milner, 2010) ... Teachers must affirm and communicate to students a space of solidarity embodied in statements such as ‘I see you. I value you. I appreciate your differences. I am committed to understanding your needs. I believe in your potential. I want to support you.’ (Howard, 2017).”

~ Source: **Confronting Inequity/Unconscious Bias Hurts** (Milner IV, 2018)

Culturally responsive educators share a particular set of dispositions and skills – a mindset that enables them to work creatively and effectively to support all students in diverse settings. Characteristics of this mindset as outlined by **Villegas and Lucas (2012)** are:

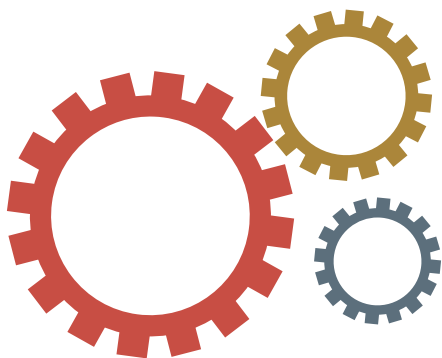
1. Socio-cultural consciousness: Have an awareness of how socio-cultural structures impact individual experiences and opportunities.
2. High expectations: Hold positive and affirming views of all students of all backgrounds.
3. Desire to make a difference: See themselves as change agents working toward more equity.

~ Source: **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Towards Equity and Inclusivity in Ontario Schools** (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013)

9. What kinds of formal structures need to be in place to support equity?

I have said that we all bring different perspectives or biases to our teaching. But in any teaching and learning context, we also have to look at the policies and structures and programs that we have to take into account in order to fit into that culture, the culture of the school.

If, for example, policies say that educators should not contact parents when students come late to school, or if school policies do not enable or support particular sporting interests, educators might be put in a position where they are supporting the policies, rather than students’ interests and needs. There may be policies or structures that disadvantage some students or may not be equitably applied or cannot be applied in an equitable way. For this reason, leaders and educators must apply an equity lens to implementation of structures, policies and programs and look for opportunities for differentiated application. In my view this requires continuous monitoring and oversight to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by them.



10. As we think more about how to ensure that teaching and leading are culturally responsive and relevant, what are the key capacities we need to develop?

Again, as a priority we need to discover who the students really are, rather than making assumptions because of their culture or place of origin or community. We also have to understand that culture is constantly changing. It is not static. It is fluid. It changes with each generation. For me, being effective as a leader or an educator is having the capacity to help people live with that diversity and that fluidity.

In our work with students, we need to adopt what I call a community referenced approach. What this means is that we pay attention to the communities from which students come. When I say communities, I mean the social community, the neighbourhood community, the cultural communities, the gendered community, the racial community, the Indigenous community, and so on.

Paying attention to various conceptualizations of community and knowing that the information we have about cultures is never going to be complete is critically important to our work with students.

Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan, released in Fall 2017, recognizes that systemic barriers are caused by embedded biases in policies, practices and processes that can result in differential treatment of students in schools and classrooms. The actions in the Plan are intended to help identify persistent inequities in the education system to ensure fairer and more inclusive schools and workplaces for all student, educators and staff regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, or any other factor related to individual identity.

Carl explains that a community referenced approach:

- begins with an understanding that students exist in relation to their communities,
- gives attention to the relationship between school, parents, and community,
- understands that students' sense of self and their possibilities are informed by the larger society's perceptions and media representations of their communities,
- recognizes that the culture of the community, in part, shapes the behaviour and structures the perceptions of students,
- encourages the integration of knowledge from and of the community in building relationships with students,
- utilizes the backgrounds and experiences of students in building curriculum and pedagogy to meet students' needs, interests and aspirations,
- requires establishing positive connections with families.

11. You have said that understanding the community is important. Can we go further and build relationships within the community?

It's absolutely critical that we establish those relationships. We should know the service agencies in the communities – as well as those not located in the community but serving the community.

Bringing parents to school to talk about their community can have value, but I think it often has its limitations. We need to think of other ways in which to connect with the community. So, in the case of school councils – we might want to rethink its purposes. Is it just for parents? Do we want people in other roles and from other organizations such as agency workers to be members of school council? How can the community feel that they are part of the school or contributing to the school – especially when the school door closes at 4 o'clock?

12. What specific role do formal leaders have in strengthening this capacity?

Since our information might be limited and incomplete, what leaders have to facilitate is helping staff to be comfortable with discomfort or, being comfortable with being uncomfortable. The fact that we have a tendency to be in our comfort zone means that we will need help with the process.

We might think that we have it down pat and that we understand our students and their cultural backgrounds. Then lo and behold, when we begin to interact and work with our students, we can see the gaps in our information. This means that educators have to be comfortable with sometimes being wrong and therefore be willing to learn how to engage in the process of self-correction.

One of my favourite quotes is from James Baldwin, who said, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” We have to pay attention to change as a constant but we can’t work with it unless we confront it.

School leaders “must inspire teachers to develop a deep knowledge, not just of content, but of students as individual learners. In this way educators integrate the lived experiences of students into the daily learning of the classroom.”

~ Source: **The CUS Framework for Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy** (Kugler & West-Burns, 2010)

The Principal as Leader of the Equitable School (2012) is a resource for school and system leaders that provides action steps for:

- Establishing a climate to promote equity
- Empowering staff to accelerate change
- Fostering student and community support and involvement
- Assessing progress toward equity.

13. How do we help schools and school communities identify and address bias, racism, and discrimination?

First of all, we need to come to terms with the fact that racism exists everywhere, not just elsewhere. It exists here in Canada. It exists in Ontario. It exists in all the communities in which we live. We have to recognize that discrimination is a product of racism.

Racism is not simply that of the individual. We talked earlier about policies and programs and how we have to consider that they may help to structure or frame racism, and colonialism, which is its surrogate. We have to consider how policies and programs might be couched in a colonial frame and might be discriminatory because of who constructed them and when they were constructed. After all, people’s biases have influenced the development of policies and programs. For me, it’s looking at the structure, the systematic ways in which racism, bias, and discrimination operate.

In our role as leaders, we need to help students understand this reality and help educators understand their role in combatting discriminatory practices. We can do this in very concrete ways such as reviewing policies, asking how they may be affecting some groups in differential ways and why, and then advocating for changes that may be needed.

There are other, very concrete actions leaders and educators can take. They can get to know the school community beyond simply driving in and driving out each day. They can invest time developing deep understandings about where students and their families live and work. That, for me, is the definitive data schools need to know, understand, and take into account.

Having a diverse and representative staff for students is also very important. Seeing, experiencing, and having cross-racial interactions within the school is a very powerful component of the culture that schools present to their students.

14. What do you say to those who feel that they do not have biases?

Sometimes it helps to have individuals think back to their own primary context. For example, one would say that one of the most stable spaces for most people is the home. One would think that everyone in the home grew up living together and trying to maintain some kind of stability.

However, there are diversities in the home situation between parents and youngsters. There are also generational and gender differences. So often we have to negotiate the problems that may arise. If we see that even in our primary context there are problems, then we realize that in every context of a group of people, there are going to be differences and some of these differences are going to contribute to problems that constantly have to be negotiated. It's simply because diversity exists.

One reliable approach in identifying our unconscious biases is **Harvard's Implicit Association Test (IAT)**. The IAT is an instrument that has been developed and rigorously tested to measure the distance between our conscious and unconscious attitudes. Decades of IAT testing have shown it is an effective tool in measuring our unconscious prejudice. Among its findings the IAT confirms that we all have implicit biases, that we are unaware of them, that we differ in levels of implicit bias, and that implicit biases predict behaviour (Choudhury, 2015).

15. How can we approach the curriculum in a way that respects that diversity?

We talked earlier about history and recognizing the colonial perspective that suggests Canada began with the arrival of the Europeans. We need to learn about the colonial process, the power that colonizers exercised over others, and how it presumes a certain amount of subjectivity of people in the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. Students need to learn how colonization

is responsible for where we are today. We celebrated the birthday of Canada in 2017. Really? For whom was 2017 a 150th birthday and for whom was it not? We need to get students to answer that question and think it through.

That's getting at decolonizing. That's getting students to understand the colonial space in which we live and how the colonial space came to be. That's bringing out into the open how constantly we have points at which this colonialism is celebrated.

Diversity: The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

~ Source: *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014)

16. You mentioned data. How can schools compile and use data to better identify barriers and biases?

I like the idea of data, but it cannot only be what the board collects – and then sends out to the world. I think if data is going to be useful to the school it must get down to the school level. Once data is available, principals and educators at the start of the year or the end of the school year need to look at what the data says. What are the gaps and how are we going to address them? What does the data say in terms of the mission and students' performance as linked to the curriculum that we might be able to enhance? If achievement is the issue, how are we going to address that because of what the data says?

And we should look at the data over a period of years, to potentially identify issues that cross various generations of students. Data also alerts us to the areas where we should focus finances. It might

guide us toward spending our resources in the most effective ways and providing support to the people who most need it.

To identify the particular needs of students, we have to pay attention to identity data. We cannot just use gender. We must give consideration to gender in relation to class, in relation to race, in relation to ethnicity, in relation to language.

“As educators, we need appropriate assessment tools to determine what students know and what they have learned in order to revise and refine our (educators’) practices. Assessments and measurement tools provide important evidence of what we have actually taught – and how well we have taught it. Assessments should be seen as opportunities for educators to adjust their practices and respond to students ...”

~ Source: **Confronting Inequity/Assessment for Equity** (Milner IV, 2018)

A critical step on the road to ensuring equity is to gain a clearer understanding of who our students are and of their school experience, and as such, the collection, integration, and reporting of identity-based data is a foundational pillar of **Ontario’s Education Equity Action Plan** (2017). Collecting and analyzing voluntary demographic and perceptual data can enable school and system leaders to more precisely address the barriers to student success.

17. This is a complex undertaking – what advice would you have for a school leader or educator – where would you start?

First of all, I would ask of a leader – including myself – how well do you know the community in which your school is located? How much do you know about the people and the diversity of that community? How much do you know about the relationship students have with the school? How do the students view the school and what is their outlook on education?

Education is seen in some communities as a way to escape that community. For others, education may be seen as something that will help individuals maintain themselves in a particular community because the community is one where they feel accepted and comfortable. So one needs to understand the interests that education serves and the ideas about school that students and their families bring with them. Therefore, knowing all that, recognizing diversity, and paying attention to data which is a rich source of information, are essential to our work with children and youth. I see all of these as important.

“ A Closing Thought from Carl James:

We need to recognize the inequity in society and develop ways in which we might mitigate it in schools and in the educational system as a whole. It requires taking a holistic approach by looking at the policies, programs, and practices, and analyzing how they might maintain inequities. It requires having a strategy for working with them in ways that bring about equitable schooling and educational outcomes.

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