

Speaker's Corner Transcript:

Karen Murray

Stephen Hurley [00:00:08]:

In October 2023, participants from Ontario district school boards, education stakeholders and scholars focused on educational equity and human rights gathered at Toronto Metropolitan University to share practices around equity-based initiatives, along with creating space to reflect on and commit to steps towards greater action in support of enhanced equity for elementary school students. voicEd Radio is honoured to bring you some of the many conversations that took place before, during and after this year's symposium. Welcome to Enhancing Equity in Ontario Elementary Education.

Stephen Hurley [00:00:51]:

And today I'm happy to be speaking with Karen Murray, who is a System Superintendent for Equity, Anti-oppression and the Early Years in the Toronto District School Board. Karen, welcome.

Karen Murray [00:01:02]:

Oh, thank you. Thank you for having me here. This is so exciting.

Stephen Hurley [00:01:06]:

So, is it really exciting?

Karen Murray [00:01:08]:

It is exciting.

Stephen Hurley [00:01:10]:

So you actually, in a way, started off our work today. You were on the first panel and you led and really led that panel. Tell me about why you're here. You do a lot of this work. Why this symposium?

Karen Murray [00:01:25]:

I think one of the important part of the work that we do is to build awareness and to deepen knowledge around issues that many of us are passionate about. But some people are still wary about. They're uncomfortable around talking about issues of race or talking about issues of injustice or naming when hate and racism exist and live around them. And one of the things we've learned is that finding spaces like this today to uplift those who are in that heavy work, because it's not easy work, and giving them opportunities to build an affinity space that they can talk with each other and engage with each other, but also figure out what is one thing I could take away for tomorrow. And I was hoping to do that this morning. I always say, what are we going to put in our toolkit? What are we going to put in our backpack? So, I hope with some of the suggestions and ideas that came across the first panel, people were able to kind of walk away with, okay, I could see myself engaging in that in some kind of way.

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Karen Murray

Stephen Hurley [00:02:48]:

They used to say at Edutopia..., teachers need something for Monday and something for one day. How do you start thinking about the Monday? Because we're good at the one day.

Karen Murray [00:03:02]:

I think there's a bit of intentionality all of us as educators have to kind of reason with. And one of the things I talk about all the time is that our beliefs and really kind of positions, our actions, one of my good friends always remind me of that, and it's the idea of what is that thing that we're coming with? What is our position in all of this? What is our fundamental core hope and dream and wish. And once we know that, we know what our next actions are. So for our Mondays, we need to think to ourselves, what is my goal for this week? What is it that I want to do? What change am I going to make? We talk transformative change all the time or transformational change all the time. But do we know what that really looks like? Do we really know when a change has happened? And the only way to do so is when you actually take the risk and say, I'm going to do something. So I'm going to give an example. One of the conversations we're having this morning on my panel was the enhancing equity. And for us, the group, the core group, the intentional group of conversation, was Black students.

Karen Murray [00:04:25]:

And we were talking about what are one of the promising practices, and one of the promising practice that we know is when students are affirmed in a classroom space, and that is through curriculum, and that is through representation. And it could be from resources that are there that enhances the curriculum, et cetera. And I think one of the things we know is, if I didn't think that, if I didn't understand or believe that students seeing themselves through that mirror of curriculum or resources or classroom means they are going to change the direction of their life, if I didn't believe that, then I don't do it. But research tells us that when Black students see themselves affirmed in a classroom space, either by the representation of the staff, so one Black teacher in their entire school career, or by the resources in which we provide or the stories in which we tell in curriculum, then they see themselves in that possibility. So I'll give another example. We know that in STEM fields right now, there is a disproportionate amount of Black young people entering into those fields, science, engineering, medicine, et cetera. But how can they see themselves in those fields when nobody showed them the possibility of somebody being that looks like them in that field? And when we talk to young people, they say that, right? So when we're saying we want to make a difference and change the trajectory, well, I didn't even know the trajectory was a possibility. So if I've never seen, as we talk about science, Black female scientist, Black male doctor used in curriculum to talk about the things that we're talking about every single day, how are we expecting young Black students to be able to see that as even a possibility or option for their future? So that's the Monday.

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Karen Murray

Stephen Hurley [00:06:57]:

A teacher's Monday in 2023 will take their mind in various places. They have a new language arts curriculum in elementary, there's school safety, there's mental health and wellness, there are so many things that might occupy that core of a person, and they really care about it, and they really believe it's important. How do you break through with something as important as equity, diversity, inclusion?

Karen Murray [00:07:27]:

You know what I enter as. That we can't put it as the 'and', or the 'or'. So I'm either doing fundamental teaching things, and I'm going to do equity. We can't do it that way.

Stephen Hurley [00:07:47]:

Okay.

Karen Murray [00:07:48]:

It has to be braided as the part of your work from the get go. So I'll give an example. If we're teaching literacy, let's go there for a moment, and then I'll circle back to math. So, if we're teaching literacy, what are the things that we need to know? We need to know that for students to have academic success, what they're reading must have high interest, must appeal to them. So even though we know that we have to teach the skills, the technical skills of reading, that cannot go outside of what it is that is going to appeal to that child's heart. So they pick up that book. So it's an 'and' - you are teaching for a purpose. And the purpose is you want kids to love and enjoy reading. If it is so technical that they're reading something that has no interest at all, we've lost them. It has to be embedded, and equity and diversity and inclusion allows for that. The braid.

Stephen Hurley [00:09:11]:

I love the metaphor of the braid, and I love the 'this, and...', it reminds me of my improv studies. I'm thinking that the way that curriculum is set up and the way that we teach teachers how to teach in that curriculum context sets us up for the 'or'.

Karen Murray [00:09:31]:

Yes.

Stephen Hurley [00:09:31]:

So we're either doing math or we're doing literacy or we're doing the arts.

Karen Murray [00:09:37]:

I think you've described it perfectly. What we need to not do. What we need to do is we need to intersect all of those, right? So when we want students' voice, they should be able to have choice. Choice to be able to show me in their most artistic, creative ways, that allows them to not only express themselves, but then they're excited about writing about this really creative amazing thing that they just shared, that is an expression of their thinking. Kids write for that purpose, right. When we're thinking about mathematics, one of the things we know is that not every single place in the world, they engage with numbers the exact same way. We know that. We are the most diverse city.

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Karen Murray

Karen Murray [00:10:40]:

And so we have families who think about numbers as they group them. And then from the grouping, then they subtract. And then there's places where we do add ons, so we add it all up and carry. Right. There's different ways in which different people engage with numbers, and we need to allow families to be able to support their child, to be able to understand there's multiple ways in which math can be actionalized.

Stephen Hurley [00:11:20]:

So we heard this morning about community involvement and community engagement, but not just getting families into the school, but actually maybe going out to the community and finding out how they engage with mathematics, with other things. That requires a different way of thinking on the part of administrators, part of teachers. How do you begin working with a staff on that type of vision?

Karen Murray [00:11:47]:

Well, I'll say for myself, because I've done it, is that we first have to honour community knowledge and family knowledge. That's the first step. Right. So I think one of the lines I said this morning was about extending and enhancing curriculum. We have to assume that when we enter into community through partnership, through families, through community educators, et cetera, it's to extend the work that we're already doing and enhance that work in a way that makes sense for us, the educators, to continue to build and grow, but for the child and that student to see themselves inside the learning, extending and enhancing. So we might have to, and I feel like I'm about to do an old school moment, but we used to have family math nights. Remember those? I remember how amazing those were.

Karen Murray [00:12:57]:

Right. And we have different ways. So two things happened in family math nights. One, we shared with community, with families the way we were doing things, so they understood. So when their child came home and we didn't know what the kid was trying to tell us, I lived that, too. Even though I'm an educator and what we end up doing is the kid would get frustrated. Your child would get frustrated with you. Be like, stop it, forget it. I'll ask my teacher tomorrow.

Stephen Hurley [00:13:30]:

That's right. That's not the way we were taught today.

Karen Murray [00:13:32]:

So what it did, it gave that window in. Right? It gave the window in. Into, what is the way that this new way of doing math, as we would have said or our parents would have said, they would have seen it. So there was no surprises. There was, like, full transparency around, okay, this is how we're trying to do it. And then we would name it. So when the family is trying to figure out what the kid is trying to say, we already gave, like, a little sneak peek in.

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Karen Murray

Karen Murray [00:14:09]:

Right? So it made sense. So we build that bridge into the classroom. What's the second thing it did, it allowed us to see the various ways families were engaging in the exact same experience.

Stephen Hurley [00:14:23]:

I went to a lot of family math nights and ran a couple myself. I've never heard that part of it. I've never heard the part two on that.

Karen Murray [00:14:31]:

Ah.

Stephen Hurley [00:14:32]:

So this is fascinating. Are parents willing to articulate that?

Karen Murray [00:14:36]:

It's how we set the conditions. So it's back to that other piece. Right. The conditions you set allows families to enter if they feel that we are authentically, honestly, really trying to figure out the ways in which they are engaging in mathematics with their child so that they can articulate and build that bridge. Okay, I'm showing you this way, but here's the way your teacher is showing it to you. Let me make sense of why I'm doing it this way. So the child doesn't feel there's a right way or a wrong way. They just know that there's different ways in which to get to the answer.

Karen Murray [00:15:15]:

Me in the classroom, me in the school now knows that that child, this child, this child over here are coming with multiple different ways of solving this problem. So now I know that when that child skips all of the ten steps I have shown to do the long division, and they went straight to the answer. I know they were doing mental math. I know that because guess what? I saw it. I saw it when we were connecting or talking through. And many educators may have lived through this moment where a kid does not show the work, right. But the answer was absolutely correct. And they'd never used a calculator.

Karen Murray [00:16:05]:

They just knew it, because at home, that is something they've been playing with for the very longest time.

Stephen Hurley [00:16:12]:

And that's okay.

Karen Murray [00:16:13]:

And that's absolutely okay.

Speaker's Corner Transcript:

Karen Murray

Stephen Hurley [00:16:15]:

Okay. So you have written a book on culturally relevant pedagogy. CRRP. Many of our listeners have heard it. They may think they know what it means. Maybe they do. But you've taken a bit of more of a Monday focus to that and taken the theory and tried to make it real, tangible on the ground. Tell me about that.

Karen Murray [00:16:44]:

So, first off, I need to send a shout out to my co-editors, which is Jennifer Watt and Alice Te. And the wonderful thing about what we were trying to envision was to answer the question that we get every single time you talk about culturally relevant and or responsive pedagogy, which is what's that look like. So what we try to do is give a menu of sorts of different ways of entry tied to curriculum, tied to the arts. So what would it look like as we engage in a promising practice of culturally relevant pedagogy through the arts. What does it look like in mathematics or science? Or what does it look like in terms of this leadership? So what would a leader know? And I think what the feedback we've been getting is that people are appreciating the range of entries, but they're also appreciating the document, the resource. The book has something called the bottom line, and it gave you, like, sneak peek of few little things you could put in your toolkit for tomorrow. And they have really been appreciating that. We've gotten a really good feedback from practitioners, and that was the goal for practitioners to see what this idea looks like.

Karen Murray [00:18:31]:

You know, it's so funny. I've been talking culturally relevant pedagogy for a very long time, and we use the tenets from Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings on high expectation and cultural competence and critical consciousness as our basis, as our frame. But what we wanted to do was to make sure that when we said high expectations, people saw it. When we talked about cultural competence and students lived realities and lived experiences and bringing it into the classroom, we wanted to say, this is what it really looks like, and you could really try this, and this is what it can be. And we were lucky to be able to have educators who wrote with us who are practitioners and who actually had samples of students' work. So people actually saw like, oh, my goodness, I could see this tomorrow. I could try this.

Karen Murray [00:19:48]:

We're happy about that.

Stephen Hurley [00:19:50]:

I am assuming then that because it's an edited book that you did get on the ground articles or lesson plans.

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Karen Murray

Karen Murray [00:19:58]:

So the design was, and we did this with Rubicon as one of our publishers, Rubicon Savvas now. But what we did is we actually reached out to practitioners. So each chapter is a practitioner, and a practitioner entered with their idea of how they feel they could bring what it looks like or sound like or feel like in terms of culturally relevant pedagogy to life. So hence the practitioners that talk around math and science and the ones who talked about literacy or whatever that content area was. So it was blending this idea of content and practice. Right. And how those three tenants live in those three areas. Right.

Karen Murray [00:21:02]:

And so we did that, and then we lined it up so people can see. Like, this one really speaks to this tenant.

Stephen Hurley [00:21:15]:

In regard to culturally relevant pedagogy, what questions do you find teachers practitioners still have about CRRP?

Karen Murray [00:21:20]:

We will always have what it looks like. It doesn't matter how much we may show one or two examples, but because, as you said, things change every single day. The world changes every single day. So constantly seeing... how do I... I saw that example, but now I'm working on this. So being able to see how they can use that framework is one. The other is many people heard the terminology, heard the theory, but never knew where it came from. So being able to link it back to this was the root of where culturally relevant pedagogy came from. The work of Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, and being able to see where that foundation started, that has helped a lot. And many people ask about that because they heard it in this kind of, everyone's talking this CRRP thing, like where it come from. So that has been one that's been consistent.

Karen Murray [00:22:33]:

And then the other is how do they see it now that it wasn't always a focus when they were learning to become educators. That's a big one, too. So they hear about it, but they didn't see it in practice, or if they saw it in practice, now they're trying it. And sometimes they're in spaces where people are like, what are you doing? What's that about? So really trying to continue to, I would say, lift and build and pour oil into these amazing young equity minded educators who are out there doing amazing things, and we need to reassure them that what they're doing is good work.

Stephen Hurley [00:23:22]:

Still a lot of work to do, Karen Murray. What gives you hope, on a Monday basis?

Speaker's Corner Transcript:

Karen Murray

Karen Murray [00:23:27]:

Oh, my goodness. You know what gives me hope on a Monday basis, is students. I hang out with young people so much and talking to them, and when they reaffirm that how what we are doing is making a difference or changing their lives, then that more than gives me hope. That just says to me that we're on the right path, and it is not going to be us who's going to make that change. It's going to be them young people who are going to make the change, because they're already saying it how what we are doing is impacting their lives. And that feeling is the feeling they're going to carry over and be in spaces to make and sit at tables to make a difference in our educational future. And that gives me more than hope. That brings me joy.

Stephen Hurley [00:24:26]:

Well, you've given me hope. I should let you tell people what the title of the book is and where we can get it.

Karen Murray [00:24:32]:

So the book is *My Best Idea: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, and it is with Rubicon Savvas, and it is available, and we are so looking forward to you enjoying it.

Stephen Hurley [00:24:50]:

Thank you for this conversation. Karen.

Karen Murray [00:24:51]:

Thank you.

Stephen Hurley [00:24:54]:

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