Vidya Shah (00:00:10):

Hello and welcome. My name is Dr. Vidya Shah and I'm an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at York University. Welcome to another episode of the UnLeading Project. UnLeading requires a commitment to holding multiple truths, to troubling common sense assumptions of leadership to living the inquiries and to sitting in the ambiguities of complex ideas such as leadership, schooling and society. Unleading asks us to engage in the practice of leadership, a continual interplay of action towards systemic change and deep inner reflection. This podcast series will highlight voices of leaders in classrooms, communities, homes, schools, school districts, and beyond. Culturally relevant and anti-racist leadership invites us to explore identity and power and education. And challenge the dominance of Eurocentric values, perspectives, and knowledge systems, and our conceptions of schooling and leadership. In particular, we dive into issues of race, racism, and racialization as they influence leaders and leadership, as well as the learning experiences and wellbeing of Black, Indigenous and racialized students. As somebody who identifies with the Brown or South Asian woman and whose scholarship explores anti-racist approaches to leadership and school district reform, I have been in continuous dialogue with these ideas and continue to have many questions.

Vidya Shah (00:01:45):

Our podcast today is on culturally relevant and responsive and anti-racist leadership featuring an amazing group of leaders in education and community that are creating transformative possibilities for schooling. For a list of their full bios and contact information, please check out the UnLeading webpage at www.yorku.ca/edu/unleading. Today we will be exploring tensions in leading for anti-racism and as anti-racist leaders. As we begin with our other podcasts, today, we have Melissa Wilson who will be joining us to speak about anti-racist leadership, culturally relevant and responsive leadership to help us explore the tensions to pose questions and to frame our discussion for today. Please welcome the amazing Melissa Wilson, educator in Peel District School Board, and extraordinary community educator on Twitter and beyond. Welcome Melissa.

Melissa Wilson (00:02:46):

Hi thank you, Vidya. I'll just introduce myself quickly before giving a little introduction to the podcast. Hello everyone, again, my name is Melissa and I identify as a Black woman and I use the pronouns, she and her. During the day, I'm a vice principal. I'm also a Ph.D Candidate in the Social Justice Education department at U of T. Some of you may know me on Twitter as @Drawn2Intellect. Thank you Vidya for welcoming me to the podcast, happy to be here today. So when we think and talk about educational leadership, I'd ask us to think beyond roles and titles. Rather than equating educational leadership to professor, superintendent, administrator, teacher leader or community leader, this podcast is asking us to think about educational leadership in practice. What does educational leadership entail in various systems and community spaces? The panelists today will share their insights and knowledge about educational leadership based on their own experiences in the Ontario public education system, the academy and the community. I thought a good entry point would be to frame some of the tensions that currently exist in education.

Melissa Wilson (00:03:59):

Many people can testify that education systems in general elementary, secondary, college, university they're at a crossroads. For so long, these education systems thrived off of producing and reproducing a single narrative, your "success" in education dependent upon your ability to survive in the single narrative. And we all know what that single narrative is. For so long, academic success has depended

upon teachers and students assimilating into epistemologies, framed by whiteness, masculinity, heteronormativity and the English language. If we pause for just a moment the evidence of White supremacy is everywhere. The vast majority of educators are White. We are all forced to take mandatory courses, and these usually position Europe as the centre of all global knowledge. In these courses, experts and theorists are positioned as White males, well usually being taught by white males no less, reinforcing the idea that knowledge is White and masculine. Textbooks and educational resources celebrate Eurocentricism and literally marginalize racialized, Black and Indigenous folks to case studies that present us as existing in the past, exotic or from some deficit lens, like being impoverished, imprisoned or somehow inhumane.

Melissa Wilson (00:05:18):

The curriculum continues to be Eurocentric in spite of parents, communities, scholars, journalists and educators, relentlessly advocating for it to change. All of us are forced to learn and use English and French, two colonial languages while Indigenous languages continue to be underfunded, if included at all, and students who don't speak English are funnelled into special education programming. These are just some of the ways in which whiteness thrives in education systems, even when the vast majority, sometimes more than 80% of our students are not White. One tension that exists is this juxtaposition between our schools being populated with Black and Brown students, yet these students are being forced to learn about whiteness in classrooms every day. The second tension is that theories, research and studies about educational leadership are continuously offering us alternatives to this Eurocentric education system. So, it's not like we don't know how to do better, we do, we've actually known for quite some time. For many decades, scholars, educators and community activists have been researching, documenting, and practicing teaching and learning that discenters whiteness and instead focuses on paradigms of learning that considers culture and a holistic understanding of knowledge. For example, in the 1980s, Kofi Lomotey was studying and documenting how Black principals lead differently than their White peers and were more effective in working with Black students because of their shared cultures. This study from 1987 also showed that Black students were more likely to be successful when they had Black teachers. These findings have been replicated in many other studies since then. We also know that in the 1990s, Gloria Ladson-Billings began crafting theoretical frameworks for naming and identifying these cultural connections. Many of us have benefited from her work on culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings shifted how many educators viewed African-American students. She started asking what is right with African-American children and what is happening with teachers who are having success with African-American children. Ladson-Billings was intent on learning from children, not about children. In other words, Black children became the subjects rather than the objects of her research.

Melissa Wilson (00:07:37):

The panelists today will discuss culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and how it has been taken up over time, but it's important that we mention some of the problems with how culturally relevant pedagogy has been taken up in racist education systems. Perhaps the most alarming aspect of CRP work today is how Black children have been removed from the conversation. Ladson-Billing's work was about Black children, yet our predominantly White teaching population has managed to learn some of the basic principles of culturally responsive teaching while maintaining their anti-Black racism. Even Ladson-Billings critiqued how her work has been taken up. In 2014, she stated, "My work on culturally relevant pedagogy has taken on a life of its own and what I see in the literature and sometimes in practice is totally unrecognizable to me. What state departments, school districts and individual teachers are now calling culturally relevant pedagogy is often a distortion and corruption of the central ideas I attempted to promulgate." And herein we find our third tension, no matter how much research and

theory and findings are produced by Black people, White education systems continue to ignore it and refuse to centre this research. It cannot be possible that Black principals may know something their White peers don't. It cannot be possible that Black scholars are utilizing their worldviews and insider knowledge to create theories and studies that are surpassing their White peers in education. This cannot be because of racism. One of the foundational logics of racism is that Black people are supposed to be inferior to their White counterparts, so it is inconceivable that Black people are creating knowledge and leadership practices for others to learn and follow. This obvious refusal to learn from Black educational leaders has allowed racism to persist in education and we can now see that culturalism hasn't worked. It hasn't worked because the problem has never simply been about people being culturally different from one another.

Melissa Wilson (00:09:40):

As White educators selectively choose which parts of culturally relevant pedagogy is palatable and suitable to their needs, they end up doing very little to transform their practice because their ideas about culture are so, so limited. As Marie Battiste explains, culture is an educational concept that allows Euro-Canadians to focus on empowering the deprived and the powerless. Yet not having to confront any explanation or evaluation of the effects of racism or colonialism on these cultures or people. Likewise, Verna St. Denis comments that if cultural authenticity is the problem, then we don't have to look at what is the immensely more difficult task of challenging the conscious and unconscious ways in which the ideology of White identity as superior is normalized and naturalized in schools and the nation both in the past and in the present. Finally, Martin Cannon also concurs that focusing on the other does little to help non-Indigenous peoples to know, understand and challenge their own investment in colonial dominance and self-identification.

Melissa Wilson (00:10:48):

This failure to disrupt oppression in inequities has brought us to our fourth tension and the reality that we're all contending with today. In spite of decades of research about culturally relevant pedagogy, in spite of all of the equity policies and documents, proclaiming that school boards believe in equity and inclusion. And in spite of all of the character education about being respectful and nice to one another, we have yet to take racism seriously in education and actively work to address and disrupt racism in our classrooms. The evidence is all around us. Black students are streamed away from academic courses because educators have low academic expectations of them. Black and Indigenous students are suspended or expelled at higher rates than their White peers. Many educators have anti-Black bias, which results in racial profiling and harsher disciplining of Black students. There is a significant gap between the graduation rates of Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students, Muslim students experienced Islamophobia in classrooms. In Ontario classrooms, specifically, Muslim students have been streamed into lower academic placements or inappropriately placed in ESL programs based off of their teachers' incorrect assumptions about their abilities. And of course, we all know that racist, Islamophobic and homophobic language is often being overlooked and underreported in schools. Here we are in 2021, and most educators are just beginning to take Critical Race Theory and anti-racism education seriously. And not necessarily because they care, but because of the community advocacy forcing education systems to admit their racism. In spite of this topic, being new to some people, there is nothing new about these fields. Black feminists, Indigenous feminists and Third World feminists have been theorizing about the intersections of racism, sexism, colonialism, capitalism and heteronormativity for decades, but racist education systems have refused to hear them. In 1996, George Dei published his book, Anti-Racism Education: Theory and Practice, yet White racist educators refuse to hear him. Dei states that anti-racism work explicitly names the issues of race and social difference as issues of power

and equity rather than as matters of culture and ethnic variety. To be an anti-racist educator is to be a theorist and a practitioner for social change. Anti-racism calls for putting power relations at the centre of the discourse on race and difference. Here we are with the culturally relevant and responsive leadership and anti-racist leadership podcast. We are responding to Dei's call to put power of relations at the centre of our work. This podcast will explore culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and anti-racist education in conversation with one another to imagine and create educational leadership practices that expose and disrupt White supremacy in education, and to rebuild an education system that serves our communities.

Vidya Shah (00:14:05):

Oh, wow, Melissa. Thank you so much, thank you so much for your thoughts and your wisdom in this space for the ways that you bring together theories, histories, the longstanding place of Critical Race Theory, anti-racist theories and other theories into this conversation. You know, I love the ways that you name, how White supremacy is manifesting in the bodies, in the knowledge systems, in the language and the programming of schooling. The fact that we know this, we have documented it, we have expressed it, we have researched it. And importantly, I think this is why we made the distinction on this podcast between culturally relevant, responsive and anti-racist leadership. When you spoke about Gloria Ladson-Billings response in 2014 saying, wow, everything and anything, and everything has become culturally relevant and responsive. It reminds me of what you're saying about the ways in which whiteness co-ops everything, including culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and race and racism and racialization were always central to that work. Now, there's this need to sort of separate it to make sure that it doesn't get erased again in these sorts of conversations. Finally, I want to really thank you for naming the ways in which knowledge systems from the global majority have been erased, have been silenced and this includes Indigenous people, Black and African diasporic people, people of colour, people of multiple and intersecting identities, all of that. Thank you so much for framing this discussion for us for asking important questions and for really demanding a call to action. Thank you for the tremendous work that you do to raise the critical and collective consciousness of all of us on Twitter and beyond.

Melissa Wilson (00:15:57):

Thank you Vidya.

Vidya Shah (00:15:59):

Folks, now to extend the conversation and to talk about the ways in which leadership practices are enacted daily. We have a wonderful group of panelists that I'd like to take a moment to introduce. For their full bios, you can check out the UnLeading website, but I'd like to introduce them and ask them to share a little bit about how they come to this conversation. So first off, Alice Te.

Alice Te (00:16:23):

Good evening everyone. Vidya, thank you so much for inviting me to participate. Melissa, you have been very provocative in your opening and I hope we can do it justice in terms of our conversation. I'm Alice Te and I position myself as an Asian woman living in Canada. Pronouns are she and her. I am originally Chinese Philippina, Pinai, actually, and came over first-generation during the first Trudeau years, right? I came over during '69 and have been living in Toronto, call Toronto my home for the last 40+ years. In terms of my political and professional space I've been an educator, union activist, a social justice activist as well as a feminist for the last 30 years and I've also had the luxury and opportunity to engage in many

critical conversations in many learning spaces. I come to you as a learner and as a person who is committed to engagement and I'm really looking forward to this discussion, thanks.

Vidya Shah (00:17:37):

Thank you so much, Alice. I'm so happy that you're here with us. Next, I'd like to introduce Ramon San Vicente, welcome Ramon.

Ramon San Vicente (00:17:45):

Good evening, everybody. Thanks Vidya. Welcome everybody to the podcast. My name is Ramon San Vicente. I identify as a Black male, born and raised in Canada from two parents who were born in Trinidad and Tobago. Miguel San Vicente, my father, is a freedom fighter to the core, that's his essence of who he is, and I take a lot of that with me into my profession and into my life in many ways. My mother, Patricia Haynes, is an artist, living and working as an accountant was her profession, but she's an artist at heart and her creativity and spirit lives within me. Beyond my parents and my stepparents, I would also say that I was raised by hip hop music and culture. That was my upbringing as a listener and observer and participant in the culture, as well as an emcee. So much I learned from hip hop, geography, politics, history and so much more that I bring to my role as an educator. Currently, I work as a principal in the Toronto District School Board. Thanks for having me, looking forward to the conversation and learning from everybody and sharing some ideas as well, thanks.

Vidya Shah (00:19:01):

Thank you so much, Ramon, and I love the connections to family there too, thank you. Next, I'd like to welcome Karen Murray to the podcast. Welcome Karen.

Karen Murray (00:19:10):

Good evening, good evening everyone. Good evening, Vidya and Melissa, that was just a brilliant way for us to move forward as we start interrogating and engaging in the conversation. As mentioned, my name is Karen Murray, I identify she and her. I come to tonight's conversation, locating myself as a Black feminist. I centre students first, but I also centre theory as well. I live and breathe in the world of Critical Race Theory and Africentric and anti-racism pedagogical frameworks. I locate them as I work to build bridges around theory and practice and many, many, many hats I wear, but right now, as I think about the conversation we're going to have this evening, I'm proud to be a Centrally Assigned principal in the Toronto District School Board, and even prouder to say that I'm the Central principal that is leading our new innovative space of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement. So glad I'm here tonight, looking forward to the conversation and looking forward to where we can head beyond this moment.

Vidya Shah (00:20:40):

Thank you so much Karen, and for the tremendous work that you're doing in TDSB and provincially and nationally. So thank you so much, thank you for being here this evening. Next I'd like to welcome Shernett Martin, welcome Shernett.

Shernett Martin (00:20:54):

Thank you so much Vidya. Hi everyone, my name is Shernett Martin. I identify as a Black woman, proud of my African ancestry and Jamaican identity. My pronouns are she and her. I'm a teacher by profession, a consultant, a principal consultant at the Gordon Group and the Executive Director at ANCHOR, the

African Canadian National Coalition Against Hate, Depression and Racism. A long name for a very short mandate, which is to fight against anti-Black racism in all its forms. We were formerly known as the Vaughan African Canadian Association. I am very delighted to be here. I'm looking forward to this discussion. Thank you Vidya for the opportunity to be amongst this esteemed group. I'm a lifelong learner, a creative. I consider myself an abolitionist who believes in tearing down structures that get in the way of justice and equity. I believe in love as our greatest weapon towards that kind of change, how we get there is why this work is so important. I'm also honoured to be here, I'm grateful for the land that we're on, which has been the site of human activity since time immemorial. It is a traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nations. I'm coming to you from the city of Vaughan, which stands on the land of the Chippewa of Georgina and the Métis. I also honour and pay tribute to the strength, beauty, and wisdom of the ancestors of African origin stolen from the shores of our Kublan. It is with their power and it is with their leadership and with their strength and faith that I march onwards and forward. Thank you.

Vidya Shah (00:22:40):

Thank you so much, Shernett, that was such a beautiful opening. Thank you again for the tremendous work that you're doing in community and beyond such an inspiration. Thank you so much. And last, but certainly not least Nora Hindy. Welcome Nora.

Nora Hindy (00:22:56):

Thank you, Vidya. My name is Nora Hindy, I am a visible Muslim woman meaning I wear a hijab. My pronouns are she and her. My experience is informed by my heritage, which is my parents come from Egypt, my ancestral home rather, has been colonized, was colonized by the French and the English. I do share and feel that I share and understand colonial trauma due to that, but I do want to acknowledge that I am a settler on this land and this land has been stolen from its rightful owners, and that I benefit from that. As well, I'm an educator with Peel for over a decade, I have a Master's in Public Policy from York University where I was focused on Islamophobia and Ontario public school, which informs a lot of my work. I'm a community organizer and advocate as well. Thank you for having me.

Vidya Shah (00:23:55):

Thank you so much, Nora, thank you. Thank you for that beautiful intro and for the tremendous work that you're doing and so many different spaces to tackle Islamophobia and more. What an amazing group of people we have in conversation today, this is really quite exciting. I think we should just jump right into some important questions that I think will help us frame the discussion for leaders. The first question is really what does culturally relevant and responsive leadership and anti-racist leadership look like in your everyday practice? What are the things that you can point to or the orientations that you can point to that indicate to you that this is what anti-racist leadership is, or this is what culturally relevant and responsive leadership is. Maybe Shernett we'll start with you.

Shernett Martin (00:24:41):

Thank you. Vidya. Now, as I mentioned in my intro, I'm an educator by profession and before sort of the language around cultural responsive teaching was sort of in our vernacular as educators, it was something I questioned even during my teacher's college where we weren't really seeing that, even what we're being taught to then implement when we became teachers. I was always that student questioning why certain people and experiences were not in the space of learning, questioning why I didn't see myself. I think for a lot of people, whether you're racialized, consider yourself a member of the BIPOC

community, for me as a Black woman, culturally responsive teaching for me is always almost been like culturally responsible living. It is something that I carry everywhere I go. For me, it's leaving the house and seeing things on a shelf in a grocery store or in a pharmacy or buying things that I think I would need as a Black woman. The world itself is not responsive to a multitude of cultures. If we're going to shift and change that, especially for our learners and our students and our colleagues and our school communities, we really have to look at where the void exists, what is missing, what is not there and understand the importance of ensuring that it is there and be intentional about that. Within my own sort of positioning as not just an educator, but as a community leader and the work that we do in ANCHOR, and the work that we're currently doing as well with students who, due to the pandemic and lockdown have slipped through the cracks with the virtual learning and the in-person learning is that we need to really consider and take inventory of what has been missing in terms of their own learning and how we can then be able to change the way that we perceive what is important, what is necessary, what is possible. I think the possibilities of our students opens up to culturally responsive teaching pedagogy.

Shernett Martin (00:27:03):

The issue, most cases is not what are we doing for our own benefit as educators, but what are we doing for the benefit of our students? We have this unique power as educators to impact the lives of our learners, impact the lives of our students, ensuring that we are being not just inclusive and being positive, but that what we are teaching them and what we're showing them lasts far beyond their classroom time. That is impactful, not just for those that look like me as a Black woman, but for everybody. We have this unique power to really change the way we are doing things and I've heard this term a lot through the news media, the great reset kind of eerie, quite frankly, when you think of what that could possibly mean in this pandemic and lockdown. But in terms of education, the great reset, it could really be a time for us to really include and activate a different type of learning when it comes to our racialized students. What we've been doing in the past clearly has not been working. It has not supported critical thinking. We have not really helped Black students to leverage their cultural capital. We have not looked at students more than just these blank slates that come into our classrooms. We've seen them as just this homogenous group without having anything to share and their diverse experiences over time. We've basically looked at racialized students as having nothing really to contribute.

Shernett Martin (00:28:38):

I think it is our job to ensure that mainstream and typical education addresses the realities of today's students, not just the White middle class English speaking families, but really try to look at education as a transformative and promote equity, promote students' sense of identity to support their critical thinking and look at their prior knowledge to contribute. I've seen so many educators who are just doing the same old Western White supremacists sort of way of teaching and not looking at sort of the worldview or not even looking at an experimental way or transformative way to teach culturally responsive teaching. I'm a proponent of really teaching outside of the box, a proponent of not just doing what everybody else is doing in the classroom, but listening to your students, reforming, changing the way that we do things including diversity, including different histories, looking at the way in which that we are teaching students that they are capable, and really dismantling this sort of notion of what public education has been because we know that it's not working. We have to kind of look at the way in which that we sort of have a demarcation line between what students have been told throughout their education, what they've been told about their outcomes, about what they are capable of doing and achieving. Instead of having them riddled with this belief system that we live in this fair and equitable society and that if you just try hard and work hard and do all your homework and study hard that you're

going to graduate and the world is going to be yours, that's a big lie. It takes much more than just trying hard. We've seen the students that have done all that they can be. They've been there. They tried hard, they'd been present, and yet the outcomes are just not the same for them. Culturally responsive teaching, and just understanding that the importance of seeing our students for who they are, their capabilities, understand the underlying systems that are present, that are making our racialized students feel inadequate, feel that they cannot achieve the systems that are there that have been oppressing them for all of these years. We have got to have the discussion of resetting that and ensuring that we are creating the circumstances and the outcomes for them, so that we're not going to be on a repeat cycle for the next, how many decades.

Vidya Shah (00:31:14):

Thank you so much Shernett, thank you for that. Nora, I know that you had some thoughts on this question as well.

Nora Hindy (00:31:21):

Yes, I'll be answering this in terms of, like Melissa said earlier, leaders are, it's not by title, but I do hold a title that has positional power. I was trained in Ontario to be a vice principal and that training involved a lot of talk around this idea of a moral imperative as well as learning together alongside educators in the school that I'm leading. Now of course, being a lifelong learner and having a moral purpose is important, I'm not saying that it's not however, all of this training that most administrators go through is devoid of the acknowledgement of the racial oppression and violence that the educational system has inflicted on first and foremost, Indigenous students and subsequently Black and racialized students. With my own lived experience, being a Muslim woman who myself has experienced racial oppression as a student and later as an educator in the Ontario educational system, I inherently understood the need for culturally responsive and anti-racist education. As a result, when I became a vice principal, I heavily relied on my lived experience along with my academic research to become a culturally responsive and anti-racist leader and not really from the traditional training, principal training that I did go through. So, how does it look like in my everyday practice? I understand that I do have positional power in my role, as a result, I use it to hold teachers accountable and the most effective way that I found to hold teachers accountable is by empowering parents to advocate for their children. The traditional practice of professional development and staff meetings, in my opinion, is not very effective. We can PD ourselves to death, but it really doesn't. Actually, what I feel that it does is serve to almost convince teachers to not be racist and we'd really need to move past this convincing. I'm not saying that I don't hold PD sessions and staff meetings, of course I do, and I do ensure that they're always focused on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and anti-racist, and anti-oppressive education and explaining the difference between the two to educators. But I do know that holding educators accountable in their day-to-day practice is essential. What I do is a lot of disruption, questioning the status quo the last few years. To give you concrete examples would be using my positional power to make real changes within special education and ESL programming and like I said earlier bringing the parents into that is very important.

Nora Hindy (00:34:14):

I think we were talking about this, either you Vidya or Melissa, were talking about how the concept of CRRP has just been watered down with something with some people, and we're constantly trying to bring that back. You'll see now, currently in education, the concept of disrupting and special education has now almost moved to that where it has been co-opted and there's a lot of lingo around it. There's a lot of talk about disrupting special education, but in order to make it actionable and really effective in terms of getting rid of the White supremacy and oppression that happens towards students does take

real action. For those meetings, as you know, I know every board is different, but for the most part, anything to do with special education has formalized meetings and informal meetings. What I was able to do in my school this year, due to actually technology, everything going online is that we've invited parents into all these meetings. That has had a profound effect because if you want to be racist, it's a lot harder to be racist when the parent is sitting right there and when there's someone in there who can understand and let the parent know what is going on. Again, that's the role of empowering parents to be advocates for their children as opposed to me, myself being the advocate for parents. I really think we need to move away from that and move into empowering the Black, Indigenous, racialized parents for them to ensure that the education that they're getting is free of oppression. In terms of ESL, Melissa did mention that it's a place where Islamophobia thrives. Interestingly, this is actually an example of where a lot of teachers and White teachers or teachers who uphold White supremacy, think that this is a place of culturally responsive pedagogy. It kind of is if you're going to use it in the watered down term that it now sometimes seems to take, where we're bringing in books from the First language, we're honouring parents, we're having events where we're celebrating cultures, but it actually is not anti-racist in the way that it operates. Parents are not given agency, a lot of decisions happen without their knowledge. This is not just a board issue, this is a ministry issue where parent voice within ESL is it's pretty much non-existent. I started to question it and we've completely revamped the ESL program in our school, and intend to revamp it a lot of, unearthing what's happening this year. There's a lot of navigating that I have to do and having a culturally responsive lens is crucial.

Nora Hindy (00:37:10):

I'll give one more example before I pass it onto Vidya. There was a situation at my school where there was Muslim boys who were bullying a non-binary student. And of course, it goes without saying that the first thing I did as a leader would be to ensure that the non-binary student is safe. The students were given severe consequences for the fact that it was hateful, but what was important is what I navigated after is what I do want to talk about. What I was worried about was that Islamophobia would rear its head because a part of Islamophobia is thinking that the religion, Islam, is inherently homophobic, right? If I was someone who did not have this culturally responsive lens, who did not understand deeply what it is to be responsive to culture and understand, and of course, culture is very vague. Like in this example, it's faith responsiveness, right? Understanding people's faiths and cultures and another person would not have been able to navigate the situation without causing harm to a lot of people. And what I did ensure was that I ensured that the White educators were very clear that this is not a situation that is in line with the religion and that what the students were claiming has nothing to do with the religion. And that if they start to kind of think around along those lines, that Islamophobia would be fed and that these students would be harmed from that. It was a very tricky situation, but again, having that lens is very important to ensure that everyone in the situation was not oppressed.

Vidya Shah (00:39:00):

Nora, thank you so much for sharing that and for the nuances in distinguishing between the watered down version of culturally relevant and anti-racist approaches that are actually at the heart of culturally relevant teaching. In the example of the ESL classroom and the nuances, and the second example around the non-binary student and the Muslim students, and how that can play out in so many different ways. Thank you so much. Ramon, did you want to share some thoughts on this question?

Ramon San Vicente (00:39:28):

Thanks Vidya. You know what? I spent a lot of time thinking about this because I was like, what does that actually look like on a day-to-day basis? What are the things that we do to be leaders in education for

equity and social justice and do we even frame it as that for ourselves? When we wake up in the morning, when we think about who we are, one of the things that I was thinking about is how I think we all start with this assumption that oppression automatically reproduces itself without interruption. And that's something that I know Dr. Khalifa talks about in his book, Culturally Responsive [School] Leadership. We basically have to start with a choice, once we acknowledge that oppression exists in every space that we operate, are we going to uphold the current system and our actions and our thoughts and our words or are we going to continually fight to disrupt it so that education is a political act. It's a spiritual commitment, it's mind, body, spirit, it's everything that we are. Shernett kind of talked about this in the beginning. When we think about sort of the challenges in having culturally responsive pedagogy, even take hold in our school board, in the Toronto District School Board or across the province or across the country or North America, part of the challenge is that people learn the language and they learn what to say, but they don't, they haven't internalized or lived it in many ways and thought about how this impacts everything that you do. KRS-One has this quote about rap is what you do and hip hop is what you live. I think the essence of that is when you think about how you operate to be a leader for equity and social justice, it's every moment of every day.

Ramon San Vicente (00:41:05):

There's a podcast that I listen to sometimes called, Better Leaders, Better Schools and what they do on there is they ask you, can you give us a day in the life? What does that look like for you? I took my inspiration from there. Because some of our other colleagues have sort of, your names are very important pieces. For me it starts from the evening, it's before you go to sleep, it's visioning what the next day needs to look like? What are the things that you're seeing in your context that need disrupting and what's your challenge for the next day going to be? That starts from the evening, I think, visioning that and then in the morning for me, it's early rising because I think doing this work can be heavy, the assault on our bodies, on our minds, on our spirits. When you know that you're walking into a space that is not meant for you to succeed and not designed based on your ways of knowing and understanding and not in the best interest of so many of the young people in the families that we serve. It's like you've got to prepare yourself for war on a daily basis. For me, I got an affirmation, I don't know if other leaders on the podcast or those of our listeners do affirmations. One of my affirmations in the morning is I am a motivational, instructional leader and team builder who will work collaboratively to improve the educational life outcomes of underserved students. I will expect and only accept greatness. I have to remind myself of that on a daily basis. I get up in the morning, I do my emails early in the morning and the reason I do all my emails early in the morning is because during the day it's all about building relationships. It's all about making connections with young people, making connections with staff too. We haven't talked so much about how do you move staff when you're a leader for equity and social justice. We all work in predominantly, where many of us let's say, work in predominantly White spaces that just uphold in so many ways the dominant culture. How do you navigate that from your identity and your space, how do you navigate that tension on a daily basis? I think we have to be present for it all. Some of the technical pieces or the administrative tasks, we got to put those to the side and be present in the moment. So we can continue to build our lens, to name, to acknowledge, to see the harm, the violence that's happening around us, and then be intentional and strategic about how we're going to disrupt it.

Ramon San Vicente (00:44:13):

I set aside time every day to sit with my leadership team, my two vice principals and we strategize, we look at data, we think about how we frame our School Improvement Plan, so that first of all, the School Improvement Plan is in essence anti-oppressive and that everything else flows from there, how we use

our budget, how we decide what professional learning is going to look like, how we design the timetable, how we position certain staff into certain roles in the school, it's all strategic. The classroom walks, how we make sure that we're in the spaces every day, noticing, naming, disrupting as some of our other participants on the podcast have already talked about. One of the things that I just mentioned around community is we spend a lot of time talking about how we want to work with, learn from, advocate with alongside community, aside from our newsletter, we think about, okay, how are we going to position that we make phone calls, community phone calls, large call-outs. We do video messages all positioned students in those video messages, all thinking about how our work is with and alongside and in partnership with the communities that we work with. I think it comes even when you finish your day, I think when you lead from a lens for equity and justice, that it influences your conversations at the dinner table, it's what you choose to read in the evening, what you're watching on TV. And not only what you're watching and reading, but how you're watching and reading and taking in those texts. It's the food preparation at nighttime to get ready for the next day because you got to take care of yourself. You gotta be well to do heavy lifting and heavy work. For me, it's thinking about how we fight the system on a daily basis. A system that we all know is corrupt and violent and so many other things and how at the same time we build relationships, even with those who are perpetuating the violence because in the spaces that we work in to have the impact that we need to have, I think it's dynamic ways that we have to work in to bring people into the conversation and to be able to have the impact that we need to have and that we want to have. Lastly, Dr. Khalifa talks about this that sometimes we just assume, okay, well, if we talk about race with our colleagues and staff and we mentioned a few identities or whatever, then we're doing the work and that we're prepared to do the work, but it kind of talks about the fact that people need to also, for ourselves, we need to constantly be building our lens of how do we, we might know what culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy is and what anti-racist education is, but how do you become an anti-racist a leader in education? What does that mean? What does that look like on a daily basis? I'm glad, so glad that you brought us to this conversation and asked the question.

Vidya Shah (00:47:53):

Ramon, thank you so much for walking us through a day in the life of and the personal care that is needed in this work and it becomes life. There's no separation between how we live and how we work, and how we move in community. Thank you so much for walking us through what that looks like for you. It's such an important way for us to think about this. One of the things that you spoke about and that all of you have spoken about is this idea of disrupting. I'd really like to pick up on this idea of how does culturally relevant and responsive and anti-racist leadership disrupt normative ideas of schooling and leadership, in what ways exactly are we, what are we trying to disrupt? What does disruption look like? Let's try and name some of those pieces. Karen, why don't we start with you.

Karen Murray (00:48:53):

Thank you so much for that question and that prompt. I think I'm going to enter by circling back to some of the things that was just said by Ramon and some of the other colleagues. I think the first thing I want us to think about is let's disrupt the notion of leader, who is a leader because sometimes we need to start the conversation of leadership from the time you thought you are going to come into this profession that has impact on the lives of children's and their families. I think why that is important is that if we have to wait until you get into positional leadership, you've missed all the things that needs to happen to make you be that leader that does the things that Ramon described and be this social justice, equity, culturally responsive, relevant and anti-racist leader, right? You can't start it from that positional power. Here's some things I want us to think about, right? One - when we engage in leadership, doesn't matter where we enter, many people enter into this colourblind approach to it. I don't see colour so we

don't talk race. As leaders, when you think about leadership development courses or one year in teacher's college and you're going into practicum spaces or as I'm engaging in professional learning as an educator, we use White theorists. We positioned the learning of how to be a leader from the space of whiteness. How do we expect people to have the courage to engage in this work, to centre students, to put racialized students at the forefront, to put Black and Indigenous students in your line of who's most impacted needs to be part of the conversation. How do we even do that? When everything we read about brings it into this place that the identities of leadership that comes from racialized bodies aren't even included in the theoretical conversations of who is a leader and what you must do in classrooms. So there's one, the second - representation matters. And we know that, right? So what does anti-racist education leadership and culturally relevant and responsive does it reminds us about representation. It reminds us that those who are most impacted by the educational system that we're working in right now needs to be centered within that work, that we need to find spaces. As you know, it was just described, this is heavy lifting. This is hard work. Sometimes you go home with trauma when you're talking race and racism and trying to convince people that this is what they're supposed to do for the betterment of children. For me, we need to be able to name - representation matters. A leader who represents the students who are most impacted, absolutely needs to be part of the conversation, but we need to create spaces for self care for them as well because it's heavy lifting.

Karen Murray (00:52:53):

One of the things I want to always remind us is that teachers of colour don't really need the conversation about racism and racial discrimination because they're living it. What we need to do for them to build them up as they continue in their leadership role, is to find those affinity spaces, to encourage the affirmation that Ramon is talking about, to push them into self care because that's what it disrupts, it disrupts that you have to live in a space where you can't see yourself as part of the solution. And I think I'll do one more. One of the things this does is it reminds us that we have to have some commitments and the commitments are these: if I'm going to be a leader, if I'm going to embed culturally relevant and responses as my basis of instruction, if I'm going to push forward to be an anti-racist leader, I need to commit to building my critical consciousness. I have to commit to really understanding history so I can understand current day context. If I don't know why something is happening right now and I don't know the historical relevance to it, how can I make change? You can't make change for things you don't know. This goes beyond the book club, this goes into now I've learned it, so what? Now I've learned this, now what? What do I know? What do I need to know? And here's the most important, what is my knowledge sources? Where did I acquire this knowledge from? The other commitment - you need to understand yourself. You have to understand your position. Where does your beliefs come from? Because honestly, when we think about this work, what brings us to this place of what does it disrupt? It disrupts the notion that everyone has to be the same. That's what it disrupts. Leaders come in, all forms, all sizes and you know what? Those of us who are deep into Critical Race Theory belongs just as much as those who don't even see race because sometimes we have to take their spaces. Many times we have to take that space. And then the last one, what are my actions and how am I implicated? One of the things by engaging in this work, recognizing the importance of it is for us to be able to name that racism exists. It exists in our classrooms. It exists every time I never do a positive racial identity development book for a kid. It exists when I don't affirm families. It exists when I don't even know the communities in which I serve. It exists. To be that leader, I need to know that. I need to notice it. I need to name it. I need to interrupt it and I need to engage.

Vidya Shah (00:56:23):

Thank you so much, Karen for reminding us about the importance of naming and expecting racism in every single space. Instead, looking for the ways in which we are, where is it? What does it look like? What are the ways in which it all intersects, I'd love to hear as well from you, Alice, what are your thoughts on this question in terms of what exactly are we trying to disrupt?

Alice Te (00:56:50):

Thank you Vidya. There's little that I feel I can say at this point because so much has been said. I think what I want to do is approach the whole concept of leadership. I actually find it very problematic, the concept of leadership and the idea of the noun leader, and here's why. The myth that we have all grown up in and lived with historically, and currently is the myth of the natural leader. This is a White, male, straight, middle to upper class body. That is the leader. Honestly, the whole connotation of leader as a noun, I've always rejected. Never seen myself as a leader, never thought of leading as an act that I would intentionally do. Here's what's interesting. There are more provocative verbs for me, not so much as lead and many of you have spoken to this. It is about engaging. It is about advocating. It is about partnering, disrupting, challenging, questioning, reflecting. These are much more interesting verbs and if you want to make them into nouns, the engaged, the engager, the advocator, et cetera. Here's my second thought. The problem with the word leader is it invokes hierarchy, the very nature of the term invokes hierarchy. If we were to be true to this whole idea of critical anti-racism or culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, it is to actually challenge hierarchy, to look at our students and the communities we work with and the educators in our systems as peers and partners. I reject leadership as a term, as an idea because of its hierarchy. Until somebody proves to me that this is not the way our system works, it is a challenge for me. Here's the third point - I have chosen to work within a system. I am complicit. I need to focus on that. Not only that, but as a beginning, I cannot lord it over somebody how much more I know, how much better I am, how much of a truer anti-racist, anti-oppression activist I am. As soon as I position myself as someone better, I have lost all credibility. I know I'm coming at this quite strongly, I really believe this. Here's the problem. If I don't make myself accountable and look at my own complicity, how am I critically challenging the system? I really believe this position. When I talk about our need to work with, not on, not over at every stage of the game, it is really important. Whether we're talking about students engaging, whether it's talking about communities and parents engaging, whether we're talking about the so-called racist educators, we're engaging. As soon as we put hierarchy on this conversation, we have lost most of the population. I've chosen to work within a system. I understand that people position differently. So, yes, absolutely, we have people who want to dismantle based on aggression. We want people, we have people who want to dismantle based on more force and "sage on stage". That is just not the position I've come to. Karen talked about this whole idea of awareness and knowledge, awareness and knowledge. Beautiful, but it'll only get us so far. As she said, it's important for us to know history. It's important for us to know accountability and self-reflection, but then what are we going to do with that the action piece and the action piece, the piece I want to stress is I can't do this by myself. The action piece, I will not get very far. If I am determined to do this action piece by myself, I will fall flat because it takes capacity. It takes collaboration. I need to win people over by engaging, by critically conversing, by bringing people into the discussion and the action.

Vidya Shah (01:02:02):

Thank you so much. Thank you so much for sharing those points and for naming some of the tensions and challenges in this work as well. Shernett, did you have thoughts on this question?

Shernett Martin (01:02:13):

Thanks Vidya, yes, absolutely. I hope if there's time to share a little anecdote at the end as well. I'm not even sure what normative schooling is anymore. I'm going to speak from the perspective of leadership in the community, just in terms of what I've seen community leaders experience sort of in this role. Culturally responsive and anti-racist leadership is about reform. It's about justice from our lens, it's about disrupting systems that have gone unchecked. Do most people even understand and believe that racism is violence? Do they even attribute those two words together? Most people probably do not. Do they understand that it is a mental prison, Bob Marley, in a song, Redemption Song, sings about freeing yourself of mental slavery. If you're freeing yourself of something means that you've been in captivity, you've been in captivity. It's liberating to feel like you're getting out of something that's kept you in captive for so long. Our lives and our bodies have been told for centuries that we are chattel. We were simply a transactional being that was meant for the economic privilege of White supremacy, capitalism and economic domination. Imagine being told that for centuries. When educators and leaders don't think that disrupting anti-racism that we have to be intentional about it, you're doing a disservice to this movement because you must be intentional about what cultural relevancy is and the importance of it. So much has been taken away from racialized and Indigenous students and I'm not in the business about creating an equal playing field. You know, of like looking at this work as we have to create these equitable sort of opportunities for BIPOC students. To me, that's like creating an equal playing field White supremacy. This cannot be about where do we go from here? We need to fix the pain, the trauma, the violence, the horrors of racism and oppression. We need to repair that pain and then we can talk about where do we go from here?

Shernett Martin (01:04:39):

Transformation must be tethered to intention. Change shouldn't have to ask for permission, right? Or give you notice when something is as deficient as a system that has created unequal outcomes for Black students and relegated BIPOC students to the margins. We shouldn't have to ask it to change. We cannot become an accomplice for this broken system that has violated every basic tenant of human rights. When we are trying to change something for the better, whatever that is, it's more than likely that it is tethered to what you intend to see on the other side, right? We changed things about ourselves, our families, where we live, what we're going to do with our careers, our movements, our friends, whatever it is because on the other side you're looking to create something better for yourself, right? I became a vegan 3 years ago to transform my health and to create a different type of energy throughout my being. I was intentional about it. There was intentionality about my health and my choices. When we talk about cultural responsiveness, it must be intentional. The Black community is tethered to this generational trauma that is deep pain. When I talk about community, I'm talking about like people within our generation. I mean, just think about the students from grade 4 that start kindergarten up until high school and post secondary school. Think about that trauma that they're tethered to and what do they have? What skills do they have to work through that? If as an adult, I can't even work through it. It is deep seated pain. So anti-racist work is a witness statement. It is the retelling of our trauma on a witness stand and hoping that the judge deems your experiences as a horrific crime that needs a harsh and steady judgment against it. The White collective needs to know that the daily lives of BIPOC students looks so much different than their White student counterpart. The evil of racism is that it starts as a social thought, but it is maintained by social practice. Sometimes we need to see things in reverse. We need to see things in reverse. Why do we think this way? Why was that? Why did that teacher do this thing with the administrator, what is the reverse? Where did it stem from? Where did it originate from? Racism will prevail if we don't prevail over it. It's a statement that leaders, teachers, administrators have to contend with. My life has been personally about prevailing over things that get in the way of justice. In every space that I've occupied, whether it's been as a student in school or as an educator or even as a

community leader, I have had to prevail over it. Is that something that I've wanted or wished upon my life? Absolutely not. I feel so many times that August Alsina said it best in his documentary. August Alsina, who's a rapper for those who don't know his work, said that in his life, he's always felt like he has to get ready for impact. That it's almost like sitting in a chair that's going to be parachuted off into orbit and you're getting ready for impact because our identity is built around so much trauma that it's like, what's next, right? You're just looking for the what's next. You can't even just be within your skin and feel comfortable and happy and bold in your choices, your identity, because you know something's going to come at you.

Shernett Martin (01:08:17):

My quick anecdote Vidya was, I think I shared the story with you, when I was in university in teacher's college and I remember the work that I was doing in terms of culturally responsive teaching, questioning my professor. I remember and I don't know if it was because I was just very outspoken about my work and very outspoken about my abilities. One of my professors said to me that she didn't think teaching was for me and that I should do something parallel to teaching, like working in a children's bookstore. For a young woman, that again has gone through so many tragic things and trauma throughout your life and you get to a point where you're now about to catapult into your career, for someone to look at you and tell you you're not going to be filling up this space and this is better for you. If you always feel like you have to be ready to confront it, you've got to be ready to condemn it aund you have to be ready to always defend who you are as a person of colour, Black person, BIPOC person. The importance of culturally responsive teaching could not be more important than what we're experiencing in this moment because we have the opportunity to prevail over this racism, to prevail over the prejudice, to prevail over a system that's just been horrific to our students. We have the opportunity. Now the question is, are we ready to do it?

Vidya Shah (01:09:40):

Thank you Shernett, thank you for that. I'm just thinking of your story and the number of stories that fall in line with that and the tremendous pain that you speak about that is at the heart of experiences of racism systemically. Thank you so much for sharing that. Many of you have been talking about the challenges that we face as leaders that lead for anti-racism, some it's personal challenges and it's thinking through different experiences of racism, the racisms and the complexities there and how we work through that, how we work through the fact that even within the conversation of anti-racism, there's so many power differentials there that we have to think about as well. This idea of the challenges that you face as a leader, I'd love to hear from folks as to, what does it mean to lead in this way and the challenges that you face. Nora, did you want to go first?

Nora Hindy (01:10:45):

Thank you, Vidya. I've been really thinking a lot about what Shernett has just talked about in terms of just waiting for that impact to happen all the time. I actually wrote a quote that really spoke to me. It's from the book, Colorizing Restorative Justice by Barbara Sherrod. She says, "As a Black woman I'm cautious about interacting with non-people of colour in this work. I have to protect not only my physical self, but also my intellectual property. Daily, I ask how can I honour this work, bring its true intention forward and keep it alive without having to sacrifice myself or struggle based on the nonprofit culture or society that expects me to work for little to nothing". And, really that encapsulated my experience as an educator, as a leader, as a vice principal and the interior school board system. Everyone is talking about this work is so important, it needs to be done, we need to move forward. But unfortunately, this work is done by people who share the identities of those who are oppressed within the system. It's this vicious

cycle where it really falls on our shoulders and it has a real impact on our mental health, on our physical health. Yet, we're the ones that have to keep going and keep doing this work. Like I said, I am talking from the point of view and I know everyone has been talking a lot about, what is leadership, but I do have to acknowledge that my role, due to the colonial system that we're in, does hold positional power. I talked earlier about really making changes, pushing back, pushing people forward, talking about the legal imperative, as opposed to the moral imperative. We're not, I'm not here to convince I'm not here to win people over, I'm really here to tell people that this is their job, that this is what they need to be doing, that human rights trumps even the curriculum. So, don't come to me and tell me that, you don't have time for this because you're doing the curriculum. This is the Charter of Rights, this is a human rights issue.

Nora Hindy (01:13:07):

Putting that aside, doing all of this work, we don't really talk about how non-White leaders, the violence that we face. I think Ramon did talk about this and Shernett as well, that it is quite violent. I've had conversations with people even on this panel about can our bodies handle doing this work and for how long. To speak of actual specific examples, I've interestingly, like I said, I've mentioned many times I've been vice principal in both times, and I've had male, White men as principals and they've both been extremely supportive. What I did find interestingly is that when I would push things, they would give me the platform to push this work, talk about and demand culturally responsive pedagogy and the anti-racist practices that the White staff would tattletale on me to the principal and try to kind of turn in both schools that I was at, trying to turn them against me and have me stop the atrocities that I'm putting on them. The other thing that I've noticed recently, which is very powerful, very powerful way that whiteness operates is silence, is the White silence. Like I said, both times having supportive principals and having this common message that this work is non-negotiable, that we need to move forward with this work. I found that a lot of the White staff just pull back and go silent. So, they're going to listen in on all the work that's being done, staff meetings, nodding and well now, it's really turning off cameras and just silence. There was a situation where a staff member, a racialized staff member, called out a White staff member over e-mail and after that, we had a group that was doing a lot of work in terms of creating anti-oppressive and anti-racist lessons that would go straight to the students. A few White teachers pulled out of that and said, we don't want to speak on behalf of Black, Indigenous and people of colour, we want to step back. I had to call them in and say, there's a difference between taking up space and a difference between actually not doing any work. This is White silence and inaction is a very powerful way that whiteness operates. I can talk about this for very long, this can turn into a therapy session, which nobody wants, but I do feel that really, it is important that we do talk about it within, and we do do therapy and take care of our bodies and our minds because it is very violent. There's only so much that we can handle before it actually starts to impact us. The last part is the performative piece, it is very, very painful and very hurtful. Also, like I said, in the quote that I first mentioned where Barbara Sherrod talks about not just protecting her body, but also protecting her intellectual property. That's something that, again, that I've seen being done, which is because now at least in our board, there's a lot of questions about this. We've had a ministry review and so, the performative pieces are very obvious and people stealing and taking credit for other people, for mainly White people taking credit for the work of Black, Indigenous and people of colour, it just keeps growing and growing. That's just a really a small snippet of the challenges that we face when I saw this question, I was like, oh, okay. I don't know how to answer that in a short amount of time, but thank you, that's really from my perspective.

Vidya Shah (01:16:46):

Nora, thank you so much for that. This was such an important conversation around the challenges that leaders face in leading from an anti-racist culturally responsive and relevant stance. So thank you so much for naming that. Ramon, did you have thoughts on this? What challenges do leaders face in leading from this perspective?

Ramon San Vicente (01:17:08):

Yeah. One of the things that I'm thinking about is the question really depends or part of one's answer might depend on their identity, you know, or not might, it would depend on your identity and how you're navigating White spaces from our different identities and how they intersect. One of the things that I think might be common for many is the inability to turn off. So, one of the things that I struggle with it, I think about Vidya, I've known you for a while, Karen, I've known you for awhile. This idea that because we feel in many ways the urgency of the work, and we think about that for many people like this is not a joke. This is life or death and many of us have experienced like legit, like people, young people dying because systems continue to enact violence on their families, their communities, their possibilities, their futures, right? So, this inability to turn off seeps into so many things like it's every evening, like we're doing podcasts, thank you Vidya, for bringing us together for this one. And I'm not, in no way am I saying, but this is the level to which we have to do this work because the urgency is there. We're trying to find ways to stop Bill-197 on weekends and summers and in the evenings, we're petitioning against streaming and we're on Twitter. Those of you on Twitter trying to change the conversations and bring new ideas. I find one of the things is I have trouble, I have trouble turning off. Even when Alice is talking about, her challenge to the concept of leadership, my brain is moving a mile a minute, thank you, Alice, for continuing to push me and challenge me in different, us in different ways. It's real, how do we disrupt the hierarchies even through the language that we're using? At the same time, how do we acknowledge that no matter what we choose to identify with or how we choose to frame ourselves, we are still taken up in society in certain ways. Even if I don't use the language of leader to identify myself and I think it was Shernett talked about positional power. That's one thing I became very conscious of when I was an administrator and I was trying to build in certain ways, even with certain students or staff. I noticed that there was automatically the space had changed a bit just because of my position. I had to come at it from different angles. The work was different in terms of the approach. I don't know if other people experienced that, but it's because of the way that these positions have played out historically. Right? So people have lived in real trauma from the ways they've been treated by people in these positions of power. There's unlearning and it has to happen, I think, for us all. I just think we have to continue to find the joy and the work that we're doing, we have to continue to feed our soul. Audre Lorde has a quote that, thank you, Karen and Dr. Nicole Westbridge for sharing this at a session of professional learning that I recently attended, trying to up my game and figure out how to do this work properly. They shared a quote from Audre Lorde, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare". I'm just gonna leave it on that note, find your allies, continue to do the work, find your joy.

Vidya Shah (01:21:07):

Thank you, thank you for that. There is tremendous joy in this work. Thank you for that. Alice, I think you have some thoughts on this question as well.

Alice Te (01:21:20):

I'm struggling to find the joy right now, but okay. So, Ramon, there's a reason why I seek you out often and you kind of put a nail on it. Unlearning leadership, right? Here's the thing and I see this in myself as

well. When we think about these critical, progressive, anti-oppression stances and frameworks, whether it's anti-racism, critical theory, intersectional feminism, whatever, sometimes because we haven't unlearned our ways we end up falling into the very pedagogies and approaches of engaging and disengaging people. Even though the framework we're attempting is one of liberatory transformation. I'm not sure if I'm making myself clear, you know, Ramon, when you said you enter a room and you feel people's bodies shift because you're seen as a leader and the natural leader, whether at this point you're a Black body though, the position in itself is going to set people up, right? That is an unlearning we have to do because if we don't unlearn it, there's a natural tendency to play the hierarchy out. And here's what's interesting about today's space, if I may indulge. What's interesting is that I think all of us come to this work seeing ourselves as anti-racist, critical pedagogists, anti impressionists and yet, there is no one size fits all. We are not a monolith, right? We all come at this work in interesting and provocative and slightly slanted, if I can say approaches, strategies and ways. A lot of this comes from our lived experience, the bodies that we live in, but also who we've read, who we've engaged with and who we've surrounded ourselves with in terms of our own growth, right? It is a very interesting thing and I think there is, again, an assumption amongst progressives that we share values and we share styles, and we might not.

Alice Te (01:23:50):

This whole idea of understanding racism in order to be critical anti-racists, here's the thing. More recently, I've started to read and learn about my own history, the history of Asians, not as a monolith, but across the system, right? If I'm learning me, having been doing all this work for so long thinking that I know my own positionality as an Asian woman and my brain has blown up recently. What I'm trying to say is racism is experienced in many different ways and we have a lot to learn about so many things. I think many of you said this what's important is to position it in the scheme of dismantling White, male, heteronormative, supremacy and colonialism. But, if we're going to talk about learning, there's so much to learn within the concept and the branding of racism that groups experience in Canada. I don't think we're short of lack of learning that can happen. I don't like this word, but I'm going to use it. There needs to be a humility in this work. I don't like the word humility, but I think you know where I'm coming from. There needs to be a genuine curiosity and at the same time, yes, urgency, right. I read a really interesting Instagram quote recently, "Only the privilege can call something urgent," right? Because how many people in marginalized spaces have been saying, this is urgent. Nobody listens. Until now, who is defining, what's urgent. All this to say, I've got a lot of work to do as well.

Vidya Shah (01:26:05):

I so appreciate that, Alice, thank you so much for sharing those thoughts and the complexities within this work. This is uneasy work, it's difficult work. It is work that continues to require that we are thinking about the ways in which whiteness is operating in and through us at all times and that's a never ending journey. So thank you so much for naming that. Melissa, did you want to add to this?

Melissa Wilson (01:26:33):

Yeah, so some of the challenges that I experience or have just experienced over many different roles that I've had is one of my frustrations is that education systems authorizing us to do work around anti-racism and settler colonial work. For example, now it's trending, right? So many of us who are on the panel have experienced you disciplinary action, stigma in different education spaces for saying the words and doing the work that is now trending. And so overnight, it was suddenly decided, oh, now this is what we're doing. Well, thank you, that's really nice of you to decide that your mind has changed. Now, you're going to authorize the work. Wow. The gratitude is in abundance here. And then, they start defining what are

the parameters to which we can speak about this. Now you can talk about settler colonialism in Canada, right? With keeping White fragility in mind, so don't offend anyone. You can talk about White fragility, you can talk about anti-Black racism, but you're not allowed to talk about Palestine, that's off the table. So, don't even bring it into the room, right? We're only talking about settler colonialism, Turtle Island, don't look beyond, right. And that's bizarre and weird and troubling and just bizarre in every single way. The ways that school boards and universities and colleges authorize our work as well is problematic, but also the ways that they co-opt our discourse as anti-racists, even leaders. The branding now of disrupting racism, right? Ooh, it's trending, it's cool. I'm waiting for disrupting anti-racism t-shirts to come out.

Melissa Wilson (01:28:18):

Similar to what Alice was just saying around defining what's urgent. So they now are deciding that disrupting is the way to go. It's like, wow, okay. I'm pretty sure Black feminists have been talking about this at kitchen tables since the 1960s, but whatever, sure. I'm glad that you now feel that disrupting is really important. And then also, that this language is coming out of the mouths of people who have explicitly been racist. So many of us are now having to sit through professional development workshops and collaborating with people who we know are racist, right? You've now read some chapter of some book, probably just a paragraph or two, but we'll even give you a chapter, so you've probably read a paragraph or 2 or a chapter, and now you think you know the language. Now I have to sit and listen to you for 2 hours, who I've seen you be racist and all these different spaces, but now suddenly you're an anti-racist person you're going to teach me. This is awesome, this is just getting better and better, this is how my day operates. Then finally, one of the last things, and I believe Ramon was speaking about this when referring to the immense hours we put in, but just in general that the length of time that it takes to understand a system. The theory is the laws, the curriculum, how a board operates, how a university operates. This is why people don't do the work because you have to do back flips and be an Olympian to understand how the system is operating and that is something that is really a struggle that I see, that I experience, especially the one around authorizing the work that is just some mind games. Once upon a time we were all getting tied to the whipping pole for doing this work and now it's trending and we're just waiting for the door to close. It's just someone else is going to come in and it's not going to be trending anymore. It's just this like cycle of liberalism, it's vomit, it's not attractive at all and it's really problematic. This is why we just need to teach the next generation to just change, burn down everything and start again. That's my 2 cents.

Vidya Shah (01:30:27):

Thank you, Melissa. Thank you for sharing those. Yeah, that pattern that you name. All too familiar and all too painful. Thank you so much for sharing that. As we think about the challenges in this work, we're also thinking about the possibilities in this work and Ramon named joy that comes from this work and through this work. I'm wondering what other sort of examples of possibilities you think may come from this kind of work and what do you hope that leaders take away from this conversation? Shernett, would you like to start first?

Shernett Martin (01:31:06):

It's a great question. I don't even feel I can really speak to the question and as a person that I am because I think that leaders have it within them. So I'm not going to kind of share characteristics or a couple words that I think will be helpful, not because I don't think that would work. I just feel like I don't want anyone, listening to think that it has to be done this way or this is a blueprint cause it really is not. Everybody has it within them to do something. What I'd like to perhaps do is kind of twist the question a bit in that what will happen if we don't? What do we risk losing if we don't? I think the possibility that

can emerge from all of this is that our students are treated humanely. That could actually happen if we are responsive to anti-racist leadership, the possibilities that exist are insurmountable. There's this saying that I heard, I wish I could remember who said it because I love it. There's a saying, "Eat the fish, but spit out the bones". For my vegan friends out there, think of it like, "Eat the soursop, but don't eat the seeds", cause those seeds are poisonous, never eats soursop seeds. The saying, to me, is if you eat the fish without spitting out the bones, it will suffocate you. As a Jamaican, growing up in the country with my grandmother, that was one of the things that we're taught from an early age, when you're eating the snapper fish, take out the bones it will choke you. De-bone the fish. It'll suffocate you, it will get stuck in your windpipe, it will kill you. The bones are prickly, they have sharp edges, they don't feel good in your throat, they hurt, it'll stop the oxygen in your body. If we kind of look at it in the sense that it's not all going to be easy, so you take what you can and you throw out the rest of it, but you got to find purpose in what you're doing. I hope that leaders understand that every student has a purpose. Every student that has been ignored, disadvantaged, marginalized, every student that you have not listened to, that you have treated like they were invisible, that you chose not to select them to, as simple as, I've heard Black students tell me all the time, "Miss, I just stopped putting my hand up in class because I'm never picked. Nobody picks me so I just put my hand down". Every student that is ignored, every student that you chose to just treat as if they were like everyone else, rather than seeing the beauty and the vitality and the uniqueness in them. Every time you chose to reuse that stale, unchecked and incorrect curriculum from God knows when and teach from a White supremacist framework, you have interrupted that purpose. You have interrupted the purpose for which they are here to accomplish. You played a role in that. On a higher, sort of, level of thinking, you have interrupted whatever they would have contributed to humanity and that to me is something that is a huge burden as an educator and a leader that these children come to us with so much potential, and we cut it down. We try to make them invisible. We don't share and put into them all that's been taken out of them. Listen, regardless of the people that you work with, who stand in your way and all of us on the panel, I'm certain have met that person, right? That colleague, that superintendent, even sometimes that friend or family, that is defending the system that we're all fighting so desperately against. Regardless of those people that stand in our way, we must defend what is right because fear debilitates progress. We cannot stand for something as important and vital as our students and their future. and We talk about it, we tweet about it, we share it, but we do nothing about it. If we cannot look at the horrors of what White supremacy has done and continues to do and make up our mind that this is going to be an atrocity, that we are willing to disrupt, that we are just being complicit to this. That's how I see this work. It's literally a demarcation. Are you on the left side, the right side, the pink side, the blue side. It literally is as simple as that, are you going to continue with this system or are you going to disrupt it and understand the reasoning behind the disruption? It cannot continue. This cannot be sustained for another 500 years. We cannot allow it to - what more proof do we need to keep this system, to not question things and to not teach that next generation to be as critical as we are. To wrap up, I think, the possibilities are tremendous and it exists and it starts within us because we all have the power to do something.

Vidya Shah (01:36:54):

Shernett, thank you so much for that. Thank you so much for that and for the power of your words and the power of the emotion in your words. Thank you, thank you for sharing that. Alice, did you have thoughts on this question, possibilities that might emerge and what you'd like leaders to take away?

Alice Te (01:37:12):

I think maybe I want to bring a topic up that we haven't talked too much about and just kind of add to the mix. We spoke earlier about this whole notion of there is no one form of leader, even in a room full

of activists and progressives. Then when we talk about the bodies we're in, this whole conversation of how complex we are as human beings and I don't mean human beings in the most relative, benign sense of all lives. I'm speaking about how bodies are read based on the intersectionalities of race, gender, class et cetera. Even within our own circles, having conversations about race and racism, anti-racism and anti-oppression, even amongst our own colleagues and allies, like, you know what, it's more allies, right? Because people have kind of measured their line in terms of colleagues or opposition, but even amongst people who share values, I think we need to recognize that we are not immune to the very power struggle that we claim we are fighting the system on. That within our spaces of liberatory educators, we fall into the trap of hierarchy, the "tell" meaning being told how to think, being told how to engage, right? I mean, I'm not going to be apologetic about this because I have been accused of being too soft. And absolutely there there's time for aggression and assertiveness in this work, but I know my position in terms of bringing people along. Yes, sometimes it's in a hurry and yes, sometimes we can be more critical and engaging, but we go back to what Melissa said in the get go. She said in her opening that the co-op thing has actually done more harm than good and here's the problem. When we hurry too much on anti-racism, people want to do the what, they don't want to get into the how and the why. And really, it's very dangerous to play into the what as a practitioner, if we haven't actually thought about the how and the why. Because, we don't live the ideology and the framework and the beliefs that come with a progressive framework. It's like years ago, when I was a consultant with the board, teachers would say to me, just tell me the ABCs of anti-racism, Alice. Don't spend time helping me understand. I just want to do the work. Absolutely, action is where we want to land, but if people don't engage in the thinking and the awareness and the building and the self-reflection, the critical self-reflection, the action can be done terribly wrong. We know that.

Vidya Shah (01:40:44):

Thank you so much, Alice. Melissa, did you have some thoughts on this question?

Melissa Wilson (01:40:51):

Yeah, for me, the joy is always about empowering students in very explicit ways. For me, some of the most joyous moments are when working with Black students associations and letting them see that this is actually work that I believe in and also sharing intellectual praxis with them. So I will share with them works of intellectual scholars and Ontario Black scholars here in Ontario, explore concepts of intersectionality with them, Black feminism with them. You can see their faces light up when they realize like, oh, okay, this is who you are. Because some of them are at home reading this literature as well. They're sitting down with bell hooks in the evening, they are the children of civil rights workers, they are the children of people on the line with us and they're always trying to identify in a school, who are those teachers. When they identify that I'm your vice principal and this is what we're going to talk about. I welcome you to banter with me like this and claim the space. That for me is a moment of joy. Likewise, this Friday, I have a meeting with the Sikh students association at the school that I'm at because the teacher running it, the teacher leader said that students were reluctant to report things in the school. I'm meeting with them to share with them about reporting structures and then also how to escalate things if they feel like it's not being taken care of seriously. So the VP to P to superintendent, trustee, if need be, copy your parents into emails, to keep the email threads and also teaching them about the policies that they can even cite in these emails. Like, I hear that you have an equity and inclusion policy, that says students are supposed to be in a safe and caring inclusive environment, all that kind of lingo and preparing them of how to use human rights policies to defend themselves. Right. For me, that is the joy of this work, especially as an administrator, to be able to empower students that they can navigate

the system themselves because that's the type of lesson that they can carry on to post-secondary as well.

Vidya Shah (01:43:06):

Thank you so much for that, Melissa and the importance of centering students in all of these conversations, so important. The final word of the conversation, Karen, thoughts on this question, possibilities and hopes for what leaders might take away from this conversation.

Karen Murray (01:43:25):

Thanks for that. And thanks to all of my colleagues this evening, I think we entered raising so many different tensions. I think as we think through, as we thread through the conversation this evening, there's many possibilities that I've already been raised. I wanted to position this, we know White supremacist is an ideology, and we recognize how it has normalized many structures, which has limited actions for a very, very long time in education. We know this. And when Alice talked about urgency and urgency for whom, we saw that play out in this most recent history. Last May, 9 seconds. Something happened that was captured by video and rest his soul with, and support to his family. We're talking about George Floyd and what happened at that moment. Everyone became woke, woke to issues that has, in many communities, specifically in the Black community, has history on it, generational knowledge around. Everyone wanted to do something, but you're seeing right now, the tide is changing. The urgency is slowing down and what I hope this podcast does is re-spark, re-spark what it could look like, what are those possibilities? Here's what I'm thinking, how do we disrupt normative structures and actions? How do we engage in change? Because we know change is needed. How do we unlearn to relearn? Because we can't make change if we're still sitting in the same spaces of knowledge that we were before. How do we gain that intellectual humility to understand we don't know everything and how do we be vulnerable in the moment? The possibilities we need to think about is this, after we've taught you the language cause, you know we have, how do then, do we make sure that you understand what the responsibility and the implication is? Yes, the danger is that we run off and we do. Well when we don't know what we're doing, we're doing harm. How often do we talk to students, really talk to them? How often do we go to community to extend the learning that is required? How often do we centre the families as the first educators to support us in doing this work? If we really want to position ourself as culturally relevant and responsive leaders or anti-racists leaders, we need to understand that we're preparing students for a world we do not even know. And, how are we providing in their hand every single day the skills, the tools, the strategies required to navigate a world that we know fully that they're going to face acts of discrimination, they're going to be impacted by their race and their intersecting identities. They might face racism.

Karen Murray (01:47:39):

One way the educator doesn't set those conditions in our schools that allow students to be able to work this out and we don't set the conditions that our educators, who we work with know that this is your responsibility. Then we can't ever claim to be these leaders. One of the things we position, we have equity, leadership, competencies in the Toronto District School Board. One of them that sits under the anti-oppressive leadership area is how to hold brave conversations, hard conversations, and maintain relationships. We got to do that because it's not about walking alone. Those of us who are committed as committed those of us, that if this is our life work, this is our life work. How do we have those conversations to make those who don't see the urgency, the life-altering need required for the students in which we serve, we have to centre students. Here's my lasting advice. Identify those colleagues who are committed and work with them because you can't do this alone as we've talked about this evening,

but you also, for many Black educators, require that affinity space to do as Ramon suggested, engaging counter narratives so you can engage in self-care. Expand your thinking about these issues and show how your new learning has provided you with growth back to the vulnerability that I talked about. If you can't be vulnerable, then who could, how do you model a mentor and pay it forward, if you feel that I could only do this work if I know how to do absolutely everything. And, be humbled to know that self-reflection is required and you're going to have to learn and engage and take risks all at the same time. We're going to have to model a learning stance and openness because as you build your critical consciousness, I'm going to say to you, you can't build a critical consciousness of someone else if you can't build your own. You can't definitely build it for students, if you can't see how you have built yours. Then, most important draw from our students, they centre our work, this is why we go to work every single day. This is why you entered this profession in the first place. If we can't be their voice and allow them to have voice and to be leaders in this conversation, then there's no way we could ever be an anti-racist leader. I just wanted to end with our wonderful rep, John Lewis. I love him and rest his soul, but he says never be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble. I think in order to do this work that you've positioned this evening, we need to be okay and getting into good trouble and necessary trouble for the children in which we serve and the communities and the families who depends on us and believes in us, and we serve them too.

Vidya Shah (01:51:36):

Karen, thank you. Thank you for summarizing and closing in such a beautiful way and for drawing upon years of, and multiple spaces of wisdom and experience. Thank you so much. Miss. Melissa, we would love to hear your thoughts on this discussion as somebody that's been listening in and participating. So, closing thoughts that you have before we close the podcast.

Melissa Wilson (01:52:06):

I think I've returned to what my introduction was saying is that these pathways have already been created. I mean, listen to the knowledge and experience that has been shared even by these panelists. So, it's not, we have to always return to, it's not that we don't know how to do this work is that people are refusing to do this work. It's not that we don't know Black educators, it's that education systems are racist and silence them. All of the knowledge is out there, the theory is out there, the practicing educators are out there. They come together whenever they're called upon just like tonight in different spaces, whether it's in people's houses, pre-COVID meeting outside now, whether it's on podcasts and publications on panels, it's all there. What we need to admit is that our education systems are racist and sexist and colonial, heteronormative as well. And that they are refusing to hear us and that's what we actually have to disrupt. I just want to thank the panelists tonight for everything that you've said and all your teachings that you're sharing with others and that is how we will continue to do this work.

Vidya Shah (01:53:13):

Thank you so much, Melissa and as you're saying this, it's really and we're thinking about leaders in formal and informal positions. If you are not a leader that is centering anti-oppression and anti-racism in your everything and how you approach leadership and how you think about it, then education is not the space for you. I just need to say that. You are being asked to teach and lead, we are being asked to teach and lead other people's children, thinking of the work of Lisa Delpit. We simply cannot afford to have people in positions that do not understand, do not continuously work towards, do not continuously seek to think about the ways in which they are complicit in this work. Children deserve the best and the brightest of futures. If we can't do that and we aren't prepared to do that and we don't have the competencies and skills to do that, then we simply need to step aside and make room for people that do.

These are big systemic issues that we need to take seriously and think about what we are fighting for and who we are fighting for. There's always this, anti-racism is so negative and it's so difficult and it's, but really what it's asking for is that every child feels safe in school, that every child belongs in school, that every child can learn, every child can dream, every child can create. That's what, that's what the fight is for. That's what the disrupting and the challenging and the interrupting and the organizing and the back conversations and that's what it's for. It's to create that space. I'd like to take this opportunity to really thank Melissa Wilson for framing our discussion this evening for asking important questions for really helping us again, think through the differences between inclusive spaces and anti-racist spaces in such clear ways with such clear examples that that so many of us can relate to and see ourselves in. I'd like to say, thank you to our panelists for showing us how anti-racist leadership and culturally relevant leadership can be enacted daily in practice. For really sharing of themselves, their wisdom and their experiences and what that looks like in everyday action. To the listeners who are on this journey with us, thank you for being willing to undo and unlearn, un-be, as we think about what it means to lead and live and love in spaces that are safe and loving and caring for all of us. You have been listening to another episode of the UnLeading podcast. Thank you everyone.