

TRUSTEE CONFERENCE REPORT

Please attach to your Professional Development/Conference Expense Reimbursement Form. Thank you.

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Date Submitted: August 12, 2021

Name of Conference: CASSA/CSBA Annual Congress

Sponsoring Organization: Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) and Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA)

Theme (If any): Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being

Conference Dates: July 7-9, 2021

Location: Virtual

Workshops/Seminars/Presentations/Keynote Speeches Attended:

CASSA/CSBA Conference - July 7, 2021

Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being

Keynote Speaker - Kike Ojo-Thompson, KOJO Institute

Racism in Canadian School Districts Part 1: The True North Strong and Free

There is no debate – there is racism in the Canadian school system.

- Such as racist attitudes and practices of teachers and admin – deficit thinking, low expectations for particular groups - streaming of black students to applied
- Eurocentric curriculum – devaluing Indigenous perspectives
- Culturally biased assessment practices and approaches to discipline – powerful unexamined ideas about “minorities”
- Hidden curriculum and construction of otherness – perceived neutrality of education. Non-reference is as problematic as a negative reference.
- Racial harassment and racist incidents perpetrated by staff – lack of trust with complaint mechanism
- Lack of representation in curricula, admin, staffing
- School to prison pipeline

Knowing this, why are we still here? One reason is how we imagine this country and what we believe about it. Multicultural, tolerant, polite, not the US, safe, etc. Some people don't know that there was slavery in Canada, but they know about the Underground Railroad. But there was slavery for over 200 years. If this is how we think of the country, what is the appetite for the hard work of anti-racism?

Dominance culture traps – impede our ability to do this work.

The presumption of neutrality. Canada is just fair and good to everyone, internationally and here in our institutions. E.g., if you work hard you will do well in education.

Myth of meritocracy – you get what you work for and don't get what you didn't work for. E.g., but that's not the way it is.

Neo-Liberalism – low government and system intervention. If some groups are seeing bad outcomes, that is natural.

The Legacies – occurrences or processes that establish where wealth, power and status lie globally and that determine our societal values:

- Colonialism
- Slavery
- Patriarchy
- Religions universalism
- Capitalism
- Theft & conquest of the Americas

Legacies tell us what is preferred and what is less than. They create the ‘isms’ like racism, sexism, ageism, etc. It’s impossible to have reverse isms, e.g. reverse racism. There is no legacy that establishes anything other than whiteness as ideal.

Powerful unexamined ideas – come from the legacies. E.g., black people are criminals, Indigenous people are drunks.

There are no neutral spaces, they all hold as ideal the things that come from the legacies.

Impact – our systems are built as if racism doesn’t exist. Racialized students and staff have problematic experiences and outcomes in education systems in Canada.

Critical questions – how can you hold your system accountable? What would be different if the education system was held accountable?

Part 2: Focusing on Solutions – Applying an Anti-Racism Framework for Education Leaders

A strategic approach to equity – what is the goal, what will it look like if we succeed?

- Equity as the goal and outcome
- Equity: the elimination of disproportionality and disparity
- Equity work is intersectional
- How do we know we’re achieving it?

A focus on ‘equality’ has made us hesitant to notice and speak about differences. Equality = sameness. Treating people the same. “I don’t see colour.” Our outcome data says we do see colour. So the focus of our work should be “equity” as defined above. We can measure this.

Disproportionality – refers to the statistical difference in the proportion of a group within a system as compared to their percentage in the general population. Disproportionality data indicate the extent of over- or under-representation.

Disparity – refers to the disproportionate representation of a group in comparison to another group at a certain point or a particular outcome within a system. Disparities suggest differential treatment and outcomes.

Data needs to be disaggregated, we need to dialogue about it and then we need to disrupt the powerful unexamined ideas. If you find in the data that Muslim students are adversely affected, then you know who to dialogue with, get a hint for what needs to be done to improve. We need good basic identity data to compare outcome data to.

Equity continuum

Multiculturalism – Diversity (have diverse bodies in the space) – Inclusion (have the diverse bodies at the decision-making tables but doesn’t question the powerful unexamined ideas. Then the diverse bodies stop coming or get quiet.) – Cultural Competence (reproduces dominance and is faulty because it assumes a culture is fixed.) – Anti-Black Racism. Anti-Colonialism, Anti-Oppression (ask critical questions about the space and the people at the table).

Anti-Racism Framework – action-oriented strategizing to undo racial disproportionalities and disparities in education. Not trying to live with or live through, but we want to undo.

Dr George Dei – Anti-Racism Education is a good resource.

Anti-racism work has to include work to dismantle interlocking systems of oppression because racialized people have intersecting identities. Disruption for the purposes of creating something new.

Critical Race Theory

- Racism is not simply individual acts but part of a broader system
- Race is a social construction providing basis for racialization and racism
- Racialization occurs in different ways for various racial groups and at different points in time
- Race and intersectional identities interlock to impact experiences
- Racism needs to be countered with narratives of racialized people
- The legal system, backed by the state, operates primarily in the interests of White people.

Race – junk science that applies values to appearance that is literally less than 1% of our DNA.

Shift from fixing the child to fixing the system.

The anti-racist leader is focused on data, holding a posture of practice instead of perfection (people need to be able to tell you when something you've done is racist), continuously educating themselves, committed to accountability. Acknowledge, affirm, and hold to account. Please stay close – tells them you are going to make mistakes but are committed to doing better.

Critical questions

- What has been your approach to eliminating racism in education systems in Canada?
- Have you focused on 'fixing' the child or the system?
- What barriers do you face to addressing the system rather than the student?

Perspective adjustment – it's not my fault that this happened so long ago. But you are a beneficiary of it today.

Black graduation coaches is fixing the child. Implication is that black children are 'less'. They need support and others don't. But if the system was fixed, would they need it?

How to ensure diversity on elected boards. We should each support a non-white candidate.

Panel – Sherri Moore-Arbour. Elan Bailey. Organizational Review Through an Anti-Racist Lens

Work CSBA is doing to review the organization with an anti-racist lens.

The history of public ed policy in Canada has roots in inequality, assimilation and injustice. To build a nation through the teaching of common values.

Elected boards of education matter. Local representation has the power to build inclusive policy. Our policies are a reflection of our values.

CSBA developed an EDI acknowledgement statement.

Process –

- Created acknowledgement statement.
- Ask for help, especially if your org is very white.
- Fund it.
- Assume there is racism and you have blind spots
- There will be mistakes and discomfort. Prepare for that and don't let that stop you.
- We have to model the work that we want others to do.
- They chose to make change in policy partly because it's easier to change – less personal – but makes a big difference. It also provides accountability. And with the election cycle, you may have trustees excited to do the work now, but not in the future so to have policy already in place is helpful.

CASSA/CSBA Conference - July 8, 2021

Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being

Mental Health Panel – Cindy Finn (Montreal school board director), Nathan Ip (edmonton trustee), Kathy Short (school mental health ontario psychologist), Jen McCrea (BC ministry of Ed)

Equity and inclusion for student mental health – students need to feel like they belong, feel safe so they can learn. Design systems to meet students/families where they are – culturally sensitive. Supports need to be different for different students to take into account their particular needs/identities. Belonging leads to reaching wellbeing and achievement objectives.

Dignity, purpose and options.

Context matters. 3 aspects – conditions, content, classroom/clinical practice.

- Conditions – need ‘fertile soil’ in the schools/district for a good program to take hold. Strong leadership, staff practice anti-racism, work centred on relationships
- Content – most programs created with a western bias, so need to be attuned to cultural responsiveness. Should consider having students and community part of the development of mental health programs to include cultural relevance.
- Practice – good implementation is key, needs PD, staff wellness, ongoing support.

Jen - Things can seem overwhelming right now, but this is also a reason for hope as this is a moment ripe for change. Beautiful and disruptive things can grow.

Jen - We need to take care of, build capacity in the adults to implement good student programming.

We need to figure out how to share information with other agencies, create a system of care.

Cindy - We can't just focus on services when students need intervention, promotion and prevention are key. Schools can be therapeutic without staff needing to be experts. School can be protective, help develop good mental health habits, social-emotional learning (be explicit about it and name it). We need mental health literacy for staff and students – how the brain works, development, etc.

Kathy - There's no road map for the work of returning to school post-COVID. 5 top of mind considerations for School Mental Health Ontario (everything they create needs to be ‘plug & play’ to reduce stress for teachers – virtual field trips, videos, etc.)

1. Amplify the promotive and protective influence of schools – avoid rushing to an academic press, focus on really welcoming students back, social emotional learning tools for staff and students.
2. Identifying emerging and escalating mental health problems in secondary
3. Mobilizing focused support for those most impacted by COVID
4. Having a system of care and safety nets with partners
5. Countering negative headlines with hopeful communication, esp. re education.

Nathan – created a youth mental health program where young people talk to other young people? Especially at the prevention stage. Pilot project for FNMI students connecting each student with a coach or mentor in the community.

Specific examples re anti-racism lens in mental health work – start with date and make sure you drill down to figure out who you need to talk to then get the student voice when developing your program.

Indigenous way of knowing – to put that into action, you should partner with an indigenous group. Sometimes, the expertise lies elsewhere.

Reviewing social emotional learning programs at SMHO with an anti-racism lens.

Welcome bell rather than warning bell – language matters.

The work can get uncomfortable, we won't like what we hear. Sit in this discomfort – there is creativity here, gives an opportunity for critical thinking about where we come from. Systemic racism can still exist in an environment without prejudicial attitudes. It perpetuates itself. System leaders have to be open to redesigning the system, to really critically looking at the system and ourselves and to listen to stakeholders who are sharing their experience.

When we come back in September, remember that we don't know how people are coming back, how they/their lives have changed during COVID.

Afternoon – Student Panel

Great ideas!

- Private Safe spaces are important – many kids end up in the bathroom, but bathrooms are often problematic
- Earlier teaching on mental health issues
- Teach language to explain what they are feeling, teach empathy
- Teach ways to deal with big emotions
- Peer-to-peer support
- Allow students to leave the classroom when they need to
- Recognize that something that looks positive (focus on studying, healthy eating) could be obsessive and a problem
- Relationship with teachers is key
- More counsellors available to schools
- Continued need to break down stigmas
- Incorporate learning about other aspects of health – physical health, sexual health, etc.
- Normalize going to see a counsellor, asking for help
- Teach kids to recognize if someone else is having an issue, encourage them to reach out, but don't expect them to bear the responsibility of solving the problem
- Adults in schools need more training and still need to break down the stigma
- Recognize that students are experts in their own feelings/mental health – don't gaslight them when they come to you saying they need help'
- Teach each kid like they are the smartest kid in the world
- Need to connect kids to resources when required, remove barriers and bureaucracy

CASSA/CSBA Conference - July 9, 2021

Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being

Kevin Lamoureux – ed lead for national centre for TRC, U of Winnipeg, etc.

Truth and Reconciliation in Schools

Amazing speaker.

We (all of us) were given a gift that day – the 94 Calls to Action. When reading them, think about these questions:

Why is this being asked of us? This is the truth part of the journey. If these are stories you haven't heard before, that's not your fault. You are owed time to grieve, feel anger.

Would implementation of these make your community better?

Shout out to the survivors who came from residential schools and yet have the strength to reach out a hand in friendship to the people who hurt them. As long as the survivors want us to do the work of reconciliation we can't walk away from it.

Reconciliation is a gift that was given to us so that we can be a part of healing our country. Canada is a beautiful country that does lots of good things but we aren't as good as we can be yet.

Looking at Call to Action 63.3

Why is this being asked of us?

- Why don't they just get over it? This is a common reaction but not healthy. We wouldn't say this about our family member who was assaulted. This means our relationships are broken.
- We have an opportunity to "Deconstruct Otherness". Otherness – the psychology of discrimination. Otherness can start simply, with a joke – you know I'm not racist, but...
- Move away from the idea that difference makes someone less than.
- We can't change people's mindsets through shaming and humiliation. We can't yell someone into giving up racist ideas. Need another approach to challenging racism.
- Steps to deconstructing otherness –
 - o Humanize the other – this is why it's so important to have indigenous content for all students. Build relationships. We can't guarantee that students will get this from home, media etc.
 - o Education and awareness – 'requires a practice that starts with a pedagogy of kindness to open hearts to allow us to open minds. It's not my place to take away another person's dignity. Have to create a safe space for them to be vulnerable enough to consider that they may have been wrong. Curriculum matters but more important is pedagogy and environment.

- For police, they only see people at their worst, most vulnerable. People call them when there is a crisis. This is a breeding ground for ‘otherness’
- No other first-world country on the planet has legislated racism – Indian Act of 1876.
- Acknowledge, understand and explore privilege. This can be very difficult. But it doesn’t have to be an act of shame. It can be liberating – I can use my privilege to create change. But if I pretend it doesn’t exist, that can make me and us sick. Pathology of privilege.
 - ylf we expect violence to happen to somebody else but not to us, that is privilege.
 - Understand poverty, don’t judge the people living in it.
- If we’re doing reconciliation the right way, nobody loses.
- Honoring diversity
 - Reconciliation is not subject specific
 - Deconstructing otherness
 - Is not about winners or losers
 - Is not about taking kids away from their community, but about everyone enjoying pride about who they are.

Afternoon Presentation

AFN Carriers of Hope –Calls to Action on First Nations Education

Youth Leaders Patience Sylliboy, Hailey Rose

Carriers of Hope started in 2019 with 36 First Nations Youth. Developed 5 calls to action re education.

In 2020 created a How-To-Guide to outlines measures that First Nations and Non teachers, students and schools can take to implement the calls to Action. This year they created videos to be used with each C2A.

1. We call upon all levels of government to increase funding for education to have a male, female and/or a Two-Spirit Elders to have a significant role in schools; as counsellors or teaching traditional ways, which will support the mental, spiritual, physical and emotional wellbeing of First Nations youth in every school in Canada. E.g. attending assemblies, advising admin, on school council, having a space for them in schools.
2. We appreciate the significant investment in land and cultural programming announced by the Assembly of First Nations and the Government of Canada. This commitment matters to First Nations youth because culture and being on the land keeps our traditions alive while connecting us to ourselves, families, nations and ancestors. However, we call for the expansion of this current funding to all First Nations students, including the North, and those living off reserve. This becomes another resource to support their wellbeing and success. E.g., have regular outdoor lessons with elders, cultural sensitivity training for staff, school gardens.

3. We call for increased funding for Early Childhood Development, increased daycare options, and lowering the age requirement for First Nations children to access ECD programs. This will ensure there will be a safe and secure space for our children and sustain young First Nations parents' education. E.g., combine daycare and classroom space, hire Elders to help in daycare, provide breastfeeding space, accommodate students who are parents.
4. We call for equitable funded K-12 schools with a sufficient amount of resources, supports, and culturally aware faculty for First Nations students in every Nation across the country.
5. We call on the Assembly of First Nations, Federal Government, and national organizations to encourage the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to influence and advocate for the inclusion of our shared history and First Nations knowledge into curricula.

Advice to system leaders – Learn about the First Nations cultures where you are. It never hurts to try.

Can School Boards connect to the Carriers of Hope?

dedwards@afn.ca Dakota Edwards at AFN works with the Carriers of Hope and you can connect with them through her.

The System that Binds Us – Supremacy and Discrimination

Mary Culbertson, Sask Treaty Commissioner

The numbered treaties – treaties are nation to nation agreements rooted in mutual recognition and respect

There was a treaty right to education but that wasn't to include losing their culture, language.

Saskatchewan has mandatory treaty education.

The systems that came after the treaties (residential schools) caused destruction – assimilation into the dominant culture. Based on the assumption that aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs are inferior and unequal. White supremacy – belief that white people constitute a superior race and should dominate society. Colonization was based on the idea of white supremacy.

Indian Act – goal was civilization and assimilation of Indigenous people. Controlled all aspects of First Nations peoples' lives, but they weren't involved in the development of the Act.

Impacts of Indian Act and Residential schools include loss of culture, language, sovereignty, freedom, traditional leadership and membership, identity, discrimination against women and children.

Interfered in sovereignty of traditional chiefs who were removed and quasi-chiefs installed in their place.

First Nations people are beginning to take control of their communities, assert their identities and heal. The rest of us need to understand why, need to learn the history and learn about treaties and how they have been breached. Education is key.

Must teach treaties in the classroom. Not all will learn it at home or elsewhere. Need resources and guides for educators. In SK they have General Public Education on treaties as well. It's part of teacher training in SK. Lots of resources available from the OCT in SK.

