

IN CONVERSATION WITH

GEN LING CHANG

Understanding and Addressing Anti-Asian Racism

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Shayle Graham, Gen Ling Chang

RESOURCES

[Addressing Anti-Asian Racism: A Resource for Educators](#)

Park Hong, Cathy (2020). *Minor feelings: An Asian American reckoning*. One World.



The Human Library

Conversations around Equitable, Anti-Racist, &
Anti-Oppressive Practice

SHAYLE GRAHAM

Hello colleagues and welcome to TDSB Human Library Conversations around Equitable, Anti-Racist, and Anti-Oppressive practice. We are your host Shayle Graham and Dr. Stephanie Fearon from the Equity, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppression Team. We have an insightful conversation in store for you today. Are you ready to talk courageously? Let's get into it.

Hello to all our listeners out there and welcome to the TDSB Human Library Podcast Series. In this episode, we are going to discuss understanding and addressing anti-Asian racism with educator, social justice, and global humanity's advocate, Child and Youth enthusiasts, compelling storyteller, and former associate director of the Toronto District School Board, the admirable Gen Ling Chang. Colleague community, we really are in for a treat today. Gen Ling is currently with Alpha Education, and also serves as an executive member of Asian Canadian Educators Network. So, without further ado, we welcome Gen Ling to the microphone.

So before we begin unpacking this conversation, I do have one very small request. Can you in true Gen Ling storyteller fashion, share with us some of your lived experiences that propel you to do the work that you do?

GEN LING CHANG

I would love to your question, Shayle, prompts me to reflect on my childhood, elementary education, and secondary education. As a child, I grew up with a strong sense of identity, and that is because of the benefit I had from learning from my parents and grandparents. They taught my siblings and I the history of China—its civilization, culture, poetry, classics, legends, contributions to knowledge, and of course, its struggles, the years of humiliation, and World War Two in the Pacific Theater. My grandparents left China and I'm second generation Chinese diaspora born outside China. When I went to school, what I learned a school was not the same as what I experienced at home. I grew up in a country that was a colony of the British Empire. My education was Eurocentric, I learn about the world of Europe and England, and the world of my home and heritage were not present in my school learning. Undoubtedly, I benefited from our education. But as I grew older, I began to realize there were gaps between home and school learning.

Like my mother, I developed a love for reading. What my parents and grandparents taught me were complemented by my avid reading. I read widely, history fascinated me. I love history. I read books about countries and places have not visited. Its people, their civilizations as well as their struggles. I was also fortunate in my secondary years to have had a teacher who taught me the importance of asking questions. I learned to ask questions about what I hear, observe, and read— questions of causation, questions of consequences, questions of comparison of one historical period with another period, comparisons of the same historical period across places in the world. It is a combination of these experiences, Shayle, that led me to be curious about the histories of colonization, and the ideologies. On reflection, this was a start of my journey as an anti-racist educator.

SHAYLE GRAHAM

Gen Ling, in our conversation prepping for the podcast, I remember you saying something that I found to be so compelling and just so profound. You were talking about the power of narrative. And you said, "Narratives are so powerful because people see themselves in compelling stories." And when they see themselves in these compelling stories, it gives room and space for them to share their compelling stories. And that can create change. What I find particularly intriguing is that you position the ways of addressing anti-Asian racism as being interconnected with other forms of racism.

SHAYLE GRAHAM

So, my question to you, Gen Ling, is why? Why do you think it is important for educators to learn about and to understand, and to address anti-Asian racism, not in silos, but as one entity under the larger umbrella of anti-racist education?

GEN LING CHANG

I would like to take a moment to deconstruct the term Asian. Asian is used to refer to billions of people who have distinct civilizations, histories, cultures, religions, ways of being and learning and more. At birth, we collapse a diversity of identities into a monolithic group. Using geographic regions, such as East Asians, Southeast Asians, South Asians, central Asians, and West Asians is equally imperfect. They ignore the intersections of gender expression and orientation, faith, class, ability, sexual orientation, and the diasporas. Anti-Asian racism consists of a wide range of experiences of oppression and stories of displacement and struggles for social justice, and full representation in different parts of the world, on the same part of the world, such as Canada. It is important that we approach this conversation acknowledging this bias.

Coming back to your question, Shayle, I believe it is important to acknowledge Indigenous and Black liberation voices in our work against anti-Asian racism because we have benefited and could learn from them. Moreover, the injustices of racism to any group is an injustice to all. Racism takes on polite and vulgar forms, and the old forms are never completely abandoned. The Shadows of racism is so easily revived or amplified. Take as an example, COVID-19 and the resurgence of anti-Asian racism experienced by those who identify as East and Southeast Asian Canadians is on a larger scale, more overt and brazen. The movement from the fringe to the mainstream of racist messaging and misrepresentation by the media and some political leaders have the effect of normalizing anti-Asian racism. Yet, some would have us think anti-Asian racism is a thing of the 19th century.

Historically, inflection points occur where the specter of racial discrimination against a specific racial group raises is ugly hate. Racism is a pervasive and destructive social force, both in Canada and internationally. Media and social media provide a wide array of examples, demonstrating both the current existence of racism and its detrimental effects on Canadians. Its rise with a pandemic where Canadians of Asian descent other target forces us to revisit and examine the question, "What has changed, not just for Asian Canadians, but for all and what else needs to be done?" Such examination requires us to recognize how race continues to be part of the hierarchy of corporate material and political power and privilege. More important is to recognize and understand causes and continuity and how they work together and why.

Discrimination and hate are not about the behaviour of a few bad individuals. There exist sanctioned systems of oppression and exploitation. George Floyd's I cannot breathe, reverberated and resonated across the world, not just in USA, why? It is a cry that connected all who have experienced racism and hate, a narrative that captures not just a moment, but a history of brutalization of human dignity. The knee on a neck was a raw display of inhumanity that compels us to combat state sanctioned racism of all forms.

As educators, we believe in the power of education to disrupt systemic racism against all racialized populations situating anti-Asian racism with respect to anti-Indigeneity and anti-Blackness whose histories of racism in Canada have been persistent, perpetual, and relentless. Indeed, education can help young learners develop interrogative voices that question stereotyping, discrimination, erasure, and hate. Their self-efficacy and voices are nurtured when we engage them, for example, in tracking continuity and change between the experiences of Asian Canadians, and one or more groups, which have the effect of privileging a group and disadvantaging others. It is important that ways of addressing anti-Asian racism centers Indigeneity and Black voices under the larger umbrella of anti-racist education so that we can all breathe.

SHAYLE GRAHAM

Thank you, Gen Ling, for your transparency. I feel like every conversation I have with you, you say something that just resonates with the very fiber of my being. And that takes courage. And that takes bravery, you know, to speak on some of the things that you're saying. And I know that the listeners appreciate that because we need these types of conversations to happen in order for changes to be made. In our podcast preparation conversation, there was something else that you mentioned, that I wanted to share with the listeners because I think it's so important to understand our role as educators when it comes to policy. And in all my years as an educator, and I'm still fresh in the game, by the way, but in all my years as an educator, I've never heard policy described, or talked about in this way. And you stated, "If we only address racism at the interpersonal level, we will not get anywhere. It's the policy and procedures where the reimagining has to happen. Curriculum is policy, and educators have the power to reimagine it." As the goal of this podcast is to inspire educators to go beyond the conversation and to take action, how do we as practitioners utilize our power to teach the curriculum in ways that promote solidarity and allyship in the 2021 virtual and face-to-face classroom?

GEN LING CHANG

Let me make two simple statements. Curriculum is policy. Dismantling racism is a duty that we owe to present and future generations. As educators, we have the responsibility to implement the curriculum. But we also have the agency and obligation as anti-racist educators to reimagine the curriculum by bringing into the classrooms and pursue learning about uncommon histories and issues of overgeneralization, erasure, and exclusion. By uncommon histories, I mean the voices unheard or stories overlooked, but are necessary as an integral part to Canada's common history, as well as understanding Canada's relationship with the world and the world in Canada.

Let me pause with an incident I experience. A young mother informed me very distressed that a young son's project on the Indian civilization was rejected. The young lad devoted time and interest and excitement in investigating about the Indian civilization. He brought to school his diorama and his research. Unfortunately, at the end of the day, he informed his parents that his research project was rejected. He had to redo it by focusing either on the Greek or the Roman civilization. Let us pause us educators to reflect on this incident. Imagine in a grade 4/5 class when our students' topic of investigation focuses on civilization as mandated by the curriculum. Let us, imagine if we enabled our young learners to select a civilization from any part of the world— South America, African continent, Greece, Rome, the Middle East, India, or China. We can imagine the rich knowledge constructions that would happen. At the same time, in the course of study civilizations, our young learners will encounter struggles that people experience. For example, against injustices, such as slavery.

Anti-racist pedagogy centers, learning that engages students in big ideas and questions on topics of racism optimizing the diversity of learners in our classrooms as microcosms of United Nations. What do I mean? Let me illustrate with three examples. For example, engaging students in a group analysis of historical political cartoons of the 19th century in Canada and compare it with 2021 media reports and cartoons to identify and make the case against injustice substantiated by perspective and impact. Another is reading and responding to social media posts, treating them as primary source documents to deconstruct and disrupt implied social mores, polite and vulgar racism, and intentional linguistic bias. Students' case studies are then presented to a tribunal of students that will decide to uphold or dismiss the case of implicit or explicit racism. A third example is engage students in the four roles of social activism, organizer, advocate, helper, and rebel. That's my favorite role. In a case of seeking redress for historical injustice, the project would include research, ethical assessment of the actions taken to address the injustice and presentation of findings. I hope with these examples, we begin to examine how curriculum as policy mandates what to teach, can be reimaged by anti-racist pedagogy that informs us on how to teach.

SHAYLE GRAHAM

Thank you so much for that Gen Ling before you go, would you be so kind to leave us with some takeaways to help us further build our toolkits? What deep learnings can you share with educators to support the urgency of programming for students in consciously inclusive ways?

GEN LING CHANG

One of the deep learnings for me, Shayle, is the connections of colonization and the breadth and depth of racial injustices. We all know colonization differs in saliency, intensity, and consequences for Indigenous peoples and Black Canadians fomenting maintain discrimination, bias, marginalization, and violence against them. To be consciously inclusive, in part, is to know the histories of colonization and its impact. But stories of colonization must be juxtaposed with stories of resiliency, mobilization, and survival, such as the Black liberation movement, which exposes oppression, exclusion and hate, and are in themselves focal points that built collective capacity.

Colonization is not a thing of the past. It continues to prevail in 2021. As such, we all need to be intentionally and consciously inclusive. What might I mean? Let me illustrate the two personal stories of identity and how others chose to construct it differently. I'm Gen Ling Chang an immigrant to Turtle Island, home of Indigenous peoples. I came from another country, which was a colony of the British Empire. When I was born, my father gave me my name, a departure from my family tradition, where the eldest, who was my grandfather would name any child born, as he did with my older siblings. But that is another story as to why the departure from the practice. My name being given to me by my father holds special meaning and meant a lot to me. When I was a child, my name was often made fun of, and as children was considered child play. I was also given an anglicized name, which are discarded when I was old enough to do so. However, when I was older, I met people who would tell me that I spell my name wrongly, and that the G should be a J. And I will be addressed as Jenny instead of Gen Ling. Each time it happened, including when I was in England pursuing my master's, it hurt, and I was tired of explaining. Another was my accent when speaking English. The one incident that I finally found courage to confront it was when I was much older. When at a meeting with me, a senior staff made fun of my accent by mimicking me. I was completely taken aback, called her out, and asked her to stop. I was shaken by the experience, and it left scars that remain. I hope by sharing these two personal stories, they provide reflections as to what it means to be consciously inclusive. The impact of racism in dispossessing, erasing, or making invisible identity, voice, and stories overlooked and understand why we all need to decolonize ourselves as anti-racist educators, both in our practice and our orientation. Thank you, Shayle, it's such a pleasure to have this conversation with you.

SHAYLE GRAHAM

Okay, colleagues, that's all for today. We look forward to you joining us for our next courageous conversation. If you liked this episode, don't forget to share it with a colleague and posted on social media using the #tdsbtalks. Bye for now.