**IEA Awesome Podcast**

**Episode 13 – Educational Equity Work with Sherri Jones**

00:00 *Kelsey: Welcome to* the AWESOME IEA Podcast brought to you by the Illinois Education Association.

00:05 Diana: The podcast for curious well-informed association members.

00:09 *Kelsey:* I’m one of your hosts, Kelsey Harms, a Computer Specialist from the IEA Program Development Department

00:14 *Diana:* And I’m Diana Zaleski, one of your Instructional Resource and Professional Development Directors from IEA Teaching and Learning.

00:20 *Kelsey:* The goal of this podcast is to educate our members about important new educational policy initiatives in a brief and *hopefully* entertaining format.

00:28 *Diana:* Today we are going to speak with IEA UniServ Director Sherri Jones. Sherri, thanks so much for being with us today.

00:35 *Sherri:* Thank you for having me. I’m excited about being here.

00:37 *Diana:* So, to begin, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to the Illinois Education Association.

00:43 *Sherri:* Sure. Let’s see, I came to IEA about eight years ago and I came here from Wisconsin. I was actually kind of recruited here so I like to always put that out there. But, I was a UD in Wisconsin for WEAC, so I was in Milwaukee for a number of years and then I was in Fond du Lac for a number of year.

01:01 And, I got into union because I was a teacher in Milwaukee. So, that really got me involved in equity work and I sometimes think about, was education my first place that I first learned about equity and started doing equity? And, it really isn’t.

01:15 Prior to teaching, teaching was actually a second career for me. I was an organizer with National Association of Working Women. And, you know, our job was to organize low wage working women to try to make better working conditions for themselves. And, oftentimes that meant organizing a union. And, you know how difficult that can be. So, I really learned a lot about organizing and equity and justice from just being out in the field.

01:42 *Kelsey:* So, Sherri, one of the many talents that you brought to IEA is your expertise concerning educational equity. First, can you help us define educational equity and maybe equity in general and maybe the importance of equity in our schools.

01:56 *Sherri:* I’ll make an attempt, Kelsey (laughter). So, let me go back first. Kind of, to talk about equity I have to go back in history a little bit. So, if we go back to 1964 with the Civil Rights Act, a lot of this type of equity training was actually called anti-discrimination training.

02:14 So, it was really about making sure workplaces did not discriminate against protected classes. And, then that kind of morphed into assimilation work which was, oh, so now we’re having women and people of color in the workplace now that has been predominantly white and male so we need to have training that is around assimilation. How do these folks fit in?

02:39 So, you know, fast forward to maybe the eighties and the census data and multiculturalism. These trainings then became sensitivity. Oh, so we’re recognizing differences. What do those differences mean? Are they good? Are they bad?

02:55 But, really up through the nineteen nineties all of this work was really to meet legal requirements. And, so in the early two thousands, the work started being about human flourishing. And the way that got translated, I think, in the field of education is, what are the barriers that prevent our students from flourishing, from being their very, very best?

03:18 And, so equity work in the field of education is really having the adults be able to develop their awareness, knowledge and skills so that they can recognize any inequities, any biases that might prevent a student from being their full, actualized self.

03:38 And, so sometimes we think of equities, or inequities, as some of these big topics that we talk about like funding, lack luster curriculum, teacher shortage. And, those are all inequities but then there are those inequities that are kind of like imbedded in us and those are based in our values, our beliefs, our ways our knowing. And, then those affect our decisions.

04:05 So, equity is an inside job and outside job and it’s really moving us toward what systems are in place that may either support or obstruct a student’s access to resources, opportunities of learning, opportunities of condition.

04:23 So, I really think that’s what equity work is, kind of, now. And I think why it’s so important is, traditionally, schools have really relied on a deficit model. So, what’s wrong with the student? And, let’s figure out what to give them. You’re not doing good in math, you’re doing good in reading, we’re going to find something. But, they never really said what’s good about the student? What are their gifts? Right? And, then let’s build from that.

04:50 So, this equity work really is based on that human flourishing and it’s moving away from this deficit model to how do we support the student and their growth and all their gifts and talents?

05:03 *Diana:* So, this summer our members ready a book titled *Flourish*, by Martin Seligman, as part of one our IEA book studies. And, you made a lot of really interesting connections to the field of positive psychology which is the study of wellness and why we’re well, rather than the typical area of psychology which is why we’re unwell.

05:26 *Sherri:* Mhm.

05:26 And, I think a lot of our members can connect really well to that idea of how can we help our students flourish? Have you ever read any of Martin Seligman’s work?

05:38 *Sherri:* No, no, but I must have gotten it in my sleep (laugh) because I’m resonating with it. But I do think there are a lot of resources out there. There’s a lot people that are really on the forefront of this work. And I think you do get some of those great ideas from all the great people you talk to and work with. And, so, no I have not read that book. I am going to add it to my list and hopefully that will help me deepen my understanding around how to support flourishing and being well.

06:08 *Diana:* Yeah, I just thought that was a great connection to something our members have been doing recently and some of the conversations they’ve been having so that’s fantastic. So, how does educational equity align with the work our members are already doing, specifically around that trauma-informed practices work and restorative justice work?

06:26 *Sherri:* I think that trauma-informed is that next step on the continuum of this flourishing idea. And, so, yes, it does have us look at what are some of the lived experiences of our students? Mental health, substance abuse, incarceration, divorce. You name it. Whatever anyone of us as a human can be impacted by or confront in our lives.

06:48 And, so, looking at that and saying, oh, so this is what the child is bringing to school, not just looking at what the child doesn’t bring to school. And, then to be able to look at their behaviors in a new lens. Because I think under the deficit model, students who were confronted with these adverse childhood experiences, of course, are behaving a certain way.

07:10 I like to think of it as an adaptive behavior. In a deficit model, we look at it as disruptive behavior. So, I think the trauma-informed schools educational professionals have a lens in which they can look at the student’s behavior, the student’s, how they’re feeling, what they’re seeing, what they’re not seeing in a way that doesn’t punish the student and doesn’t make them responsible for the situation they’re in.

07:36 But, then I also think the equity work is even further along on that continuum because it doesn’t just stay with the situation. Whereas, you know, the ACE’s score looks at how many adverse experiences, or which ones you’ve had. But not necessarily how many of one and the severity and frequency of it.

07:59 So, I think equity work starts look at, beyond situational, but systemic. What are the systems in place that support, or hold in place, these conditions for our students. And, if the conditions are such that they disrupt or obstruct their flourishing, then we have to do something about the system.

08:20 *Kelsey:* So, Sherri, I know that you go throughout the state and help provide this training to our members. Can you share how any interested members might learn more about this educational equity work and really just get involved in this work because it is so important?

08:36 *Sherri:* Well, there is some great resources out there. Diana just mentioned one. Besides calling me, and, please, call me, reach out to me because I love doing this. I love coming in and meeting with members and saying, hey, so what’s going on and what are you looking to develop.

08:51 I would remind people that this is not a one and done effort. It’s not a training that I can come in and say I did two hours with you and you’re good to go. It’s a continuous unlearning and relearning but some resources to start with are Rethinking Schools. Fabulous. I have everything they’ve ever published and all of it is from a lens of equity.

09:15 Teaching Tolerance. Another good place. Good resources, free resources for educational professionals. Teaching for Change. And then Paul Gorski and Ed Change, fabulous leader in equity in the education field.

09:31 So, it’s a lot about reaching out to some of these resources and learning yourself. But, calling me and have the conversations because it really is about recognizing what we know and don’t know and what we think and may think differently in order to do the equity work.

09:47 *Kelsey*: And, Sherri can you share what training in this area might look like. So, if somebody, they’re just starting out, they kind of have no idea what to expect, if they’re, if they’re calling you, are there things they should know in advance, or things they should consider? Or kind of lay out what…the training might be different in lots of different places, but kind of some examples, maybe?

10:08 *Sherri:* So, we do have some, what I’d say are some stand-alone type trainings. So, like an overview of cultural competency, an overview of implicit bias. And, then we start going in a little deeper into racial lenses, economic lenses. But, whatever you might be looking for, I try to start with a conversation.

10:27 What precipitated you to have this conversation with me? Is there something going on? Is there something you’re trying to fix? Who wants it fixed? You know, so we really do just have a conversation because, like I said, it’s not a one and done. But, once we have that, I can better determine, are we just going to do an hour kind of overview and conversation, or like some districts, have partnered with their union to do this training and to do it long term.

10:54 So, a three-year kind of scope, would be the first year, we’re just really developing our cadre of leaders with our union, with our school district, with parents and communities. And they’re really thinking about what is that we need to do to unlearn what we think we know about equity and rethink about this flourishing?

11:13 Because, before, like I said it has always been in the realm of deficit. So, then, once we’ve done that, the second year is really around professional development. And, then the third year, looking at policy and procedures for making changes there.

11:28 But, if you’re not ready to do that, just call me up and we start with a conversation and some light training and often times it is uncomfortable but that’s a good thing. It’s a good thing when we’re uncomfortable because we know we’re learning something different. So, I’m always here. Just reach out.

11:45 *Kelsey:* Yeah, that is excellent to know that you kind of run the gamut, wherever the district or the union is at, you can kind of meet with them and…

11:54 *Sherri:* Meet where people are move from there.

11:55 *Diana:* Is there anything else you’d like to add? Are there any additional resources you’d like members to be aware of?

12:00 *Sherri:* There are so many resources. We’d need a few more hours for me to identify them. But, I’d like to really say to start the conversation with me or any of the other great resources we have in IEA because it really does start with a conversation

12:14 It’s something I’d say is hard to do by yourself because we don’t necessary know what we don’t know, and where are biases are, so this work is mostly done best, or well, in groups. So not much more to say but just get started.

12:30 Equity work is not neutral work. It’s not passive work. It’s very aggressive and is very much committed to unlearning, undoing, and rebuilding.

12:39 *Diana:* Well, we will make sure to link the resources that you’ve already shared on the site so folks can access those easily. So, again, thank you so much for being with us today. We really appreciate you coming on the podcast. And, if any of our members have questions, comments, or feedback, please check out the contact section on the podcast page on the IEA Website.

12:59 *Kelsey:* Special thanks to Mark for the audio help, Amanda for the transcription, and Dan for the website. As always, thanks so much for being a member, and thanks for joining us!

13:07 *End*

Below are the resources discussed in the podcast:

<https://www.tolerance.org/>

<https://www.rethinkingschools.org/>

<https://www.teachingforchange.org/>

<http://www.edchange.org/>