

CRITICAL

CONVERSATIONS

Event transcript featuring Zaretta Hammond

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING & THE BRAIN

CRITICAL CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING & THE BRAIN
CONVERSATIONS feat. ZARETTA HAMMOND

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

- IT'S NOT HOT SAUCE YOU CAN'T JUST PUT IT ON EVERYTHING
- FREE FROM MICRO-AGGRESSIONS
- FULL BODY BELONGING
- LEARNING COMMUNITY
- PARTNERSHIPS & RELATIONAL
- LEARNING TO LEARN

INSIDE-OUT WORK

- START WITH YOURSELF AND YOUR LOCAL LEVEL.
- HOW WAS I SOCIALIZED?
- HOW DOES THAT IMPACT ME?
- NARRATIVES AND STEREOTYPES. YOU ARE NOT A NEUTRAL PARTY!
- IT CAN BE EMBARRASSING. BUT WE CAN'T BREAK OUR MENTAL MODELS IF WE DON'T UNDERSTAND THEM.

WIDEN YOUR APERTURE

- ASK WHY?
- EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
- RESILIENCE
- WHAT WORKS FOR YOU?
- CO-DEVELOP
- WE MUST CREATE SAFE SPACES FOR THESE CONVERSATIONS
- HAVE THE CULTURALLY HUMILITY TO ASK AND DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY (MINDFULNESS IS NOT ALWAYS THE ANSWER!)
- AMYGDALA HIJACK
- NOT ME! THOUGH!

THE WARM DEMANDER EST. 1970S.

- BUILDING TRUST & ACTING AS COACH
- CARE + PUSH
- BOTH RELATIONAL AND INSTRUCTIONAL HELP THEM GET UNSTUCK

TEACHERS: YOU ARE THE STRATEGY. THESE ARE JUST TOOLS.

CLOSING THE KNOWING-DOING GAP

- LOOK AT THE REALITY, NOT OUR ASPIRATIONS
- PICK SOMEWHERE TO START START WITH SMALL, INCREMENTAL CHANGE
- BE OK TO MAKE MISTAKES THE 1ST PANCAKE PRINCIPLES
- IDENTIFY COGNITIVE RED-LINING AND SEEK SUPPORT
- YOU MUST DO IT WITH STUDENTS HELP THEM SEE PROGRESS

CREATING THE CONDITIONS TO LEARN

- DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION HAPPENS TO ENVIRONMENTS & SYSTEMS, NOT PEOPLE.
- MORE AWAY FROM PROBABILITY OF COMPLIANCE
- HELP STUDENTS ANTICIPATE IT.
- ONLY THE LEARNER LEARNS (NOT THE CONTENT)
- PRODUCTIVE STRUGGLE WE MUST STRETCH TO LEARN!
- TIME TO CHEW & REVIEW
- CONFIDENCE PRECEDES COMPETENCE
- INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY

CHANGES HAPPEN

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Event hosted by **New Roads School**

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Critical Conversations Speaker Series

Featuring Zaretta Hammond

TRANSCRIPT



Guest
Zaretta Hammond



Moderator
Mario Johanson
Director of Student Wellness and
Human Development
New Roads School



Moderator
Daniela Pennise
US Administration
New Roads School

MARIO JOHNSON:

Good evening friends. Welcome to the Critical Conversations Speaker series. My name is Mario Johanson. I will serve as this evening's event moderator. I'd like to welcome our esteemed featured guest, Zaretta Hammond, New Roads Upper School Director, Daniela Pennise, and our expansive national network of partner schools. We're also pleased to welcome graphic recorder, Jessamy Gee from Think In Colour Australia, who's here to help capture our thinking. Jessamy will be creating a live visual representation of the output from our session today that will be made available to our partners. Zaretta Hammond is the national consultant and author of *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain*, promoting authentic engagement and rigor for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

She's a former high school and community college expository writing instructor. For the past 20 years, she has supported schools and other institutions in deepening their understanding and application of culturally responsive practices. She currently runs the Culturally Responsive Education by Design, a six-month intensive inquiry-based professional learning experience to build instructional capacity to use culturally responsive tools and practices effectively. Ms. Hammond is a strong literacy advocate who sits on the board of trustees for the Center for the Collaborative Classroom. She's also a member of the advisory board for the consortium for reading education, CORE. It is our immense pleasure and we are so excited to welcome the illustrious Zaretta Hammond as our guest this evening. Thank you so much for being with us.

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Oh, thank you so much for having me.

MARIO JOHNSON:

In recognition of our time limitation, I'm going to jump right into the heart of things.

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Yeah.

MARIO JOHNSON:

We've got lots we want to cover. Tonight's discussion will be divided into three segments. The first segment will concentrate on pedagogy and curriculum moderated by Daniela Pennise. The second segment will focus on climate, culture and the social emotional dimensions of teaching and learning, which I will facilitate. The final segment will be an open discussion that revolves around next steps, leveling up and closing the gap between knowing and doing. When it's time to transition to another segment, I'll deliver a gentle tap of this chime to indicate that it's time for us to move on to another segment of the conversation.

Let us begin with the first segment, pedagogy, curricular decision-making and instructional leadership. I'll hand things over to Daniela.

DANIELA PENNISE:

Thank you, Mario. Hi, Zaretta.

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Hi.

DANIELA PENNISE:

Hi. As the assistant head of program, I assembled a team of teacher leaders who spent two years inculcating our entire faculty into the pedagogical and curricular orientation of culturally responsive teaching. So, it's particularly rewarding to have this opportunity and speak with you this evening. Our teachers, along with those of our partner schools are ecstatic about your work, so thank you so much. For starters, can you provide a brief articulation of culturally responsive teaching?

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

I can build on some of the research, bodies of research that are out there in the scholars who have provided that, and I typically then build on and anchor and twist that definition. So building on the work of Dr. Asa Hilliard, Gloria

Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, but also Angela Valenzuela, Chris Gutierrez. There are a number of scholars out there that have looked at different aspects of it.

So as I was coming up as a teacher in practice, I would consider myself at the time a teacher researcher. I really came to understand culturally responsive teaching had four elements, a classroom free of microaggressions where students felt a full body sense of belonging. In addition, having a community of learners of peers that were not just, hey, we have a nice social environment, but we are up to becoming better learners. Third, a learning partnership with their teacher where that teacher was the coach, the personal trainer of their cognitive development, and the student knew that was the role of the teacher and could trust the teacher to guide them to higher levels, and the opportunity to actually learn how to learn so they can grow their brain power.

All of those elements, to me, make for a holistic approach. I would say nowadays when people are talking about culturally responsive teaching, they're leaning very heavily into the belonging, relational elements. Very few are into the instructional. Most people land toward the curricular. We'll put some social justice themes in, things that students are interested in to make it relevant. But the responsive piece, the instructional decision-making growing students' brain power is the piece that I have tried to contribute to the body of knowledge that's out there.

DANIELA PENNISE:

That's wonderful. Thank you for that overview. One piece that I heard you mention was that coach that you need in a teacher, and you refer to that in your book as the warm demander. And so can you talk about how teachers can utilize that approach of what you call the warm demander to inspire more dynamic activation by not only the less intrinsically motivated students, but also higher performing learners?

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

I first want to make a couple of corrections. Number one, that body of research has been around, the warm demander, since the 1970s, so really understanding what that means, because people are sprinkling culturally responsive teaching on everything like it's hot sauce. We have to check ourselves. It's just like the gluten-free craze, right? Go to the department, meet gluten-free. Well, it always has been gluten-free. What are you talking about? So I see the same thing happening with culturally responsive teaching. So I like to help people unpack it, not just fall into terms. Warm demander is one that I see. Warm, strict, or they focus on the demanding part. And what ends up happening when you do that, you're leaning into a pedagogy of compliance, demanding something. Versus when you actually look at the literature, what it says is active demandiness, which is partnering with a student and asking the student to level up, showing the student and coaching the student to level up.

So this is why I use the phrase, being the personal trainer of students' cognitive development, but it starts with personal warmth. If you don't build trust with the student, not just connection and friendliness, but literally where that student will follow you out on the branch of a tree, into that zone, proximal development, or as James Nottingham likens it to The Learning Pit. So that student really, in that learning partnerships, needs to have someone that they can

trust, and the warm demander has the knowledge of the student, encourages the student that they are capable, but also takes them through their paces like a coach would and asks them to continue to stretch themselves. And cognitive neuroscience tells us that's when the brain starts to grow, but there's a lot of emotion that comes with that kind of cognitive stretch. So that warm demander has to know how to set that container so that it's just the right mix of care and push.

DANIELA PENNISE:

And another piece that I wanted to discuss with you was the relationship between the warm demander and the disruptive innovator, and how are these two practices related and how do they complement student engagement?

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Well, you have to think about one as being the relational or interpersonal. So the warm demander, when we think about culturally responsive teaching, what people have a tendency to do is think about the cultural part, talking about race, racial politics, anti-racist education, social justice, but they rarely focus on the responsive, and that is where the art of teaching, the science of teaching, the science of learning leans in because it means instructional decision-making. You see the students confused. What do you do? You don't go say, "Ask three before me." That is not the response. But most teachers don't have a sense of what would be the right thing to say or do or to prompt the student without over scaffolding or leading them through it. What's the right thing? And that's what instructional decision-making. And a lot of times we divorce the science of learning and teaching from culturally responsive teaching, even though teaching is at the end of the word.

So when we think of the warm demander, it's more of the skill around that instructional decision-making, being more responsive. When you see the students confused, what do you do and how do you actually leverage that relationship so you can help the student become unstuck, find their way to clarity? Now, disruptive innovation isn't something you do to a person. It's what you do to an environment to ensure that you are not falling into the pedagogy of compliance. So you cannot conflate them. That's really apples and oranges. A teacher who is preparing the environment, I call it preparing the dojo. Because if martial artists go to a dojo, there's padding on the floor, there's a prepared environment, like Maria Montessori says. So disruptive innovation is how am I disrupting inequitable practices? How am I disrupting cognitive red lines that historically have been put in place.

And sometimes they're invisible to us. We reenact them, even despite having mission statements in our schools that say we're about equity or being anti-racist educator. Yet, and still, we look at the feedback from parents of color and students of color, and there's still indicators that they're not feeling seen or heard or getting the same kind of educational outcomes. There's still gaps. So it's really a matter of thinking about how do I use the notion of disruptive innovation, the smallest, highest leverage change that I can inject into an environment that will create a domino effect for creating the kinds of conditions.

So for example, if creating a community of learners is one of those conditions, how do we bridge in the first few weeks of school from building community to building a community of learners so that all students find their way into? We're going to talk about instruction, we're going to talk about how our brain learns. We're going to talk about and practice productive struggle. We're going to create a culture of errors. We learn from our mistakes, not just as a mantra, but literally we are able to dissect that. So that would be, creating that culture of errors would be a disruptive innovation.

DANIELA PENNISE:

I want to shift a little bit into the realm of curriculum design. Can you speak to how people in my position can encourage teachers to incorporate a culturally responsive lens as they're designing curriculum and lesson planning?

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

I will tell you that is where I see the least power to shift students. Because if the student doesn't know how to process information, I don't care how zhuzhed up your lesson plan is, it's not going to change. Only the learner learns. So if the teacher is not incorporating it into that lesson, into that unit, into that curriculum, the place where productive struggle is going to be and how they're going to coach students in it, just changing the content is not going to actually result in anything culturally responsive. Because remember, cultural responsiveness is about having a different outcome. Students are underperforming, not through any fault of their own, but because the system is designed to underdevelop their capacities. So a culturally responsive educator understands what I'm trying to do, is help the students reclaim that agency, not out of compliance, but out of liberatory education.

And so if we think about it, that when we go back to curriculum design, you can't just make the content more diverse or inclusive. You still have to think about where is the cognitive challenge going to be? Where are students going to chew on the content? So in culturally responsive teaching the brain, this is what I talk about with ignite, chunk, chew, and review, that's not a lesson plan template. Unfortunately, a lot of teachers have taken it up as such. It is instead an instructional design template. Where are students actually going to have the time to chew? What are they chewing on? And to chew means you have to have cognitive challenge. What are they taking apart? What are they looking at in terms of cause and effect? How are you initiating students in that? Because you can't just throw them in the deep end.

So part of that design is where are they getting practice to do this? Where are they understanding and where do they get to step back and actually talk about their learning moves? This is where I got stuck in that. This was where I had confusion. Where do you stop and just say, what's the muddiest point here? What I see is a lot of teachers don't do that instructional decision-making, instructional design. Instead, we get enamored with our own coolness in creating a cool unit. I created this cool unit. It's got cool stuff. It's diverse. The kids are going to love it. Got some hip hop in it. The kid's still not reading.

What are we doing? That's making us feel good? And maybe for a moment the students are engaged, but the older students get, the more they're resentful of that because it's just edutainment that really doesn't empower them. They're not growing in their competence, and therefore in their confidence. Competence precedes confidence. If I

see I'm becoming a stronger runner and I want to run a marathon, then I'm going to keep running. If I see somehow I'm not making progress, why am I investing time with you? Nobody goes to a personal trainer where at the end of the six weeks, I'm actually going to be less fit, unable to do... Nobody does it. Going to a restaurant where I'm leaving hungry and underserved. But again, so this is what's happening for our students.

DANIELA PENNISE:

Thank you. My last question in this segment is, how do we get teachers to embrace that productive struggle that we're talking about here? And I know you mentioned that earlier. What does that mean for our audience?

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Well, it should be if we're teachers, we all should, and we're considering ourselves to be anti-racist educators and culturally responsive educators, we should assign ourselves to understand what the neuroscience says about how people learn. We learn, our brain grows. We grow in our ability when we have to stretch ourselves a bit. So this is akin to lifting weights. You have to keep lifting a progressively heavier weight in order to grow. Our brain is no different. So productive struggle is the ability for the teacher to create an environment where that brain stays calm and ready, students are at their growing edge. This is what Vygotsky calls that Zone of Proximal Development. And the teacher can get the student into that ZPD, leaning in, ready to go, excited that students learn the joy of this kind of chewing where their brain tingles a little bit like, ooh, it stretches them. It shouldn't be the teacher dragging the students along to do that.

So that's a way in which we create an environment out of intellectual curiosity. So all teachers should look when they're designing a unit, designing instruction, where's the intellectual curiosity? And this can relate to how we make things relevant, but if you know your students and you keep notes on them, I talk about kid watching in the book, you take index cards and do that. There are ways to gather that from students at the beginning of the year. Then you incorporate those when you are designing that lesson, when you're designing that opportunity for chewing. The other thing is, do you have the time in your classroom for students to have those types of talk structures? If you design that and all you give them is a turn and talk, that turn and talk is weak for the kind of productive struggle we were looking for, where that chewing, that brain, the kind of complex thinking, getting with other people and pulling things apart, that has to be the road that we go in terms of being able to define productive struggle.

And here's the other thing, productive struggle is not just making all things hard. One aspect is focused. You are trying to figure out how the puzzle pieces come together or what the pattern recognition is. Our brains love to do that. But the other side of that is what they call diffuse learning, the ability to sit back, let everything soak in while you're talking with others. There's a social dimension to that. And have teachers set it up where students have that opportunity to talk to each other about this, in a way that there's some flow, and then go back to focused learning that might be individual.

So this is that chewing, and it comes in a variety of ways that leads to the productive struggle where kids, that maybe they don't get that every day, but it should be at least two or three times throughout the week, they are in that zone. And for a lot of teachers, they're trying to keep up with the pacing guide. That is not the road to equity.

DANIELA PENNISE:

Thank you.

MARIO JOHONSON:

I just wanted to do the ding, even though y'all ended perfectly right on time.

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

On cue.

MARIO JOHONSON:

Exactly. Absolutely. So I'm going to transition now to our second segment, climate and culture, social emotional learning and DEIB, that's diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

So Zaretta, like Daniela, as the Director of Human Development and Student Wellness, I led a team of peace, wellness and inclusion practitioners who spent the second year of our exploration of your work inculcating our entire faculty into the SEL and DEIB implications of culturally responsive teaching. I'd like to share a quote from your work on this topic and ask you to elaborate on its meaning and significance. You state, "The true power of culturally responsive teaching comes from being comfortable in your own skin because you are not a neutral party in the process. You can never take yourself out of the equation. Instead, you must commit to the journey. This means we each must do the inside-outside work required."

Similar to what you did in the previous segment, can you provide a brief articulation of what you understand inside-outside work to be as it relates to culturally responsive teaching?

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Yeah, I talk about this sometimes as outside-in as well. A lot of people doing DEI work will talk about this notion of inside-out work. We have to look at our implicit bias. We have to do that work in order to continue to do the work-out in the world. I think that for educators, we have to invert that. Meaning, if you don't have racial literacy, if you don't understand how we got to the place we are within equity, then you are going to reinforce inequities that are invisible or they transmute themselves or they look benign. But that's by design that they hide themselves. And so this notion of

doing inside out work and outside in work is starting with that racial literacy. And then once you understand how do we get here, not on always the global area, but in your local context is where you start,

The school district I'm working in, what were the covenants for housing around the school district? Because in the United States, we have several districts around the country that used to exclude Black people, used to exclude Asian people, used to exclude Jewish families from the owning home. So if your local school was where you were supposed to go because that's where you lived and the racism was around this red lining, you don't even understand how you got to having this kind of differential or maybe some of the tensions. You have to understand that at your local level. Then you have to place yourself in that to say, now how was I socialized? Harro talks about the cycle of socialization. How was I socialized around the three dominant narratives about dark skinned people? The first is low intelligence. Dark people have low intelligence. Dark skinned people, lack of motivation for betterment, aka, they're lazy. And thirdly, they are prone to criminality.

Now we see all of these playing out in the media. All you got to do is a little Google search, and you could see how these are memes that people laugh at, but they are there because they are the narratives, the dominant narratives. So you have to actually see how was I socialized into them even as a person of color? How did I hear about them? How do they impact me? How do I change how I move through the world? So this is Claude Steele's work around stereotype threat. We recognize these narratives are there, and yet still the majority, the majority of teachers around the world are still white, Eurocentric or in an individualistic cultural orientation. Nothing wrong with any of those things, but there's that mismatch in terms of if you've lived in a racialized world, that you have been socialized into these narratives.

The biggest challenge is, it's embarrassing for people to say, yep, I hear that all the time when I'm with just white people. Because we want to distance ourselves from that. So the work is not just, oh, let me look at my bias, but let me look at the socialization, because you can't change your mental models until you understand how those mental models play out and are operationalized in your context. So to me, that's what that 'you are not a neutral party' means, that you have to look at your positionality so that you can understand how to interrupt those narratives. Even in the guise of, oh, it's harmless, or that's race neutral. But education that sorts students and labels them, underdevelops their cognitive development, particularly when you see how colonization around the world has been operationalized. It looks a little different in every country that has had a long history of colonization, but those narratives are always there in some version.

MARIO JOHONSON:

Absolutely. Wonderful. Thank you so much. Very, very comprehensive answer. I also really appreciate your importation of the conversation around the impact on people of color, that these tropes, these racially oriented tropes, racist tropes don't only impact the dominant group. Minority folks also, people of color also are subject to those also, and we can bring that into an educational space and be the voices for a white supremacist language and a white supremacist framework also. And so I think that's very important to include as part of that. So thank you for that.

A large part of inside-out conversation has to do with self-regulation, it seems to me. Can you talk about the relationship between inside-outside work and the amygdala hijack scenario? It seems there's a relationship between those two that's implicit in the conversation we're having. zaretta hammond:

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Yeah, I think the connection for me, I talk about the amygdala hijack in a way to help people understand part of the learning equation. But it also is really important when we start to think about how we move out of our comfort zone into the zone of proximal development where learning happens, particularly for adults.

So when we are doing DEI work, when we are actually looking at how have I been socialized into those narratives, there's a way in which our brain wants to resist, wants to say, 'oh, no, not me,' particularly amongst progressive educators. So what happens is this amygdala starts to say, 'alert, alert, you're about to be called a racist. Stop. Stop having that conversation, back away, now.' I'm old enough to remember lost in space, Danger, Will Robinson. And if you don't know who Will Robinson is, you can Google that. But the reality is, this is what happens. So being able to create an environment that feels intellectually safe, that feels psychologically safe for that kind of exploration, has to be created. And that is some of that work. And that's why I say it's not a neutral space to be in. You cannot want to be culturally responsive and not want to examine your own socialization around these three dominant narratives.

MARIO JOHNSON:

Well, I'm sure that you're also aware, Zaretta, that some schools believe that discussions around diversity, equity, cultural humility, implicit bias and so on, are the actual sources of the amygdala hijack for many students and teachers, and therefore they should be circumvented. What are your thoughts on this issue and what role do you think mindfulness can play in supporting the teacher's self-regulation through those episodes?

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Number one, inequity will keep telling you a lot of things. So you know how to put the wax in your ears and be about our business. Because again, we know what needs to happen. And this is what Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow* says in her first chapter, *The Rebirth of Caste*, that inequity, every generation will morph itself to the degree that you think it has died out or it somehow is benign now and all it's doing is laying dormant or actually going underground. And we see that. We thought all this progress we did in the 60's, 70's, 80's only defined there were certain circumstances recently with folks and jumped out of the closet. So the reality, it's always been there. And so this is really, I think, also part of the narrative that these conversations are making us uncomfortable.

This is why I want people to be able to anchor in instruction and then step back to say, 'why are we getting that result?' One of the ways to keep the amygdala curious is to come at it looking at this historical through line or looking at the instructional decision making and starting to ask why do we make that decision? I talk about this in chapter four,

is widening our aperture. And then what happens is, you can back into those conversations, not avoid them. You don't have to go deep in them. If you're talking with students, you have to figure out why are we having this conversation? Is it historical? Is it because of an incident? And clearly, adults have to be asking themselves, are they having the right conversations if students, despite all the equity and diversity and belonging rhetoric, if students are still talking about racial bullying, still feeling othered. Because I work with enough independent schools and charter schools and public schools to know that this is what's still happening. Those racial incidents in some independent schools still haven't gone down.

My own children went to independent schools. I've seen that from the parent perspective, like progressive people. So why are y'all still throwing the N word around on the school yard? So there's still a lot of work to be done that closes that knowing, doing gap between what we aspire to and what we're willing to do to make that true. So the people who say that these conversations are actually what spurred that, we know the motivation of those folks. And so I don't say that we have to respond to that. You have to build a culture in your school where people have the emotional intelligence and the resilience and the ability to hold space for each other so they actually can do that. Do I believe mindfulness can regulate? I come from a collectivist culture with an African orientation, others may come from a Latinx background or Aboriginal or Native American, whatever that collectivist culture is, I can tell you, I never went to the picnic and we were sitting around saying, 'let's have a moment of mindfulness.'

So I am going to suggest that we have other modalities. And despite the fact that people say they want that diversity and inclusion, we're not including those other contemplative ways. Everything is mindfulness. Now, I'm not opposed to mindless. I have a meditation practice myself. I think there's an overselling of it as the remedy. Ask children, what do they do? How do they do? What are they doing to regulate? Because here is the truth. People of color who have been through racial trauma, have learned to regulate themselves. Ask them and bring those practices into those spaces and have enough cultural humility to do something a little different, even if it makes you feel initially uncomfortable. But to say mindfulness is the cure-all to all things, I don't know. Sometimes movement is what moves things through our body, a more somatic practice. And what does that mean to have that if a student needs that? It's not necessarily the peace corner. Most parents that I know are not sending you to the peace corner when you go home. They can have some.

MARIO JOHONSON:

Definitely not in most traditional African-American homes. We're not doing-

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

There's no peace corner. Now listen, that's not to say that there aren't strategies, that moms and dads and aunties and grandmas knew from their own history, you got to move that out of your body. Here's a way to do that, with compassion. There are ways in which we do that in community. I just see a narrowing of what is acceptable for cognitive and emotional regulation that always ends at the mindfulness stop.

MARIO JOHONSON:

Thank you. Thank you so much for that. So the last question in this segment involves climate and culture. What do you believe are the climate and culture consequences of not asking educators to do inside-outside work as a precondition for culturally responsive teaching?

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

I think my fear and the danger is they think it's a gimmick. They think it's a treatment. They think it's the strategies. When I tell teachers, you are the strategy, these are just tools for you to use. And if indeed you are building students' agency and helping them reclaim that which inequity try to keep from them, then how are you coaching them to use these tools and develop these tools? Not because, oh, you never had them and now we're going to help you build it up. That's still a very paternalistic view. Instead, you have these tools, you're just not able to develop them. I'm going to create a space where you can feel. Free to lean into them. Let me coach you to use them better. So I do think there's a way in which we have to help students be partners in being able to do this work.

MARIO JOHONSON:

It's a very interesting vision that you provided because our independent school, for example, we do human development. We have a human development team that I work with, that I lead, and mindfulness is a big part of that conversation and that practice. And there have been areas where it is incredibly effective, but there have been deficit areas also. And so it is interesting listening to you say, well, if you have a demographic that has a historical orientation toward being impacted by this, that's a resource. You can actually tap into those folks and say, 'Hey, what does work for you?' Let's go directly to the source and call that information and start to incorporate that into our human development practices and expand out what actually are effective coping strategies for dealing with the context, the sociocultural context that informs the learning process.

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

And I think two things from that. You have to not just tap students as informants, because that's still predatory, in a way. Oh, we're just going to come and take this information from you versus come be co-conspirators with us, come be co-developers, come lead some of those spaces. So youth are doing that. And this is really important for white students too. And the reason it's important is because we are a brown world. The majority of the world, two thirds or more are brown people. They're coming from a collectivist culture. White students are going to go out into that world. They should be comfortable with a variety of modalities, not just this paternalistic view of kumbaya, but literally that ability to be comfortable even in a space where people are doing things that are not their family of origins practices.

Because this is what most people of color do all the time, whether in their workspace or when they're out and about. They have to learn how to move across those ways of being and doing. So part of building culturally competent students, period, is, even for white students, they need to know how to do that. That's not always the orientation in independent schools I see. It's more like, if we allow students in, they get the privilege of being in proximity and they're going to have the same benefits. So the research that's out right now says when you create these kinds of environments that are diverse and inclusive, the ways of being and doing change, and it causes friction, meaning the majority culture, 'why are we doing that? Oh, that's too loud.' Or 'Oh, we don't listen to that music when we're...' The change is not tolerated.

And so again, this is that disconnect between the knowing and the doing. Should it be a precursor? I think you can screen for people who have that growth mindset. So if they've done their work, they've done their inside out work, but haven't started to translate that in regular practice, how do you ascertain? Is it just rhetoric? And when they're in an environment where they are not the majority or they do have to do something different, what's their experience then? Because that's going to tell you their ability to stay in a space and be that distress-free authority that anchors that classroom as it is shifting. That's what you want. Not just, 'Have you read Dr. Kendi's work on being an anti-racist?' So we have to have better tools for pressing past what's become like the thing to say and do. Information is not transformation. Reading a book, that's not the Vulcan mind meld.

MARIO JOHONSON:

I'm sorry, the audience has to excuse me for a little bit of my chuckles. Okay? you're very engaging, that you have a lot of really great little dingers that really get your mind going.

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Clearly watch too much TV and too many movies. Don't even ask me about Lord of the Rings. Let's not even go there.

MARIO JOHONSON:

That's great. Okay, Daniela's going to up and wonder tonight, 'What's going on in the third segment?' So let me hit the tap for third segment there. Thank you so much, Zaretta.

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Thank you, Mario.

DANIELA PENNISE:

So segment three is next steps leveling up and closing the knowing-doing gap. So this last segment is about where we as educators go from here. How do we help students become more powerful and independent learners, and what needs to be done to close the gap between knowing and doing?

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

I think-

DANIELA PENNISE:

Oh, go ahead. No, go ahead.

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

I just think there's so much that you can do. But you got to figure out a starting place. So one of the things that I always tell teachers when we're working together, they're doing an inquiry, is what are you going to assign yourself to? Because here's the thing, the kind of transformation that you all are talking about is not going to come because somebody is doing a PD for you. There's not going to be in the, 'oh, we're going to do PD, and we came together and we told our stories.' that's not going to happen. This is going to happen on your own time. Most people of color are trying to figure out how to navigate white spaces on their own time. What are you going to assign yourself to do? So the four things I talked about in deconstructing culturally responsive teaching in the definition of the top of our conversation.

Classroom free of microaggressions, where students have a full-body sense of belonging, having a learning partnership between the teacher and individual students, students being a part of a community of learners, students being able to build their learning muscles. You can pick any one of those areas, and there's a ton of stuff to do. You just have to figure out what your starting point is and know that you can't do it all. And part of what you're trying to do is get the student to do a new thing. So this is what Freire talks about as praxis, conceptual understanding, informed action and critical analysis. And you have to move through that cycle in order for real change to happen. You have to move from conscious incompetence to conscious competence. And that may seem like, 'oh, I just get good.' No, there's a big dip. There's always a dip. There's always a dip.

Productive struggle. And part of that is getting comfortable with making mistakes. Because again, what we know about the cycle of change, is there's always a drop off in our proficiency or competence in the beginning. I call it the theory of the first pancake. You know that first pancake, right? She laughs because it is. It's runny and beige on one side, crisp and burnt on the other. Nobody's trying to get that pancake, but at the same time, we ain't shutting down the kitchen. We're going to let the cook adjust. Now that means got to heat the griddle up, got to turn the heat down, or thin the batter out, whatever you have to do. The folks that are wanting pancakes are just waiting patiently. This is what we have to do in our classrooms, that instructional core, the teacher, the student, the content, always in a dynamic dance.

So if you are trying new things, this is back to disruptive innovation. The disruption is going to actually break things up, then the putting it back together. So it's going to take a little dip as you adjust. This is why inquiry is so important for this and not just, 'Hey, I got a strategy, I'm going to try it and then I'll come and report back.' That is not inquiry. That show and tell. And show and tell does not lead to equity. So the reality is you have to have a little more methodical inquiry process in which you are able to do that critical analysis piece that Freire says is so important to our praxis.

Step back, how is that doing? What needs to be tweaked and reiterated? And then we get back in. And you can't do it to students. You have to do it with students. The older they are, the more they have to be conspirators to channel, Dr. Bettina Love's word, that they are up to their own liberatory education. Why? Only the learner learns. So you can work really hard with these lessons that are culturally responsive and setting these things up, but the learner does not have a different experience that allows them to do different things. In a new move, you're not going to see a change.

So that's the knowing doing gap. I think the biggest challenge is we usually take too big a bite and we want too much change. And so it's really up here. And we're going to change and we have all this aspiration, but really, the changes in tiny habits, tiny moves that accumulate over time.

DANIELA PENNISE:

And what would you say is something that educators just truly need to just stop doing?

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

I don't think we have another hour, but here's the thing I will say, educators are not doing these things out of malice or ill intent. And nobody getting out of the bed saying, 'I'm just going to go and not teach them children today. I'm just going to let inequity take hold.' I think the thing that we do is this pedagogy of compliance. We are so holding the whole class. We haven't set up structures for differentiation. We don't necessarily have that partnership with the student. So we're just covering our content.

So one of the things that we have to stop doing is this whole class, thinking the whole class is going to move through. This is particularly, I think, an element in high-performing independent schools. Because what happens is the students, the older they get, they learn to hide within that. They learn to look like they're productive. I answer questions that I do this, but the quality of their writing, the struggle in math, we start to see it as they get in out of the lower school, moving into the middle, and the skills aren't up to par by the time they get in ninth grade. And we don't know what to do about it, but we are growing that gap.

So we really need to create an atmosphere where the student can look at where they're still struggling and be able to lean in with the teacher to fix those gaps because only the student closes those gaps. But if the teacher hasn't set it up, isn't giving formative feedback, giving it in a way that is timely and actionable and hiding that because everybody's high performing, the student starts to get anxious. So this has an emotional consequence as well. So I think one of the things is how do we have less about what to stop doing, more about assess current realities. Where are you helping to

assess students, with them, in terms of what their skill set is to analyze a task, to write the essay so that you can move beyond two pages? You're going to have, by the time you leave here, you have to write a 10-page essay.

We're going to start with stretching you two. Is the paragraph coherent or is there a transition? There are individual things that that student can actually start to. Work on and that student's growing competence is going to be growing trust in the teacher, 'oh my gosh, you are getting me where I need to go.' Just like we would go to a personal trainer, 'Wow, you're getting me shredded in record time' or 'I feel healthier.' And so whatever the health outcome we want, we are able to trust that person to take us even further because we can start to see results. Our brain has a progress principle. And the older the student is, if you can't help them see progress, they lose trust in you.

MARIO JOHNSON:

Yeah, we know that experientially. That's absolutely the truth. Absolutely. Another critical conversations guest, Helen Immordino-Yang talked to us extensively about the relationship between emotion and cognition, which you touched on a bit, and I know it's a major component also of your work. Can you speak to this relationship and then elaborate on what you mean by cognitive redlining? It's such a provocative term. You've talked about it somewhat, and I get a sense of it, but it seems like there's different understandings of that.

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Yeah, I'm happy to, and I love Mary Helen's work. We talk every time we cross paths and just geek out on the neuroscience. And she certainly comes with that research lens and experiential lens. I see that play out and try to help people, say, how does this apply? Versus, 'Oh, we're going to have 15 minutes of SEL time.' How do we move that kind of emotional support closer to the cognition? Because cognition comes with emotion, and that is the piece I think we miss. We want to do it at the beginning of the day. And then what if I am feeling anxious or having self-doubt when you get me into my productive struggle in that ZPD? What are we saying in doing then? And we have nothing for that. And that is where you really can get the student in terms of that social emotional grounding to regulate and get into that.

Usually, I don't have time for a mindfulness minute because I'm trying to calculate this math. So ahead of that, we have to help students anticipate that this is what it means to be in productive struggle, to be confused, particularly if you're hiding amongst the high achievers, you don't want to appear that way. So you're going to hide your stress, and it comes out in other ways. So that is the connection, I think, to the really powerful work that she and Dr. Pam Cantor is doing. And what Linda Darling-Hammond, Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond is doing with the SoL, the Science of Learning and Development and whole child equity piece that they're talking about.

And all of those are relevant to this notion of cognitive redlining, which I borrowed from redlining in real estate. And I'm not the first to start to talk about this notion of racializing spaces, but this idea that when we look in schools and the pathway students can take, that we know certain things happen early on are going to close the opportunities for the student to move forward, and it causes a cognitive redline, just like banks would redline from this block to this block or on the other side of the railroad, we won't invest. And we see this in some schools. And so, a lot of independent

schools get students of color who have promise, but they have learning gaps. The student gets in, there's no opportunity to correct those learning gaps.

So without those, they grow and grow and grow. The student feels them and there's no help. So the student is drowning. And it becomes too late when it's evident to people. And now the student is getting dinged or put on academic probation. And then the parents are like, "Well, the student had these gaps." So the redlining is around how are we going to make sure students get the right skills so they can actually progress, they can close gaps, they can take the advanced math if they want, or the honors course if they want. But if we do certain things early in the student's academic career, they don't read fluently, they're not writing proficiently, they don't have algebra, we know we have cut off a path. And that is where that red line, you start to see it, who's reading, who's not, who's writing full paragraphs or who's writing is still pretty anemic. And then we start to see it and it starts to sort itself along those class and racial lines.

MARIO JOHONSON:

Excellent, excellent. Thank you.

DANIELA PENNISE:

Zaretta, I have a question. How can families more effectively support the objectives of culturally responsive teaching?

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

Well, I think it's less about them supporting the idea and actually being able to widen their own aperture. And so again, for white parents to really think about how are students socialized into these narratives. Can you make those invisible mental models visible so that they can be dismantled in your home? What does that look like with your students? So you're not trying to do the teaching part, you're trying to do the anti-racist part. If you're a parent of color, then you are recognizing that those cognitive red lines may exist and that you have to be a pretty strong advocate for your student. And if your student is not getting what they need at school, then by any means necessary, you need to get that help for them. If they are not reading on grade level or above or writing proficiently, find that extracurricular thing. Find that support.

I think writing is, of course, I was a writing teacher, but I think it is the real divide. The division happens around writing when we start to see students get into middle school and that ninth grade at the beginning of high school. So that's another place. And a lot of parents don't think my student needs to be a powerful expository writer, essay writer, different types of essay. There are a lot of Saturday writing groups for young people. Dr. Alfred Tatum talks about this Dr. Gholdy Muhammad, before she was really talking about the cultural historical literacy. That was what she did.

How do we create writing spaces for our students so that they can write and build their capacity as writers? Because what's happening is the gaps that they come in with, they're not being filled. And under this rhetoric of we're inclusive, we are anti-racist, a lot of inattention to students' cognitive development and their academic development is still

happening. And that's just the truth about, it's not to shame or blame, it's to say, if we really want to fix this, we have to look at the current reality, not our aspirations, but the gap between what we aspire to and where we really are, and what do we actually need to do to close those. And it's usually small, steady actions that build on each other. Thank you.

DANIELA PENNISE:

Thank you.

MARIO JOHONSON:

Wow, this has been an energized and inspiring and really deeply meaningful conversation. So many different dimensions that we could go into for volumes. And so, I just really want to thank you deeply from the bottom of my heart for being with us this evening. Not only is your work really, really, really important for all of us in the industry of education, but particularly for us here at New Roads. For us here at New Roads, we spent a lot of time with your work, and it really resonates with a lot of the aspirations that we have.

And so having a conversation with you really lands some of the things that need to take place in our educational program to really level up and to really manifest more of the responsiveness dimension of culturally responsive teaching. Because I'm going to be honest with you, yeah, the culture piece is a little bit easier, it is a little more of the low hanging fruit. So there is definitely much more to be done, and it starts with tonight. And so again, thank you so, so, so much for being with us.

ZARETTA HAMMOND:

You're so welcome. This is my happy place. Being able to talk about that instructional piece, the structural design, and getting people to really look at the small but steady changes and to remember it's a long arc. You're really talking about 18 to 24 months before you actually see the accumulation of change. And that's a hard place. How can leaders help people stay energized that long? And what are the lagging and leading indicators that you're moving in the right direction? Doug Reeves talks about this.

So in creating this atmosphere, you have to be able to see that long tail of change and know how change is managed because people look at the strategies and, 'oh, we're going to all go use the strategy.' But it really is about turning our gaze toward the student and knowing the student is the primary actor, and how do we lift them up and how do we make sure they don't have to hide, they don't have to hide their gaps, they don't have to hide their confusions, and that this is a psychologically and intellectually safe space to grapple, to be in productive struggle, to figure it out, to grow.

Just like we can't be embarrassed when we go to the gym if we want to get healthy. Yeah, it's going to look a little crazy and hopefully nobody's trying to do any Instagram lives right behind you because [inaudible 00:58:09] out there for the world to see. But we just put that aside and say, no, this is where we just have to be able to do what we need to

do. And how do we help students really believe that we are there for them? They don't want to hear the rhetoric. They want to see that this feels as a whole body experience that says, 'I belong here as a learner as well as a person.'

MARIO JOHONSON:

Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful. Thank you again so much. Our listening audience, our next Critical Conversations event will take place on March 14th, featuring Richard Louv, centered on addressing Nature Deficit Disorder.

A final point, if you are connected with the private or public school community that would like to partner and join with us, please reach out via our website, criticalconversations.com. Again, thank you so much, Zaretta. Thank you so much, Daniela and our partner schools, this has been phenomenal. Everyone have a wonderful evening.

DANIELA PENNISE:

Thank you.

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NEW ROADS SCHOOL

at The Herb Alpert Educational Village
3131 Olympic Blvd.
Santa Monica, CA 90404
310 828 5582
criticalconversations.com