

Shannon Simonelli: \00:00

Welcome to what we are calling Effective Practice Briefings. These are a series of audio conversations focusing on Evidenced Based Practice in education.

This project is sponsored by the Hawaii State Improvement Grant.

Today, we have with us Linda Christensen who has been a Language Arts teacher for over thirty years. She's the director of the Portland Writing Project, editor of Rethinking Schools and is the author of "Reading, Writing and Rising Up." We are really delighted to have Linda with us.

We've also got Dr. Julie Smith with us and she is playing a role on the Hawaii State Improvement Grant of Professional Development, which will be working its way to state-wide.

I'm Dr. Shannon Simonelli of the Center on Disability Studies, also working with the State Improvement Grant.

I want to welcome both of you and allow you to talk story and have your conversation about Evidence Based Practice, social relevance and social action in education.

Julie: \00:00

OK, Linda, I'll just start with a question just to open if that's OK with you?

Linda: \00:06

Sure.

JULIE: I'm hoping that you can talk a little bit about your journey to finding student-centered, socially relevant teaching an effective practice

Linda: \00:19

OK, That's a really interesting question because I think that it is a journey that I started as a good language arts teacher, teaching what I would say is a traditional curriculum that most teachers teach.

I landed at a school that was predominantly African American. I started in the Eighties adding for example an African American literature unit or a Native American literature unit, but holding on to the traditional units as the mainstream piece. Then I became involved in a study group and we started reading Paulo Friere and some other people like Ira Shor and Donaldo Mesadoand thinking about, "Well, really, is this the kind of education our students need? How does this talk about their experiences in life? How are we teaching them about their history?" And realized that we weren't.

At the same time, I started team-teaching with Bill Bigalow who had written a great curriculum on South Africa, another one on labor history, and was involved in work in Central America at the time. It really opened up my eyes to a broader view of what language arts instruction could be and also to what our students needed. That in fact, the traditional curriculum did not talk about their experiences, it really left them out and didn't help them see their place in it.

At the same time I became involved in organizations called The National Coalition of Education Activists, and Re-thinking Schools. I talked with a lot of parents and community activists about their education. One of the stories that I carry with me is the story of a young Puerto Rican woman who said, "I went all the way through school without ever seeing or hearing about anybody who looked or sounded like me." I thought, "That's not right." I know that even as a white woman, that I felt excluded from the curriculum in a lot of ways [while] growing up.

The question for me was, "How do I teach the students the kind of academically rigorous skills that they need to be effective in secondary education and in post-secondary education, but at the same time affirm their identity? Teach them about a broader group of people who have contributed to the literature and history of our country."

That was the beginning of the journey and then I spent a lot of time working with my students and hearing about what didn't work pretty quickly and what was working and what made them learn, helped them learn.

Julie: \00:00

Linda, I'm thinking about the journey and what got you started there. You're talking about making sure that what you are teaching is really affirming your student's identities and their value in this whole process. I'm painfully aware that as far as I know, there are no packaged curricula that address the diversity that we find in our classrooms here, and I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how you go about the process of making this socially relevant for the students that are in your classroom and that are student-centered.

Linda: \00:39

That's a great question, and I want to take that in two different places. The first place is knowing what I think is really important, and the second one is listening to them and figuring out what they need to know.

I'll address the first because one of the units that I spent quite a bit of time developing is on the politics of language. This came about as part of my journey as well. When I was in ninth grade, I was asked to stand and conjugate verbs and pronounce words as an example of how not to talk. It was a scarring memory for me and pushed me into silence for a lot of years. One of the things that I thought at Jefferson, where a lot of students spoke African American English vernacular at my High School in Portland, Oregon was that they didn't understand that there was a history to their language. In fact their language did follow grammar rules for that

language. It was seen as an inferior language. I realized that I really needed to teach them about that. This was a curriculum that developed over a lot of years because it meant a lot of research on my part actually. I started looking at the history of colonized languages and having students reading stories about that. And then reading actual linguistic analysis of that. They're doing some sophisticated reading but they read for example, one of the pieces that we read, we read "Pygmalion," by Shaw, as a look at how class affects language and then we look at pieces from "Brothers and Sisters" by Bebe Moore Campbell. Pieces by Richard Rodriguez, "Hunger for Memory," ??????. We do a piece from Hawai'i, from Lois-Ann Yamanaka. I'm not sure if I'm saying her name correctly, "Wild Meat and Bully Burgers," where she talks about the politics of Pidgin.

Julie: \03:05

Yes, I was going to draw that same parallel to what you're talking about with the students that you experience at Jefferson. It's a parallel experience.

Linda: \03:17

One of the things I want to establish for them is that, if it happens one time, it's an aberration. If it happens as a pattern, over and over again, then it's something that we really need to look at. So we look at the intersection of language and power. They keep a chart of the stories that we read and the gender, the race and the class of the protagonist, and whose language has to change and who's doesn't in the story. Then the students begin to form that. I don't begin by saying standard languages have power, and Pidgin languages or Creole languages don't, or colonized languages don't. To begin make it so that the students can begin creating those understandings themselves from the readings that we have done. In particular, because the schools that I work in have a predominately African American population, we look at the grammar structure of Ebonics or African American vernacular English and I show them the history of it. So then we read "Spoken Soul" by John Rickford, which is about African American vernacular English and some other pieces. We read some of Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o from Africa, looking at colonized languages in Africa. We go around the globe really studying stories around the globe and looking at how colonialism affected language, indigenous languages, or mother tongue languages.

After we discover that and talk about it, I don't want to leave them in a hopeless situation. Then what we do, is we move to where there are people making changes. We look at the Mother Tongue Literacy Project in Africa that Neville Alexander is working on. They are creating books and starting to have mother tongue literacy in villages and in schools and in pre-schools, so that children aren't losing their mother tongue. We look at the debates over English only. We look in Northern Ireland where groups of families have come together and started Irish Schools so that their children can learn Irish. We look at Native Americans' schools where they are trying to bring back mother tongue literacy. I have books that I've been collecting for a number of years that show some of these things. Britain and Irish and indigenous African languages show students that people are working to change. This is the kind

of method that I'm using most often, and that is a place where an issue intersects power. Getting the students to critique it, and then giving them examples of how people are working to change it.

Shannon: \06:27

I would also imagine, this is Shannon, that it would also, even if they're not in a situation where they are directly benefiting from the changes that other people are making, that having the information, being sort of armed with that information would be incredibly empowering for them in their own perspective and view of themselves in relationship to language.

Linda: \06:47

Exactly. I think it's two-fold. One of the things that I frequently hear is that if teachers are working in predominately white schools that they don't need to do this. I think that's a huge mistake because that's where the shame is often perpetrated.

Shannon: \07:07

Say more about that.

Linda: \07:10

That's one of the things that happens with mother tongue languages. People who speak Ebonics or speak a Creole or a Pidgin is that they're made to feel ashamed of it, that their language is seen as inferior. They're seen as lazy language speakers. They're seen as less intelligent and so it's really important that we educate mainstream students about this, so that they understand the history of these languages, why these languages came to be. They were born speaking the standard English. They didn't have to change anything to get where they are.

But people who do not speak the standard language always have to change. It often will come at the cost of assimilating into mainstream culture and losing their culture behind. Language rests with culture. It's really important that students who don't speak Standard English keep their language alive as a legitimate goal, and that attaining another that is Standard English is also a goal. But that they don't have to assimilate in order to attain it.

We have conversations about that. What does it mean to code switch? That's where the story of "Brother and Sister," and actually the obituary story in Lois-Ann Yamanaka's book, come in very handy. Students can have conversation or debate about that. Do they have to lose who they are in order to change, to gain access to Standard English?

Julie: \09:00

Right. You had another, a second part to the question.

Linda: \09:05

Well, yes. And let me just finish up with that because it doesn't end with they had this. There's another part of that. The students then write essays that I want to publish. This is academically rigorous and how we meet state standards and all that kind of thing. It's not that they're doing this instead of practicing the kind of fundamental skills that they need in order to be literate in our society. But that, in fact, they care much more deeply about the topics because they're invested in them personally.

Julie: \09:37

Right.

Linda:

There's that other...

I'm sorry, go ahead...

Julie: \09:41

No, no, no, go ahead and then I'll come back to it.

Linda: \09:43

So the other piece of it is that I also want my students who don't speak Standard English to move more effectively to code switch more effectively between the languages. So rather than just counting their errors as wrong and counting them as errors, what I try to do is show them language transfer patterns. When you say, "my mother she," that is an African American vernacular phrasing. It's one of the grammar structures of African American vernacular English, or dropping the "B" or dropping the verb. To teach them how to switch more effectively, I show them the difference between the two languages, so that they know when they are moving in and out. It's not seen as wrong, it's seen as different. I think that's the other piece that I think is really important because you're starting with an affirmation rather than a put-down.

Julie: \10:41

Exactly.

Shannon: \10:44

I'm smiling.

Julie: \10:49

And I want to go back to something you said a little bit earlier, about holding the students to academic rigor and addressing the standards. Because I think there is a huge misconception right now in kind of... given the times we're living in right now, where the pressures are all the standards and meeting annual yearly progress and that kind of stuff. There's a misconception that you cannot do what you're talking about, Linda, and still meet the standards.

Linda: \11:25

I think that...

Julie: \11:30

It is a misconception. It's out there. I promise you that it is there.

Linda: \11:33

Oh, believe me, I know it is because I see it happening. I think that one of the things is, if you look at... I have a reader that my students have to read, so in addition to reading to Pygmalion, they're reading 10 stories in their reading linguistics. Pieces of linguistics from Geneva Smitherman, to John Rickford, to Lois-Ann Yamanaka to other people who are writing about these issues. Neville Alexander, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o. So they're reading very difficult text which is one the standards. It's learning how to read and decode difficult text. We're working through that together, but because they're personally invested at this point, they are more willing to make that kind of persistent effort in order to read it. I'm teaching them how to decode it as well. That's one thing.

The other thing is that we are writing during this unit. We write a personal narrative about a time when we felt targeted because of our language, or that we were a bystander when we saw somebody else targeted, or some kind of interaction that we had where language that was an issue. So they're writing a narrative, which is one of the standards. They're also writing a critical essay where they're having to embed pieces from a number of different readings that they've done and having to cite those sources as they're going through. So they're writing an essay. Over the years, I've had students at Yale, University of Chicago, Howard and Stanford that have used the essays, that [my students] wrote in my class in their college classes. So I think that piece of academic rigor can be there, even if you are addressing social justice issues.

Julie: \13:30

Exactly. I needed that to be out there because it's something that I bump into all the time.

Shannon: \13:42

Well, how about if we take just a brief break here so that we give our listeners a chance to reflect and we'll come back with your next question.

Shannon: \00:00

So here we are in the second part of our conversation with Linda Christensen and Dr. Julie Smith and I'm Dr. Shannon Simonelli and I think Julie has another question.

Julie: \00:11

Ok, yes I do. You left off the last conversation with the issues of social justice and again, in my work with schools and teachers and so on, I bump into teachers that are pretty much resistant to doing that kind of teaching. And so my question to you,

Linda, is how you encourage other teachers to facilitate social action as part of the education of their students?

Linda: \00:43

Well, I think that one of the things that I want to outline is what social action means. One of the pieces that I see is that often teachers move to social... to kind of what I would say... pretty modest social action without having the critical analysis that needs to come before it. In other words, we move to writing letters, or doing something that is in the name of social justice, but often students haven't done that critical analysis of the social context of the issue that needs to be done. That's the piece that I think is really important and that needs to be investigated more.

So the way that I've worked on that in Portland is that we have, over the past seven years - I should say that I was a teacher, this is my thirtieth year of teaching but for seven years I was a high school language arts director for Portland public schools. During that seven years, one of the things that I saw as critically missing from, not all of our classrooms, but some classrooms, was really the multi-cultural literature and the background knowledge that was needed to effectively teach it.

I think it's one thing to bring in a piece like "Kite Runner," for example, that's about Afghanistan, or "Martyr's Crossing," which was about Palestine and Israel, but that you have to give a lot of background history in order for students to understand it.

I think the problem for a lot of teachers is that we're teaching on the run. We are having to create the curriculum at the same time that we are teaching it. So what we did was, we created a weeklong summer literacy camp, we called it. We brought teachers together for a week. We bought new novels every year and we paid them to come together for a week to study about the background of each of these, and to put lessons together around it, and to develop a curriculum on it. That also integrated the language arts standards so that every piece ended with, I mean that it looked at, critical literacy. It looked at critical literacy. It also looked at developing reading comprehension.

It had at least two writing pieces within that unit, and so we did them on "Kite Runner," on "Persepolis," on "Thousand Pieces of Gold," on "Always Running". There were over 60 books that we did, trying to make sure we represented a wide variety of writers from cultural backgrounds, and we also made sure that the books that we chose were written by people of the group that we were writing about, as much as possible.

It was through that that we ran workshops that were very similar in nature to the National Writing Project Workshop, where teachers were teaching each other, or we would bring in outside experts if we didn't have the background knowledge and use them as critical friends to help us understand the situation. Those were kind of some of the ways that I was trying to work with other teachers to help them understand how to do this work.

Julie: \4:12

Ok, I'm going to continue on the same topic for just a second and just ask your opinion on the notion of, "Do you think that it's possible for teachers to be effective in teaching through social action if they haven't engaged in it themselves to some degree?"

Linda: \04:35

That's a really good question. Well, I think that there can be different kinds of social action so could I give you some examples of some of the things that my students have done?

Julie: \04:43

Yes.

Linda: \04:44

And outline what different ways that that can look? I think that one of the things, when we say social action, often people get scared because they think that what we are talking about is taking kids out and marching in demonstrations or setting buildings on fire or something. I'm not sure, but one of the things, for example, that I wanted my students to see - that came back and they were hammered by - was the SAT. So they came back, and of course they wanted to blame me for it. And so not wanting to take the blame, and wanting to put back on the SAT, we decided to critically read the SAT. In order to do that, we started by reading "None of the Above," by David Owens. In one of his chapters we looked at the history of the SATs. We looked at the history of testing and tracking, and how often they went hand-in-hand as a way to keep down the aspirations of the poor working class people and people of color.

We looked at the history of that, and then we went through the SAT and we looked at the data from Fairtest that looked at how, as Alfie Kohn says, "Give me a student's zip code and I can tell you what his SAT score is." There's more correlation between a student's zip code and their SATs than their achievement in high schools and their SATs ,or their grades in college.

Julie: \06:16

This is about class.

Linda: \06:18

We looked at that, and then we went through the SATs and we looked at how they were constructed. I talked about and we looked at how they were culturally constructed, which is one of David Owens' points, and so they addressed a certain culture and a certain class. Then I had the students create what we called the JATs, a Jefferson Achievement Tests, that they constructed based on the culture of Jefferson High School in the African American neighborhood that surrounded it.

After they constructed the tests, they went to Lewis and Clark College, to Portland State and University of Portland and gave the test, different groups of them, to college students, education students. After they gave the test, they deconstructed that test with them and talked with them about the politics of testing.

So for me, that is an example of social action. It is embedded in analysis, and it takes it out. The students use their new knowledge to help other people understand something that is often hidden from the rest of the world. That helped, having the students as the cultural anthropologists, who are helping deconstruct people's lack of knowledge about cultural situations.

Julie: \08:00

Right, what you are describing there is a wonderful example of social action. It's also quite sophisticated. You see what I'm saying? That what you did, what you let those students do was pretty sophisticated and wonderful. I'm thinking about how to approach teachers who may be teaching at the elementary level who have a fear of moving into that because of the stigma that's attached to the term, social action. And that their students might not be able to accomplish the same level of sophistication with a project that your students might be able to do. I have some ideas of how to approach that, but I would like to hear, because this is your forte, how you would recommend approaching that with teachers who are teaching at a more elementary level.

Linda: 8:59

Well, one the things that I do, because actually the thing about a project like that is... it is sophisticated even in high school because... and hard because we are constricted by a seven period day, a six period day, and you have to have funds to go out and take busses to these different universities and arrange the field trip so it's awfully time consuming.

Shannon: \09:23

I just want to add how empowering I think that would be for students to be able to illuminate and articulate something that has otherwise gone unaddressed and unspoken, that's just sort of excepted and woven into our expectation and acceptance around what testing is and how we test and striving for the test. I just want to sort of bookmark that and applaud the efforts in that regard.

Linda: \09:47

Well, I think that... I think actually students at any level could do that.

Shannon: \09:51

Yes.

Linda: \09:52

I think that the whole thing of taking practice exams, it does it on a number of levels because it also teaches the students how to take the test, and yet it takes away the

boogey man feel of somebody who is so smart that they must know all the answers and I don't. So, I think at any level, it's something that I would do because it helps students understand the test. But another kind of... That's definitely something that I would do, and they can do the same thing, but a social action piece could be taking it to another grade level to share it with another grade level or another school or give it to their parents. You know often students have cultural knowledge that their parent's don't. How to figure out the DVD for example.

The other piece that I think works really well and I've used a lot because again it gets at "how do you teach to the standards at the same time that you're doing this," and that is a couple things that I'm doing right now.

This comes back to something I eluded to earlier. One way that I get at social action, or social justice teaching, is something that I know that I want to teach. Another way that it comes about, that it comes up, because of something the students say in the classroom, or because of something that's happening in the world that you can't ignore and you need to deal with it.

The other day, one of my students said, "Well, the Mexicans should just all go back to where they came from."

So, it was an opening to say, "Well, Josh, let's talk about that."

Let's look at the history of Mexican American War. Let's look at the North American Free Trade Agreements. I It just so happened that we had just published a book about this, so I had all the materials available. It's called "The Line Between Us," so I was able to have some of this material available on a short notice.

We looked at a more full history of the Mexican American War and how it started, and then I had the students... and there are some, the one in the book, "The Line Between Us" is from Howard Zinn, which is a more sophisticated read, but there's also some written for younger students that I can't remember the name of but I can get the reference on that. Students could read that; it would help them understand, give them a fuller understanding.

Then I took my students down to the library and they looked at our social studies textbooks, our US History textbooks. I had them write before we went down, what was absolutely essential that students would need to know in order to understand the Mexican American War. So, they wrote that down. Then we went down to the library and looked at the history textbooks, and they compared it to the three paragraphs that were in our history textbooks.

[They] said, "Well no, it didn't say anything about the protests. It didn't say anything about how African Americans felt about the expansion of the slavery. It didn't talk about Polk sitting on the boundary and having cannons facing Mexico with thirty-five hundred troops." So they have this whole list of critiques, Then what they did was, what they're doing tomorrow actually, is they're writing a letter and they're choosing an audience they want to address this to. About what's missing from the textbook.

Do they want it to their history teacher? Do they want it to the district secondary administrator in charge of book acquisitions? Do they want it to the library about what should be added?

Every student will create their own audience for it, and then they will write an analysis of the... of what's missing from the textbook.

Then part of the larger piece is, they will look at how, because we've looked at Vietnam, we've studied something about Vietnam, they'll look at the pattern of US intervention and how... what... what is... why... what is missing doesn't help students understand the pattern of intervention, if that makes sense.

So, that's one piece of it. The other piece, then, is that they will have an opportunity to create their own version of the textbook, what should be in it.

So, this is the same kind of thing that could be done in an elementary level.

Julie: \14:46

Absolutely. As you're talking about this, I'm thinking about one my favorite articles that you wrote is, "Building Community from Chaos," that you did a while ago. And I love that. I've used it many, many, many times in classes and so on, but there's a sentence in there that's reflecting what you're talking about right now, and I'm going to read it to you, "We were polite to each other as we kept uncomfortable truths that day."

I think that does reflect most teachers' thoughts about when issues come up that are uncomfortable. They tend to sweep them away and they start teaching the content instead of addressing the concerns that the children have. I'm kind of summarizing that as a teacher, you need to have some courage to address the issues and then help the children challenge their taken-for-granted assumptions. I think if I am encapsulating this accurately, that's what kind of propels you into the teaching for social justice. Am I making sense?

Linda: \15:54

Yes. Exactly. I think that's well said.

Shannon: \15:59

Wonderful. I'm going to suggest that we take one more short break here and give our listeners a moment to integrate.

Shannon: \00:00

Ok, so welcome back to our listeners for our last section with Linda and Julie. Take it away.

Julie: \00:08

Thanks Shannon.

Linda, one of my last questions is to ask you to address how this form of teaching for social justice, social relevance, student-centered approaches would be helpful, or how you see it fitting into the life of students who are receiving Special Ed. services.

Linda: \00:32

Well, I'm glad you asked that question because actually, I came back to the classroom this year and I asked not to be teaching honors classes. I want to really make it clear that the students that I'm working with are students who... I love teaching untracked classes where I have a wide variety, that is not my teaching situation this year. So, mostly I have disaffected youth and I have mainstreamed Special Ed. students who I would say at least a third of my students are on IEPs.

I think that one of the things is that in general, we're not asking students to think about big ideas, about ideas that matter, and that we're not asking them to be public intellectuals. That's what I'm astonished by constantly is that these students who are... carry IEPs with them, are creating amazing pieces about the world. They're able to take them out and talk about what we're doing and why we're doing it and how we're doing it. In fact, they've made tremendous strides in their ability to read and to write. Writing is really for me the lynch pin because writing is thinking made manifest. It's how students are able to tell us what they are understanding of what we're doing.

So right now we're doing... one of the pieces that we're doing is looking at unsung heroes in history. And actually not just in history, but in our local communities as well. To do that we looked at the movie, "Freedom Song," and students we're astonished by what has happened during the Civil Rights Movement and that they weren't well informed really beyond Martin Luther King, a little about Malcolm X, a little about Rosa Parks. They really didn't understand how people had worked over time to create change. Now these students are going down, they're doing research on Ella Baker. They're researching Shane Endicott, who's a local hero who has started a re-building center to... keep building materials out of dumps by re-building them, making them available for low income people.

Once students are able to grapple with big ideas that they care about, they soar. The problem is that too often we're asking them to regurgitate information that they don't care about. That's when they act out, and it's when they refuse to do the work or they give you very little to go on.

When there's a real audience, so that the students are creating a short research paper, and then they're creating stories, fictional stories, that they move into children's books that they're taking to elementary schools to read. They can inform them about these, that these are Special Ed. students who are doing this.

Julie: \04:02

Yes, letting them soar because you know when you were talking about having them do a lot rote learning and things that just don't matter to them. They truly do find remarkably creative ways to un-bore themselves.

Linda: \04:16

Yes they do.

Julie: \04:17

That are actually, you know, what we would consider unproductive. Then the other thing that I wanted to point out with your kind of focus on letting them explore the civil rights and discover things that the hadn't known before was, and this is just a suggestion for you, and if you've already addressed it: there is a distinct parallel between the events during the Civil Rights Movement and what's currently happening in the Disability Rights Movement. That might be something that the students, any of the students, might want to explore.

Linda: \04:55

That sounds great. I did not know that. So that would be wonderful.

Julie: \04:57

It's not widely publicized. Well, we could talk about experiencing media. You know that kind of stuff. It's bubbling underneath. It is alive and well. We just don't find it in the media very often, so it's kind of digging for it and Linda, you and I can talk about sources of information for that, if that is something you want to pursue. We can do that by way of e-mail, but I just wanted to point that out, as that's a possible link into making it even more relevant for those students.

Linda: \05:31

I think that's a great idea. One of the pieces my students are doing right now is writing about... I taught them the terms, "ally, perpetrator, target, and bystander," as one of the ways that we're looking at what's happening in the Civil Rights movement. But they're also writing a personal story about when they have been in each of those roles; A perpetrator, a target, bystander, or ally. One of my students wrote, who's a Special Ed. student actually, wrote about how he was a target. He was targeted by his friends who were in honors English classes. They said that he is not smart because he's not in honors. So his whole piece is a story about his disability. In fact, I think that actually giving the students the space and courage to talk about that, and to refute it, is really important in part of their intellectual growth as well.

I would love to see this because I think it would be very helpful for my students to know about this.

Julie: \06:44

OK, I have many, many resources that I want to share.

Shannon: \06:47

Wonderful, and we may even post some of those on the web. I'd like to comment just for a second because I'm an adult with a learning disability and grew up with a learning disability. For myself, trying to remember and apply isolated factoids was never my strong suit in terms of the way that I learned and as I was given

opportunities to learn... to develop my contextual thinking so that I'm able to think about how a variety of different things came to bear on a particular topic or subject. Then I could really get in and explore and deepen my own understanding of it. So for my own personal experience along with what you are sharing, it's definitely and all the brain research supports that as well in terms of how we learn. So...

Julie: \07:37

I think I would go a little further in terms of... some people would go as far as to say when we teach in ways that aren't embracing what you're talking about, Linda, in terms of being socially relevant and connected to their students personal lives, allowing them the opportunity to take action and to take their power in doing that. Some will go so far as to say that more traditional ways of teaching are... that would be a curriculum of oppression.

Linda: \08:07

I would agree. Yes, I would agree.

Julie: \08:11

We kind of set them up to be you know... not be successful as adults. I would say that.

Linda: \08:23

And to think that they aren't smart. If the outcome, the curriculum, is a test in which there are definite answers and only one way to think, that's often... it privileges a certain kind of way of knowing. Some students end up feeling like they're all "that" and others end up feeling like they're "not." I think that it ends up with in a number of teachers in my language arts that talk about, recently, the surge in plagiarism and copying and on tests and on papers, and I don't find that at all. I don't have a problem with that and partly because everything is so individualized. It so comes out of the students. It so comes out of their lives and there's no way that anyone but Chris could write this paper because it's about his life. The assignment is constructed so that the student has to create, rather than regurgitate.

Julie: \09:39

Sometimes we go into those choices that lead to negative consequences for them by the nature of what we are doing and how we are doing it.

Linda: \09:50

Exactly.

Julie: \09:54

We're setting them up to say, Ok, I don't have any choice except for I going to copy, paste and spackle and try and make this my own.

Linda: \10:05

Because I don't care enough to invest in taking the time to do it. Either I haven't been taught how to do it or I don't care enough to invest the time in doing it.

Julie: \10:14

Or the expectations are so narrow there is no place for who you are and what you are doing.

Linda: \10:25

That's a great point. I think that when we talked earlier, you talked about challenging assumptions and I think that we need to challenge student assumptions when they make remarks that stereotype and put down. I think we need to challenge our own assumptions when teachers, when we hear ourselves making generalizations about students and what they can't do or what they won't do because it's at a point then that we have to question what we are doing that leads to that student behavior.

Julie: \11:10

And that's part of what teachers need, in terms of being a good teacher, is that reflective piece. The piece that can look inward and critically analyze where they are coming from, what their perspective is, how that might be coloring and shaping what they're doing with the students, how that may be creating a barrier to their learning.

Linda: \11:32

In fact, I think that that's part of what cultural competency is.

Julie:

Exactly...

Linda:

That when we can begin to see that we are making assumptions about a group of students.

Julie: \11:48

Right. And having that awareness. Right.

Julie:

Exactly...

Linda, is there anything else that you would like to discuss with us?

Linda: \12:00

I think the only thing that I would say is that this is work that is not work that we do alone. It is really important to have communities of teacher workers doing this together. It helps to do it with... I mean doing it with universities helps as well. Being able to bring in experts that can help us, but also to rely on teacher expertise and that "it takes many hands to make light work" so that we give teachers the kind of

time that they need in order to really do the work that addresses the needs of their students.

We talk about closing the achievement gap, and yet what we want to do is give pre-packaged curriculum that doesn't differentiate or meet the needs of the students who we have in our classrooms. So we [need to] give teachers the adequate time to create materials that actually meet the needs of the students in their school and in the class, [otherwise] I think that we are going to have a tough row to hoe.

Julie: \13:10

Right, right the challenge would continue.

Exactly, and I agree, absolutely.

Shannon: \13:20

Inspiring conversation.

Well I'm wondering if there's any last thoughts from either one of you. Julie? Do you have any thoughts you'd like to share or to link to what you know is happening in Hawaii?

Julie: \13:36

I was just sitting here, just feeling like I'm so happy to be having this conversation with Linda and that it's making me feel quite validated in the work that I'm doing here with the teachers. Part of what I'm trying to accomplish, and initially it's at the elementary level, though I've been dabbling a little bit more with the secondary schools, is to make sure that teachers take the time to really know their students and to be able to make the curriculum relevant to their student's life for all the reasons that she's talked about. So it's kind of a foundational piece in what I'm trying to facilitate locally. Having your voice and your comments on this topic and the issues that are involved in them is giving support to I think what we are all trying to accomplish.

Shannon: \14:40

Well said.

Julie: \14:41

And I'm very appreciative of your time and your expertise.

Linda:

Well, thank-you. It's been great having this conversation.

Shannon:

Yes, I've really enjoyed it. So thank-you both and I feel very fortunate and I hope our listeners do as well. So a big Mahalo. It means thank-you here in Hawaii.