

Episode 1: Standing on Solid Ground Transcript

Val Brown:

Welcome. We are so excited to present to you CARE's four-part anti-racist educator web series. In order to reach our goal of an anti-racist educator in every classroom, we need to be able to talk. So, we invited 16 different educators from around the country to discuss what it means to be an anti-racist educator. Our hope is that you will be inspired to have similar conversations in your own communities. We even created discussion guides to help. Let's get started.

Val Brown:

For anti-racism to be more than a buzz word, we thought it was really important to begin with some foundational principles, and that's what we're talking about today. I'm really excited to introduce to you our first four guests.

Val Brown:

We have Scott Bayer, a high school English teacher and a cofounder of #THEBOOKCHAT. Dr. LaGarrett King, an associate professor of social studies education who's really examining how Black history is taught in schools. Jessyca Mathews, a veteran educator and author from Flint, Michigan. And Juliana Urtubey, a special education teacher who is also a 2021 finalist for National Teacher of the Year. And I'm Val Brown, the principle academic officer from CARE. Get ready to take some notes. We're jumping right in.

Val Brown:

Hey, everybody. It's really good to have you all here today for this conversation. Um, let's just dive right in. You've had a chance to look at the CARE antiracist principles. What do you think of them?

LaGarrett King:

I really like this notion of embracing historical truths. Everyone needs to be a history teacher [inaudible] because, because history, history is about identity, and history's about humanity. It's the first time that we learn about ourselves, it's also, it's also the first time that we learn the other, about people who are othered from us, right? And when we understand, like, the, the importance of how history is more about the present than it is about the past, I think that will help us really understand what's going on in our current situation.

Val Brown:

Dr. King, that is my one regret. I, I always say if I could do it again, I would be a history major and whatever my other major was. So, I think it's a non-negotiable, absolutely.

Scott Bayer:

So, I was gonna actually point the, to the same principle, um, that embracing historical truth. So, uh, several years ago, the first time I got to hear Dr. Clint Smith speak, he said, "I know enough now that I can't be lied to anymore." And that really hit me, and I said, "That's where I need to get."

Scott Bayer:

Um, and so, as an English teacher, you know, I'm, I, uh, also embrace that idea of, of teaching, um, history? Right? And when I'm thinking about history, I'm thinking about systems. So when I'm looking at texts with students, you

know, we've moved from, you know, thinking about plot and what's happening and things like that, and, and moving towards, you know, what institutions, um, are wielding power in this text? And what type of violence, uh, are these institutions doing? And who is the recipient of the violence? And in what ways did those people resist?

Val Brown:

Thank you, Scott. Um, I know you said historical truths, but I saw critical consciousness all over that. So, thank you for combining those.

Juliana Urtubey:

I'll speak to creating just systems because I love this. Because if you think of all the micro-environments in a school, you have classrooms, you have lunchrooms, you have playgrounds, you have after-school clubs, you have family engagement nights. You have all these little microcosms, all these little tiny pieces that you can create a just system.

Juliana Urtubey:

And I think that the advice that I would offer forward is in any of those just systems, they can only be just if they're 100% informed by students and their families and their communities. So, making sure that when you're designing that just system in whatever which way makes sense to your school community, that the majority of the speaking ideas movement planning is being done by students.

Juliana Urtubey:

And this is possible with all of our grades, including our Pre-K. You know, I see it every day in my Pre-K classroom. It's possible, it's possible in, with our students who have learning and thinking differences. It's possible with the families who are linguistically gifted and may not speak English. It's possible if we're careful about the design, if we believe that everybody has great gifts to offer, and if we're committed to doing the slow work. Oftentimes, people want the quick work, they want the, the result overnight, but we all know that this is one little tiny seed at a time.

Jessyca Mathews:

Um, I think the one thing that I really wanna bring up about the principles is it's not a checklist. Um, there's so much of the anti-racist work that it's out there, that districts like to use it as their checklist. Like, we're hitting a box, we checked it off, and we're moving on. You can work within these principles and go all over the place, it's just one big circle to me, and it, it represents by the work has to continue.

Jessyca Mathews:

So, the one that I really like, um, is the one talking about recognize race and confront racism with thinking about intersectionality. Once you understand yourself, like it's been said many times in here, you start to question the world. And I think that's one of the most important things young people need. They have to question everything, and they have a right to question everything.

Jessyca Mathews:

So when you question, you're developing that deeper consciousness. When you question, you're thinking about the historical truths that are out there and pushing back on them. You're thinking about your identity, you're thinking about the just systems that we need to have. So once you have an understanding of yourself and you give that opportunity for kids to understand who they are, and say, "Please question the worlds." Never, ever have an environment of, like, "Don't question me, don't question an adult." They should question everybody.

Jessyca Mathews:

And once you question everybody, we start to find real answers. And the principles help to do that. So, that- that's the one thing I would wanna uplift today.

Juliana Urtubey:

I think that the CARE, uh, principles are really important because most educators want to embody what it means to be anti-racist, what it means to be responsive, what it means to be holistic. Um, and sometimes educators don't have a good place to start. So, there's an incongruity between the equitable outcomes that we would like to see and then what's actually happening. And sometimes that can be frustrating for teachers, especially in elementary school.

Juliana Urtubey:

What I think is beautiful about this is that it lets us not just add new things to what we do every day in design, but instead to holistically stack what it means to be an anti-racist educator, what it means to be somebody who's culturally affirming and sustaining, responsive, responsible, relevant. Um, and it lets us explore one part at a time so it's easier to really move together with other colleagues. 'Cause we share common language, I think that that's a key part of having principles, is it helps us name those really difficult things to name.

Juliana Urtubey:

And so for me, you know, if everybody on my campus uses the language of historical truths, then what we know we're doing is we're bringing people of color to the center, we're bringing women to the center, we're bringing communities that are often overlooked, undervalued, um, and we're bringing them to the center. We have common language, and I think that's really powerful, powerful for teachers.

Val Brown:

Thoughts, Dr. King?

LaGarrett King:

Yeah. Um, the principles are our action, right? They're, they're, they're, they're divert. A- a, um, a lot of times, you know, we have aspects of anti-racism and it's all about building knowledge, right? Um, but these particular principles, um, call for action, right? You know, "affirm."

Jessyca Mathews:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

LaGarrett King:

You know, "embrace," right? "Develop," "confront." Right? "Create these just systems." And that's extremely important for people, you know, to really, um, realize. Because, uh, knowing is not enough. Right?

Jessyca Mathews:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

LaGarrett King:

It's just the beginning, right? But we have to provide some form of action, right? Um, so we can actually transform these particular systems that we're trying to transform.

Val Brown:

So Jessyca, you're 20 years in the game, 20 plus years in the game, love to hear your thinking on this.

Jessyca Mathews:

I think with my experience with doing this for, you know, two decades, one thing I would say is this holds people accountable. Um, I think there are a lot of people who wanted to hop into anti-racist, anti-bias work, um, after this summer without having any accountability that they had to answer to.

Jessyca Mathews:

So when there are these principles et, um, not only for those were doing the work or new to the work, they have something as a structure to follow. But more importantly, those who have been doing the work for years, they're being held accountable for what they're doing. If you are stuck just in one specific space, then you're not really doing the work. You have to make sure to focus on the whole piece of, of the structure in order for us to actually want to make, um, make change and build good humans to make the world a better place.

LaGarrett King:

The work that we all do we, we can kind of, um, compare it to exercise. Right? For us, you know, for u- for, for you-

Val Brown:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

LaGarrett King:

... to have gains, whether you're losing weight, whether you're trying to build muscle, whether you're just trying to stay healthy, right, you have to get out your comfort zone or you're not gonna finally gain. Right? You know, you get on the treadmill, you know, two miles per hour for 10 minutes, you're not doing anything. And that's our problem.

Val Brown:

Yeah.

LaGarrett King:

We've been on the treadmill for two miles per hour for 10 minutes when it deals with antiracism, when it deals with equitable history curriculum. When it deals with anything about providing equitable, uh, change in our society, we just get on that treadmill for two miles per hour for 10 minutes and think we've done something. Right?

LaGarrett King:

Um, so if, if we kind of look at it in that particular aspect, it's exercise, it's, it is time for us to shape up. Um, and if we do it, then of course, you know, um, hopefully our world will change.

Scott Bayer:

And I like, I like that metaphor, Dr. King, because I think a lot of people believe that being kind is an outcome. Um, and, you know, when we've talked equity now for many years, and especially over the past one year, um, you know, the language of it has, has become such that a lot of people don't really understand what it is we're trying to do. And I'm not sure that we're, even though we talk about equity, we're really striving towards equity.

Scott Bayer:

I think we're striving towards justice and liberation, and these four, or these five core principles put into action, implemented into our pedagogy, into, implemented into our policies and procedures at the school and district level will get us closer to those outcomes.

LaGarrett King:

Yeah, yeah. You know, we go to Target, right, you know, we buy the workout clothes, we buy the books, right?

Val Brown:

(laughs) I feel judged. I just did this weekend. I just did that this weekend. (laughs)

LaGarrett King:

(laughs) We, we, (laughs) we, uh, we, uh, get the membership, right? You know, saying we may join organizations such as like this, you know, right? Right? But when we actually get into the gym, what are we doing?

Juliana Urtubey:

Yeah, and I always think about, what does this look like for children? Right? So, I teach elementary school. This is something that can be done in schools, from Pre-K to colleges, right, and post, post.

Juliana Urtubey:

But I, what does this look like for students to unravel? What does this look like for students to find the language, to voice their language? What does it look like for them to use this language to connect to their families and their communities? You know, those are the questions that I ask myself in, in when, when I design instruction is, how, how does this help my students come into self-love without having to exchange any single part of themselves?

Juliana Urtubey:

You know? And how do we all unite for this collective community care? That we're not leaving anybody behind, we're open, we're vulnerable. Some of the words that I love that pop out in the, in the principles are humility. I think that if you're ready to engage in this work, which everybody needs to be, you need to be ready to have a whole lot of humility, put ego aside. It's okay to be wrong.

Juliana Urtubey:

I think in this country, people are unequivocally scared of being wrong and being told, "Hey," you know, "there's another way to look at it." Or when you look at it this way, look at all the people that you are either silencing, or marginalizing, or not uplifting everything that they can bring.

Juliana Urtubey:

So, I think I'm always, always asking, what does this look like for families and communities? Not just our students, but how can our students use this to continue to bridge? So especially within the Latinx community, I'm wondering how we're bringing families together in terms of language, in terms of identity. Juliana Urtubey:

I know that, um, growing up as a student of color, I always wondered how the things I was learning in school how it might separate me just a little bit from my family. 'Cause how it might force me to create two separate identities that don't have bridges and asked me to choose one identity over another, or one layer of my identity over another, and what were all the subconscious, uh, bits of information that chose me to look at what I thought was normal when I was younger.

Juliana Urtubey:

Up until a couple years ago, you know, I took that normal and I broke it over my knee because there is no such thing as normal, right? How empowering is it for our students to realize that they are perfect the way they are, there is no normal, and we're embracing it not through just this, like, uh, we love everybody. We do love everybody, but it's through we love everybody for who they are.

Val Brown:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Juliana, you just said, you know, the past couple of years you've been grappling with this thing, and it's making me think about the principle related to developing your critical consciousness. Can you all talk a little bit about what that means for educators who are teaching our students, um, what developing that critical consciousness can do?

Juliana Urtubey:

I think that it's a full-time commitment, right? I'm building the relationships so that I'm committed to not only knowing more, but conversing with other people more about this. Um, and I think that's really critical because when, um, everything that happened this summer with, you know, all of the, the, the response to police brutality and the killing, um, and how we responded, it was a really critical to not just go to a book.

Juliana Urtubey:

I think that's what teachers wanted to do, was like, "What is the one book that I need to do, uh, that I need to read, that I need to ingest so that I know how to respond?" And it's not just about that. It's about knowing what your neighbor thinks about everything that's going on, it's about talking to the students at your school. How are they responding to this kind of trauma? It's about if, if you're not Black, it's about being a good ally. It's about a lot of different things, and so I think that it's a commitment sun-up, sun-down about constantly assessing the world that we're in.

Jessyca Mathews:

I would also say it's, it's courage to do it, and that's the problem. There's a lot of people, not only in education but in the world, they're not courageous enough to actually do the steps that she's saying right now. It's easier to do a book 'cause you can hand it off to someone, they can get lost in it, have a couple conversations, and move on.

Jessyca Mathews:

To actually sit back and listen to the feelings, the reactions, the pain of different people, and, and think about how you might have contributed to that, it takes a lot of courage. I don't think many people have the courage to actually do that stuff. Which is interesting to me, because it's actually mentioned in the principles, too, about having courageous dialogues. And I think that's one of the most crucial things to do with your people.

Jessyca Mathews:

Like, with my students, we talk about anything and everything, and it's gotta just be the courage to not only for me to go and read and to make sure that I'm educated enough to have those conversations with them. But giving them that space, knowing that, you know, people can come after me for giving them that space, (laughs) or, um, having that moment where a kid is actually courageous enough to speak up about something very important to them and supporting them, and doing that. So, courage is a huge part of it that I think we need to have more conversations about.

LaGarrett King:

You know, um, in, in the process of developing, um, the critical consciousness, right, there is an identity element to that, right? Um, where, you know, people would have to realize who they are in this world. Right? What privileges that they may have that others do not. Right?

LaGarrett King:

And that doesn't mean that, you know, people are not working hard, or that they don't have concerns, or everything was given to them, right? But, but they are, there are, are, you know, some privileges where people you don't have to think about those particular circumstances. If you do something, there's no, you know, you're not really stressed too much about those particular aspects. And we all know that, right?

LaGarrett King:

Um, so in order to develop critical consciousness, um, you have to develop your identity or understand who you are within this world, right? And, and, and that is, that, that's even before we even get to pre-packaged curriculum, right? This is even before we even get to book clubs, right? You know, it's about understanding who I am, right, within this world. What power do I yield, right? Uh, what kind of effect if, if I say things, do things. Um, if I become an ally, those things are extremely important in the process of developing that critical consciousness.

Val Brown:

Dr. King, I'm, I'm glad you brought that up. We thought of them always as you have to do some of these things simultaneously, if not all of them. Like, we have to figure out how to do multiple things at once.

Scott Bayer:

Val, can I just follow-up with what Dr. King said?

Val Brown:

Yes, absolutely.

Scott Bayer:

Okay. Um, and so, what Dr. King said I think is, has been very important for me, um, as an educator. So, I've been thinking a lot, um, about, um, Jimmy Santiago Baca's, uh, a book, *When I walk Into a Room, I Am.*" And so when I walk into a room, I am white. When I walk into a room, I am male. I'm cis-gendered, I'm heterosexual, I'm middle-class. I'm neurotypical. I'm all of the things, literally almost all of the things, um, that are granted privilege in this society.

Scott Bayer:

And so, it's really important for me to think about how I'm leveraging that privilege on a day-to-day basis, from moment to moment, from unit to unit, from semester to semester to create spaces for my kids so that they are empowered. Right? If I am not recognizing each part of my identity and how they are, are, are intersecting with one another, then I'm not raising my own critical conscious, I'm not thinking about myself, and I'm not thinking about how every action and every word that I used with students is impacting them in a positive or a negative way.

Val Brown:

So, I'm thinking about the principle, um, recognizing race, what you spoke to, Scott, just now and confronting racism. How do we help educators understand that you have to say something (laughs) in these situations? Jessyca, you talked about courage, but what else do we need to do?

Jessyca Mathews:

I, I think one major problem that I see is a lot of times when these situations are brought up, they, they take it as a personal attack, (laughs) and then the defensive force comes up. And then, it's, it's, and it's a never-ending, 'cause I, I teach at the school I went to. But when I went there, it was 10% Black. It was 10% Black when I was there when I graduated. So, it was very common to be the only Black person in the room.

Jessyca Mathews:

And having those teachers who just refused, they just wouldn't do it. And if it was brought up, the times it was brought up, it was automatically, "Are you calling me racist? What do you mean?" And it was just such a blow up that suddenly everyone, like admin, would automatically go into their feelings, I guess is the best way to put it. Like, my feelings would be pushed away in order to deal with the feelings of the white educator.

Jessyca Mathews:

And, you know, I, I say many times the people that I work with, "You, you need to admit you make mistakes." And, you know what? If a kid says it's racist, it's probably racist." Like, just admit it and, uh, talk about, what can I do better? How can I make you feel better? How can I assist you? How can I... What, I a- I apologize. Like just say you're sorry, first of all. Just say you're sorry. Just say that instead of trying to deflect it and think about just yourself because your pain will never equal out to the pain that happened to that, that young person.

Jessyca Mathews:

And you can carry it a long time. I still carry it with me. I teach for the love of my students and making sure they don't have the same pain that I did. And if it happens, making it right. That's what I do, and that's what I wanna do with working with other educators, of bringing that to our attention and saying, "We can't continue to do this, 'cause it's damaging."

Scott Bayer:

I think for some teachers, one of the challenges is the historical weight that the job title teacher carries, right? The power and the positionality of the authority, uh, bestowed upon the teacher. And that, you know, a lot of us grew up thinking the teacher's always right. And, you know, in instances like what Jessyca's just talking about, obviously that's not true. And what Juliana said earlier about how the, the principles, the CARE principles call out humility.

Scott Bayer:

And it's really important to, to shed that historical weight, and to understand that you are a human being interacting with other human beings. And when you, uh, err, and you're going to, then you repair the harm and you do your own learning, and you do your own work and you don't ask other people to do that work for you. Um, and I think that's, you know, hard because I think teachers think of themselves in the ways that they think teachers are supposed to be thought of, rather than sort of just letting that go and being their full self in a classroom.

Val Brown:

Scott, to your point, I'm thinking we have to, to let go of the historical weight and still embraced those historical truth, right? 'Cause when we think about the history of schooling, (laughs) right, um, it's not all rosy. Um, and teachers have, unfortunately, been in a system that has caused harm to lots of people.

Val Brown:

And so, I don't know, and, and Dr. King, you would, you would know much better than I, like, how popular are these foundation courses in the college of ed? Do we need more of them? Like, how do we help educators understand these historical truths?

LaGarrett King:

I read study that only 20% of white students take ethnic studies courses, right? And since the teaching profession is, overwhelmingly white, right, they, it, it stands to reason that a lot of our teacher education students are, aren't taking these classes at all, you know, based on, you know, credits and, uh, the amount of hours that they had to take within the school of education.

LaGarrett King:

So, it's a larger, you know, issue, but, you know, we, we do see some resistance, right? Um, and, and, and sometimes it takes a while for these young teachers, these young people, to realize that recognizing race and confronting racism, right, it's part of the job.

LaGarrett King:

So, it's, it's interesting because we can have the same students, and I can get them five years later after they've graduated, and they decided to get their master's, now they're ready for it. There's this kind of disconnect, right, between a 19-, 20-, 21-year-old who thinks teaching is this, but in reality, you have to, there's so much more to the profession than just going in there and writing lesson plans.

Jessyca Mathews:

Dr. King, I, I have intern right now, and we, we talk a lot about this. And that is very interesting to me to think about these young teachers who actually do want this, but they have no idea how to ask for it, or they gotta go to a session and look at it for an hour and walk away, when they know desperately they need this to move on.

LaGarrett King:

(laughs) You know what? You're right, and thanks for, um, you know, telling us to student advocate. Something that we don't talk a lot about, uh, in this race conversation, right, uh, racial knowledge conversation, is that, you know, sometimes you need people in teacher ed that know what they're talking about. And you'll be surprised that a lot of people don't know anything about race or racism or they're not, um, you know, knowledgeable enough to teach those particular courses. Right?

LaGarrett King:

A lot of people think that university's just a little bowl, wasteland of knowledge, but it's, it's really not. So, demanding for, you know, uh, schools of education, universities, to really hire, you know, folk that really know how to really teach these subjects is, is, uh, very important.

Val Brown:

So, I think about this regularly. Only about 30% of the U.S. population goes on to attend college. They do other things, which is completely fine, but not everyone is even going to a college and university. So, Juliana, looking at you, thinking about, how do we encourage teachers to feel comfortable having these conversations super early?

Juliana Urtubey:

Yeah. I, I was thinking about something similar as Scott, Jessyca, and Dr. King were sharing. I think first it starts with understanding the generational impact of public education on certain communities. Um, I think recognizing and providing space for intergenerational healing within schools is critical.

Juliana Urtubey:

So, that's why it for me it's so important to make sure that we have uh, um, open, horizontal spaces where family members, not just parents, family members are celebrated, uplifted. And not just, it's not just a space like a make-and-take type of a space, but where teachers are building relationships with families.

Juliana Urtubey:

Um, because oftentimes, I'll see teachers extends asset mindset to their students, but not to the communities of which they come from. So, you can't have an asset mindset about me if you don't have that same asset mindset about my community. So if you hold xenophobic ideas about the Latinx community, then you can have an asset mindset of me because I refuse to be an exception. I am part of my community.

Juliana Urtubey:

So for me, that's, that's one of those macro-ideas that teachers need to have, but one of the things that kind of hurt my heart a little bit while we were talking is that a lot of the times, teachers don't realize that these situations

are racist situations. I'm thinking back to a situation that I don't even wanna recall, but I had it pointed out to the teacher the magnitude of the word she chose to reprimand a student with.

Juliana Urtubey:

Um, and so, I think folks need to have more experiences. Folks need to have a hard look at their life, look at who are the people they see in the daily li- daily, um, basis. Are they all within the s- same socioeconomic axis that you have? Are they all the same ethnicity, the same language speakers? We need to be able to push ourselves to build a world where lots of worlds fit. Right?

Juliana Urtubey:

And so, COVID has made that both more difficult and easier, because yes, we're all physically different, distant, but now we have access to all sorts of parts of the world. Right? Um, and so, we need to really take advantage of having that.

Jessyca Mathews:

I appreciate and applaud you for everything you said today, and everything you're going to continue to do as you, you move forward in this.

Juliana Urtubey:

I hope that we get the opportunity to continue to build and continue to exchange and have, like, this vertical alignment between what this means for our students the second they walk into a public education space, and the second they're ready to leave it. And hopefully we can do it in a way that'll they're gonna wanna come back like you, Jessyca, to be teachers, 'cause we're the teacher that we needed when we were students.

Scott Bayer:

These discussions are so important to the work that we're doing, and hopefully, um, you know, this discussion will mean something to other teachers out there, and, and will inspire all of us to kind of continue our work, um, and see the need for it on a daily basis. Because we know we face a lot of pushback, um, and it's, it's, it's just work that we need to continue doing. And we need to get a critical mass of people doing.

LaGarrett King:

I'm so happy that, um, our students out there can take classes with, with these dynamic educators. Right? Everywhere I go, I just, just have these excellent educators that were, were, in my mind, like, far above, more advanced than I was when I was teaching. Right? Just in terms of, um, the commitment, in terms of just a professional development, and just in terms of educating society. Right?

LaGarrett King:

Uh, so, I'm so delighted to be on a panel with you all, and, uh, I look forward to, to continue to follow you. Uh, I followed you all work and learned from you all and, um, and, but, but, uh, the kids are, are really the winners.

Val Brown:

There you have it. Our students are winners when we are antiracist educators, just like the panelists said. Your next steps are simple. Read and get to know the CARE principles. Bring some people along with you on the journey. Teach. Change. See you next time.