

## Episode 4: More than a Moment Transcript

Val Brown:

Welcome. We are so excited to present to you CARE's four-part Antiracist Educator web series. In order to reach our goal of an antiracist 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 antiracist educator.

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Val Brown:

Antiracist educators know we're not going to get to the future that we want with a one-time event. You need both strategy and stamina to move systems. That's all we're talking about today. I'm excited to introduce to you our guest, Dr. Heidi O'Gilvie, former teacher, professor, and now director of leadership development at a large school district in Maryland. Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah, a California based district leader and founder of WeLeadEd, a chat and podcast focused on educational leadership and social justice.

Val Brown:

Josh Parker, a senior director at UnboundEd who's focused on high quality professional learning for educators, and he's a former Maryland teacher of the year. Finally, we have Dr. Mica Pollock, educator, professor, author, and editor of *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real About Race in School*. And I'm Val Brown, principal academic officer for CARE. I think we're ready. Let's go. All right, first question here for the group. Talk about being an antiracist educator in your role as a school leader. Rosa, you gonna start?

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

Being an antiracist educator as the director of 17 elementary schools, um, in a new role. Uh, this is my second year in that role, it can be absolutely, uh, different. Uh, I was a principal for seven years before this and, and you know, after a few years, you're, you're building this culture. So we all understand where we stand, how we feel for kids coming in as a new person, not only to the organization, but with these, you know, wild thoughts that, that equity is education and antiracism is education.

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

Um, I, I've learned to get to know my community and to be able to introduce a lot of these pieces as new pieces and new learning. And so building those relationships with my team so that they, they understand who I am and why this work is, is the only work. And the only way we can really educate kids, um, requires some time, some massaging, some sharing, and some building of capacity around the sense of urgency that I feel and that a whole lot of people may not feel as well.

Josh Parker:

Rosa, I love how you said that and how you couched it, but then how it has to be active. So when I think about being an antiracist leader in my building, which is really the virtual one in my organization, it's about not accepting the premise that racism has to just be here and is intractable. So when I don't accept that as a given, as a premise, that in my lifetime, I will not see the end of racism as an organizing function of life, then I take on a different approach to act, to acting because I'm no longer assuming that yes, racism is here and it will be so difficult, and I may never see the... No, I'm actually gonna see the end of it in my lifetime, and that's what animates my work, not to accept the premise that this is going to be the story of my life and education.

Josh Parker:

And so when I come from that angle, then it, it just orients the work differently. I don't talk about short term solutions and I don't talk about branch level causes. I go root with my conversations. I go deeper with the things that I wanna change, and I've push broader for what I think is possible.

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

And when you say things like antiracism, that word for someone who's not engaged, who's never heard it, um, hearing that from the director at central office is, you know, a little, uh, a little, um, it shakes them a bit. And so an approach that I've decided to take is pointing out what racism is, what it looks like, how is that embedded in our systems and, and how we support or are not supporting students, um, especially students of color.

Dr. Heidi Oliver-O'Gilvie:

I love what you both said. And for me as a director of leadership development, one of the things that I am trying to do is to build an antiracist leader. And I know that that sounds very hopeful and very dream oriented, but if we're not dreaming, as Josh said, if we don't think that we can dismantle and disrupt the system, then why are we doing this work? So quite often for me, when I am engaging with principals or assistant principals or any building leaders for that matter, my beliefs come into the room before I do. And I think they know exactly what we're gonna talk about. What's the, what the work is, no matter if we're talking about literacy or mathematics or fill in the blank content area, we're talking about the work, we're talking about how we can identify policies that don't allow all students access and policies that they keep and the ways in which we disenfranchise students and how it's, how it just tears apart any access to, or any hope access to anything that we're trying to do as district leaders.

Dr. Mica Pollock:

These are all such great points. Um, I would add that, I think in my role since I, um, don't lead a school, but I have the, um, role that asks me to, um, offer tools into right. I've been trying to offer tools for everyday and racism for a long time for, um, powerful educators to take into their schools and districts. And so, um, to follow on what everybody said, I think, um, everyday antiracism is that, you know, collection of conversation starters that tries to pump that urgent action, uh, that all of you mentioned, and also that constant reflection on, um, which actions and situations, um, reproduce racism versus counteractive to be antiracist. And then also, I think another key part of, of whatever they were saying was trying to infuse that work into everything we're doing in schools.

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

I was just gonna say a toolkit. Um, I thought about what this looks like at every level. And sometimes I think when parents hear, um, we're doing equity and antiracist work and, and you know, social justice, um, a little warning bell goes off and, and they, they begin to wonder, "Well, what are you doing? And are you trying to indoctrinate my child into, you know, believing, beliefs that may, I may not agree with." But I think educating not only our, our school staff, our, our colleagues, but our families as to what does this look like when you are teaching your own children how to be better humans, how to, um, speak up when, when you, you experience or see injustice so that

they're not bystanders along this journey, whether it's second grade or eighth grade. So I love this idea about a toolkit and making things, um, age appropriate for our students as, as we engage them in education.

Val Brown:

What supports or advice you can give for other educational leaders who are trying to be antiracist (laughs) educational leaders, but might be struggling a little bit?

Josh Parker:

So what has always struck me about racism, and when I say always, I mean recently, because I'm constantly learning about how to be antiracist, is not so much how cruel the ideology is, and it is cruel and not so much how it can really oppress and it can, and it does, but how thoughtful it is, which is to say how much design is put into racism staying in place and how many people are invested in that system. And so the difficulty for me is being clear about helping educators and leaders be strategic about uprooting it versus being blunt force trauma with trying to remove it.

Josh Parker:

But now, there, there are spaces and lanes for everybody in this work, but what I found that in school systems, the architecture of inequity is so intricately woven that you're going to have to be really focused and strategic on how you root it out. And so the difficulty for me has been, how is the architecture set up in this district that I'm consulting with? How is it set up in this district that I'm focusing on and how do I get and partner with the leaders to help them to see it, and then develop strategies and replacement to do it in a way that can be sustaining, right?

Josh Parker:

We can make change in short-term change in some of these situations is necessary. There's an emergency change like first and second order change. Then there's a more sustaining change that takes clarity, precision, persistence, and really strategic thinking. And so that's been the difficulty for me is getting people to see that in their own backyard.

Dr. Mica Pollock:

Um, I was just gonna follow on what you said, Josh, um, to underline the word sustain. Uh, I've seen, um, you know, even in, um, PD that is kind of, you know, pretty successful at the one-off level in the sense of everybody in the room seems bought in. And, um, you know, somehow we pushed through initial resistance and people are saying, "I wanna learn more," sort of noted how easy it is, um, to not follow up. Um, and, uh, so I've been thinking a lot, uh, with a colleague, Andrew Matschiner, uh, who is looking at some of this with me about how we might structure the work in schools and districts to expect that sustained follow-up, whether it's asking people to, uh, you know, go forth and learn something else on this topic, you say you wanna learn on or go talk about the next step, actually with someone else and come back to the next gathering we have to report back on what you've done.

Dr. Mica Pollock:

It's, uh, super easy. Um, I, we have found to not follow up and not sustain and people kind of rest satisfied with having had some PD, having had that single session or even those five sessions. And we're done. So, so I just wanted to underline that word, sustain that you said.

Dr. Heidi Oliver-O'Gilvie:

Yeah, I agree with that, um, Mica. Um, in our, in our district and some of the districts that I've had the opportunity to work with, they, there's no real critical design thinking that goes into, that goes into place. So a lot of it is spray and pray. We'll spray you with a little bit of this and we pray that it sticks and that isn't productive, right? And, and

folks don't understand that this work should live in all of the corners or pillars or buildings with, throughout the school district. It is in HR because we need to hire smarter, right? It is in the schoolhouse because teachers need to be better at what they're doing.

Dr. Heidi Oliver-O'Gilvie:

When we think about the undergraduate coursework that our teachers have, they generally have three hours of social justice, diversity coursework. So when they come to us, they're not coming with a bevy of tools to do this work in the classroom, or to do this work as a professional. So figuring out how we do very smart, professional learning in our district is critical. We have to figure out... We have to let people know that it is not a one-shot deal in August, and the other thing in December, it's, it's not quarterly work. It's just as important as the literacy work that the teachers get, and the mathematics work that the teachers get. It has to be authentically embedded in all of the learning that we do. Otherwise, we're gonna be a hamster on that wheel, just perpetually starting over and over and over.

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

I love what you just said. Um, when I think about how this focus is sustained, I think about the important role of leadership. And as I navigate systems, uh, as, as a principal or as a teacher, I could just say, "Okay, if I'm not getting the support, this is my, my staff, my team, my family, we're gonna do what needs to be done here. And so you don't sustain that. If I, if my team members leave, if, if we have changes in the district, then that disappears.

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

So the focus that leaders put on sustaining, um, this energy and making this work part of everything that we do, that's a lens that we use is critical. And, and that begins with acknowledging, having a leader that acknowledges that this is an issue. And that, that, uh, we are gonna work on this as a district, um, having a leader that says, that declares their solidarity, and that says, I am, you know, with our team, we're gonna battle this, um, having leaders who disrupt, disrupt, disrupt those systems with the PD opportunities that are provided, with the things that we stand for, with the messaging that we provide our communities and a really big one, I think that's harder for folks is investing. And so how are we investing in, in people? How are we investing resources to make this work happen?

Josh Parker:

Can I add on just two quick points? Two words really resonated with me Rosa in what he said, investment and disruption. Uh, those two words are resonating with me, and it's reminding me of that famous quote, the illusion of a broken system, that every system is perfectly aligned to the results that is currently getting, which is to say, there are people invested in the inequity that's currently happening, and we have to disrupt the system as designed. So I just appreciate you saying those two things.

Val Brown:

Love to hear, like, any stories that are calling out to you right now in terms of you doing this work. Um, either now in your current role or in the past, what is, what are you thinking about?

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

I've been thinking about this a lot with our team. And so we are modifying how we educate our students and staff and community, and the vision that's in place right now is running every school, like a community holistic school, where we're addressing the needs of, of not only the whole child. And I know that got a little played out, um, but the whole community and part of that is aligning our resources so that we can address all of those pieces. So, as I mentioned earlier, social workers at every site, counselors at every site, community liaisons at every site, um, coaches, language arts, um, English learner, um, at the district and the site level, figuring out how we are, um, consistently addressing.

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

And we started with having those conversations about self-awareness and starting with self. How do you contribute to inequity? Unintentional perhaps, but how do you as a teacher, as a principal, as a counselor, whatever your role may be, how do we contribute? Because whether we want to acknowledge it or not, our beliefs translate into behaviors in the classroom and in the boardroom and in the schoolhouse. And so beginning by helping people see that this work begins with self and acknowledging where we are and where we'd like to be, and then developing programs and investing in people and, and resources, and just changing the way we do, because we cannot go back to the way things were.

Josh Parker:

I love to follow that up with a story. Some of the work, uh, that I do, um, in the cohort programs that I have, which are the system leader academy and equity influence a residency, I work with a lot of system leaders. And I remember planning professional development sessions around what equitable English language arts instruction is. And we were planning this together and we were coming to what we're gonna do here, what we're gonna do there. And when we, when we implemented it, and when we started looking at the feedback, we started to understand that actually not everyone in a particular district has shared meaning around what equitable instruction looks like.

Josh Parker:

And so one of the first steps that we said we have to take is we have to get participants to commit to making the meaning around equitable instruction shared so that there aren't 70 different ideas about what equity looks like in a classroom. And so just recently, maybe about two weeks ago, I was in a session and I was over here and one of my system leaders, and she said, "What we have to do this summer in our PD sessions is to get shared meaning around what equitable instruction looks like, K-12 and ELA."

Josh Parker:

And I was so happy that our process led her to that conclusion because Rosa, to your point, looking at self first, what can I do? What's local and immediate? I have control over the PD structure, which means that I can direct what it is that we learn and this is a priority. And so that's just something that's getting me through this pandemic is, um, seeing the change happen at that level, and people are realizing their power and making decisions.

Dr. Mica Pollock:

Back to that, Josh, the idea of sustaining what I was struck by and what you were just talking about was how, um, you know, rather than a framework overload with people trying to sort of take 50 million on-ramps to their antiracist effort and everybody stays on their own on-ramp, we're trying to join one antiracist highway in a way. And so the idea of, um, focusing for a while on an antiracist project, we're all gonna figure out, uh, equitable instruction in ELA, and we're gonna stick with it for a while and push toward actual change in that domain.

Dr. Mica Pollock:

Um, I think that's really important and, and kind of rare in some ways, because we so often understandably, I think because, um, antiracism requires many on-ramps, uh, this person's a math teacher, this person is working on restorative justice, but if we have too many, um, goals who might end up all sort of working on as individuals and then a bunch of people just drop off. And so I'm really struck by what you're saying about sort of sticking with, um, uh, an entry point for a while.

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

Because you know, you have people just sitting and waiting, especially, especially folks who've been sitting, uh, who've been educating for a long time. They're like, "Eh, it'll go away."

Dr. Heidi Oliver-O'Gilvie:

Absolutely.

Val Brown:

Absolutely. (laughs). Heidi, I know you wanna get in there, go ahead.

Dr. Heidi Oliver-O'Gilvie:

I, um, I just wanted to dovetail off of something that Rosa said, which is the work starts with self and it really begins there. And there's no easy way to help folks do the work. Now we have some time to actually go deep. So I started a series called Lunch and Learn in the article. We read an article together from ASCD and we unpacked it. I invited people via Twitter, folks from our district and it caught on and we've been able to sustain that work. So in that particular project, it's, it's gone from Lunch and Learn because, um, we can no longer use the 12 o'clock hour to what I'm calling social justice and soft drinks. I know it's really corny, but it starts after the school day.

Dr. Heidi Oliver-O'Gilvie:

And we jump on Zoom for one hour and we start off with our commitment, something that Josh mentioned earlier, what are we committed to? We talk about some requisite skills that we wanna hone. We go deeper and we level set terms so that we are all describing the same things and have an understanding of what racism is, what does it mean to be racist? What does it mean to be antiracist? What is inequity? What is equity? What is the difference between diversity, equity, inclusion and ABAR work?

Dr. Heidi Oliver-O'Gilvie:

So we go deep on understanding what all of those terms mean and how they intersect and impact the work that we're doing. And that has been revolutionary for our district because so many folks come, so many folks now walk away and they are ready to begin to speak up, they were ready to begin to disrupt, and they've done amazing things already, and, um, I'm very proud.

Val Brown:

Okay. I have a question. Um, this comes up often, do you think that this work should be required? The PDs, you know, the sessions, um, how do y'all feel about that? I'm torn personally, but go ahead. Love to know what to think.

Josh Parker:

I actually would love to hear more Val, about you being torn about it.

Val Brown:

Um, I would love for it to be required and I have facilitated hundreds of PDs where, because it was required, people have extremely high amounts of resistance, and then it becomes dragging the folks who are ready to have the conversations, you know, like they're dragging back the folks who are ready to have a conversation. So that's, that's why I'm torn. I'd love to hear what y'all think.

Josh Parker:

Yeah. I'm, I'm glad you made that distinction. So I personally believe that it should be required, but, um, maybe, maybe required isn't the word. I almost think it needs to be foundational, which is to say you can't actually be certified without this competency, or you can't be tenured unless you develop this competency as demonstrated through these set of practices. So it no longer is a thing to the side, but it's actually what it just means to be a teacher. So much of what I think the antiracist work is that I'm trying to be invested in is to eliminate the need to determine it and to use a term so that antiracism is woven into actually what it means to be a teacher. Like there's no teacher...

Val Brown:

And a human, and a human.

Josh Parker:

And a human, right? It's like, this is so core to what it should be. So to your question, I don't like that it's really required or voluntary, but it should be foundational.

Dr. Mica Pollock:

Maybe the other term I always follow Josh is the kind of normalized like that, that antiracism is I, I feel like in, in, in, um, a lot of the work I've tried to do to certain, of course, we're doing this, you know, as opposed to, um, sort of humoring any, any, any fighting about whether we should do this or, you know, whether this is part of the work or, you know, just, no, of course, this is the work and this is part of the work. Um, I think that was, uh, I think that's a really, um, important point you made.

Dr. Mica Pollock:

I mean, I think to your point, Val, at the same time, um, going with, uh, those were the most energy and champions of the work to move forward, rather than letting those most resistant sort of hold back the entire, uh, collective effort is important. So I think there's a mix to be had where it's, it's, it's simply a foundational to, um, learn not only a set of competencies, but also I would argue, uh, a certain amount of content, uh, related to, you know, countering deep myths, um, understanding our history, uh, basic content that all educators should know.

Dr. Mica Pollock:

Um, but that also in, in sort of, uh, as we continue to push for antiracist change, uh, uh, letting those with the most excitement and energy push it forward rather than waiting for, um, for the resistance 'cause I think a lot of PD ends up so focused on getting the resistant that we then never go to the sustaining ongoing action that we were talking about earlier.

Dr. Heidi Oliver-O'Gilvie:

I, I totally agree with you. And this is why I tried to create that library because I thought if I could just get them to expand their ideology, then maybe, just maybe we can move them up around.

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

I'm ready for bumper stickers. Equity is the foundation. Um, I don't see how we can educate. That is the same thing to me, everything I do and I look at begins with that, uh, that lens. How is this equitable? Not only for our students, but for our teachers and our families. And, um, I'm not kidding, I'm gonna go make some stickers.

Josh Parker:

You know, I just, what I'm gonna take you hyper-local with this is gonna be quick I promise. But I got the, one of my favorite chicken sandwich shops in Charlotte is called Bossy Bueller's, I love it. And you go in there and it's a local

shop, it's fantastic, and the menu is the menu. So, you know, if you want other types of chicken sandwiches you have to go somewhere else. And for me, for a system, equity is just gotta be the menu. When we come here, this is what we do. You might go to another place and get another type of sandwich. But when you come to this district, to this classroom, to this school, this is a menu we don't do substitutions. What you get is what we have, and then what we have is what you'll give. And that's it.

Dr. Heidi Oliver-O'Gilvie:

I think if building leaders create that same vision, then teachers will either stay and do deep learning or they leave. And I think that's what we need (laughs). We need people who understand what's on the menu, they understand what the non-negotiables are, and they learn to love it, and they learn to appreciate what's there, and then make the best of the situation. Um, so I, I, um, that's great. I love that idea. This is the menu, this is what we're doing, this is what we have, this is the core, this is the cornerstone.

Val Brown:

I have question, I have a question about what, what would you say to teachers who are trying to push their leaders to do this work? What, take a moment to think about it, but what, what advice can we give teachers who are the ones who might be leading this work in their schools, but their, their administrators might be hesitant or their district leadership, like what, what can we tell them?

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

I've been in that position. It is a hard position to be in. I, I, I went back and forth between just shutting my door and doing what I needed to do with what I had, um, to, you know, dropping articles, sharing stories, buying books as gifts. Um, but sadly, how many of us have left organizations that, that were just unhealthy because this work is exhausting and this work requires that the co-conspiracy, um, it, it requires all of that.

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

And so my advice would be, keep pushing, take care of yourself, um, learn, build your capacity, fill your backpack with knowledge, do the work with your students. And at some point, um, you do all you can. If it gets to a point where it is an unhealthy setting for you and you cannot, can no longer thrive, then you know, I wouldn't expect you to stay. Uh, so my message would be, keep trying, keep working, and try to share that knowledge with your leader. And here we are, again, it's that dang leadership piece, uh, whether you are the leader of, of your district, or your school site, or your classroom, it, it really takes that leadership to sustain and to grow this work.

Josh Parker:

If I can say just a couple of quick things to this. Um, I so appreciate Rosa what you say in terms of if it's unhealthy for you, you have to make a decision. And I think sometimes we're afraid to say that in this space, because if I'm an educator at heart, so we're always like, save everybody, move everybody, try everything, the leader isn't with you, make them believe, you know, whatever, right? But sometimes it's like the leader is not gonna agree with me I gotta go somewhere else, right? Um, however, in some cases there is flexibility. It's just hard.

Josh Parker:

So three things that have come to mind that I have said often and I'm still learning. A lot of these from the adaptive leadership concept from Dr. Ron Amedee. So, the first is, people don't resist change per se, they resist loss. So then when you are trying to get leaders to come along, you need to consider the loss your change is inflicting upon them and mitigate to the grief possible while still getting the thing done. So that's one, one aspect.

Josh Parker:

Second, don't go at something alone. Building a coalition of two to three folks to get something done within a school district to move a leader, to manage up, is always preferable to the one person, because you can easily be dis, discarded if you're just one voice, but if it's a collective voice that can make it happen. The last thing is, I would say, make it as much as possible in the self-interest of the leader you're trying to influence because at the end of the day, leaders have things they wanna get done, they're vested in certain things. Let's go back to investment again, Rosa, right? That word. If you can sense that, and connect the equity initiative to what they're personally invested in, there is a greater chance they can move. All these are imperfect, but their starting points.

Dr. Heidi Oliver-O'Gilvie:

So, Val, I love your question. I'm wondering if we can flip it the other way. So what I've noticed is when teachers outpaced the leader in their learning, the work stalls, so that becomes wildly problematic. So we have to figure out ways to get the leaders involved in all of the learning that the teachers are doing. Number one, I think leaders feel intimidated when the teachers know more about the work of antiracism or the work of, of equity. So I'm finding that when I do the, my professional development in my district, I try to target leaders so that leaders feel empowered to be the lead learners in this work. So thinking about that too, how do we stop, or how do we mitigate teachers from outpacing the leaders? And I know that we don't necessarily wanna stop them, but we do want the leaders to take advantage of the learning as well.

Dr. Mica Pollock:

I think the only other thing I would add, add to these great points is, um, the energy of youth is, um, just exploding nationally. And I think, um, the, uh, educator, um, who are harnesses that energy is, uh, goes very far. Um, and so the, you know, to, to not feel alone in the work regarding one's colleagues, but also, uh, to, um, be doing it in community with youth, uh, I think is particularly exciting. And we see a lot of, I think, um, curricular overhaul antiracism happening powered by that youth energy particularly right now. Um, so it's a really exciting moment where, um, you know, I think once again, to our point Josh, about sort of normalizing the work, of course we're gonna, this is what you felt so excited to (laughs) overhaul the curriculum. And, um, and to your point, uh, I think Rosa, you said this, um, when leaders who might've been resistant, um, uh, see a lot of young people excited to learn that's, that's the business, that's the sort of proof in the pudding. So, um, leveraging that excitement, uh, is I think part of, part of the solution.

Dr. Heidi Oliver-O'Gilvie:

I didn't necessarily prep for this, but I would like to share a few just words of encouragement for folks that are doing this work. I think that this work requires hope. And if we don't have hope, creativity, um, ideation, and deliberate action, then we're not gonna see very much change. So I want folks not to feel a sense of hopelessness, but a sense of hopefulness that change will come in community.

Dr. Rosa Perez-Isiah:

I'm so glad you said that Heidi, I, I was just gonna put that out there, and that it has been a difficult year and a difficult four years just to be frank. Um, and, and people are exhausted. And I got to a point where I, I began to doubt. I've always been a hopeful person, but I, I, I went through some times when I thought, "Wow, this is really where we are." Um, hope is a great strategy when you combine it with action. And I, I want people to remember that, um, uh, we will continue to do this work, that there are more people just like you, don't lose hope, keep doing it. We are beginning to see those changes, we see it every day.

Josh Parker:

Change has to be a system, so that when people walk into it, equity is an automatic. And so, keep thinking in that way, keep striving, know that you're in community with all of us.

Val Brown:

I'm leaving here with lots of gratitude and the ideas of one, of course, we have to keep that hope. And just the idea that we have to be so strategic with what we're doing, we have to be as intentional as racism was to entrench itself in our systems to get it out of there. Um, and that we need to take care of ourselves and each other, right? This is hard grinding work. And the last several years have been very difficult, um, to your point, Rosa. And, um, we need each other. So thank you all for a wonderful conversation. I really appreciate you.