

TRANSCRIPTION – PART II

Dr. Kyser: My next question is we know that inequitable access to education affects long-term outcomes for students. How do you each make critically conscious decisions around schooling for your child or children? And, Christen, I want to turn it to you, and then Dr. Lynn I know you have to run here shortly, so I'll ask you to maybe answer second.

Dr. DePouw Okay. Okay. Um, something that we're currently grappling with in my family. Our-our son is 3 years old, he's multiracial, he speaks both Spanish and English. And we were looking for a pre-K program that's dual language immersion, but the only one we could find is in the Catholic school system in our city, because our city's kind of small. And, um, I don't know how critical they are about issues of race in their curriculum, just from what I've seen. Um, there's like mascot-ing of-of Native peoples, some of the art projects, those kind of things. Um, and so we've been really grappling with this idea of do we privilege the language and the social interaction with-with other Latinx youth, or how do we- how do we help to interrupt some of the messaging that definitely is like that, coming from that curriculum. Um, so we've been really thinking about building more relationships with the principal and some of the teachers as we get ready to enter into that school. Um, and just kind of for me, letting it be known that I'm in Teacher Ed., I study around race and culture, um, if y'all what to collaborate on some professional development down the road, I'd be open to that. So, so for me, I think it's difficult because I don't think there's always the one great answer. And I think depending on your context, you know, those difficult choices are going to be different. Um, for us, because both of us are thinking about the ways in which language is connected to racial identity and the likelihood that the way our public schools are structured in our community, he needs all the strength he can get to support that language once he gets into kindergarten. Where, right now, we're choosing to privilege that issue of language. Um, but I think it's really hard because I already know I'm choosing to allow him to be exposed to these kind of negative forms of socialization. Um, and so, for me, and my husband, what we've been talking about is just not necessarily in terms of controlling information that he's exposed to, but figuring out good ways to guide him and lay a conceptual foundation so that he's aware of alternative messaging and that he's able to make good choices, even even even at the age of 3. But, but honestly, I don't want- I think we don't have good answers /laughter/. We do the best we can with the money and the options available.

Dr. Kyser: Thank you Dr. DePouw. Dr. Lynn, your thoughts? And we'll follow up with Ms. Parker.

Dr. Lynn: Yes, um. If you're thinkin' about, uh, school and what kind of school, um, I often talk with my friends all the time about the fact that there are no good options. Um, and, I have not found the kind of school that I think would prepare my kids to be, um, you know academically strong and critically conscious. Uh, and and maybe it's just a

function of where I've live /laughter/, so that could be it. But I think that that's a missing piece and I feel, personally, like there's something we need to do about that. So it's-it's a slowly developing project in my own mind. Um, if I have to make a choice, though, I would choose to make sure that my kids are in academically rigorous environments. I think the best thing we can do for a kid of color in this country is to make sure they have a good, strong foundation in terms of the basics, uh, and that they, um, get a head a start. And so, um, then they have the ability to do a lot of other things. As parents we take responsibility for teaching them about their history and their culture and, uh, uh and-and then providing that critical consciousness. We've had some pleasant surprised about things that have been taught in the school around Black history and so on, but for the most part we see schooling as our responsibility.

Dr. Kyser: Thank you. Ms. Parker?

Miss Parker: Um, when I think about, these are also things that I grapple with myself. So, um, there's a lot. There's a lot because I think, what I think about, too, with, um, Dr. DePouw, she just said "I don't expose them to everything," um, because your child is at risk of internalizing this inferiority complex or this inferiority that's out there. That's part of white supremacy. And on the other end of it, I have White children and I'm afraid they're going to internalize this superiority complex, which is how White domination occurs. And so, um, it is, it's difficult for me to make all these different decisions around what building and what school am I going to put them in. Um, I was raised in a very integrated environment, but still a White space, and so I think sometimes White parents say, okay well they were-they weren't integrated, they were a "majority minority school." As though that, then, solves some sort of race problem when really it kind of stages White supremacy in front of more children of color. And so a lot of the people I went to school with that were White came out feeling more superior than the kids in the 'burbs that never had contact with people of color. And so I think the integration thing is very interesting. I do send my children to an integrated school. It's about 50/50 Latino and White, and not much representation from other groups. And within that, that, um, so things that I have done, I think...I interrupt, I interrupt the curriculum that comes home as much as possible, and I have also introduced myself to their teachers as somebody who could help out with teaching about race, and, um, they all got it. See, I'm in a White, I'm in a liberal environment, and so I think a lot of people know that White liberals are very difficult to deal with when it comes to race because "they've got it." They don't need, they don't even understand what they don't understand. So me going in and saying "I study this." They might say, "I read the New Yorker, so I'm up on that conversation." Well, okay. I'm so disappointed because my fifth grader has only learned about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks, and one of them believes that Rosa Parks was the president at one point. So, it's the same thing happening all the time. Every year it seems the same issue which is lack of the critical, lack of representation. So I also do that at home at the dinner table and they have their homework, and it's the social studies homework, what's going on

here.

With teachers, when I meet with them individually, but I haven't had as much luck, and then as far as what goes on within their school, there are other things that I'm trying to constantly get them to think about or give other parents to think about which is a runaway gifted program that's at my school. As we know, giftedness in a lot of research is White imaginary, it's part of the fantasy. This upholding of IQ and, and that White students just come out smarter. Um, and there's a lot along, if you study White parenting, you can see that this starts really early. Like, when White mothers start their breastfeeding groups and start talking about how much higher their kids IQs are going to be, and the research that supports it. But then there's no research on the, the same group of people that doesn't seem to believe in race, in race, um, research. So, it's very difficult to deal with, but one of the things that happened at my school is the Opt Out Movement, where it was primarily the privilege White kids that were opting out. Now, I do not believe in the standardized testing, we are completely off track right now in public education with the testing, but when I saw who was opting out and who was involved in that movement, it was mainly, I gave the decision to my kids were taking the test with everyone else because I did not want them to internalize some idea that they were special and they did not have to take that test. My time's up, so I'll wait on that.

Dr. Kyser

There's not timeline. But keep it succinct, that's helpful. /laughter/ But, um, uh, I appreciate the nuanced unpacking of how both of you are trying to tap into your own critical consciousness as you make very nuanced decisions that directly impact your children, but also how you go about conceptualizing that space for your children so that they, then, have a model to understand the development, hopefully, I think I'm inferring, and please correct me if I'm wrong, they're, um, able to see you as a model and you're able to kind of create spaces for them to cultivate their own critical consciousness.

In response to that, I want to jump to a question for Dr. DePouw and Dr. Lynn. Dr. Lynn, I'm going to pull from your research so I'm sort of jumping into some questions specifically related to your research, and Dr. DePouw, yours, as well. And I'll read both questions first so you know where I'm going, and Dr. Lynn, I'll first refer to you first to answer, and then Dr. DePouw.

Dr. Lynn, the question I have for you is, critical race parenting calls for examining the areas where decolonization is costful. Some children of critical researchers have mentioned to their parents how they cannot talk to their teachers about Whiteness, but kind of going with, uh, Ms. Parker's idea sort of the narrative, um, that underlies the experiences particularly for students of color, but students broadly all extend to those who are on the margins. From your research on critical race theory in education and your work in teacher preparation, do you have advice for parents and caregivers who are raising children with a critical, uh, race consciousness

specifically on how to engage with the power structures that involve whiteness in their school, for example, with their teachers and their administrators. Dr. Lynn, that's my first question to you. Dr. DePouw, as a follow up, I would ask you as you were talking about the dynamics and iterations of raising a multi-multi-racial child, how do you conceptualize what allyship to people of color means for you, um, and then how do you, or said another way, how do you, um, position yourself as loving, uh, for and with people of color, including your son, husband, without appropriating their experience as individuals of color. Those are the two kind of questions I want to pose both of you. Dr. Lynn, I'll pose your question first.

Dr. Lynn

Okay. And I want to respond to something you said earlier about gender and having boys develop a kind of gender consciousness. Um, I work really hard at helping my boys develop a sense of healthy respect for, um, differences around gender, but also a gender identity, which I think is more hard for, you know, males in a heteronormative context that we live in, um. For us, um, Hillary Clinton's, um, candidacy was a great opportunity for us to talk about gender and to talk about women in in leadership roles, and what that what that would mean. I think me and my boys how transformative that would for this country. But, I think they were also talking to their friends and reading the tea leaves and understood how threatening that was for a lot of men. And I think we-we were critical of that. So, um, I think, you know, helping them think about, uh, have develop-developing a healthy respect for-for-for gender as a construct, but also for-for girls and for women. Um, we talk about equal rights, you know, this idea that Hillary talked about in terms of equal rights and equal pay for women in the workplace, and, in in supported that idea very much. But also I, you know, it's important for them to be careful as far as how they interact with girls, right? And that they don't take on a masculinist identity and a sexist identity when it comes to thinking about how they interact and how they think about girls. And it helps that they have a mother who is very strong and who herself is a proponent of equal rights for women, and demonstrates that in their lives every day. They're very fortunate in that sense. But, I think it's important to give children a critical consciousness about social equalities particular about race and gender and sexuality and gender identity and other axes of domination because kids of color, in particular, tend to internalize, um, what they experience and so my research really has been interested in the work of teachers who understand that if kids don't, um, see racism, sexism, and other isms as kind of external constructs that are grafted onto them, that they tend to internalize the things that are happening to them. And this is particularly true for Black boys. That when teachers express fear in the presence of Black boys in the classroom, a lot of Black boys will then assume it's because they're scary, right? And if we teach them that no, that's how the world has taught them do Black boys and that's not about you, then they are less likely to develop a vision of themselves as scary. And, you know, that when males in particular develop a vision of themselves as scary, that can lead to lots of things, right? Some very dangerous things down the line. So it's really important that we teach them to externalize these events. And then to engage in some kind of activity- productive activity- that is about

changing that, uh, I don't encourage my kids to confront their teachers on an individual level because I think that can get kids into all kinds of situations that unfortunately don't lead down a positive road. I do encourage getting involved in, uh, student leadership work, student council work, and I try to model that as a dean and as a leader, uh, as somebody who is engaged in leadership work with the goal of having that engagement be transformative on lots of levels through the institutions in which I work, and in those surrounding communities that I work in, as well. And so I encourage them to be on the student council and promote equity and social justice through that lens.

Dr. Kyser Thank you. So I'm hearing that along with, um, a focus on, sort of, um, critical race consciousness, critical consciousness for you broadly is really surfacing for your sons that axes, you called it, of oppressions and understanding that, um, racism, sexism, classism, linguisticism, etc., uh, uh, discrimination against those who identify with physical and non-physical disabilities, etc., are important to sort of harness from a construct, that I like, that lovely term you use, social constructs that are grafted onto those of us who have those identity, uh, identities. Um, and also really, for you, as a, um, parent encouraging your sons to tap into systems, more structures that may shield them from what we know are common, uh, trappings for, uh, students who are on the margins to sort of voice or redress or face certain power dynamics without a level of, I'll say, maybe not protection but some insulation through structures. Would that be accurate?

Dr. Lynn Yes.

Dr. Kyser Okay, wonderful. Thank you for that. And Dr. DePouw, the question posed for you as sort of the contour on this is as sort of an anti-racist scholar who is engaging in this work, but not necessarily through the same lens as a parent as Dr. Lynn does, so really curious about your view.

Dr. DePouw Okay, um. Well, the first part of your question was about conceptualizing how to be an ally and-and I think this is where my professional work really helps me. Um, When I was speaking earlier about how we grapple with that individual decision for what school our son should go to and all that, I also recognize that that's a bigger question because his well-being is connected to every other kid in our community, and as a teacher educator, I'm actively helping shape the experiences of those children in our community. So, part of how I imagine this idea of allyship is, you know, as a parent, of course, my main focus is on my own family and how do we keep him healthy and safe and resilient. But, I need our schools to be healthy in our community. And I need to make sure that I'm helping to produce teachers that are going to allow that space for well-being and critical thinking and to recognize that relationship, um, between the kind of teachers that I'm helping to have access to our children and then what I imagine as allyship. So, I-I guess a different way to put that is that sometimes I really get tired of teaching White students about racism. My program is 97% white with my students, every semester I have to do a lesson that explains why we don't use the word "colored" anymore. That's a legitimate lesson plan I have to roll out every semester, and people still do it, and I have to have that conversation, and just a lot of other really antiquated terminology,

because a lot of my students are very isolated and very segregated into majority white spaces in a very conservative or maybe not well-informed ideas about race throughout our society, and it's- I see the difficult work but I also see that as work that somebody has to do. And, as a White scholar, I'm often uniquely positioned to have that conversation with some students who maybe aren't in a place to hear that conversation from a professor of color. I don't want to say it like there's some sort of magic to it, I guess what I mean is part of being an ally to me is taking on responsibility for doing work that needs to be done. Even if it's not always enjoyable or the most pleasant part of whatever. Um, but it's needed and it's necessary. And so I recognize my own privilege of having the choice of whether to continue doing it or not, there is that option of doing it a different way, or even just opting out of it all together and kind of playing around with that as a-a cultural tourist. Um, and so I think that's also where a parent helps me to be just kind of in it now. It's not really a question of whether to continue or not because choosing not to be engaged in this work is choosing to harm my child, so I can't really, I can't really do that. Um, so in terms of appropriation of experience, um, inside my family I don't know how much that's an issue because I've always been really hyper aware of my whiteness, and it's really been more of this idea of how that works and our interactions because I want to be able to see how its affecting my family. But, I think in terms of these broader conversations, I'm really conflicted about that. Because I know that since race evolved as an ideology, parents of color have been having these conversations, this isn't a new conversation, and so the White scholar to kind of jump into it like I know some stuff? I'm not really sure that I do. I really started looking at this for me as a guide, for something to learn from personally to inform my own practice. And so that idea of appropriating, I do think in these broader academic conversations, there is a risk of, um, shifting focus to White parents or, um, I'm-I'm not sure how much my experience is unique. Um, I even think that voice can be talking about his schools, what do we do about this, and then, other than that is the-the dilemma of how do you keep your child safe and healthy and well-educated all at the same time. So, for within my family, I would say. Actually, you know what, I think the only thing I would say is how some people want to exert my family and kind of lay that on me, as well. So, my husband is Cuban, as well as Spanish, and so sometimes people tend to fetishize that, or treat me as like a special kidn of White person because of that. And so in those situations, I would say it's really about me kind of reasserting that idea of there's a lot of ways to be White, but this doesn't make me not White.

Dr. Lynn I would say, too, that to observe Christen's teaching, and I think it was a class on critical race theory, and I was really amazed at sort of the high level of discussion hat was happening around White supremacy and race and I came in to sort of give an example, kind of a counter story around that, and it was, I felt like it was embraced by that group. So. So. You're doing your work, and I, uh, have a lot of respect for that. Unfortunately, I have to go, so, if that's okay, I'm going to bow out now. But, thank you for including me in this conversation.

Dr. Kyser Absolutely.

Dr. Lynn And I hope to continue the conversation with all of you.



Raising Critically Conscious Children

Equity Spotlight Vodcast Series



Dr. Kyser

Thank you so much, Dr. Lynn.