

TRANSCRIPTION

David: Welcome everyone! My name is David Hernández-Saca and I am an Assistant Professor of Disability Studies in Education at the University of Northern Iowa, and I investigate the role of affect and emotions in teacher learning, as it relates to social justice issues. I am here with three of my colleagues from UNI in an interdisciplinary collaboration. From the Department of Educational Psychology, Foundations and Leadership Studies, we have Associate Professor Dr. Scott Ellison, whose areas of expertise include social and cultural foundations of education. Dr. Scott E.'s background is in cultural studies and sociology of education.

Scott E.: Hey, David. Thanks for inviting me.

David: Thank you! No problem. From the Department of Kinesiology, Dr. Scott McNamara is also with us today. Dr. Scott M. teaches physical education and adapted physical education courses. Dr. Scott M. has experience as both an adapted physical educator and special educator. In addition, Dr. Scott M. has developed the “What’s New in A.P.E.” adapted physical education podcast, which provides insight into the profession through interviews with panels of A.P.E. professionals.

Scott M.: Thank you very much for having me. It’s always nice to be on a podcast that’s not my own.

David: Wonderful! I am so glad you’re here. I appreciate it. From the Department of Allied Health, Recreation, and Community Services we also have Joyce Levingston, M.A., who is a current Ed.D. Candidate here at UNI. Joyce is also our local Black Lives Matter Chapter Organizer from the city of Waterloo here in Iowa. Joyce is also a community activist, and has led many of our local community’s BLM marches given the racial reckoning this past summer with George Floyd, Ahmaud

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Social Justice Education in the Midst of Pandemics and Crises: Part One

Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

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Arbery, Breonna Taylor's senseless murders. Joyce is continuing her work to address systems that need to be exposed and dismantled such as white and ability supremacy in and outside educational institutions, but also food insecurity for Black and Brown communities as the Founder of Cedar Valley's Little Free Pantries.

Joyce: Hey, everyone, thanks for having me today.

David: Thank you for being here, Joyce. I really appreciate it. So, welcome Everyone! I am so excited for our conversation today. The name of our podcast is *Social Justice Education in the Midst of Pandemics and Crises*. Within this podcast, we will critically engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue to respond to Critical Race in Education Theorist and Teacher Educator Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings' challenge to educational equity researchers, teacher educators, and all community members on how we would respond and be better given the four crises in education and society we are experiencing: one, the COVID-19 crisis, the fires that happened last year within California, violence against Black Americans, and political divisiveness. Individually and collectively, we personally and professionally provide perspective given our identities and positionalities for our respective fields for future justice praxis. Dr. Scott E. will start us off by asking us our broad focus for our podcast.

Scott E.: Alright, well. Again, thanks David for inviting me to participate. This is fun. This is exciting. And just to kick it off, I mean, Gloria Ladson-Billings, you know, she's talking about the four pandemics: COVID, systemic racism, environmental, and economic crises. Or, pandemics as she puts them, kind of conjoining in this particular moment. So, this is something that I've been thinking about quite a bit over the past few years and doing some work on. And, I guess just to kick it off, I mean what—what is—how is—how—how do you guys think about this moment? Whether it's Ladson-Billings' framing or not, and what does it mean to actually do

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the kind of work we do in this kind of historical moment of kind of crisis? So to speak...

Joyce:

I think for myself, and the, you know working in the community and doing protests for Black Lives Matter and social justice, and it's been very interesting because of the pandemic, because we have had to be out in the streets. We've had to gather, even when it wasn't safe to gather. And we had to do this to, you know, fight for our lives in more ways than one. So it just wasn't police brutality, even though that was a large part of it. But, what I saw and what we all saw, was an uncovering, too, of the racial injustices within our healthcare system, too. And not only our healthcare system, but other parts in our communities. Like, do people have access to not only health care, but food proper nutrition? Why are certain populations, you know, dying at disproportionate rates? And so, it was just like an opinion being peeled back. Like oh, police brutality. Oh, we're in a pandemic. Oh, you know Black and Brown communities are suffering the most. Oh, they're dying, the most. And you know just the revealing of all the injustices that were you know coming together, and then also being out there, like I said gathering and protesting and marching during the pandemic. So, knowing that even though you are in that disproportionate group, that you still have to be out there to literally fight for your lives because if we didn't then, who would?

Scott E.:

Yeah. And I mean. I like the way—I like the layers of the onion. That's a great way of thinking about it. And, I think what I admire about Ladson-Billings' framing here is that it does expand. I mean, in education especially, we—we...it's a practical field, right? It's practice-based field. And, we often think in really narrow terms about what you know, better lesson plans, better curriculum, and so forth. So, what I admire about this framing is that she is, you know, opening it up to all the things that exist outside of schools that are impacting inside classrooms. Just like, I think that is a great way of putting it, Joyce. And, I think that's one, I mean, I do

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Social Justice Education in the Midst of Pandemics and Crises: Part One

Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

David Hernández-Saca, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Iowa

have some critiques for Ladson-Billings here, but I do admire that. I like that she's expanding the conversation outside of schools.

Scott M.: So recently on my podcast, I had this awesome great guy from the Ohio State University, Dr. Sam Hodge, who is an expert on, you know, does a lot of research in social justice. We talked actually about the Black Lives Matters movement and a variety of other things, including COVID a little bit too, but we talked about how the history and kind of how it developed, and we talked about civil rights movement in the 60s as well. And what we kind of discussed, and I think you could even also discuss this in those other areas too, is are these moments or movements? So, we call it the Black Lives Matters Movement, but is it really a moment? Is it 2020-2021, or is there actual change going to occur? And even...I think again...you know, I think with COVID or political divisiveness, like are these things that are right now, or are these things that are going to actually, cause you know, is COVID gonna...going to create change, systematic change perhaps, to make online learning more accessible, to make learning environments and social environments more accessible? I don't know. Are these...I think this is a little bit of a discussion too. Is this a moment that we remember 20 years from now, or is it something that actually...legislation is changed, attitudes are changed, and systems are changed. And I'm not sure if right now, if we can say that that's happening.

Scott E.: Oh, I think that's super important. Because, especially if you go back. Because I've been doing a lot of historical work and, specifically in the modern conservative movement in the 1960s, in response to Civil Rights. And, what you see is... first off. Let's talk about the Long Civil Rights Movement. It's much longer than the 1950s and 60s. It's a long historical movement that's, let's say, a way to put it. It's become more salient, and then kind of there's been a reactionary period. And, you can see that reactionary period in the 1970s and 80s and 90s, to that period of activism in the Civil Rights Movement in the 60s. 50s and 60s. And, that's

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Social Justice Education in the Midst of Pandemics and Crises: Part One

Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

David Hernández-Saca, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Iowa

something that should be a cautionary tale of where we are going. right? The difference between a movement and moment. Wow. I think that's big.

David: I really like that as well. Because I think...I think how I sort of position myself in a lot of these discussions is as someone who is cautious of binaries, right? Is it a movement or is it a moment? But it's more complex than that, and I think I'm sort of alluding to my post-structural critique of such discourses here, that really would caution against like as if these moments are universal, for everyone. And so, if we think about the work of critical race theorists, that also would anchor intersectionality and the qualitatively different ways, given some of the situatedness that Joyce talked about, how different folks experience this moment differently given issues of power and structures that afford some, like myself to, in terms of the COVID-19, to not really change much of my life, right, as a privileged, university professor.

David: A lot of the technology and the university resources that I would have had access to, that didn't really change on one level. So, it kind of goes back to what Scott E. was saying, that is real change going to happen? But I think we can't globalize given the qualitatively different ways that people are situated in their institutions or families, and things like that. So, one example that I've seen here in Iowa is a new divisive concepts bill coming that is structuring, at all state level agencies, that is most likely going to become law. Where pressure to talk about diversity, training and issues, so this is an offshoot of executive order to curtail diversity training at that you know national level. But so it, this is an excellent example of how anti-Black and divisive politics is also here, and has been here.

David: So I concur with Scott E. in terms of the ways that we do need a historical consciousness about that this is not only, you know, in the 1960s in our post-apartheid space that we find ourselves as well. After you know, Jim Crow. But I

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Social Justice Education in the Midst of Pandemics and Crises: Part One

Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

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think one of the things that here within the state of Iowa as a teacher educator, when Senate File 478 came out, you know, in my work in the special education department, I'm coming to such discussions that help us go beyond the technical dimensions of teaching and learning in order to contextualize and think critically about these events or these movements, we can call them, that might constrain social justice praxis in the world of—of...in the world that we live in, in terms of Scott E and Scott M. And also Joyce, in terms of, you know in terms of dismantling white supremacy and ability supremacy, when Joyce comes and speaks to my class of pre-service teachers, for example, to really account for issues that do not decontextualize and only think about the technical dimensions of these policies and practices. Because we know that they're part of a species of white supremacy and ability supremacy that constrain what's imaginable, for—not only for Black, Indigenous and youth of Color, but also for white females in relationships with their diverse groups.

David:

So one of the things that, you know, we did a couple weeks ago with in my class, is to really respond to and read the 10 different divisive concepts that supposedly can't be, or will not be able...we cannot necessarily train teachers, excuse me, train employees on. And some of these are basically misinformation that Iowa is inherently racist or sexist state. I think it—it's just a lot of misinformation, which I think is also undergirding a lot of our current time as it relates to these issues of social justice. Things that inherently are also ideologies or worldviews that perpetuate Eurocentricism, that individualism and meritocracy because an individual might be, you know—you know, inherently value hard work. Then there...it's said that that would be a “divisive concept” to teach or to talk about. Thank goodness, there is some leadership going on within our university, that we can...it's not necessarily right now, this is fairly new, that it's not about our curriculum, or what we teach; it's more in the level of how we employ...how we

train employees. But I think this is another offshoot of this hegemonic movement as well.

Scott E.: Yeah

David: I wanted to connect it to something recently going on.

Scott E.: Sure, but I think that's also... I mean. You've got to remember power is constructed, right? It's constructed and it's contested. So, when you think about the law you are referencing about diversity training, and banning it, and so forth. That plays right in with Nixon's and Reagan's Southern Strategy, right? It's a means of constructing power through ideological struggle, and through the structuring of institutions. So, I think that actually plays in. I mean, we often, you know...and I get your point about binaries, right? I totally get it. I think of those binaries as being dialectical. How about that? Meaning, power is contested. Like the activist work that was done over the summer with Black Lives Matter. That's contesting power, but there is always going to be a reaction to it, right? And, the thing that we have to remember is that these reactionary forces...I mean, to use the example, again, of the state law you are referencing, that didn't come from lawmakers here, right? That comes from large networks and institutions within the conservative movement that are...that are, you know... trying to—trying to contest power that way, and to construct it. Does that make sense?

Scott E.: So, I think—I think Scott's reference to the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s and 60s—and this movement, or period, or, moment I think that is really instructive, because I think, in terms of this larger question of what does all this mean for the work that we do, I think—I think attending to those dynamics of power constructed and power contested is super important. And I think the work that Joyce has been doing is an important part of contesting it, right? But, we also need to think more

Social Justice Education in the Midst of Pandemics and Crises: Part One

Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

David Hernández-Saca, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Iowa

broadly about what does it mean to contest that power. So, what does it mean to do ideological struggle in a classroom, for example.

Joyce: Yeah and just thinking about, you know, those terms in other people's conversations, or is it a moment or a movement? I just think about my grandparents raised me, and I think about people who I worked with, and who I currently work with now. So besides Black Lives Matter, we, I also work with the NAACP, which has been absolutely long-standing in the fight for social justice. It may go a different way than what, you know, what we do organizing with Black Lives Matter, but it's consistent, and I do know some people who, for an example Vicki Brown in our community, she is in her 70s. And when she speaks at marches and protests, she talks about losing one of her best friends, and I believe it was the Birmingham church fire. And also, talking about having scars still on her legs from getting hit with the water hose.

Joyce: And when I think about her in her age, and when I think about the way I was raised by my grandparents, and I say that because they raised me in a way to keep me safe. Certain things that we weren't allowed to, do other kids could do, or my counterparts could do, and I was raised in a predominantly white community. And that was because they knew something that I didn't know, and that is the way the system was built against me. And I am...as a mother, who has a daughter who's 18 and is out here testing the world, even though the way...and I have a Black son as well. Even the way that I raised my children is kind of the exact same way. Um, but I said that just to say, it doesn't really matter if it, you know, if it's a moment or a movement, because there are people that don't have the privilege to say, "Is this a moment or a movement?" I've seen since the murder of George Floyd, going from having 400 allies to 4 allies, you know, some people pick it up for the moment, but some of us will be in this fight for all of our lives, and we don't have

Social Justice Education in the Midst of Pandemics and Crises: Part One

Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

David Hernández-Saca, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Iowa

the privilege of even hanging it up for one day, and it is tiresome, and it is exhausting.

Joyce:

And the older I get, and am able to reflect, I kind of see like the future ahead of me because of when we organize, we have to lean on, right, history. What were people doing before? There's been that term used, "Are you Malcolm, or are you, you know, Martin?" which is not a term that, you know, I would use, but still. You know the fight has been forever, and will be forever because of these systems that are in place. And even when Black Lives Matter is not marching, we're still organizing and working hard weekly, rather that is with meetings with the school districts, rather that is a going over bills and policies and creating infographics for the community to be able to understand what's going on, rather it's focusing on voting education, right? Rather it's focusing on all the other facets of social justice we still do that work, which is similar to other groups who are organizing doing the work, rather it's a long-standing group, like NAACP. Or you have people who literally have just changed the name, right? We could have changed the name, but for me personally, I felt like if we would have used a different name other than Black Lives Matter, we would have been catering to whiteness, and that's what we aren't trying to do.

Joyce:

So, you have other groups like Social Action Inc., or you know Social Action Activists, or you know, you have these other groups that have just basically changed the name, but they're doing the same thing, and their focus goal is to make actual change. Which we know takes time. We know it takes time to educate our communities, we know it takes time to change policies. We know it takes time to even when like the bill came out, it took us a while to even be able to understand it. If you're not from that background, then it really looks like it's trying to you know, read the Bible: "how art thou are, by way, by..." you know. And so, really breaking it down, so we can share with, you know, our community, and so

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Social Justice Education in the Midst of Pandemics and Crises: Part One

Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

David Hernández-Saca, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Iowa

we can take action. By that time, it's already slid across, you know, the wrong desk, so. But anyways, I just wanted to make reference that some of you know, some of us just don't have that choice or that privilege to hang it up, or we don't even have the privilege of not knowing all of the harm, and all of the bad, and just taking a break from that.

Scott E.: Yeah, and I think that is important Joyce. Because, especially in education, we think of social justice as though there is an endpoint. As though there's some, you know, utopic ideal at the end. And, it's really not. I think what you are speaking to is the centrality of struggle. Right? To do the kind of work that you're doing is to push that boulder up the hill with no end in sight, right? You're never going to see the top of the hill, and it passes from generation to generation. And, I think that kind of perspective needs to be incorporated into education, and into the legal justice system. We need to stop thinking about how... and don't misinterpret this... how to 'fix' things. By which I mean, with just these little tweaks to the system, we're going to 'fix' everything, instead of thinking about the centrality of struggle. Because every advance is going to met with a reaction, right? We need to get beyond that kind of instrumental thinking and really focus on the struggle.

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Social Justice Education in the Midst of Pandemics and Crises: Part One

Equity Spotlight Podcast Series
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