



The 20-Minute Talk:
Episode 3-A Conversation with Antiracist Leaders
Anti-Racism Vodcast Series
Dr. Jerry Anderson and Dr. Anthony Lewis



TRANSCRIPTION

[Intro music]

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Hello and welcome to the Region III Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center Anti-Racism Vodcast Series entitled, The 20-Minute Talk. The Region III MAP Center's Anti-Racism Vodcast Series aims to advance anti-racist efforts and support anti-racist activities within school communities across and beyond the maximum 13-state region within a succinct 20-minute discussion, led by anti-racist practitioners.

Nickie Coomer: Today's Anti-Racism Vodcast episode is focused on the importance of anti-racist practices in educational leadership. So, today we'll be talking with two leaders who are anti-racist leaders in their districts and in their schools about their experiences, perspectives, and recommendations for our audience.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: My name is Tiffany Kyser and I serve as the Associate Director of Engagement and Partnerships with the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, which I'll refer to moving forward as the MAP Center. I have the privilege of serving as your host for today and joined with me is Nickie Coomer, Doctoral Research Assistant with the MAP Center.

Nickie Coomer: Now, we're also thrilled to have two guests who are not only tremendous scholars and practitioners in educational equity work but are also going to lead us in understanding what anti-racist practice looks like, well—what it means to them and what it looks like in there, again, in their districts and schools. So joined with us today are Dr. Jerry Anderson, who is the Principal of Homewood-Flossmoor Community High School, which is located just south of Chicago and Dr. Anthony Lewis, Superintendent of Lawrence Public Schools, which is located in Lawrence, Kansas. So, thank you both so much for joining us today.



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Dr. Tiffany Kyser: So, I wanted to kick us off with two reflective prompts with the first prompt really focusing on this question of: *What does anti-racism mean to you?* And Dr. Anderson, I—I want to welcome you to kind of get us going on—on this topic and this definition.

Dr. Jerry Anderson: When I think about what anti-racism means, for me, it starts with embracing our own common humanity, you know, the ability to open our hearts and minds, to see the possibilities of strengths and gifts in others. Now, when it comes to embracing our own common humanity, we're really making a deliberate choice to let love live where hate could easily reside. You have to be very deliberate about how we choose to see and respond to the world around us and in keeping our hearts and minds open, I think that can be very challenging sometimes for an administrative of color. But you have to be able to keep your heart and mind open in spite of the disregard and some of the harm that's caused by those who sometimes refuse to see you or those who see you and despise you because of what they see. For me, I always believe there's—there's power in those who are oppressed and their allies.

Dr. Jerry Anderson: So anti-racism, makes you understand that—that there's power, not just in—not just in those who are oppressed, but when you—when they have allies, that power is really multiplied. You have to know, especially being an anti-racist leader of color, that sometimes people will stop listening when they see you or when they're listening to you because what you believe doesn't necessarily fit with their view of the world. But you really can't take that personally. You can't take it personally to the extent that it stops you from continuing to pursue your journey. You have to actively cultivate and build a critical mass of anti-racists. And I say that to say that the work you do as an anti-racist, when you think about anti-racism, it doesn't just exist in the hands of one person. It's something that when a critical mass is built, can change the world, can change how people are viewed, can change how people are—are included. It's a decision to be courageous, resilient, while steadfastly appealing to the hearts and minds of others. That's what's going to allow you to create this critical mass, to do this important work, when it comes to justice and when it comes to equity.



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Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Thank you, Dr. Anderson. If I were to mirror back some—some key, I think considerations or key elements of your definition of anti-racist leadership, it would be leveraging one's own positionality. So, an inherent understanding of how one's identity, as you talk about knowing yourself, shows up in day-to-day situations as a leader and you underscored some—some extensions being a leader of color. The second, was critically examine and dismantle systems of oppression. And I'll go so far as to say, but correct me if I'm wrong, critically examine and dismantle systems of racial oppression. I want to pause now and allow Dr. Lewis if you have anything that you want to extend build on, push back against as we kind of work together to think about this definition of anti-racist leadership.

Dr. Anthony Lewis: I definitely appreciate the terms that Dr. Anderson used to describe what a true anti-racist leader is, she used terms like being a courageous leader, being resilient. And she—she talked about how some people can—can talk the talk, some people can—can read the latest books, you know, on—on anti-racism but I would—I would say those are the individuals that you kind of have to be leery of. In—in—I'm from Alabama, so in Dr. King's, "Letter to the Birmingham Jail", he kind of talked about that. When he talked about that—that's—what he called that shallow understanding from people of goodwill and how that's more frustrating than a true absolute misunderstanding of people of ill will. And he goes on to say that "lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering—bewildering than outright rejection". And so, these individuals that, you know, that are reading the latest books, and I think we saw a mass—a mass number of individuals right after the George Floyd murder, purchasing books, you know, which is good. It's a good first step. But now—now what is—what is happening, you know? So, I definitely appreciate Dr. Anderson's comments.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: And that—that connects to a question I had around Dr. Anderson's comments around leading to let love live where hate can reside in spite of some disregard. And if we are leading us anti-racist leaders to let love live, we're pushing to let love live where hate can reside in spite of that disregard, from your perspective, is that different for a leader who identifies as white versus a leader who identifies as a leader of color? Or is—said another way,

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does it matter depending on your racial identity, how you lead for anti-racism? How you consider how to build and examine systems, of racist actions and activity within your school systems?

Dr. Anthony Lewis: Also, I think it's—it's, it's more important for a white leader, a white anti-racist leader to get out on the front and lead this work. I will tell you I identify as a Black male leader in a predominantly white community. And I've been personally called a bully and described as throwing a temper tantrum when I became passionate in and frustrated in—in—in my response when we're considering our most vulnerable scholars in wanting at the time, to get them back in school. But when white individuals were also, or equally as passionate as—and frustrated and their—their dialogue, nothing was said they were—they were applauded, you know. And so, I think that is definitely strong consideration because I think Dr. Anderson mentioned in her—in her remarks is that sometimes leaders of color can be silenced or attempted to silence or—or not paid attention to. I think she used the terms that yeah, that—that sometimes leaders of color will not be paid attention to if we continue this work. And so, I think it's much more important for our white, some say allies, I like Bettina Love's term co-conspirators, I think we definitely need co-conspirators in this work with our white anti-racist leaders.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: I think this dovetails nicely, Dr. Lewis, into our second prompt, which is: *From your perspective, what are key practices our viewers and listeners can engage in to be anti-racist?*

Dr. Anthony Lewis: I think the—the first practice is this notion of really examining self, examining self, educating yourself. Dr. Anderson did a beautiful job of describing what this anti-racist leader is and we think about that—that—that term leader and leadership, one must possess some of those critical skills of being a true leader in the truest sense of the word. And I will say being an anti-racist leader, this is not a time for timid leadership. One of my mentors once share with me just in leadership in general, and definitely with this anti-racist work, you won't be liked. It requires that—that conscious decision that I'm going to really pursue this work with a goal. And I like the way I think Dr. Kyser and Dr. Anderson both said, "dismantle these

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systems of oppression". You know, some people say, we want to disrupt. If I disrupt the room, I can put them back together, but I want to totally—totally dismantle these systems of oppression. And really examining self, and educating yourself, really truly understanding the historical context of how we got here, really understanding from our Native American perspective from our African American perspective in terms of being dehumanized. Truly understanding that foundational work of why and how America was built with these racist ideologies in these races—with these racist practices.

Dr. Anthony Lewis: I would probably couch—couch this question around what I call the three P's, which is it is really examining People, Policies, and Practices. In your organization, I'll speak from a K-12 standpoint, really examining the policies. And so, when we think about what are some of those practices looking at current policies that are in place in your—in your school district or in your organization, looking at how some of those current policies may have been implemented, maybe with good intent, but has continued to perpetuate the status quo, or has continued to—continued to marginalize certain groups of people. Looking at what policies need to be in place that will help dismantle and yeah, that will—that will help dismantle these—these systems. In our district, we are crafting an—an equity policy that will help us with continuing to move forward. Look—also looking at practices in your in your district, looking at, again, for example, behavior policies. There's these, what I call subjective terms that are in probably every K-12 code of student conduct, these terms like "disobedience, disruptive behavior, defiance." All of those are probably in many K-12 code of student conducts books but looking at those from a—from a standpoint of those are subjective terms. What does—because I will guarantee you if you put ten people in a room and asked him their definition of "defiance" or they're just—their definition of "disruptive behavior", you will find probably ten different definitions. Looking at policies, practices, the people, sometimes you may have to remove some people that are continuing to perpetuate the status quo. You may have to have those courageous conversations with those individuals when you see them harming marginalized students. And finally, looking at practices that are in place in your district. Looking at your budgets. How are you spending your budgets to support marginalized students? Or how you're not spending your budgets to support

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marginalized students? And so, these—these—these practices definitely, again requires courageous leadership, it will require that. And I think now more than ever through this pandemic we've seen, I'll speak personally, in my district we've seen a continued—continued need to continue to talk about this work. Some people may not have a true understanding of—of—of this work. And so again, this pandemic has really kind of pulled the Band-Aid off of the work that we need to continue to do in our district. I like to tell people this—this anti-racist work is —is true legacy work., work that will outlive us. Work that we want to— when we're—I used to say when we're sitting on the porch reading a newspaper, nobody reads the newspaper much anymore, when we're—when we maybe have our iPad looking at a school district or an organization, and we can say, "We did that." You know that—that's the work that someone once said, you know, "we're—we're planting trees whose shade will never be able to sit in", and that's the true legacy work. But it's tough work, but it's the right work.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: So, with that, I'll turn it over to Dr. Anderson if anything else you want to build or extend.

Dr. Jerry Anderson: I wanted to say Dr. Lewis, what you said about this idea of not being liked, knowing that what you say is not always going to be popular just reminds me of how important it is to not only have that self-confidence, but to be able to surround yourself with like-minded people who understand the work that you're doing. Because that's where you're going to get your power and your energy from sometimes because otherwise it can be draining there. I really like also what you had to say about the subjectivity that—involved in a lot of our disciplinary practices that really lead to students of color often being punished, not given an opportunity to restore themselves more so than other students. The pushback that comes with trying to change those systems because its what people are accustomed to doing, a fear from doing something—doing something different in thinking that it might not work as well. But also, you know, you also deal sometimes with people who think that people deserve a certain type of treatment. And that's—that's—that is really heavy. When you talked about history, that just ties it back to history and to think about where we have come from as African American people, as

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people of color, where we've come from to this point and remembering that we are on this journey. And every time that we've made progress on this journey, I'll use your word this time, co-conspirators, there had been co-conspirators along. So really finding a way to find your strength in those who are like-minded and willing to accept not being liked for doing the right work.

Nickie Coomer: Thanks so much, Dr. Anderson and Dr. Lewis. I just wanted to add something that I heard from both of you. A reason not to be liked, that's the reason not to be liked. And I think that ties and really importantly with the idea of being a co-conspirator and an accomplice. That means that you're giving something up in order to resist a system that is harmful. To be a co-conspirator, to be an accomplice means that you're ready to get into the work and you're ready to— to be unliked, you're ready to get in trouble, to get in good trouble to— to—to not only be disruptive but to dismantle. And I think again, I mean, to really call white colleagues to the table when you know that you're positioned in a way where you get a benefit of a doubt that your colleagues— that your black colleagues do not get, acknowledge that publicly and say it out loud and engage in that anti-racist work as well to your—to a detriment, right and then be ready to—prepare to bear the consequences of that. So, thank you both so much for your comments. I've really, really appreciated the personal stories that you shared, and I am really looking forward to sharing this with our audiences and I, you know, I appreciate the privilege of being able to be here and to listen to you.

Dr. Tiffany Kyser: Thanks, Nickie. I want to again extend a warm and gracious thank you to Dr. Anderson and to Dr. Lewis for enriching us with their—their thoughts, their perspectives, their lived experience. I know I've—I've got a lot to think about in response to this conversation, but just really appreciate you both. Thank you.

Nickie Coomer: Alright, don't forget to stop by our online equity resource library at www.greatlakesequity.org for an array of resources and supports related to anti-racist practice. Some titles you'll find are our—are our, Educational Experiences of Students with Multiple-

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Marginalized Identities: A Qualitative Research Synthesis of Disability Research, which is a podcast, that you can find on Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts. Also, our newsletter, *Shifting from Surveillance and Control in Virtual Learning Environments: Utilizing Principles of Universal Design for Learning and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy*. In this newsletter, we discuss equity issues in discipline and virtual learning and how to shift away from discipline toward engaging students and educational and instructional practices that will engage students rather than punish them. And then lastly, *An Intersectional Approach to Building Inclusive Schools*. This is a recording of a Virtual Roundtable hosted by Dr. Federico Waitoller, a scholar and author of the recently published book, *Excluded by Choice: Urban Students with Disabilities in the Education Marketplace*. And lastly, don't forget to follow us. We are on Twitter and Facebook. You can find us on Twitter @GreatLakesEAC #MAPEquity. Please, if you're listening and for our listeners, share what you learned here today and don't forget to tag us and hashtag. And then also like us on Facebook again, you can find us at Great Lakes Equity Center /Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center. Give us the like and follow in order to stay up to date on our publication and events.

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