

Episode 8

Omar (Host): Welcome to Episode #8 of the HEART podcast, everyone. This is our final episode of the season. In today's episode we focus on Community Engagement and Antiracist Teaching. What's exciting is that all of our guests, including our fabulous students, are involved in community outreach and working with youth. Throughout our conversation we will be hearing about how their community work informs the way they approach antiracist teaching. In addition, we'll hear about how and why they teach and engage in the work that they do.

Omar (Host): We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the territory of the Mohegan, Mashantucket Pequot, Eastern Pequot, Schaghticoke, Golden Hill Paugussett, Nipmuc, and Lenape Peoples, who have stewarded this land throughout the generations.

Milagros (Host): Thank you Omar. It's hard to believe we are now in our last episode for season one of the H.E.A.R.T. podcast. It has been an incredible journey and we're thrilled to be closing our season with our guests today with a focus on community engagement as part of antiracist teaching. Joining us today is Dr. Danielle Filipiak who is an Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Connecticut. Her research and areas of expertise include civic learning and critical digital literacies, in addition to identity construction of urban school administrators and academic achievement.

Milagros (Host): Also joining us today is Dr. Johnny Ramirez who is a PostDoc Fellow with the Interdisciplinary Research Incubator for the sTudy of (in)equality (IRISE) and a faculty member at the University of Denver. His research interests span the areas of Chicana-Latina school pushout, youth resistance, Positive Youth Development, and also he possesses a deep passion for community-engaged research and critical pedagogical approaches.

Milagros (Host): We are also excited to introduce Marissa Martinez Suarez, who is a first year, first-generation college student and emerging student leader who is interested in Ethnic Studies, Community-Engaged research, and student activism. In addition, Briana Aguilar is joining us, who is a fourth-year, first-generation college student, and serves as chair of the Latinx Student Alliance at the University of Denver.

Milagros (Host): We are so grateful for you all joining us today and look forward to learning from you during our conversation. Danielle, can you get us started on the conversation by sharing with us how your work with communities and youth, in particular, inform how you approach your teaching and what that looks like in your classroom?

Danielle (Guest): Sure, it's like, I feel like we could talk, I could talk about this all day, right? Into like, forever, such like it's such, it's work, you know, and it's not about even a product. Sometimes we think that we're going to, like, all of a sudden at the end of 15 weeks in the semester that everybody's going to be woke, you know, or you have these predetermined outcomes. Right? But really, it's about this process

and it's very it's also a spiritual process, right? And we, a lot of times we like to put our, I think, especially in teacher preparation we're really guided by, like, program goals and outcomes and so on and so forth and kind of like this neoliberal agenda around like, you know, producing numbers, right? Um, but as for me and my work with communities for and young people for almost 20 years now.

Danielle (Guest): Something I've been thinking a lot about is just thinking about creating, you know, pathways between, you know, young people's desires. Especially in this specific, historical and sociopolitical moment, right? And desires, I am also drawing on the language of, like, [Eve Tuck](#), when she talks about focusing on, like, the desires of young people, instead of these damage centered frameworks and seeing young people as broken, right, all the time. So, really trying to think about like, what shows up in these spaces where all of us have been working with young people for several years. You know, what desires exist there? And then what I'm thinking about in the pre-service classroom, which is definitely, like a transition, right from working in these communities to, like, working with pre-service teachers.

Danielle (Guest): I think there's such a tendency, especially in lieu of these hyper accountability and new of these hyper accountability measures and hyper standardization to keep plugging along, right, and not imagine how things might be otherwise. Um, to talk about, like, [Maxine Greene's notion of Social Imagination](#). Um, so. For instance, my work with justice, which is a New York City based youth development program that apprentices youth through youth and pre-service teachers actually, as critical social researchers through the development of critical social research methods as well as cultural and multiple literacy. Um, like hip hop and spoken word, I realized, and my work there, um, that this focus on expression in young people being able to exist fully as they are, right, really was important for them, right? It's not always what comes out, right? So, I've been engaged in this youth research work for a while and young people have explored things like the school-to-prison pipeline and dehumanizing curriculums, and so on and so forth. But it's also about the epistemology, right? And identity work and young people being able to share that right in a space that feels safe. And so, for me, like, translating that into the pre-service classroom, really holding space for that.

Milagros (Host): I've got to ask you Danielle, actually, just like yes, I want to know about that. I feel like you're, you're navigating, we're bringing together 2 different worlds. I feel like there's the community on the ground youth work that you're talking about this free expression where youth can just be. And then you were talking about the service classrooms, and every time you say it, you, you sound like, a constraint is in your voice when you are saying pre-service. So I want to know what happens in your classroom? Like, how do you bring those two things together?

Danielle (Guest): Yeah, so so, like, for instance, in thinking about all this work, because I'm also simultaneously trying to create a context, so you kind of understand a little bit about what I've done right? So, just like, for instance, in my pre-service class and multicultural ed, when I was really thinking about at the time, all of this multiple literacy stuff. I invited in a hip hop facilitator, like, okay, let's bring these, let's bring this community teaching artists in, right? Let's think about what this looks like, how can you do this in your own classroom? Right? So that they can really understand first hand what it actually feels like in their own bodies, right? To engage in these, you know. To engage in this work, right? And authentically

valuing these cultural and multiple literacy. So I think it's, like, ability to like, specifically change the ways we teach, right? So, we're inviting the identities and literacy of young people into the classroom, right, creating those methods authentically can shift disk courses because the ways that, and the ways that we come to interact with each other part of the reason that racism exists is because for some people who are very privileged, it feels largely invisible. Right. Um, and it's, it's hard to dismantle.

Danielle (Guest): But I think it's important to think about ways to disrupt schooling to account for these, you know, literacies and identities and put them front and center. So that the desires and understandings of young people are, you know, do come first, so, I think pre-service teachers need to be able to experience that. And so those are some of the things that I've been thinking about is inviting opportunities for teachers to engage some of those methods in those multiple and cultural literacy. That's one way.

Milagros (Host): Yeah, I have a feeling. Yeah, you have like, one hundred other ways. So I appreciate that you're like, giving us a little snippet and then what I'm hearing deeply in what you just shared, Danielle, is that it seems like there's a really strong commitment for the desires of young people to be what is driving learning in the classroom, and I'm curious how your pre-service teachers to respond to that type of commitment that your evoking through without your teaching?

Danielle (Guest): I think it's exciting in some ways, but we're careful not to fetishize, right. A lot of times this stuff is made as a side dish. You know, but the question always becomes about, like, but what about standardized English? But what if my school administrators doesn't let me do this? And so I think the work of like, these lenses that these, these lenses of history, right? Having presservice teachers understand like the roots of the historical roots of racism. Like getting that knowledge, fair with what they're like, they need multiple ways to connect with this understanding that this is not a side dish. Like, this should be at the center of what we're trying to do. So, not just engaging and fetishizing young people, but understanding the ways in which, you know, this, this is work that can be powerful and liberating. This is what we should be doing every day, and we should be making the case for. So, sometimes there's tensions. But I don't and I think that's what makes it so hard for us as pre-service educators sometimes. You do the work and you're not sure what the impact or result is going to be, right? But you do it anyways because you're planting seeds with hopes that later on down the road that pre-service teacher will remember that moment or experience and. Return back to it, you know?

Milagros (Host): No, thank you for that. Johnny. What are your thoughts about how your community work you know, shapes the way you go about teaching now?

Johnny (Guest): Cool. Thank you, Milagros. And thank you, Danielle, just for sharing that. You got the wheels turning too about really like reflecting on, kind of like, two different contexts. Like, when we're in community space, and we're able to meet young people in their places where they want to be and you don't have the heaviness of these schooling structures and these institutions, that in place all these rules and regulations kind of almost like a policing of how to be. It's a whole different dynamic that occurs and I think for me, that's been one of the things that have been a blessing or strength of doing event intervention work for, for also over 20 years too. Starting off where my journey working with young people

was really about this framework of meeting them where they were at. I started off in some youth intervention programs, that focused on gang affiliated youth, but it was also really dealing with young folks that were just struggling in the community as well. Youth that have been pushed out of school, you know, teen parents, right? Like a lot of different young folks that just needed support. They needed a space. To feel, like, connected to. To feel in many ways, I guess, to use scholar lingo, Humanized, in spaces where a bit of their humanity, and who they are, were being kind of attacked. So, I think in many ways. That kind of guided a lot of meeting young people where their at. Learning their stories and really focusing on developing relationship and trust. And one of the biggest takeaways was that wasn't going to be given immediately.

Johnny (Guest): That's where I think a lot of folks in academia, when they talk about some community engaged work or working in partnership with community, that there has to be a measure of time spent and where community can kind of begin to see who you are, and then begin to see if your actions represent those values or are you just being kind of a "drive by researcher" or you're only here because of this grant or if you're only here, because it's your job. So that's kind of like, I think a big thing for me was that. So what I bring, I think, in my teaching, bringing in that work as a youth worker, and as a youth organizer is, I try to meet my students where they're at. You know, literally, in many ways, I think of my classroom as kind of like a community space. I call it a classroom community where I'm trying to really evoke that essence that we're sitting in a big circle even though it's hard virtually at times. But that everyone's going to be seen, and everyone's going to be acknowledged. And I think a lot of my practice in this work has even kind of like, took a whole other dimension now that I'm at a private, predominately white institution, where I have a lot of white students, and I'm trying to shape and kind of put this pedagogy to figure out where I could meet them at a place. Because the whole, I guess kind of framework is meeting our youth in our community where they're at is the first step. And then seeing if they're willing to walk with you.

Johnny (Guest): In terms of post personal growth, in terms of, like, expanding their consciousness, or maybe picking up some tools that's a whole other step. But I feel like my first, initial step is to meet where folks are at. With no judgment or anything. Of course understanding context. But just really trying to acknowledge their humanity and being one of the pilot professors here on the Critical Race and Ethnic Studies minor. I think one of the first professors to kind of teach with this. Like, pedagogical approach that really is grounding in community, but then, I think also kind of grounding in bringing in those. How can I say, like. Like, frameworks and lenses that anchor itself, like, in Indigineity or anchors itself and like, what is it to have this platica (conversation)? What is it like to bring our community and our family spaces into these institutions? And again, it's little sparks. It's here or there. And it doesn't like, sometimes, you know, you have your moments where it feels like traditional space. But the intention all the time, I think that I approach is to not make it feel like this is a regular class, or this is a regular space and trying to be very upfront with that. With my students when we first open up class.

Johnny (Guest): And I, and I kind of model what it is to kind of share a bit of my authentic self my testimonial. So, I kind of bring it there. And then I give it to the students to see if that reciprocity. And if they're in a place where they can do it. And believe me, I've had the in-classroom engagement with my

students that have been very open, and they've shared their story, their healing journey, their traumas. Johnny (Guest): But then, sometimes that happens in office hours, too. You know, and which is amazing as well to be able to have those connections because again we're talking about context. We're talking about doing work that goes directly against what these institutions are designed to do. So, I think I kind of come with a bit of that. Like, framework and sensibility and being definitely a student of epic studies. My Master's in Chicano Studies. My PhD is in Education with Race and Ethics and then all the community work. I've been blessed to kind of really ground my identity as an active scholar to bring those with me.

Johnny (Guest): And again, then Danielle, like you said, I think it could be contentious and different spaces. I can be read in so many different ways, either by my students, or by the administration. Of, like, "who is this guy he's radical" or "who is this guy he's only for students of color" or whatever? And I've kind of heard a bit of those critiques. But I also know that the work that I'm doing is being impactful, because students have shared that with me. So, I'm co-constructing classes and trying to create space with them. And I think it's been a journey, because I think I'm still learning that kind of craft of how much community I could bring in. And then how much of the students willing to also kind of, like, be a part of that process and see what we could do together.

Milagros (Host): Yeah, John, that was powerful. Powerful Johnny and you were going to bring you because your soul what I hear you seeing is your soul is intact. You know, like, everything you do is the same, whether you're doing it in the community organizing space, or in the classroom. Because you're bringing soul work to the work, your intention is the same, is to meet people. And when you say what I'm hearing you say, like meet students where they're at, I think you're saying to the effect of, like. Wherever they are in their own humanity, their own human experience, and their own lived experiences, meeting them there and then seeing where they want to go and can go and want to go in terms of their. You know, transformation of consciousness, and then putting that consciousness to, to work right. To create change wherever they choose to, to create that change. So, I feel like that's really powerful and something you raised also, I want to ask you to elaborate on, is you mentioned that this is the first time you're kind of doing it in a predominantly white space, you know, in a private institution. And I'm curious about how you stay intact or how you approach your teaching so that it stays in tact, you know, given that context. Like, what does that look like for you?

Johnny (Guest): Yeah, thank you, Milagros. I think what's really kind of, and I've heard this from other amazing colleagues that kind of do this work too, is that the students hold me down a lot of times, because I've used this phrase with some of the student activist group so there's a student activist group at DU called RAHR: Righteous, Anger, Healing, Resistance. And that group in particular it's almost like the saying that I passed on to them was something I learned growing up, like, being in neighborhoods was, "somos pocos, pero somos locos," "we might be small, but we can get crazy." Like, we could do, we could do some work. Right? So, a lot of times that vibe, I feel vibe when I'm leaning on my students or different allies that are tenured faculty, come around and do that check-in and kind of see how things are going. But ultimately, I think was about building community with students, with faculty, and with staff, and having times where we could come together for either an event or some meetings. And with those RAHR students, it was about us having some Sunday meetings.

Johnny (Guest): We just recently had one and we all were masked up, we were at a park, it was about like, 77 degrees. And we all just did basically kind of like pulling a page from the healing resistance and activism work. We did a total check in: where folks at, how are they feeling, what are some next steps for either the summer, or if you're graduating, what might be your next steps, how can we support you? And then the very last 15 minutes was kind of like, these are some ideas of how we want to pass to work on to next year and stuff. And at that moment, I thought, wow, like, look at this community, that kind of grew out of a bit of like activism, but then now we're starting to feel more just like a community where there's a sense of connection and a sense of restoration that it's the community care piece, is what I'm getting at and I, and I think in in a, in a way, maybe being in a private, predominantly white institution that oftentimes hostile and all that, it kind of helps in terms of, like, really pushing us to connect. And not let ourselves be siloed and be divided around a whole bunch of things that we're able on on a Sunday afternoon to make time for and to be able to come and link up. And if we would have had our phones up, we would have like, 3 other people sitting on the phone call, too.

Johnny (Guest): With us at the park, so out of that kind of answers your question. But I really do think that being in this context, like, even those lines of, like. You know, of course, as faculty, there's so much privilege. I have my education, I have a salary, I got benefits, medical benefits, you know, I know it's in a different context of the students, but when it comes to dealing with all the, the excuse my language, but the [censored] of white supremacy and colonization there that in many times is over. We have to look to each other for that support and sense of community. And that would just be one of the messages because I was told early on. Well, if you do that, you're not going to be if you have 2 strong relationships with students, it's going to be a backlash. You're not going to be seen as a serious professional. You're not a doctoral student anymore. You're a professor now, you've got to kind of take up this posturing or whatever, and I'm looking at them going. Well, first of all, that ain't me. And second of all, I've been doing what I've been doing and it got me here now. So, of course, there has to be healthy relationship boundaries that might be there.

Johnny (Guest): But the fact that I can't see myself in community with my students, their community, their family, their relationship is like, right? That's that that goes against that's an antithesis as to how I do this work. It's, you know what I mean? Like, if I want to be able to show up authentically and connect with folks, I'm thinking the students, if they want to build in the same way, we should be able to do that.

Omar (Host): Yeah, thank you so much for sharing that Johnny very, very powerful. You know, I gotta say that as I was listening to Danielle and Johnny share their thoughts. I couldn't help but be reminded of my former mentors and teachers that I've had along the way that have given me that sense of humanity. When I haven't been able to find that in other communities before, you know, there's this. There's this sense in, like, students of mixed status that you're not from here nor there. I moved to the United States when I was a little over a year old and so I just know Mexico through pictures and videos and stories and yet I'm in a country that doesn't quite accept me, you know, and so what you were sharing Johnny just really spoke to me because of that reason, you know, where it's like, you can, you can find home. In people and communities it's incredible the power that it gives to the students, or the individuals involved in

those communities to hopefully create a positive chain of events where they will help other people and then they will help others. And it's just a beautiful chain of events. But I'm really curious to hear from Brianna and Marissa, it sounds like you are both incredibly involved and you're both very passionate and so I'm just curious to hear where did that come from exactly? So, if you could share about where, maybe the genesis was of your interests and your passions and what brought you to do the work that you do currently?

Brianna (Guest): Personally my first two years at DU I was a commuter student, so that alone I already feel more isolated from the community, but I wasn't aware of all the stuff that was going down, you know, like, Johnny said all the [censored] that would go down in terms of what DU was doing to, with students of color and to students are underrepresented here in general there were emails sent out. There's just so much going on in terms of. There like all, these are white counterparts, you know, get away with and. I didn't know anyone really, until my second year once I started seeing the protests and the rallies on campus, and I was like, oh. There are some students here that are actually fighting back on this, and I just wanted to help. I've always been a person who loves helping the community, loves helping out and especially because it was such a hard time for me being on campus that the student leaders would come to me and be like, hi, what's your name and be welcoming more than the university welcomed me itself and even though it wasn't funnest context to kind of meet them at these protest rallies, it's really what brought me and to see such hardworking individuals, and they didn't have to be doing this type of work, but when I started seeing that no one else was going to do it, so that's why they're doing it and just trying to help other students like us feel like they belong on campus.

Brianna (Guest): It really gave me that drive and passion as well to realize that, hey, I do belong here and I have my voice. I'm a student here as well. I shouldn't just feel like I'm isolated right? That I don't matter, and once I started hearing, like, everyone else's stories and connecting that thoughts of, like, hey, you're not the only students in that class either. Like, you know, I had so many experiences of feeling annihilated in class. There was a moment where my first class I ever took on campus, it was a full 100 student class, and the 3 seats next to me remained empty for the first few weeks. I didn't know why. I was like, yo, do I smell? Like what's going on here? And they would get chairs and move it to the front but purposely those 3 seats should remained empty. And I felt like, why did I do wrong? What is going on here? And I was the only student of color in that class, the only woman of color in that class. So it annihilating that like, wow, no one really doesn't want to talk to me. And then when these professors tell the students, like, let's go into groups, lets talk. I always feel like. I looked down upon. Like, oh, she's just the token child that got in to the university, right? They don't really actually know that I am smart. I do know what I'm doing, and it always made me question my own intelligence of, like, oh, maybe I shouldn't speak up or I shouldn't say anything on top of that, there's been more experience where one time in class.

Brianna (Guest): I don't know how we got to topic about what our parents do as jobs, but these students all my counterparts are talking about my dad's the manager, the business deal, all these things and it came to me and I was, like, my dad is undocumented and my mom is a cashier supervisor for a small company that does catering and at first I was kind of embarrassed because I was like, why even the teacher allowing to still are like, why are we doing this? But at the end of the day, this moment, this spark

was like, you know, all these students and their parents, all they got all this handed to them, you know, but at the end of day I'm still in the same seat, in the same room, ask them. And if anything, I'm on a full ride versus them, where their parents pay for them to get into there and I worked my a** off. I know I have and really that's really what brought me to this type of work to not only help the community, but also empower students who felt that same way of isolation from, in these classes because, like Johnny said, it's a predominantly white institution and it's hard being these classes, where I feel like, I have to wear a mask or switch switch up and not show up as myself.

Brianna (Guest): I always feel like, okay, well, I have to come, in this way, be on my smartest, be on my top notch of, like, my name is Brianna, like no. After a while just being able to be involved with student leadership. That's where I started to feel at home. That's where I started to feel like I have a voice. I have power and I won't be quiet. Now I'm definitely the individual or I'm like y'all need me. Where do y'all need me? I got this voice for a reason I'll like, I don't care if you need me to yell if you need me to preach. I don't care. I am not shy anymore. I am not scared any more or intimidated by this university, or these institutions in general, and just calling it out as it is, and helping the communities that again need it and it's an important line of work.

Omar (Host): Thank you so much. Marissa, would you like to go ahead?

Marissa (Guest): Yeah, so my work took a different pathway than Brianna's. Mine started like, my junior year summer when I took a course on the History of Education and how it's like, where it started and who was allowed an education who was in the education, and it was in that moment where I really started, like like. I feel like I was so numb to the point where I just accepted my curriculum to be what it was. And I, when I saw that, I realized what I deserved. And it was like, such a moment of realization. I was like, why is it that I'm basically 17 by this point and I've never heard the stories that you've gone on the Chicano walkouts why is it that I've never heard about all these leaders in my community and I guess I just had gone to the point where I didn't even think that Latinos could be leaders and I know that sounds totally not true but at the moment, I was in that stage in my life where I just, I didn't see those points of representation and once I saw it, I felt kinda like cheated and I felt like robbed for my history and I just sort of like like there are so many kids that deal with issues of identity. Like, for me, like, I, I really will use it like, I was growing up in this atmosphere.

Marissa (Guest): My grandma would be calling me a gringa, but my documentation status would not be saying the same thing. And I just I know there's so many students who deal with those issues of identity, and just having that space to heal, as profe Johnny says, like, it really makes an impact when I'm in Profe Johnny's class. He does like, if you see any way that the content that you're learning, like, relates to you speak on that and heal from that. And, like, also realize that, like, the experience that you. Experiences that you've lived through, like, those are lessons within themselves. So, in a way, like, whatever I learning in class, I also learn it within myself and I feel like that's what I don't get from. Some of my other classes is that they don't show me, like. How it relates back to me and since then my work just goes around, like, making sure that kids have that representation and also have that space to heal. And I'm really early in

my journey. But, like, um, just like these several points in my lifetime where I've been like. Exposed to, like, what I deserve has really taught me a lot what I want to give back to my community.

Milagros (Host): I mean, with the two of you just shared is both the way education can deplete us when it's not nurturing who we are, what our cultures are about, you know, what, what is possible within our own communities and then you also both shared, you know how powerful it could be when you do have the opportunity to be in classrooms where you are being nurtured, where you are getting exposure to the way in, which there's beautiful, amazing skills, knowledge and wisdom within your own cultures and communities. And then what you could do with that, because once you have that voice, you were saying, Brianna, you can put it into work and into action to uplift other people. That's super powerful.

Milagros (Host): I want to ask Danielle and Johnny, kind of like your reactions to what you heard and how do you see it connect particularly to this one thing. Everyone's bringing up these complex issues, like interlocking systems of oppression that shape experiences. It's not like one identity, but like, the whole system at play. I'm curious about your response to what you just heard and curious about how you potentially bring that intersectional lens into your own antiracist teaching. Danielle you want to weigh in, or Johnny? Either one?

Danielle (Guest): I'm like just processing all this, all of this honestly. I mean, this is the work, right? Like, this is a space where also like this intergenerational space where we're able to build upon each other, this notion of relation of relationality is so crucial I mean, even just to go back to what Johnny was saying, like. This ability to sustain yourself in these systems is so much about. You know, being able to build community and to be able to dialog that like this and come together. Um, I don't even remember what the question is, but I'm just like this is where it's going. This reminds me a lot of. And I've spoken to her a lot I've spent some time in her living room of [Grace Lee Boggs](#), who talks about this idea that. Like, you can't change any society, unless you feel responsibility for it. And unless you see yourself as belonging to it. And responsible for changing it. So what you all as young people, Marissa and Brianna, I just feel so inspired by your words, and just kind of going back to this notion of dignity and belonging and also the sense of agency. And I think our ability as teachers and my ability and Johnny, And when I hear Johnny talking about his work and with you all as well, making sure that this classrooms space that this pre-service space.

Danielle (Guest): Now, just how important these notions of belonging an agency are that it's not always just about, like, let's just get through this, meet these standards, but let me model what this idea of belonging looks like. Let me model. Let me give you opportunities to see how this work can be transformative for communities and if we're not doing that in our classrooms, and there's times I've been called out. You know, it's a hard space like I have been so humbled by my experience here at UConn, because it's a very different context of New York City and Detroit right? And so you're working with all kinds of identities and all different people's ideas of what social justice teaching looks like. But what you are again, reminding me is just how important it is to. That, like, the revolution is attached to making sure young people feel like they belong. And also feel like there's pathways to be able to do something about these systems that exist and that there is possibility and hope and disruption.

Johnny (Guest): You know, Danielle too, and I wanted to build on something that was kind of clicked a little light in my thinking, too. When you early talked about kind of like. Like, in this work, sometimes there's always like a push for the outcome. The numbers. Um, by kind of community work, the sign in sheet, how big, how many people attended with and then it and as educator/professionals the push is well, how rigorous was it? Did the students like, how many assignments? What was their points? But that's that's one part of it, but I think what gets lost in all that is the process to get that, and I think through the years, that's a big point of my growth in an area where I think as a young organizer, and a young person doing this work. I was always about the outcome. How big could we get this event? How crazy could we get taking over city hall or going into the chancellor's office or whatever? I was kind of that driven on the outcome piece. But if you really sustain this work, you recognize that the power, the transformation, is in the process, it's actually in the journey. Yes, you always want that positive, impactful outcome, but if we're hurting each other or causing each other harm or silencing each other and dehumanizing on the way to get there, then really are we doing?

Johnny (Guest): Are we really honoring the work in our ancestors? Like, no, and if you do, if you're a student of social movement history and those types of organizing, unfortunately, some of those organizing spaces and movement building spaces, where some of the more toxic spaces that were there for women for LGBTQ folks, right? Like, it's, you know, so I think I bring a bit of that sensibility. I'm all about process. I think, like, when I come in and I open up space with folks, I guess, ready to share a bit of my story, a bit of my testimonial but they also show some examples that motivate my attention to work. So one of the things I share with the students is a documentary called [Precious Knowledge](#) that outlines that kind of yeah, that talks about the Mexican American studies fight at Tucson Unified School District in Arizona. How the research was indicating that students were achieving, like, higher test scores. There was an increase in Chicana/Latina graduation rates, like all this good stuff. And then, of course, racism, the structure, it all comes, and they shut it down. And then it shows. The students mobilized with their family, embracing their Indigeneity and move forward into a movement to fight for their education for the future generations.

Johnny (Guest): That piece is very intentional when I share with my students. And I think that in the nod to, "tu eres mi otro yo," "you are my other me," that kind of Mayan indigenous philosophy, that kind of again, when we think about all of our identities and how we could show up. I think at that discussion is just a recognition of our humanity I think, at first. And then we build that our humanity is those identities as well. We bring those with us and can we create a space where we could show up and see one another and acknowledge one another and validate one another? And again, that's bumpy work that doesn't those spaces. Sometimes what? I would kind of call sacred spaces. They don't happen all the time, whether in community, or in university but I've been blessed and to have certain moments where that's happened, and I would say, I don't know if Brianna and Marissa would agree, but that fall quarter the recent Her Story/His Story/Our Story.

Johnny (Guest): Chicana/Latina student, resistant activism, I think, was the closest to me feeling like, we were really having Chicana/Latina Studies at DU because it was majority of students of color, we had so

many student leaders and organizers, and there was a big shift in the course. And I feel like, and again, those are intentions, but they don't happen unless the students feel that connection. And if they feel like it's their space to be able to do so.

Brianna (Guest): Johnny, I can add to that. I think earlier someone mentioned that, like, what it's like to even be in one of Johnny's classes and really honestly, I didn't take one of John's classes until my third year and that was when COVID began. And so had to be online and that was my first time, but honestly on campus all of my classes, I dreaded going to them. I was never feeling comfortable and I always felt like on the edge or anxious going to these classes. But when I come to Johnny's class, I felt like I could let my guard down and be myself. Like, it makes me want to cry low key. Because you think for an institution, that likes to advocate diversity and inclusion, inclusive excellence and they cost more than Harvard but I'm not feeling like the product of that. But going to Johnny's class I never, I was always was a smile. I always was, like, well, I'm going to wake up on time for this email and actually, I didn't feel nervous to raise my hand and to actually engage with the class. Every time I left Johnny's class.

Brianna (Guest): I felt like I actually got something out of it every day and not only just felt like a robot. Let me just turn in this paper and this assignment no, it was actually personal good self development to myself and to the community in general. And I really just, it makes me frustrated that it took that long. And that there's not a lot of classes, like, Johnny's in like, I really do think that, like, the reason why like, a lot like, our community loves Johnny in general, like his teachings again. Like, he says, like, you know, Johnny shows up as himself too, that made me feel like he's being real, like my teacher listens to the same type of music I listen to finally. Like, it feels like I'm at home. I'm a first-gen student too until finally someone gets there or someone's trying to get it. And it makes me. You know, sad to realize there's professors who are like, well, this has to be a professional like, you, you call me by my name, Dr. Dah Dah Dah and I'm like, okay, that's cool. But you're never gonna get to your students that way, trying to act like, you know, you have this role, you have this title, this authority. Cool. But that honestly, that pushes me away from professors here on campus interest in general. Like, I'm like, you're not even trying to get to know me. Johnny's at the carne asadas. Johnny's there! That's how that makes me want to be more engaged. Makes me want to take more of his classes. That makes me feel like I'm actually getting my education at the end of the day, I could only really say that most of the things I really am learning have been from taking Johnny's classes. And that was towards the end of my third year up into this point and my first two years. It feels like a blur. I don't really remember much material again. Most of the professors here are just more like you give us our product there. You goes kind of like that capital is structure of, like, we do this work our labor. You grade it. Cool, onto the next set of 100 students we gotta teach.

Brianna (Guest): Versus Johnny. It's like, you know my first name, you know, my, my prima, my tia's all this stuff, and he's trying. He's actually trying to build that connection with students and again not. Everyone is that same way of, like, oh, I like it takes a minute and like Johnny said, it's a lot of these professors too, want to come in thinking that we could just trust them right away or that we just need to believe in them and we'll go in and have faith that they're going to do us right, but really, I appreciate Johnny's patience and always letting us know that. Hey, if there's anything I'm doing wrong, let me know or, hey, what do you want to talk about today? Johnny never ignored the outside issues that were

happening outside of classes versus other classrooms it was always like, okay, we're just going to next lecture, next slide, not did you not just hear about the mass shooting that happened? Did you not just hear about the police brutality that's happening you're not going to address that? You're not going to? You're just going to act like, we come to this classroom and everything's gone. You know, of course, my white counterparts have the privilege of doing that, but I'm sitting here thinking oh, my goodness. Like, what's next? Like, and all these thoughts run through my head versus these other professors again, I don't feel comfortable or going up to them being, like, hey, can I get an extension on this paper? You know, I'm planning this huge protest, you know these events and stuff like that.

Brianna (Guest): I'm doing the dirty work of DU of diversity and recruitment basically. And versus Johnny, I feel comfortable letting him know, like, hey, can I please get like, and it was always because he knows he's seen it and he's there versus other professors. They're not there. Then I have been here in the community, they're just here to teach the 100 students they got to teach, and then they leave, they dip out and leave and they don't build that connection. They keep it like Johnny said that professionalism, which I respect. Right? But also there's a line of that's how you're never going to be able to connect with us and really build that community with us.

Omar (Host): Thank you so much for sharing Brianna. It's really, really powerful and I really I appreciate all of us, you know, being vulnerable. I think Johnny, to, to build off of one of the points that you made that really stuck with me is that, you know, you. You had mentioned that oftentimes in this work people forget about the process. In addition to that, I feel like people don't create sustainable systems also. You know, sometimes really great initiatives happen once. That's great. And then they disappear because no one's leading that initiative. And I think you and Danielle are not only facilitating a better process, but you're also creating sustainability and Brianna and Marissa are the example of sustainability you are teaching them you are giving them the tools you are giving them the voice that they can one day be a Johnny, be a Danielle, be a Milagros, you know, and I think that's super, super powerful. So kudos to all of you. Um, I'd, I'd really love to hear from Marissa and, you know, just, I'd really love to get your perspective on, you know, when we think of professors, and we think of creating powerful antiracist teaching education, what is it that you think of Marissa or who do you think of?

Marissa (Guest): Yeah, so when I took the class appropriate Johnny, it came out, like, I feel just the right time because it was very much risk at DU and all my other classes. Like Brianna said, like, in high school, went to school there was like, predominate, like 80% Latinx and now I go to a school where I'm the only one in the classroom and my teachers definitely made me feel that even if they care they would microaggress me, like, so bad, and sometimes, like, unintentionally, like, with no, like malicious intent, but they just couldn't relate to my experiences. And when I look at Profe Johnny the first thing that he does, when we enter class is that he tells us his story, his testimonial and he lets us know like, this is what I had to do to get here. And, like, know that, like, my family, I come from a family that's also like first generation, like all this and he really lets it all out. And from there, I can see that, like. I can relate to him in a way that I can't relate to any of my other professors, 'cause my other professors. Like, I'm not sure if they were also first generation students, or if they also went through the same struggles. But Profe Johnny really lets me know that. Like, you're not alone.

Marissa (Guest): And, like, if you're struggling right now, like, it doesn't have to be like that. And I don't feel like I get that from my other professors in the same way. And sometimes, like, when I reach out to my professors and I'm struggling, I kind of feel like a burden. And, I don't know, like, I know it sounds bad, but I don't know sometimes like, you're scared to reach out because there are those, like hierarchical relationships with teachers that like. I'm the one who carries the knowledge and I'm just giving it to you and I don't know, it just, it comes out like wrong and so bad. Like, I remember 1 time this was in high school, and we were learning about the civil rights movement. And we're like, you know, we will always learn about like, MLK, Rosa Parks and I was like, well, I want to bring in like, a little bit of a different perspective. And when we talked about Rosa Parks, I told the teacher. I was like, hey, did you know that she wasn't the first black woman not to give up her seat.

Marissa (Guest): Actually, a lot of other stories that aren't told is because of that concept of, like, fitting like the like, the model minority image, and, like, being a worthy victim and then he's like, that's not true. And then he moved on. And this, I feel like that happens a lot. It's like your points are cut off and they're not saying that they are valid or it seems like, oh, you just want to bring up this perspective or I don't know, it just. It gets so frustrating to me, because when teachers always try to do, like, how Danielle was saying that it's kind of like it's seen as a side thing. And when people treat it as a side thing, it goes into, like, this realm of, like, almost like, oh, we only have stories of oppression and we don't have stories of excellence. We don't have stories of us being leaders. We don't have stories of us, like, community organizing and we don't have stories. We're like, we're doing great things. We're only seen as victims. And that's all that we're ever going to be, and even that in itself, it gets degrading to only see yourself, like oh, wow. Yeah. Well, I guess I'm only going to be like a migrate farm worker or this or that.

Marissa (Guest): But, like, when you actually get to hear these stories, it becomes empowering and it becomes the sense of there's so much I can do in my life. And I feel like it's so frustrating. When you aren't taught those perspectives, and I feel like I get that a lot with Profe Johnny and I love how he always like validates anything that any of us say, because I feel like sometimes when I speak up in some of my classes, it's like. Oh, okay, well, now, on to the next to me, and I don't know, I don't feel like I get that. Like, I feel like when I'm in Profe Johnny's class, it's more dialogue than repetition, and I feel like when I'm in my other classes, it's more like. Okay, well these were the key points of the reading. Next today, and I don't know, but I feel like it's more engaging in community and having, like, how you said this being together. And healing together.

Milagros (Host): Wow, that's super powerful, Marissa. Send me what you're sharing about how again like, how we could feel when, when faculty when professors are only telling a single story. Of particular communities in this case racially minorities a condition is Latinx, Chicano, Indigenous communities for sure. There's always an impression story and there's truth in being able to say. These are systems operating systematically against specific groups of people, but it's not a complete story. It's not the full story. There's so much knowledge and wisdom and love and things that we know, and are cultivated within our own communities and households that can be rich knowledge. That can actually advance the disciplines if we let it into the classroom. And I value so much the leadership and and the, and the work

that you're both doing and and some and I say it was some hesitancy, because I wish you didn't have that burden to do that work.

Milagros (Host): You should have the ability to just be a student to be a learner. Right? And what you're seeing on is I have to do some of the institutions' work, because they're not doing it and. I wish you didn't, but I'm also grateful that you are because I know every time you show up, you open the door for 3 other people to show up and to be able to be in that space to see themselves in that space. So, I hope one day that burden is shared and that institution does more of what it needs to be doing. And I'm talking about all institutions, not specifically DU, you know, the, you are all institutions, including the University of Connecticut. But in the meantime, I'm really grateful. For the work that you are doing, because it does make a difference, and it has a huge impact in the communities that you serve, and the people that you build relationships with in the process. While my heart is filled. It aches but it's filled at the same time, like a lot of complex emotions.

Milagros (Host): And as we wrap up today's episode, I just want to turn it back to to Johnny and Danielle for maybe some closing thoughts about what you just heard from Brianna and Marissa, and just a conversation about what would you say to faculty or professors who want to do better? They don't want to do the harm that we just heard about. They want to do some of a better work in their classrooms to be antiracist in their teaching. What, given what you just heard today, and also your own thinking, what advice would you give to faculty who want to try this on. You know, to work towards this path, or for those who have been doing this work and sometimes feel like gosh, "how do I sustain that?" Maybe what advice would you give? Either way you know? Curious.

Danielle (Guest): I want to build off of Brianna, Marissa were just sharing because I think it's really powerful and, um. Just reminding me again, and again that this idea that we don't give students a voice. They already have it. Um, like, and this assumption, you know, the ways that we position ourselves in relation to young people, in relation to pre-service teachers. This hierarchy of knowledge, right? I think it's really important to just. It doesn't matter. So what? So, I went to school 12 years after high school. Like, that doesn't whatever that was my experience. You know, my dad tossed newspapers. Your mom, was a clerk for, you know, I can't remember. We all come from these working class companies, working class families, but. Like, all of it is valuable. You know, all of these, like, we need to throw out these deficit perspectives, which we say again and again and again, like, not seeing what.

Danielle (Guest): People from lots of communities, especially historically disenfranchised communities is not having knowledge or not, you know, not knowing things, you know? And seeing ourselves and positioning ourselves. In a manner that we are, we're just going to deposit this knowledge into into students. I think it's really important to disrupt that. Um, if we're really committed to, um, these notions of like, liberatory pedagogical and antiracist teaching. And also that we can't do this work alone. I cannot do this alone. It's humbling. It requires a stance of vulnerability and that anyone who wants to do this needs to make sure that they're, you know, calling on, you know, brothers and sisters in the struggle, you know, and building that community is so, so crucial. I learned from my colleague Grace Player, you know, we

check in. I have some friends from the UCLA Urban Schooling Program who I'm really cool with. So, Johnny, as soon as I was, like, okay, of course, of course, he's awesome. I call on young people that I still communicate with when I was in Detroit. I think there's. It's really important and worth continuing to learn and grow in this work to make sure we're open to learning from each other. So that's what I would say.

Johnny (Guest): Yeah, thank you, Danielle, that was beautiful. I echo everything that you shared. And I would, I would just say, like, in my experience, a kind of observation, when I've seen some educators, whether they're kind of K-12 teachers, or even in higher education, that I think there just needs to be a real genuine desire to want to be able to really like, you were saying, activate students their voices. Their experiences. So, I think one, it just, it starts with that humble intention of wanting to do it and then starting to look at potentially what resources that might be there to be able to do that, because we definitely need more community of educators that, one check on each other's care but that also could collectively come together to do some of the lifting, like pedagogical lifting, curriculum lifting, share strategies on how to build. And, and I think one of the things that, I think doing community work through the years is always kind of schooled me on was a lot of times is sometimes a smart move is to build relationships with folks that are doing the work or that hold those identities or that have that experience and bring them in. And honor them in.

Johnny (Guest): So, I think a lot of this just has to happen with the agency that you first need to kind of engage in to want to do it versus saying, well, can't do that. I hold all these identities of privilege. It might be white, middle class. Well, I don't share this experience. Will then, yo, start going on your journey. Start plugging in, reach out to, like, a teacher of color group. That does this work. Plug into, like, an ethnic studies campaign or, you know, I think a lot of times it's about folks, like getting past that if you really want to do it, you've got to like, now take the next step in your journey to go out there and make those and make those connections. And find that, because I know that there's folks out there I know at UConn, that there's amazing folks, like yourselves, and other educational leaders that would be there to help you on that journey. If you really wanted to do it.

Omar (Host): Well said, Johnny, well said to really everybody. I think Milagros and I are very thankful for today's conversation. So, with that said, Danielle, Johnny, Brianna, Marissa, thank you so so much for your vulnerability for your willingness to share such wisdom about what liberatory education could be like when we center trust, authentic relationships, and are truly committed to communities as you express Johnny. You're all so inspirational and we're so grateful for the leadership and education you're offering both inside and outside the classroom. So thank you so much. Keep fighting the fight, the good fight and just remember we're not alone.

Omar (Host): Since this is our last episode, we, Milagros and I, as well as Henry--who supported this podcast through his work as a student worker at the Office for Diversity and Inclusion at UConn, want to share some closing reflections.

Milagros: In thinking about all our episodes this season, my heart and soul is filled with what I've heard and learned. Something that stands out to me across all the episodes is that antiracist reaching is not

only about what this teaching is against, which in this case is white settler coloniality and patriarchy in our teaching and learning environment and experiences, but also what this teaching is for: It is heart work that cares about students' full humanity; It is soul work that requires not only caring for students' souls but also being educators whose souls are committed to liberatory praxis inside and outside of the classroom. This is not a temporary approach to teaching, it is a way of living and being as an educator.

I also loved the synergy between the episodes in terms of resources shared during our conversations. Anyone who wants to get a list of those resources, please visit cetl.uconn.edu and click on the banner for the HEART podcast. Each episode has a transcript and list of resources.

Milagros: Lastly, I really enjoyed expanding my view of what antiracist teaching means and where it can happen. In episode 2- Dr. Santos, Joseph, and Leyva provided great examples of the necessity for identifying the levers of change needed in higher education and the work antiracist educators have in pulling those levers they have access to. In episode 3- Drs. Lori Patton Davis and Frank Tuitt showed us what it looks like to take antiracist teaching approaches and stance into administrative work in higher education. In episode 5, Dr. Nienhusser, Cantu and Brownlee showed us the collective work that is needed to make antiracist teaching an organizational culture at community colleges. In episode 7, Danielle DeRosa, and Drs. Varghese and Okello immersed us in the necessity to unclass the classroom, to disrupt normative views about the process of learning to create liberatory educational praxis. I can go on and on, honestly. I've learned a great deal and have lots of reflection to do this summer.

Henry: Season one had a lot of highs, and it provided a great introduction to many of the concepts and practices that are utilized within antiracist teaching. There were also many moments for self reflection such as when Dr. Funk discusses centralizing language and ideas that are solution oriented rather than problem oriented. He offered meaningful guidance on how discussions should be framed when he elaborates on the difference between being "anti-something" and "pro-something." Wisdom of this nature was common through many episodes in the season. It provided learning moments for us, as well as for any practitioners interested in fine tuning their strategies. I particularly loved how various conversations either intentionally or unintentionally recognized that higher education and antiracist teaching is not unique to the university. Within the theme framework of higher education, there were more specific discussions that touched on antiracism in community colleges like our episode 6 theme did, or on the development of students up until they reach higher ed like Dr. Player mentions on episode 4 while discussing education's inherently political nature through all levels.

Omar: Season 1 provided a glimpse of the sheer vastness that intersectionality in antiracist teaching has to offer scholars, activists, and students. Two common themes stuck out throughout the episodes: urgency and love. Urgency regarding this issue because of the lack of uniformity that it brings about, which yields students feeling the resistance in their efforts to make the world a more equitable place. In addition, there is an incredible amount of love that's shared among the professors that were interviewed. Professors and scholars value the humanity of the past, present, and future of their students, which allows them to approach their curriculum in a more wholesome way.

We even had the opportunity to hear from undergraduates who were directly impacted by one of their professors and the results speak for themselves. The students were beyond appreciative of the support their professor provided them with and they were also learning from his leadership, by being student activists at the University of Denver campus. Sandy and Chris touched on elements of analyzing oneself in relation to others - asking ourselves, "who are my people?" They emphasized the importance of being better relatives to each other and asking ourselves what's at stake if we don't embark on certain endeavors right now, such as climate change. Danielle and Johnny reminded us that building trust with community members takes time and that there is power in the journey of building capacity for change in students and their families.

In conclusion, we hope you learned just as much as we did. Get ready for an upcoming season filled with fascinating speakers and topics that touch on antiracist teaching in specific disciplines and the gaps that exist within.

Milagros: We are grateful to the many teams at UConn that supported us this semester in creating this podcast including the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning; the Office for Diversity and Inclusion; and the team at UConn 360. We are also grateful for all the guests that participated in this first season. They were inspiring, incredible teachers, that I hope we have all learned from. Thank you to all of you. "Because it takes a village and it takes heart."

Items Referenced

- [Eve Tuck](#)
- [Maxine Greene's notion of Social Imagination](#)
- [Grace Lee Boggs](#)
- [*Precious Knowledge*](#)