

#186 — A Journey From Jamaica to a PhD, with Dr. Winston Benjamin

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Winston, Paul, Rena, Transition

Winston Benjamin 0:00

In January 21, 1989, we all officially came and got landed in the United States. So I came to the States and had my pops trying to be like, an assertive parent. It was real tough for me in the first couple of years in school. I just didn't feel like anybody cared about me.

Rena Clark 0:21

The topic of today's podcast is A Journey From Jamaica to a PhD, with Winston Benjamin. Unpacking Education is brought to you by avid.org. AVID believes that every learner can develop student agency. To learn more about AVID, visit their website at avid.org. Welcome to Unpacking Education, the podcast where we explore current issues and best practices in education. I'm Rena Clark.

Paul Beckermann 0:55

I'm Paul Beckermann.

Winston Benjamin 0:56

And I'm Winston Benjamin. We are educators.

Paul Beckermann 1:00

And we're here to share insights and actionable strategies.

Transition Music 1:05

Education is our passport to the future.

Rena Clark 1:10

Our quote for today is from the song "Untold Stories" by Buju Banton. He sings, "Who can afford to run will run, but what about those who can't? They will have to stay. Opportunity, a scarce scarce commodity."

Paul Beckermann 1:29

I kind of want you to sing that, Rena.

Rena Clark 1:32

I mean, you can sing it. You're a singer.

Paul Beckermann 1:36

Maybe we have Winston sing it.

Winston Benjamin 1:41

If you don't want, if you want to know--yes, this song is very important to me. And I'll explain to you why the song is important to me. But Paul, what does it speak to you? How does it speak to you? Because I just want to hear how Americans hear a song about Jamaica, from a Jamaican. So what do you think about the song?

Paul Beckermann 2:01

Well, first, I did not know it was a song from Jamaica by a Jamaican but I knew it was a song. So right there you earn points, Winston because I'm all about song lyrics. But I was thinking about barriers that we face, because I hear in the lyrics that people can't afford or they can't afford to get out. So money was a barrier, but it could be education, it could be illness, could be discrimination, could be many, many things that are barriers. And then I think about my childhood. I would say the biggest barrier for Paul growing up was probably finances. I mean, I was the oldest of nine kids. And we didn't have a lot of cash. Another barrier, I suppose, was that first generation college students, so I didn't have somebody to show me the way through all those hoops and things. But I had parents who were super encouraging. And that was like my secret recipe to get me through all that. And then I think about the fact that not all our kids have that in our schools. So, as teachers, we might have to be those surrogate parents or those surrogate role models in some of those situations. So that's what I was thinking about.

Winston Benjamin 3:15

I mean, yeah, all of the above. And for me, the song means, so it's the immigrant story, right? Like, a lot of times when you think about immigrants usually are the ones who can muster and gather many resources, even though they come from a place that has limited resources. But that's the thing is they're, they're engaging with and running and trying to do the best they can with limited opportunity, because it's such a hard thing. And that was one of the things my parents always reminded me of is that we still have family back home in Jamaica who struggle every day. Right? One of the most expensive things in Jamaica is food. So like, the idea of having just a chance to make a chance and just keep trying was really important because opportunity and commodities are scarce. There not everybody's gonna get something. And what does that mean that you're in a world where sometimes you have to go without just because it's

the necessary, for the thing for all to survive. So, this song was an important thing that my brothers used to play for me. My mother used to play, my pops used to play, as a way to remind me--the youngest to America--that there's still more than just America, you know. So...

Paul Beckermann 4:29

Cool. Thanks for the perspective. I appreciate that.

Rena Clark 4:31

Yeah. And then even once in America, it's interesting how it applies. I was thinking a lot about my dad and his situation, and how I benefited as a result of his running from Jersey to get out. Similar. Very impoverished with an alcoholic father, and a mom that worked three jobs just to put some semblance of food but...and so also thinking about the time, the Vietnam War, and the draft, so he got out. And it was it's interesting, the kind of the opportunity to how it presented itself.

Winston Benjamin 5:13

Yeah. And sometimes kids don't remember or even notice that like, there's like there's so many sacrifices that are made for them to exist without knowing that there are those many sacrifices being made. Like, my mom used to say this all the time: like you gotta rob Peter to pay Paul. Sometimes you gotta be a little bit late on the light. You know what I'm saying, gotta be a little late...

Paul Beckermann 5:36

Keep paying them.

Winston Benjamin 5:38

Right? Like, listen, bills count. So just those little stories about like, sometimes you got to realize what choices are being made.

Rena Clark 5:46

My dad calls that finagling. And it's funny how he ended up going into economics. Because it's, he was a world class finagler. Still is.

Paul Beckermann 6:02

So this is kind of a cool episode Rena, because our guest is our good friend and host, co-host, Winston. Winston, welcome to the episode.

Winston Benjamin 6:11

Ooh, thanks for having me. This was a little nerve-racking. I'm kind of scared. Hopefully, you'll like enjoy our conversation.

Paul Beckermann 6:24

You know, actually, it's kind of funny because we have known each other now for like three years. But there's a lot of your story that I really don't even know. You know, especially you

talked about you came from Jamaica. I don't really know much about that. You want to talk about Jamaica? And your growing up there?

Winston Benjamin 6:42

Yeah, man. So because I knew this was coming, this episode was coming, I actually called my mom and we, man, we re-lived a few of our memories. So I lived I grew up. I was born in Kingston, Jamaica. I grew up in this small community called Cockburn Pen, which is one of the largest Indian from India in Jamaican community, right? On a street called Condo Terrace, five Condo Terrace is the actual address of my street. The only thing that's remaining from my house is the stone, the stone steps. We lived in a, like a wooden, wooden shack with zinc roofing on it. It was me, my mom, my dad, and my two brothers, and my sister, in a small, one-room shack. So that was really for me--I didn't realize I was poor, in Jamaica, because everybody else looked the same way. We were all like in the same muck, walking around barefoot, no shoes, and this is 1980s Jamaica. So it's just a little bit different in terms of the context of poverty, like the island was a few years behind and just in terms of the country, so it felt more rural, in many ways. But so it was a lot. I still have my primary middle elementary school T-shirt. I was so small as a small baby.

But what I remember is my brother had to take a common entrance exam. It was one of the first time I realized education matters. So a common entrance exam is the test you take to get into high school. And depending on how well you do determines your experience in school, and my brother went to KC College, Kingston College which, at the time, was very big for my parents who really didn't have the most highest education experience. So from there, we didn't live in the best places. And then in 1987, my grandmother came. And the story that my parents told, it was raining so hard that when she stepped in our yard, it was so muddy that she couldn't believe that her grandkids were living there. And then she signed the papers to get us to the States that year. So it was like one of those kismet situations that really led our family to even get a chance to come to the States because like without a sponsorship, there was no way to go. And my parents are trying to go from...

Rena Clark 9:06

So was your grandma in the States then?

Winston Benjamin 9:08

My grandmother was in England and then married a dude in the U.S. So she had dual citizenship, and it was one of those only, like, we got lucky. Funny thing is my mom's dad, Michael McPherson worked in the U.S. during World War II in Syracuse, New York, building ships. That was the one of the biggest things that a lot of Jamaicans came to the U.S. to build ships in New Jersey. He got spinal meningitis, lost his eardrums in the medical thing and then had resources for us from the States. So that's how, like family connected through that way. And like being in military, my aunt came to the U.S. through that, as well. My Aunt Ivy, she was in the U.S. but she didn't have the opportunity to sponsor my mom. So it was through my dad's mom who gave us, gave us a sponsorship. So that's the thing about being in Jamaica, is this there's always some sort of connection to some hope. But depending on how things play out, it either

works or not. But it was, my parents were looking to try to get us to the States for like five to six years and we got lucky that my grandma, my dad's mom, Miss Blackwood, had enough citizenship in the U.S. to sign over the paper to get us to come and sponsor us. So she sponsored us in '87. My dad came to the U.S. in '88, to the Bronx, try to figure that out. Bless my mom with four kids in Kingston in '88. Hurricane Gilbert came, blew up, blew down our house. So it was one of the most traumatic experiences I remember as a kid watching a bird getting stuck in a hurricane wind storm, wind shoal, and ever since that day, like rain, wind, messed me up for a very long time in terms of like, I didn't have my pops or the family. But January 21, 1989, we all officially came and got landed to the United States. So I was six and seven years old when I came. So still, for me, it was all the joy of having fun running around being happy. But I didn't really understand the context of what we lived in at the time. Right? It was always going back home that really made it make sense of how lucky we were to get out.

Paul Beckermann 11:28

You've talked before about the fact that you know your dad had come over earlier. So you maybe didn't know your dad super well.

Winston Benjamin 11:35

Yeah, at the time, like when we first got when I first got back to the States. It's like he was this big figure. He's Winston, Senior. And I like it was like three years of my life. I had no idea who he was. So it was like your your him I guess. So it was really trying to reintroduce especially because when things were when I when I got scared, I got scared at the time. It was like my older brother, Neil, was the male figure that I really gravitated to. So when I came to the States and had my pops trying to be like, assertive parent, it was really tough for me in the first couple of years in school. And I remember getting in trouble a lot when I was when we first got to the U.S. It was it was tough. It was tough, because teachers would threaten like, back in the days it was like, Oh, we're gonna call your dad and I'll be like, I ain't worried you gonna call him. F-U! Let me act up, let me do worse. So it was a really tough first year and a half trying to reestablish a relationship with him because, again, like when, when I was at my scared worst, he wasn't there, which a lot of times I still hold, think about as a part of our relationship. Like, what does that mean?

Rena Clark 12:44

So when you when you came, you said you were what? Six? Seven? So what was that initial school experience like for you?

Winston Benjamin 12:54

Oh, my God, it was the worst. I had a Jamaican accent back then, you know what I mean? So I was definitely speaking a little different. And my mother still has my first report card. And they mentioned that I should be in special ed. I spelled color with the "u." Right? Just literally, exactly.

Rena Clark 13:18

It makes more sense, y'all.

Winston Benjamin 13:20

Small, little nuances like that really just made me academically not feel a part of. Also, I was made fun of a lot by other kids in school. Right? Because of my accent, I wasn't hip enough. And it was just like the first few years I was so silent. I didn't participate. And that's when I think people thought I needed speech support. Because I just didn't talk. I just didn't feel like anybody cared about me until I met Mr. Alejandro. He was our, Mr. Alejandro was our fifth grade teacher and he did a--this is the silliest thing. So every year he would put on a school talent show. And the year that I did it, Biggie and Super Cat had this big song that came out and I played, I did Super Cat. I was a Jamaican playing a Jamaican kid and it was like I was on stage. It was the first time that I actually felt connected into school and I still--Mr. Alejandro still I see at 70, around the block from when I went to my elementary school. I lived a block and a half away and he still connects with my parents. But like, if it wasn't for Mr. Alejandro and having like, he's Trinidadian, until I met him, I like didn't have any way of being seen because people just thought I was Black. They didn't realize that I was a Jamaican kid that was just not talking because no one really heard me. Right? And that was that was like a really hard thing where just feeling like that, that was the first time I realized I didn't belong anywhere, was in elementary school.

Paul Beckermann 14:58

So what changed that? I mean, I see you as a successful person and good guy and confident and, and all that. But how did that change?

Rena Clark 15:09

And you like to talk now.

Paul Beckermann 15:10

Yeah, you do.

Winston Benjamin 15:10

Yeah, that's the problem. That's the thing, is I was in my house, I am the entertainer, right? Being the baby of four, you got to figure out how to like make people pay attention to you. And by the time I came around, my parents were already old, so I always had to grab and pull people to me. Always, you know, like, always. So I developed just like this attitude, but Mr. Alejandro, Miss Williams, were two teachers that were very important for me. And then it was middle school. Alexander Brooks Major, the third, Mr. Major. Still remember everything about this dude. He was six-foot-four, black belt in karate. Black dude who did water polo. All those things. And he would have us after school. He would do, he had a martial arts class with some of the kids and he would have us write HIM. Highly intelligent males. That was our superhero. We were HIMS. And ever since Mr. Mr. Major put that in our head, like we were HIMs, like we are highly intelligent males. That stuck with me on no other level, right? Like, I was valuable enough because I could make myself valuable. It's not what others put in me, right? Like, I already come with stuff. So being a highly intelligent man was something so dope, and also seeing such a big, big man be so warm and loving kinda gave me my personality, right? Like, I'm a six-foot-tall baby, right? I've just a lovable dude that most people think is mean, but if it wasn't for Mr. Major, like, being like, yo, I'm a water polo player. And no one expects a Black

dude to do water polo, right? He gave me a chance to like really see different opportunities for what it is to be. Right? Like I could make up myself. But yeah, it was the reason why I taught that.

So Mr. Major, got me believing in myself. But it was for my gym teacher, Miss Greene, she hooked us up and got me connected to a start-up debate program, the New York Urban Debate League. And in New York in the late '90s, there was only two public schools in New York that did debate: Bronx Science and Manhattan Center. And these were the prestige prestige schools in New York. And George Soros of Open Society was like, Let's fund something in schools and I began with that debate program. And it was interesting to see, like, people actually wanted me to talk because like before in schools was like, You talk too much. Like I could remember my mom beating my...disciplining me extensively, from elementary school on for being talkative in school. And this is crazy that I was allowed to talk and they wanted me to talk. And one quote that stuck out to me, it was like they had us look at Malcolm X when he was like, when he was in jail, he was like, "I found my voice, I found my ability to speak through debate." And it was our calling card. But through that experience, I really learned like the racism of the world, because even though we were young, young Black kids, we got a chance to go to the New York State Championship in debate. And at the end of the tournament, the announcer was like, oh, we'd like to thank our New York Urban Debate League kids for having their own special tournament. Thank you for trying to engage in debate. And they counted out fourth, fifth, third, all black schools, all brown schools. Second place was Lake, Lakewood High School, which is in upstate New York, and it was just like surprise that we were able to beat a group of White kids. We never got a trophy. We didn't get anything. It was just like a secondary, like, thanks for doing that. So for me, that gave me that like initiative to always be be vocal and push against. Right? So that's really where like the initiative of being like, "Yo, fight for something that matters" because I was so disrespected. I was so disrespected that that's like, yo, I played your game. I did the debate the way you wanted me to do, and it was something else. So if it wasn't for those opportunities at that time to like feel and realize like a small space of like how foul the world can be, I don't think I would have the same voice as I do now.

Paul Beckermann 15:30

So you've shared a story with us in the past, too, Winston, about a teacher who helped you understand what it would take to maybe leave the Bronx. And you remember that story about restaurant?

Winston Benjamin 19:59

Oh yeah, Miss Unger. She was our, was my ninth grade global teacher. She took our class to D.C. on a school trip. We actually got a chance to sit in on the Columbine School hearing about bringing metal detectors into schools, which is wild because we had just gotten metal detectors in our school. But Miss Unger took us on a field trip to a fancy restaurant and it was like she she said that one day you're gonna be in this space. But also I would like to even push on Miss Goldstein. Miss Goldstein was my...our school tried to get us to take AP classes, and even though it was like, none of us was going to pass, none of us were going to pass. But Miss Goldstein had us read this book, Tuesdays with Morrie. It's one of my favorite books of all time,

Tuesdays with Morrie. And if it wasn't for that book, I wouldn't have got the scholarship that I got to college. Got a Posse scholarship and a Posse scholarship where it was like hundreds of New York City school students applied for the scholarship. You had to get, one—accepted into the school and then accepted by Posse. So yeah, two levels of the application process. And part of it, you have to go and interview and meet 10 of us together and talk about how we met as a team. And I didn't know that the interview started from the moment you walked into the building. I ended up being on an elevator with this old White guy and I had no idea who the hell he was. And he just started chatting. I was like, oh, man, I was reading this book. He's like, What book are you reading? It was like Tuesdays with Morrie. He was like, "Oh, really? I love that book." Then come to find out, the guy went to Brandeis University where the book, where the author met his college professor. And we talked about Brandeis University and what it meant and how that's where some place that I would like to go, and if it wasn't for the communication, of having knowledge outside of the Bronx, having knowledge outside of like, my little hood, you know what I mean? Like, I don't think I would have had those conversations to get me out.

So Miss Unger started me in restaurants, and taking us to D.C. and realizing like I had a political voice, really helped me realize how to talk and Miss Goldstein with just giving me the opportunity to read books that were outside of my neighborhood, really pushed on like, just the ability to connect beyond. And sometimes I always think I break social cues. Like people don't expect me to have a PhD. I like I literally, if y'all know if y'all would see me in the street, I look like a kid from the Bronx. I got a Bronx, New York Yankee for the hat. I got a hoodie on, I got baggy jeans and sneakers. So I look like a kid from the Bronx. But I always say even though I'm from the Bronx, I do have intelligence. And if it wasn't for Miss Unger, and all those other teachers, I don't think I would feel the same.

Rena Clark 22:44

Yeah, and I've, I've had the luxury of getting to know you better, and also get to work with you, actually, every week. So I'm glad that you came over here to Washington state. But I think that's another piece of your story. So you went to college, but then there's this whole piece that we talked about, you ultimately got your PhD, but somehow you ended up over here, all the way in Seattle.

Winston Benjamin 23:08

Oh, man, that was a story and a half. So I worked for a charter school Phoenix Charter Academy, where we had a daycare on site for our young mothers. We also worked with former gang members and current gang members in a Boston, Chelsea, Massachusetts area. And I would always tell my students get your papers so nobody could tell you nothing. Right? Get your high school diploma, because like, once you got that you could get a job anywhere, you could do whatever. Opportunity, some some opportunities came up to take leadership in the building and in our community. And righteously I got passed over. Well my students did not feel that. So they hit me with my own language. They were like Mr., you gotta get your papers, so nobody can step over you. So at the time, I was like, trying to figure out what to do next. And Posse was looking to do a grad school scholarship. And if it wasn't for them in my undergrad, I wouldn't have been able to pay for college. So I applied and I looked to them, and they had an

opportunity to attend the University of Washington for a master's program. I applied and got in and that brought me all the way over here.

And then I met my advisor, Geneva Gay, and she actually sat with me for a couple of hours and a couple of days, a couple of weeks. It was like, Yo, you're actually smart. You should think about this PhD and I was like, lady you bugging, yo. You buggin. Like I, what? What? I never ever, ever in my life, dreamt about having a PhD. I never dreamt about doing anything in terms of supporting academic knowledge or thought, you know, I was just trying to get a job and move forward in life, right? Like my kids say, get a piece of paper to get somewhere. And this, just talking to her and thinking about it and writing my PhD was literally, she called it "me" search, where you researched ourselves. And it was a way for me to justify like, how the heck did I develop who I was? I was a little Jamaican kid who not only represents Jamaica, but all African Americans. How did I learn that? What are the ways that I engage with that? I had a teacher, Mr. Pugh. I still remember this man. He made me hate a lot of White teachers because he didn't understand us. And through my experience, working with my PhD, it really helped me make sense of it. My mother and dad—I went to a vocational high school and we had made a law day and we had a law celebration. And I was a good student at the time. And my parents didn't come to the event. And he was like Winston, your parents don't care about you. They didn't show up. And I was like, Yo, bro, my mom is working as a home health aide. She is wiping somebody's mom's ass right now. And my moms is old. My pa's a construction worker. He is at work right now. Like, how dare you tell me that because my parents didn't show up to this event, that they don't care about me. You know how much sacrifice they made? Now, Mr. Pugh was the worst teacher ever because at the time, Amadou Diallo, if y'all know, was a New York City cab driver who was shot by the cops 42 times including in the bottom of his feet. Mr. Pugh protested it every single night, and never showed up to first period. My senior class, never showed up in the first period. He was so willing to protest every day outside but didn't realize that his job was protesting, that supporting students to get to college, all of our class failed, just failed because he'd never collected any homework, never did anything. I lost my opportunity to graduate with a paralegal studies. Luckily, I had accounting as my secondary backup. But he lost four years of effort and opportunities that I could never get back because he didn't realize what his students' families and community did to support their kids or how he could be supportive in that way. So within that work, and all of that, that really pushed me into like becoming a teacher that focuses in on equitable engagement with students, right, like, knowing where they come from, so that you don't make stupid statements and put your foot in your mouth and make a kid hate coming into a space and not feeling seen and not feeling loved, because my parents worked their ass off to give me everything that I could get. So that's one of those things that really like influenced how I work with our Washington state teachers. Because as you know, in the state of Washington, we have a lot of immigrant students. And it's just like, for me, it's important to recognize that you may not know the full story, so don't make assumptions about how and why they're living the way they're living. Because they're just trying to make an opportunity, have a chance with a chance.

Paul Beckermann 28:20

So you've had positive experiences with teachers and some less positive. If you could go back and talk to young Winston, what would you tell young Winston?

Winston Benjamin 28:34

Don't be afraid. I was worried. I was afraid of trying things and failing because if I failed, what would my parents or what would the opportunity be that I lost? Right? I didn't do things that I didn't know I wasn't going to be successful at. Debate was the only thing that I pushed myself out of my comfort zone. I told the elementary school me like, it's not you. It's not you. It's not you. Don't feel less than because your teachers didn't see you. Because at home I was, I was loved. I was loved. But when my first few years of schooling, I felt like the most unloved so if I could go back and tell him like don't worry about it, people got you. People have you.

Paul Beckermann 29:27

And it seems like through the years you ran into those teachers who did have you. I mean, you rattling off names of teachers...

Winston Benjamin 29:33

Yeah, still to this day. Like I still have connections with Mr. Lieberman. Like if it wasn't for those people who took the time to take a second to say, Yo, I believe in you and I see you. Like I don't think I would have came out of the feeling of being another. I definitely wouldn't have.

Rena Clark 29:50

So you alluded to this a bit with the work you do with teachers here in Washington State, but what would you say to teachers who have a student like you in their classroom?

Winston Benjamin 30:00

I'd never had teachers talk about Marcus Garvey as a value to America. Marcus Garvey, if no one knows the Jamaican immigrant, who in the 1920s, started the United Negro Improvement Association, and he had a interesting color scheme for his flag, which was red, black, and green, which is now considered the Pan African or the Black American flag. I never had a teacher telling me that I influenced America. And never had a teacher recognize any other part of me other than you just the big ass boy from the Bronx. Right? They never saw anything. So for me, I think it's for the teachers that I work with. It's like, what cultural knowledge are you bringing in the classroom? Because I wouldn't have been able to tell that teacher that story, if they had asked me, tell me about yourself. I wouldn't have known anything. I was six, seven when I came here. I didn't know anything about Jamaica, other than the fantasies that I remembered in my head. Right? So like, what, what are the things that the teachers are bringing in to give the students something to latch on to? Right? Like, that's an important part of it. It is like, don't you have, there's enough knowledge for you to bring for students to feel connected. So what are you doing to like, see who they are? Are you asking questions about, like, Hey, where'd you grow up? What's your favorite food? Right? What don't you like doing? What do you like doing? How's your relationship with your parents? Because like, sometimes our expectation for our male students and from our family homes might be different from what a teacher's expectation is, right? So it takes a second to like, really ask those questions and also

bring information into the class where the kid could say, oh, I know stories of Garvey because I could tell you fables about him leaving Jamaica and how and when he was locked up because of his political views as a son of a Rastafarian. Right? I can't tell you stories unless you give me a space to find the access point. So I think for me, that's the biggest thing for my teachers, if I could tell them now it's really try to figure out what are ways that you bring in knowledge about your students before you ask them who they are.

Paul Beckermann 32:20

Sounds like you're leading us right into the toolkit, Winston.

Winston Benjamin 32:23

Perfect.

Transition Music 32:26

Check it out, check it out. Check it out. Check it out. What's in the toolkit? What is in the toolkit? So, what's in the toolkit? Check it out.

Paul Beckermann 32:37

All right, inside the toolkit now, Winston, why don't you go first.

Winston Benjamin 32:44

One of the things that I think is important for the toolkit is teachers, don't put your foot in your mouth. Sometimes you can make statements that harm students in your attempt to believing in them, right? For example, Mr. Pugh saying my parents didn't care for me and it was, it was to him, it was his attempt to show that he cared. But not knowing that my family cared enough about me to go to work made him not realize how disconnected he was to me. So toolkit, make sure you find ways to connect genuinely, connect to your students.

Rena Clark 33:23

As you said, build the knowledge, but you have to actively go and seek the knowledge. Because otherwise society will this can continue to socialize you in ways that are not good, and you can't see a lot of those things in your own bias and you don't identify that you've caused harm. So then you don't know how to repair when you don't know. So for me, then, I would say in your toolkit is go out, seek knowledge, you know, listen to like this, listen to podcasts. There's so many different ways now that we can grow and receive information. I don't have to just read a book from the library. I can talk to students, but it's more than that. I can seek. If I know I'm working with kids from different you know...once I know, I've talked to my students. I learn a bit more about their background. Well, it's okay, then maybe I'll go listen to something about Marcus Garvey this week. Because yeah, so Garvey, maybe I need to learn more. Okay, now I'm interested. But I think that willingness to put it out there and not as, like a burden, but as an opportunity.

Paul Beckermann 34:34

I think my my toolkit is the whole relational capacity thing. Get to know your kids and listen to them. Have conversations. Genuinely be interested in them and get to know who they are. That can be a structured activity. That can be a side conversation. It can be a little chat in the hallway before they head off to lunch. It can be whatever, but show you care and actually care and learn about about those people, those little humans that you're teaching every day.

Rena Clark 35:07

All right, well, that takes us into one thing!

Transition Music 35:13

It's time for that one thing. One thing. One thing. It's time for that one thing, that one thing.

Paul Beckermann 35:26

All right, I'm gonna, I'm gonna hang on one thing that Winston said. And he talked about having a space for stories. Students can't share their identities and what they know, and what they believe, and what they feel unless we give them a space for story. So I think we can do that in so many ways. It can be informally, but even in the design of a, of a lesson, or how you show what you know, if you can connect your personal experience, your personal story, to the academic content, there's, there's a lot of power in that.

Winston Benjamin 35:58

One thing that I wanted to say is yo, build the self-esteem. Like I, literally to this day, I still draw HIM. I still draw highly intelligent male at the corner of my documents when I'm starting something important. When I'm starting something big, like if it wasn't for Mr. Major, I don't think I would have the confidence in myself. So as your, as one thing is like, as you're doing with students, how are you building their internal confidence to believe in themselves beyond you? I haven't seen Mr. Major since I was, what? Damn, seventh grade. So a long time ago, I won't give you an age. But I still remember being a HIM. I still remember being a highly intelligent male.

Rena Clark 36:48

Yeah, I love that. I had that written down, too. So I guess I'm still thinking about this question you had, sharing around? What cultural knowledge are you bringing to the classroom? And how are you bringing it into the classroom? And as Paul said, it might be through providing space for stories. And I do think that, in this time, there's lots of different ways to bring families in, and they don't have to come during the school day when they're working, Winston, for me to bring in that cultural story. Especially now, I love that. Like you were talking, I just had a conversation with my mom and I was able to bring in that information. So, I'm just thinking of the way that physical space and of school is changing, and how we communicate is changing, and how we can really expand that classroom. Beyond the brick walls.

Paul Beckermann 37:51

Sounds like a song, Beyond the Brick Walls.

Winston Benjamin 37:53

That should be a song. I'm going to do the outro of my of my episode because I got because the thing is, I really want yo, the song "Untold Story" is a beautiful story about how children of the family and the impact of immigration on children. If you have a chance, remember that your students are trying to make a chance. And as we've talked to many people like JJ in our previous episodes, is that immigrant children are not only dealing with a new culture, but they're also balancing out experiences that they don't know what to talk about or how to talk to it. I was six and I had no idea what it meant to be ripped away from my everything and dropped into snow. Right? That was a hard transition. So as you're working with your students, and as you're engaging with your immigrant children or just children, in general, remember that they don't have the language to talk to you about what they're going through. How do you support them in developing the language to communicate their needs? If it wasn't for Mr. Major, if it wasn't for Mr. Alejandro, if it wasn't for Miss Unger, I wouldn't have been able to communicate my needs. So allow for the space and allow for your students to be able to talk to you about what they need, and be willing to listen. So thanks for listening to me talk to you about a little kid who grew up and who has a PhD now because guess what? Your babies can grow up to be a PhD, too. I came from the Jamaica, the bottom of Jamaica, to the gutters of the Bronx, to the state of Washington. I still am a kid from Jamaica, and the Bronx with a PhD. Thank you all for listening. Let your kids be all they can be.

Rena Clark 39:43

Thanks for listening to Unpacking Education.

Winston Benjamin 39:46

We invite you to visit us at avidopenaccess.org where you can discover resources to support student agency and academic tenacity to create a classroom for future-ready learners.

Paul Beckermann 40:01

We'll be back here next Wednesday for a fresh episode of Unpacking Education.

Rena Clark 40:05

And remember, go forth and be awesome.

Winston Benjamin 40:09

Thank you for all you do.

Paul Beckermann 40:10

You make a difference.