

[Intro Music]

Me: Hi Everyone, and welcome back to Education Isn't a To-Do List, I'm your host, Hannah Jimenez, and I'm so excited you're here for this special episode where I reflect on my research journey, exploring the intersection of educational technology and culturally sustaining pedagogy.

Today's episode will be a little different. It's part reflection, part critique, and part celebration of everything that this project has done and uncovered. So let's jump right in. When I first sat down with my research questions, I was trying to understand how power structures and existing processes in education impacted the implementation and effectiveness of educational technology and culturally sustaining pedagogy initiatives and wow, every participant touched on this, whether it was through stories about district leadership, school boards or even state mandates.

Over and over again, it became clear leadership matters, a support of community matters, and crucially, teacher training matters, without strong support for teachers, both with technology and culturally sustaining practices, these initiatives struggle to take root. I also asked what strengths and opportunities can educators leverage to effectively integrate these initiatives here? Participants shared real hope, better strategies, stronger training, the thoughtful use of AI technologies, and most of all, the power of community involvement.

However, there was also a warning: these two initiatives are not the same thing, and should not be considered the same. They can support each other, but they should not be confused as having the exact same goals. Culturally sustaining pedagogy can and should exist, whether educational technology is used or not; however, educational technology can be a support for accomplishing culturally sustaining pedagogy and practices in the classroom. And then the last research question, what are the benefits if we get this right? And the answers really are beautiful, their student growth, greater acceptance and belonging in the classroom, higher academic achievement, and most importantly, students becoming critical thinkers, prepared for a diverse world.

I want to take a moment now to reflect on my own growth during this journey, especially around culturally sustaining pedagogy, and how my own cultural background has shaped my understanding of all this. If you'll remember, I told you my positionality in earlier episodes. I'm a white woman born in the south, was taught in a predominantly white school in a predominantly white school district, and yet, I have been on this journey since I went to college, and then I became a teacher in a, you know, inner city school that was predominantly black, that served housing projects, and I realized that what I taught, or what I was taught was not the way that I needed to teach.

There were different styles to teaching. There were different ways to connect with students, and that what connected with me as a white woman, as a white woman in a classroom was not going to be the same things that connected with my new students. And then I jump even further,

and now that I have a daughter who is multi ethnic, I think about what I want to be taught to her, what I want her teachers to look at her and see her identity, and bolster that in the classroom. And how do we go about doing that, and so that is the motivation that led me to this journey, that led me to this research. I wanted to make sure that when students walk into teachers classrooms, they are seen for everything that they are, and that we don't teach to just one identity, we teach to all of our students identities, and we make sure that they understand that their identity is good and worthy and should be sustained in their classroom and not overlooked.

And so now I think about how the educational context today comes. When I started this project last spring. I mean, the climate has changed. The political climate in which we find ourselves now, especially in regards to education, is really hostile. We've got, you know, lots of different attacks on Dei, both from state level and federal level. We've got the removal of the Department of Education and the restructuring of that and a lot of uncertainty there. We've got executive orders that say we need to remove dei from the classroom. We've got state bills saying that, you know, k 12 schools are not allowed to teach diverse education anymore. And I just, I just wonder if we truly understand what that means, that we truly understand that it means ignoring the students in our classrooms who do not look like others that North Carolina and the United States of North of the United States of America are not white anymore, and they're not even majority white. And so to think that it is, that it is the only way to teach, is just so misdirected and and ultimately harming to the students that do not identify in that way. And it makes me worried. It makes me worried for education. It makes me worried for teachers. It makes me worried for, you know, administrators and school boards and the choices that they're going to have to make.

But then I'm also really astounded and surprised and find joy in the fact that so many people stand up and are resisting the that Harvard, you know, decided to just go against the executive orders and the demands from the Trump administration is is joyful to me, and it makes me think that because one person stood up, other people can, and that's just a major source of resistance. There's a lot of other resistance that's happening in schools and in districts led by teachers, led by principals, led by people that understand that this isn't the way education should work. Education is for all and should sustain all, and should not try to hide the parts of history that are embarrassing, because it's those parts of history that truly teach us how to move forward. It's those parts of history that allow us to acknowledge what we did wrong and what we need to do better next time.

And so I just think project. The context of this project has truly changed, but I think that there's even more sense of urgency and purpose now than when I began that before it was deeply personal, and now, not only is it personal, but it's also like in our face, and I hope that resonates with with others listening, because that's Just, that's where I stand, and then how I feel about the research, the podcast and everything now that that the the major hard work is done, and I just have to say, I'm really proud of this podcast. I'm I'm filled with some anxiety about, you know, its future and what that means, but I'm really hopeful that it reaches the right people that need to hear from educators in the field, that need to hear from people that have worked in these environments, that need to hear personal experiences in order to understand what this means. Because it's one thing to have something told to you by people that have never stepped foot in a school that don't know what happens on the day to day, and then it's another thing to listen to

teachers and principals and superintendents and coaches and hear what the work actually is. And I encourage you, if you haven't been a part of schools and you want to know what's really going on, get into the schools, you will be welcome, fill out the volunteer forms and be present.

This work is something that I'm really proud of, but I'll be honest, it's been pretty exhausting, and so I'm just glad to be here, and I hope that that you're glad you joined me.

So now I want to take a moment to respectfully critique some of the responses I received from participants. The first is around the erasure of culture. One participant mentioned how technology can help cultures, languages and traditions that are disappearing. Their comments seem to put the weight of responsibility on the cultures or participants of the culture that are disappearing, and I think this is an important place to consider, are they disappearing, or are they being erased? And if they are being erased, then who actually holds the responsibility of making sure that they are remembered? A culturally sustaining response to this would be to actively uplift, validate and perpetuate the culture in living ways. In particular, schools and educational institutions should be central places where these cultures are sustained and uplifted.

Second is the mention of the book *The Indian and the Cupboard*. I want to first clarify the point that the participant was trying to make, which is that teachers need to make sure that they are making connections with their students. Students need to feel engaged with the content they are being exposed to. At some point, in the context of this dissertation and the themes being explored, was this the greatest example? Not really, but it was true to this participant's lived experience. And I think that is worth noting. The problematic aspects of this book are vast, as I mentioned previously. If this book had been handed to a boy of another race, or even an indigenous student, then the response would likely have been highly different and most likely harmful to the student. Educators must be aware of their student identities and make sure that they provide them with literature and content that uplifts and upholds not only their identities, but the identities of other students and cultures that surround them. This is not to say that we forget our past because knowing the mistakes of our past allow us to make better choices moving forward. *The Indian and the Cupboard* book, while maybe celebrated in its time, is not a respected depiction of an indigenous character or one that should be presented to students in a culturally sustaining lesson.

And finally, the idea that a successful curriculum has no one dominant culture directing it, and while it's a beautiful goal, the reality is quite stark. Today's American education system is dominated by a single cultural perspective, white western narratives. It's not that I necessarily disagree with this participant, but I want to explore more about how this can be a reality. I think now more than ever, this conversation is necessary, as we see increased book removals from K 12 libraries and with several bills, both in federal and state, legislations to remove all Diversity, Equity and Inclusion curriculum from schools. Removing all of this leaves only one culture, white western culture, and when we look around our schools, our neighborhoods, our state, we have to admit to ourselves that it's just not what we see. In order for our education system to truly educate everyone, it must embrace the diversity of its people. It must contend with the harmful

parts of American history caused and embrace that only through acknowledgement and growth can we be truly made better. So how do we get there? Well, my opinion is that culturally sustaining education should be implemented across all schools and teacher training programs should spend significant time focusing on how to differentiate not just student ability, but also student identity.

So now let's take a look at the podcasting format.

This podcast, in reality, was incredibly difficult. From the organization of the audio to the editing process. There were multiple hurdles that had to be overcome in order to get to the end, and there were so many times I looked at my computer screen and just wished I could edit a document and be done, but instead, I had to rewrite a script, delete, audio, re, record audio, format it into an mp3 so that others could review it and then potentially start the process all over again. It was a lot of work. Then there's also the discussion on participant safety in this project, I wanted to make sure my voice never overshadowed those of my participants, and that their voices, thoughts and experiences were heard authentically. But with that comes the concerns about how best to make sure my participants are kept safe, safe, or making sure that they are aware of the publication and public. This publicity that might ensue from their name and voices being attached to this research, especially in this day, it requires careful thought and consideration with each participant, as well as with my mentors to ensure that what I do is best for the research and for those that agreed to participate. I truly believe that using voice to share these stories made it come alive in a way that writing words wouldn't have had the same ability. I believe that the podcast format, especially in this day and age with the people that I want to listen to, it is the way to be heard.

And so I'm not, I'm not sorry for this choice, while it was hard and while there were many hurdles through this entire process, I am thankful that I was supported throughout this journey, and encouraged throughout this journey to do the new thing, to do an innovative thing, to make sure that the voices were heard by those that need to hear it. And that was the reason I chose to do a podcast while the editing struggles are real and the participant safety questions were a struggle that I had to contend with. I'm thrilled that we are nearing the end of this podcasting journey, and I'm excited to see where it goes in the future. I'm excited to see the response from the academic community as well as the general public, because that's really the ultimate goal, that this might bridge the gap between the two and invite a more collaborative and thoughtful relationship that moves us all forward. Podcasting brought a humanity to this research that I don't think a traditional dissertation could capture.

So what are my hopes for how this work impacts North Carolina schools? I really hope that this research is heard by someone who can create some systematic change, that teachers will hear it and feel empowered to do the work that is they're being told isn't important, that we'll see more culturally sustaining classrooms, that the legislation will potentially hear it and understand that what they're asking teachers and schools to do is not what is best for students, and I know that, that maybe they're not going to see it that way, but if enough of us see it that way, if enough people that hold the ability to vote see it that way, then we can create change for ourselves, that we can create, schools that we're proud of, that we don't need to have all of these voucher

programs where we're sending students to other schools, but instead, we can focus on making our public schools the best schools that are available for all students, because that's what it's about. That's what this work is about, to make our educational system this free, public educational system that is a right in our country, the best it can be for every student that walks in its doors. And so what are some of these questions, unanswered questions, that are still guiding me?

You know, I think about the scalability of this, this research and this work, and I know how hard that's going to be, and I'm really curious to see what it would look like on a larger scale. We've heard from personal experiences in classrooms and even from smaller districts, I would be curious to see what this might look like on a state level, what this really can look like on our country level. I think if we want to look outside the United States, I think there are probably really good examples in other countries, and it would just be about like learning from them and not being afraid to say we don't have it right here. We're not the best at this and learning from others. I think that's a really good place to focus some research, the teacher resistance that's happening. I think that's also a really good place to look at research. I think that teachers do more than we even think. And I'm just gonna leave it there. We teachers are in the classrooms with their students. They love their students. They become them, part of their family. I mean, I still. Think about so many students that I have, I wonder what they do, what they're doing on a daily basis. And I just, I think, looking at the teacher resistance and what, what it's truly doing, and what it can do would be interesting, and then I would be neglectful if I didn't consider the political challenges that are constantly being hurled at us from from state and federal legislatures and executive orders and just knowing how to navigate this system in a way that is sustaining for everybody, and I don't think, I don't think we really know what that's going to look like yet. I don't think it's over either. I think there's plenty of changes still to come, and I think we have to take them one by one, and navigate them as best we can. And just remember that as educators like our students, are our top priority, and making sure they feel safe, heard and secure is important, because that has to come first. That has to come first before learning can occur. It has to come first.

Before we close, I have a couple of recommendations for future research that I believe could be built on this work. I believe that we should be creating professional development focused on culturally sustaining pedagogy and educational technology. I think we need to have workshop shops that merge digital literacy with these practices, because too many teachers don't really know what they're doing. They're trying, and they want to do what's best, but they don't have the training to do it well. And if we're not doing it well, then we could be doing it harmfully to students. So I think that's really something to look forward to. I think we need to adopt some culturally sustaining pedagogy, informed technical, technology, technology frameworks, we need to be able to evaluate tools for cultural responsiveness. Because, like some of the participants said, just because technology is there doesn't mean it's good. And we need to be able to evaluate that so that we're not causing more harm for our students. I think we need to encourage student created content. I think student voice is one of the ultimate ways to be culturally sustaining in the classroom. They need to be making podcasts, blogs, videos. They should be leading the way. They should be leading the charge. And I think we need to build some community partnerships. You heard how important community is from the participants. We

need to be partnering with libraries, with companies, with different tribal groups in the area, with immigrant organizations. These are ways that without you know, scheduled professional development, we can be learning as educators how best to connect with the different student identities in our classrooms. This is nowhere near an exhausted list of recommendations or future future research, but these are just a couple things that I find really important that have been brought out to me in my research, and I encourage you to consider other things that were brought out for you, and to take up the mantle and and do your own research in that way you so I want to thank you so much for joining me today. I want to thank the participants and my mentors and everyone who believed in the power of this work. I'm thrilled for where this project might go, and I hope it sparks deeper conversations in classroom, schools and communities across North Carolina and potentially even beyond. Join me next time for the final podcast in this series.

[Outro Music]