The LP Podcast-Ep 0

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**SPEAKERS**

Brandon White

00:07

welcome folks and fam of all walks and talks to the LP podcast literature in practice, where we take a look at texts and practices that encourages student instruction to become more grade level engaging, affirming and meaningful. I am your host and CO learner, Brandon white. What happens when classroom instruction is focused on building academic skills, while at the same time teaching social justice? What's the game when students are exposed to teaching that is student driven and community centered, but it's also flexible, connected to other subjects and deeply interactive. That's the work of author Lorena Scotto and Aman, who joins me to discuss her book texture teaching a framework for culturally sustaining practices. This is the LP.

01:03

Folks, we have an amazing guest, we have Mr. Lorena Escoto Arman. She is a Dominican American educator focused on anti racist and anti bias work in education. She earned her master's degree at Middlebury College's Breadloaf School of English. She is a two time that's right to time, nationally awarded educator whose work has been featured in newspapers and journals, including the New York Times, and CTE journals EdWeek, the National Writing Project and embracing equity. She is the author of the anti racist teacher reading instruction workbook. And most recently, this gem right here. Texts are teaching a framework for culturally sustaining practices. Lorena is dedicated to a role as a wife and mommy, without further ado, you want to Mr. And welcome to the show.

01:59

Thank you for having me. Thank you so much. Whenever I hear that I'm like, Oh, my goodness, I need a vacation.

02:07

definitely work out here. That's the work, right? Yeah, that is the definition. I love your definition for the word, by the way. And we'll get into that a little bit later. So, before we really get started into digging into this book, we need to know, what was your favorite text as a kid, as an adolescent, and as an adult?

02:31

That's so you understand that you're asking me a rather impossible question. Beck's. So goodness, as a kid, as a kid, I was an avid reader. I used to read all the time, all the time. And then I immediately started writing. And so I used to write books, I used to write little stories, short stories, I would turn something that happened into like a very dramatic, fictional retelling. And so but you know what, I can't remember the name of it right now. But there's this little girl who had photographic memory. Do you remember those books when you were a kid?

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I don't, I don't, I'm sorry, photographic memory.

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And she would help to solve cases. So I used to read those a lot. I love them. But then I went through a little bit of a silent period where I didn't write, and I barely read. And this was primarily due to the intensity of school and just, just just school to be quite honest, like I just, I became disinterested in reading, because of the way that I was experiencing literacy in school. And then I get to college. And I find a moment where I'm like, let me just pick up a book again. And I haven't really forgotten that how much I love to read. And two books change the game. So so now we're moving into adolescence, two books change the game. Since the soldiers no disrespect, I don't know if you've ever heard of it or read it. It changed the game. I had never read a book like that. Yes, Cam Jansen. I had never read a book like like this, the soldier, any of her writing, and then also the autobiography of Malcolm X by Liz Haley, Alex Haley. And both of those books. Just I mean, it was like, wait a minute, wait a minute, I saw myself on the page, I felt affirmed. I also felt like so much was explained of the things that I thought and believed and experience. And so that's when I got back into reading and writing.

04:36

So let's talk about your book real quick. There are some questions about that. I want to ask that explore the books landscape, get some, get some folks to understand, what's it about and where you're going with the book? First question I want to ask to make it more obvious for the folks who haven't read the book or haven't gotten to know you yet. Can you describe how much code switching, code meshing or Cold neglecting went on in the writing of this book.

05:03

So that's a good? That's a really interesting question. Because when I've talked about the writing of this book, what I, what I usually discuss is that audience mattered to me. So this is what I'll say, I tried very hard to be as authentic as possible. I wrote, like I was writing to my friends. The teaching profession, particularly English teachers, or let me put it this way literacy educators are, it's about like, 87% white women. And so I'm aware that this is the big this is the majority of the audience, right? However, my editor, black woman, and I, we had a good conversation, and I said, Listen, I'm not writing for that audience, I understand that many of them are going to purchase this book, and I want them to I welcome them to this work is for them as well. But this book is not for them. This book is not for you. No, this is not for convincing them of anything. We're kind of unpassed that personally and professionally, I am past 1965, and I am past 2020, we in 2022. Okay, time to be doing this work. So I said to her, I said, I am gonna, you know, how can I write this book in a way where people don't feel disoriented, but they also fully understand that like, we're on a train, and it's moving, if you just hopped on, welcome, you're late, but welcome. And there's people here to write. So what I mean is that I was I wanted to be very careful to not write from the white gaze or for the white gaze. And so her and I worked a lot. And eventually, this is what we did. She said, I want you to think of three or four people that you're writing to, like, Who is this book for? And so I, I ended up thinking of three or four friends of mine, who are educators who are in the classroom, who have been in the classroom for a long time, who I know do a lot of this already, to make sure that I am not speaking in a way that it feels basic, right? That feels like how you're explaining things I already know, I really, I didn't want to do that. I did want to spend time at the beginning, clarifying terms so that we're all on the same page when I when I name things. So you'll you'll know that from chapter one, but I did the best that I could to talk to someone as if it was you, Brandon. Right? I'm assuming that you have a particular foundation, that you have been an educator in the classroom. So you have some knowledge of what it is right? And so that's what I did. I had pictures of them up to and I was like, would would this person need me to explain that now? Okay, I'm talking to somebody else. I don't want to talk to them. Let me talk to him. So boom, you know, and so it was I was less concerned about code switching or, or translanguaging. And I was just really concerned about let me be authentic, and speak to who I actually want to talk to, you know,

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you said you had pictures of the people that you had in mind while you?

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Yes, I'm a very visual person, right. Like I think very visually. Or, or let me put it this way, in images, I often think in images. And so I was like, I need to see them, I need to remember it was also a form of accountability. Because in my reading spaces, like I got these four people looking at me.

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I wonder what would happen if teachers during PLCs school board members during their sessions, system leaders when making big decisions, had pictures of their stakeholders, right? They're people they knew they had to be accountable to in their community, or the community they're supposed to be connected to, to make the best choices around policies, practices and procedures, but

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names up right for, for accountability, like, Are you serving this person? Well, word because one thing is being a keyboard warrior, and typing all kinds of things, right? Or, or saying all kinds of things, and somebody's not around. But the other thing is to do that or say that or practice that in someone's face in front of someone, you know,

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facts, facts, facts, facts. So as somebody's digging into this text that's been largely inspired by the faces on the wall that you would have been there in your community. What are three words or concepts that are routinely used in this text that are important for folks to soak in?

09:38

Love is one and I definitely defined that at the beginning. I tried to textured obviously, and I'm trying to introduce that as a way to think of the complexities and the nuance of what happens in the classroom. But I'm gonna turn it around on you.

09:54

That's Boomerang. Boomerang. I'll see you sis I would say A textured Yeah, for sure. I would also say, it was interesting reading the book where you are definitely, like, have your own framework, right? It's very clear. But you found an awesome balance of like, offering your distinctive framework, but still given props to you, one of your senseis, Django, Paris. Yeah. So I would say culturally sustaining pedagogy would be another. Yeah. And then I would say, centering slash decentering. Oh, yeah. Because you talk about centering a lot centering of students centering of quality instruction, but then you also talk about decentering a lot to in terms of what it means you're going to effectively censor, you have to know how to effectively dissent or some things too, right. So those those would be my three? I would, I would say, Yeah, that sounds right. So let's hop back into your book real quick. Who do you believe will feel the most seen or heard through your texts?

11:09

I hope that the teachers who I currently discontent with, with classroom practices who are like there's got to be a better way, there's got to be a different way. This didn't work. For me, as a student, I'm struggling through it as a teacher, I'm hopeful that those teachers will see themselves here will see that there is out of the box approach, that helping young people to understand and make meaning of the world around them in order to solve problems is a important part of teaching and can be a part of your practice. So I'm hopeful that those teachers, meaning myself, are seen and heard by this book. Yeah.

11:52

No doubt, well, doubt. And, you know, even in even in this space of social justice based initiatives in education, I don't, I don't always read material that hasn't as a premier target. Maybe it's intended, but it doesn't always hit the core. But in reading this book, it definitely felt that way.

12:16

You know, if nobody, you know, you're like, just stepping into this type of work, and conversations about bias, and justice, and race and all those things. And I think I would just explain that, you know, this book is, this book is meant to help you see how all of these ideas are not abstract, they're very concrete can and should be brought into our classrooms. A lot of people love to talk about Martin Luther King, Jr, and how amazing he was and how his dream for all of us is, you know, still unreached. And one of the things that he talks about is the purpose of education and what it should be. And he says that it should be to help young people or to help the learner discern truth from lies back from fiction, and to make sense of what is around you in order to stay away from propaganda. Right? And so, immediately, we have to ask ourselves, well, if we believe the things that he says, and we should, and if we believe that, you know, education should be about protecting people from propaganda, by helping them to learn and understand truth, then we have to ask ourselves, How am I doing that through through my curriculum and through my practices? And so I'm hopeful that this book helps to answer that question. This book is is meant to help us finally practice what we've been preaching, right, like, we've been talking a lot on social media, particularly since 2020. But definitely before that, if you're a person of color, we've been talking about this. So it's time that we start also walking in and practicing all of this, specifically in our classrooms so that we don't continue to have these quote unquote, racial awakenings. As if racism or bias have been sleeping, they've been hard at work every day. And so we can't have any more other people sleeping because while people are sleeping, other people are dying you know, I think what I did here was simply try to in this book was tried to take that magic that we always see in each other's classrooms, and break it down in a way so that we can all do it so that we can all keep working for our kids. So that we can continue to organize them and just fight for that freedom that our communities need. You know.

14:45

I want to get a little deeper into not just how your text is built, but the things that are actually in it. I want to when reading it, I kind of disagree pattern of folks, you know, just got further established right folks like yourself, Goldie Mohamad, Bettina love Chris endon kind of feel like y'all represent the next generation of like instructional thought leaders. How would you describe the similarities and differences from those that came before y'all like the Gloria Ladson? Billings, right? Or the freyer's or the consumer foods or the Hilliard or the dope it's?

15:32

Yeah, I mean, first of all, that's amazing to be classified with this group right to be connected to their work with such a good time and educational publishing right now. There's such a richness to what's being put out. I didn't write this book by my lonesome in a room. It is in community Dr. Gloria Ladson. Billings is absolutely part of everything that I do. As as she was foundational for culturally sustaining pedagogy. In fact, her chapter in that book is next level, like I find myself going back to it all the time, just to just to go back and get a whiff of her words, you know. And so my work is built upon their work. It is not, it is not even a critique of any of their work. But uh, you know what, let's call this a refrigerator. It's like, let me take a couple of condiments from Dr. Billings, let me take a you know, this side from from CSP, let me take this from Dr. Gays work. Let me look at you know, flavescens ideas of oppression and freedom. And there's nonbanking method of education. Let me look at the way that Delpit frames her words and makes arguments. You know, and so yeah, it's not, I have not shun them, I have not pushed them aside, I don't even know that I can say similarities or differences. I think that it is all it's all woven, right? Like, it's texture, hey, it's textured in that way. Because that's all part of the fabric I, I don't even know that I want to distill and pull away because I want it to be understood that this book and this framework come from right birthed from their work as well.

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Can you tell us about the role of mentorship and intergenerational support played, plays in text or teaching in general,

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I mean, it's played in my academic formation, like I met Dr. Paris. So for the record, I have not met Dr. Eileen, wait to meet him. But Dr. Paris, originally came up with CSP and kind of coined the term in 2012. And at that point, I was a graduate student. And he was a he was co directing that program that I was at. And I was one of the few students of color in that program. And so, you know, naturally, he was, he was making sure to connect with all of us and build community for all of us. And so I got to not only watch him, lead in an academic space that was in every way, white and wanted to keep its whiteness, and then also experiences his mentorship of me. So I got to both watch him and experience Him if that makes any sense. And oh, I remember there was this one conversation. There was this one conversation. This is my first time back in school since college. And I was feeling so insecure. I was like, yeah, oh, really, like, I want to be in this program. And I had just submitted an essay, and I got this. I got like, an A on it. And I was like, and I'm sitting there with him like, yeah, I just, I feel like this teacher just gave it to me, because maybe he felt bad for me. Like, I just don't think this is really worth an A. And he stopped. We were walking actually not. And I said and we were walking and he stopped. He was like, Are you smart? Yes. He was like, What makes you think you did not actually write in a paper? And I was like, I don't know. It's been a long time since I wrote it. You know, I was just, I was drowning in my in my academic insecurity. And he said, Absolutely not. This is a real thing. Students of Color feel like he just brought facts to the table and showed me like, Hey, you're not alone. B this is common. See, you deserve that a because you wrote that paper? Nobody else did. And I was like, You're right. I'm gonna own this, you know. And that, that was like one of the first game changes for me in education because I was like, wait a minute, not only it all these things true, but look at how he like the power that you just had in that interaction. I was like, that's what I need to do for my students, you know? So that's what I mean. I was both receiving mentorship, but I was also taking notes like, Okay, I see how you wrote that was the first kind of interaction with him that I was like, this dude is legit. And then I would listen to him as he would talk and present about CSP. And I was like, this makes so much sense to me. This, this is exactly what I want to do. This is what I need to consider in my own approach. And so I got to be there and watch CSP kind of transform. And then it, it became this bigger thing later when him and Dr. Eileen, were like, Okay, let's really expand this. And let's put together this book of what it looks like in action. And so that's how we get to texture teaching later, right? Like having this mentorship having this relationship with Paris with Dr. Paris, was kind of foundational, because I left that program with a confidence and a clarity of what I'm supposed to be doing what I'm called to be doing a confidence to say, Oh, I didn't do that. Well, let's go try that again. A confidence. And let me look at my colleagues, what what are my peers doing that works? What is doing? What are they doing that doesn't work? How can I learn? And how can I build this PLC even if they don't want to be a part of it? Right. And then with Dr. Kirkland, I mean, if anybody's ever been in a class with him, or you've heard him speak, then you understand that the man commands a room, like he really has a powerful voice, but but it's also in what he says. And so I'm being in his class, I was like, I can just really be my unapologetic self when I'm a teacher, and modeled what it was like to say, yeah, there's, there's Chaucer, and there's all these, quote, unquote, classical and ancient texts. But there's also like Nicki Minaj. And there's also Bone Thugs and harmony, and we can study them in their own merit, like for their own literary benefits to students. And I also learned a lot from some other folks, particularly, Dr. parisons wife. So she also people don't necessarily know this, but she also she's a writer, and she teaches fiction. And so she taught that program, and I took her fiction writing class. And I had never been in a class where someone unapologetically simply taught, like non white texts. She didn't even there was no preface. There was

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a you know, in this class, she was just like, these are the books we're looking at. And I didn't even notice it. I didn't even notice it until like halfway through the course when I was like, Wait a minute. What are these authors, you know, and I was, like, this is amazing, because it's been so empowering to read all of these high quality pieces, and to really sit here and get into intellectual conversation, and not have to be like, well, what's the bias here? I mean, there's bias everywhere, but not having to be focused on how can I critique this white author as part of my intellectual process, like to really just be free from that? And be like, oh, yeah, this was a crappy moment. That clearly is his bias as a man, but like, it actually doesn't overtake this story, you know, anyway. Please, it's critical to experience. And it becomes the foundation for how I get to the point of, I'm out here practicing my own approach, you know,

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about. Speaking of curriculum, you talk a lot about the idea of flexibility in the text, text reteaching framework, right? How do you offer this idea to someone being told they have to integrate a curriculum with quote, unquote, fidelity and or patient speed? Yeah,

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that's a really important question. And I tried to tackle some of that in there by saying that this began, I started texture teaching, and one of the most impressive context I had taught him, I was told what books I was teaching, I was told almost even in what order I was teaching them, I was told what assessments, I was given even objectives that I had to put on the board. So talk about inflexible, right? And it was in that setting, that I said, How can I infuse both myself and my students texture into what it is that I'm supposed to be doing? And so I cannot give a prescription to a teacher do this? I don't know. Because I don't know you. I don't know your students. So I don't want to fall into that. You know, and I don't want to fall into that type of conversation of what to do and how to do it. This is something that the teacher has to wisely implement in their own setting, considering all those factors I just mentioned, who are you? What's your position now the what is happening in this school? But I find that there are still ways we find ways we've been curriculum often even in very insular I suppose situations in ways that we might not think is bending, for example, we have a curriculum. And we are told what to do and how to do it. But I decided that I'm really tired today. And so we're actually going to watch a clip. And, and that's not part of the curriculum. But we're going to watch a clip, and I'm gonna find a way to tie it. And it's whatever thing because I'm exhausted, and they're clearly exhausted. And I found a way to find a sliver of a moment. And that's what I did with it. Now, I'm not saying rest, I'm not saying don't rest with your kids, and don't do stuff that is also like free from having to process that's important. But just like that, we find moments and there are gaps in our days. I mean, we're with kids 180 days, you're telling me you can't take 10 days spread out throughout those 180 to infuse conversations about justice in ways that are relatable to them. And that help them to find meaning and make meaning in the world around them. I was I remember listening to a teacher talk about how a kid came to class and said, hey, you know, we're doing all of this in here. But I go to Tik Tok, and they're talking about colonialism, gentrification, redlining, social justice, like is that where I'm supposed to learn about those things? Or like, why don't we learn about any of that in class. And we could continue to do that we can continue to rest on tick tock and Instagram and Twitter, when our students can just continue to go there and learn. I mean, that might be people's approach. It's not my approach. I'd rather you not be a doctor, based off of what you learned on Twitter, I read that you're not talking about anti colonialism on the streets. And you don't necessarily have the historical context or a really holistic understanding, because what you did was watch to tiktoks on it. Right? So, you know, I think that we have to find a way in those 180 days to say, by the way, this is how this curriculum is going to help you make sense of the world around you as it is happening right now.

27:01

Yeah, yeah. The point around, you're not doing it on time or anyway, with, quote, unquote, fidelity, oftentimes, anyway, right. And that's something I can personally attest to when the moment where you said, like, talk about the idea of like, you know, what, kids are tired, I'm tired. We're deviating from this for a second. Like, I know, I've done that. And also, I know, I've engaged with the curriculum in a way that dilutes it, I know, I've done that too. And I've exercised that malpractice as well. So we can change it when we're tired. We can change it when we don't believe kids can do it, we can change it when we don't believe in ourselves and our instructional power. So don't develop it. But we the challenge of believing it to actually improve for kids isn't as easy. Interestingly enough, sometimes.

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Let me ask something else, because what you just said it's also important, right? Like two thoughts, one teacher with fidelity, fidelity to whom? Am I supposed to be very loyal to Pearson? Am I supposed to be very loyal to this whatever company wrote this curriculum? Or is my loyalty supposed to be to these students in this community? Now, I understand that, you might get fired for that. So I'm not calling anybody to get fired. Okay, we don't need martyrs, we need teachers. So I understand. But I think that those are some of the questions that we don't often grapple with, right. And we just kind of follow what the instructions are for a number of different justifiable reasons. And I think that sometimes we can push back and we don't know we can't. So that's the first thought. And then the other thing is, you know, my advice is often to teachers, because because I'll get this I definitely this question. I've gotten it before, like all but we have a curriculum, and we don't have time, how am I supposed to do this? Find the areas that are gray areas, right? You might be told what books to teach, but you have not necess? Maybe you haven't been told how to teach it. Maybe you haven't been told what supplements you can use. Maybe you've been told all that, but you haven't been told in the timeframe. Maybe you can do all of that in a week. And then you have a free reply. So like, figure out what the loophole is in your system, because it's different everywhere. And that is how you you bring it in.

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About and hearing you say that it made me think of the critical difference between teaching a curriculum with fidelity, quote unquote, right, versus using a curriculum to teach your students with integrity. Right. And you just named some really practical approaches on how to how to do that. I want to ask you a bit about the process of decentering oneself, right? Because you talk about that a significant amount in the book and in moments where you are explicitly talking about it. You're definitely implying, that is necessary for certain things that take place within the texture teaching framework. Can you talk a bit about how you decentered yourself and how that impacted your ability to lead educators and deliver instruction?

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Yeah, that's so hard. decentering ourselves is so hard, because for most of us, that are teachers, most not all, but most of our teachers became teachers, because school really worked for us. And we had that great teacher that we loved. And, you know, she usually said, Oh, you're so great. And so you know, we become teachers. So I can understand how what I am saying here, and others who are saying, This feels like we're reinventing the wheel, and we're destroying your entire conception of what it is to teach. However, I think that it can be done when we think about really good experiences in our lives. Often, there isn't necessarily someone pointing things out, right? Like whether it's a tour of a new country, whether you, you know, did something and you built a something right, like a craft, you didn't necessarily have someone saying do this, I'll take this next step, put the piece of tape here, look at this thing, I'm going to walk you through that, or like, often, it's because you had this experience of growth, and you own the thing you were doing. And so the same applies to education. Now, I am not suggesting that teachers step back, and chaos ensues, right? Because that's often the pushback. It's like, hi, well, I have control. I'm not saying that. Also, we are we this is our job. This is our job. And most of not all of us are prepared, whether it's through certification and our degrees and our life experiences, right. So like, we're still somewhat of the expert in that room. And our job is to create a learning experience. But our job is not to do the learning. That's the difference. That's where we get I think that's, that's that gray area. And a lot of us fall on that line of doing the learning. Like if I'm doing most of the work, this is not working. This is not necessarily them learning, that's you working. So it's a very fine line. And it also depends on the subject, right? Like math teachers have a different process science teachers have to do a lot of modeling, I'm thinking of like labs and things like that, and explaining processes. So this is different everywhere. But my point is that there has to be a release, there has to be a process where, you know, maybe I've modeled and maybe I've given some instructions, and I'm there along the way. But I'm not necessarily pointing everything out. One of the ways, one of the analogies that I've used before is for teachers to think of themselves or English teachers. And for the for this moment, think of yourselves as like walking kids through a forest, that's what you're doing. When you're reading a book with them, you have a vision of what you're going to use this forest for. I want to point out all of the nests and all of the birds, that's what I want to do. That's the goal. Great. We're walking together. And I'm saying look at this tree, look at the nest up there. Do you see the birds great, nothing stops them, however, from noticing the squirrels from looking at the Fox from noticing all the plants and the flowers and the bees in the air right? And like, oh, look a bear. Oftentimes we do that, though, we'll be like, Nope, don't look at that. Don't look at the bear, don't look at the squirrels, we're focusing on this. That lack of flexibility does not allow for that student autonomy and their own growth, right. Like, they might notice that the birds and the nest, and the trees and everything on the ground, our job is to point some things out, but also like freely walk with them. And if we got to stop, and we're not looking at that, and right now we're gonna look at this baby fox, like, okay, like to spend some time there. And let's make sense of that. So, back to teaching. You know, what that means is that our job is kind of to guide them and to walk with them. And in those ways, we do dissenter ourselves, because one of them might be the ones that stop and pause and show us something. And now you're the teacher. And you can be sure that everybody is going to learn a whole lot when a peer gets up and does some of that teaching. And so that's why I talk about it so much like I ended up realizing how much more they were learning that was like surrounding curriculum, versus how much they learned when it was just we really focus narrowly on my specific content goals. You know, like there's so much that can happen there's this extra curricular learning that can actually take place you know, in the process

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how do you feel like your texts help can help support folks who want to make instruction more grade level, engaging, affirming and meaningful

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One of the reasons why I talk about this, this whole thing is one of the things I mentioned earlier, like sometimes we'll see a teacher doing really well in her classroom, or, you know, he really connects very well with students and gets them to do the work, whatever that is. Right. And so we relegate that to like, oh, you know, Brandon just has that magic in there, as if it is not method as if it is not thoughtful application of strategies. And he might and Brenda, you might have some magic, okay. But there's also the hard work. And so my intention with texture teaching is to say the success that I've had with students was not simply magic, it was also method and here it is, and you can do it too. And so, that's how we get to this weaving. So this textured concept and so I think what I'll do is just read this, when that woven fabric that my aunt was talking about is finished, it might look an impossible feat or even magic. beholders are left impressed. By the way the colors and the patterns come together, they marvel at the weaver and are in awe of their work. It's important to know it's not magic, though there isn't anything mysterious about how it all came together. It took time, patience, creativity and dedication. Fighting for justice, and equity and education requires commitment. And that same persistence. And it's time that we all got to work.

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Folks, Senior Airman, thank you so much for indulging me in this conversation for exposing folks to this awesome book textbook teaching.

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Thanks for having me and I hope that this conversation will be useful for other people who are listening.

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If you'd like to get more info on this episode's author, the featured text and how you can apply your newly acquired knowledge within your profession. We got check us out on the LP website@unbounded.org forward slash LP. You can also check us out on social media at unbound edu. This is Brandon white. Thanks for listening to the LP literature in practice, where we take a look at texts and practices that encourage a student instruction to become more grade level, engaging, affirming and meaningful. peace and progress