Democracy's College

Episode 26: Engaging and Supporting Male Students of Color

Announcer: Welcome to the Democracy's College podcast series. This podcast focuses on educational equity, justice, and excellence for all students in P-20 educational pathways. This podcast is a product of the Office of Community College Research and Leadership, or OCCRL, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Learn more about OCCRL at OCCRL.Illinois.edu.

In this episode, Jason Keist at OCCRL talks with Dr. J. Luke Wood, associate vice president for faculty diversity and inclusion and Distinguished Professor of Education at San Diego State University, about engaging and supporting male students of color.

Jason Keist: Welcome, Dr. Wood. Thank you for your time.

J. Luke Wood: A pleasure to be here.

Jason Keist: What prompted you to begin your research in community college?

J. Luke Wood: My first job out of college was actually working at a community college doing outreach and advising. Sacramento City College. It's not that far from the college I went to. There was a friend of mine, she was doing outreach there and was looking for someone to come help her and support her, and so I applied and came onboard.

Jason Keist: Nice.

J. Luke Wood: When I started the job, I knew I would be going to high schools and talking to high school students and going into the community and talking with the community, and I did that. That was very enjoyable. But probably the best aspect of the job was that once or twice a month, I would go to the prison release. So this is where guys have served their time in the state penitentiary, and now they've been released, and as part of their release, they basically come to this large room where there's vendors all around the room, clean and sober living, educational opportunities, jobs, all kinds of great things.

Jason Keist: Wonderful things.

J. Luke Wood: Yeah.

Jason Keist: Okay.

J. Luke Wood: To help get them to that next step, right? And so I started developing relationships with this huge group of guys who were essentially filtering through

out of the criminal justice system into our colleges. That's one of the reasons I always talk about how people frame this idea of the school-to-prison pipeline, but in reality it's a school-to-prison-to-school pipeline because eventually, at least in our experience, they end up in community colleges, so we have the opportunity to serve them, though we don't do that very well, either.

So I started doing that, got real connected to working with that population. I'd always been passionate about working with students of color, in particular black students, and so that was a real formative experience that has shaped my career.

So from there I went to Arizona State University to work on my Ph.D. in education leadership and policy with a focus on higher ed, and I started this relationship with the Maricopa system, the Maricopa Community College district. One of my committee members was then the chancellor of the system, Rufus Glasper, and there was an opportunity to partner with this system as an external researcher on this new minority male initiative that they had started. The initiative was not like what you see a lot of places where it's like a small boutique program with 30 people. This was a *large* initiative at each of their institutions with this large conference that they do, good data tracking, good assessment, just very differently done than what you usually see.

I started learning more about how to better support population from that work and how to essentially work with community college educators as a person who's external to the institution, which is something that I do to this day. So that's how I got my start.

Jason Keist: What would you feel are the most pressing issues affecting black male success on community college campuses? I know it's a very loaded question, but if you were to filter down some of the things.

J. Luke Wood: The most pressing issues affecting the success of black males, if I had to say, 'Luke, you have to identify one thing that is the biggest contributor to black male success, and also, on the flip side, black male attrition,' it would probably be the educators that work with them. So often we focus on remediating students because we have deficit perspectives of their schools they come from, their families, and their communities. But in reality, it should be a perspective that focuses on the institution and the deficits of the institution and the educators who are working with the students. So, I believe in remediating educators who, unfortunately, have never been adequately prepared to work with people who don't look like them.

So, let's step back and say if I'm going to be a faculty member in a community college, and you know this and I mentioned this before during the Black Minds class, but if I'm going to be a faculty member in a community college or in a university, I'm going to become a subject-matter expert. I'm going to go get my bachelor's. Let's say I'm in a community college and I'm a biology professor. Go and get my bachelor's, I work in the industry for a few years, get my masters,

and then I apply for a job. I go directly into the classroom, very little onboarding, if any, no training in how to teach, let alone how teach people who don't look like me.

So what people usually do is that then they teach how they were taught. So, hey, I went to school, so let me think about the professors I liked, what did they do? Then I try to mimic those different things that I saw that seemed to work for other people. And what we find is that they teach how they were taught, but how they were taught is not how our men of color, and in particular our black males, learn. There's a *huge* disconnect.

There is a lack of preparation to go into a community college to engage the group that represents the greatest opportunity for our society. Unfortunately, that just doesn't take place. So, we can think about this in three different ways. What do we need in terms of people who are going into the classroom?

Well, we need three things. We need epistemology. We need people who see their role as an educator through a lens of institutional responsibility, meaning that if a student is in my classroom and they're not doing well, my first response is what am *I* not doing that's leading to this as opposed to blaming it on, again, the students, their families, their communities. How I think about my job, and also, how I think about the students? Do I believe that they possess the capacity to be able to succeed?

The second area would be relationships. Relationships that are typified by trust, mutual respect, authentic care. Those three conditions. Trust, mutual respect, and authentic care. So, am I someone who knows how to validate students? Can I create relationships with students, learn about them, and use that information to better support them, engage them, and teach them? Do I disclose personal information about myself in a way that helps to motivate students and to erase that artificial balance of power that exists in the classroom? So there's a lot of different things that we know that are important relational pieces.

Then the third is instruction, right? So, am I teaching using culturally relevant ways? Sometimes you'll find people who, bless their heart, they've tried to be culturally relevant, and sometimes you'll find a math professor who is like, 'Yeah, I'm culturally relevant. I changed all the names from John to Juan or from John to Terrance, and so that's what we're doing to try to connect with the guys.' That represents such a superficial understanding, but I guess that I would rather work with somebody who has at least a commitment to doing it, because I can train them.

Jason Keist: That's right.

J. Luke Wood: But you can't train people who don't have a commitment, and that's the other big piece, is that we have a large group of faculty who are simply just riddled with unconscious bias. Every time they engage our students, they see our men

of color, they view them through a lens of distrust, so they're fearful of them. They view them as academically inferior, and they also view them as being lesser than. So you have this large group that perceives them this way. Then you have your few quieter, your champions, the folks who are out there who are really the ones doing the work. And then you've got this other subset, which we don't talk enough about, and that's the faculty bullies or the teacher bullies. The ones that get a rise, a sense of gratification by disempowering black bodies.

Jason Keist: Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

J. Luke Wood: Yeah, in fact, I think this is something that I've seen even more frequently at the elementary level, but it's something you certainly see at every level, and that's where, if you think about the stereotypes of a black male. A black male is viewed as being brutish and aggressive and strong and academically inferior, so there's all these different stereotypes that exist that basically frame black men as being someone that you should fear and be worried about. So it represents the apex of a predator, right? And that's how we've been framed in the media, especially through the Clinton administration, through the whole idea of a super predator and everything that went on with that.

If you have a person who's viewed in this way, and then you have a white teacher who looks at a student, and for them they see that, but they also have this desire to have power over that, right? There's this almost a misandric fetish for this, and when I say misandric, I'm referring to black misandric, like these stereotypical perceptions of black men and this fetish of this desire to control them, and you'll have in every school a few teachers who everyone knows are bullies.

They do it in different ways, but usually what it involves is identifying a black male who's in their class, framing that black male as being the problem, the bad kid, the one to stay away from, and then they frame it so then the other kids don't want to engage with that child because then they'll be associated with that, and then they frame this in the mind of other teachers, who then are essentially looking for confirmation bias for the one time that he turns around in his desk, or the one time that he writes on the floor, or the one time that he picks up a rock off the ground-

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: ... and they're bullying him.

Jason Keist: Right, right.

J. Luke Wood: So that happens at the elementary level, but I also see it at times in community colleges, where you have educators who desire to bully students. Here's some examples that I've seen of this. A faculty member who goes and starts out their class by telling all the students in the class, ‘No one in my class has received an A

for the past three years.' Or they walk into a class and they say, 'If you're not a hard worker, if you're not this, if you're not that, then this is not the class for you. You need to get out.' That's a lightweight bullying tactic, right?

Jason Keist: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

J. Luke Wood: But then you have it where it can range from that to a professor who constantly is berating a black male, and one of the things that we know is that when you are talking about people who have been disaffected by society, one of the few things that you have is your name and your reputation.

Jason Keist: That's right.

J. Luke Wood: So when you put down a black male in a public setting and you engage them in that way, you should expect that there's going to be some reaction. It's going to range in what that reaction looks like, right?

Jason Keist: Right.

J. Luke Wood: But you can't expect that someone won't defend themselves. So we see in places where you go and you'll look at the discipline log for different black males in community colleges, and you'll find out the ones that are getting written up for plagiarism, or the ones that are getting written up for talking overly loud in class, or who are basically going through some sort of disciplinary policy at the school are almost invariably black. Having some conversations recently with several students who sit on different discipline committees at their community college, and they're like, 'Everyone who comes through here is black, everyone.' So we talk about these patterns in K-12 through suspensions and expulsions.

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: But that same stuff carries all the way through.

Jason Keist: What would you say are best practices or promising practices of colleges that you've interacted with?

J. Luke Wood: Okay, so I want to say a couple of colleges that I think are doing a good job, and then I'll say some practices that I think work, because I think these are some things that these colleges are doing. One that really stands out to me as what I would call the most motivated college I've seen to support men of color is San Diego Mesa College. They have a president who is *truly* deeply committed to equity and has created a leadership infrastructure that also is similarly vested in equity. Not just equity as in like, oh, this is something that sounds good, but a true deep commitment to actually making change.

Another institution that has done, I think, a really good job is actually the system of Maricopa with their Men of Color Initiative. It's been really just marvelously

run by two individuals, Felicia and Ray, and their team of people who have just done an excellent job.

So what are some things that work? It's interesting you say that. We've actually identified 10 things that are things that work. I'll just say the few that come to my mind just off the cuff.

So one thing that we see that works are statewide consortia. So if you look at the state of New York, if you look at the state of Texas, there are states that are really investing in bringing together people within sectors, like within K-12, within community college, within four-year universities, and cross sectors to have intentional conversations about what we're doing at each stage.

The best example, I think, is really the Texas Consortium for Males of Color. It's run by Luis Ponjuan and Victor Saenz at UT-Austin. Basically, what they do is work with K-12, community colleges, and four-year institutions. They collect data. They use that data to inform practices. They have teams that have buy-in. They do regular trainings with those teams. It's like a truly awesome thing to see, people really committed and actually doing the work in the right way without deficit notions.

Jason Keist: Nice.

J. Luke Wood: That's more of a system level. One of the things, like the key ingredients are, one, you've got to have leadership that's truly engaged, involved, and cares. And they have to have a sense of urgency. When I say leadership, I do mean the president, but not just the president. The faculty senate, if there's a staff senate, staff senate, if there's a faculty union, faculty union, if there's a staff union, staff union, and trustees. You have to have those groups all on board or it doesn't go through, because they all have the power to stop it when they want to.

Jason Keist: Great point.

J. Luke Wood: Next thing you have to have is you have to have hiring practices that are equitable, that are actually bringing in people who know how to reach the population. So in terms of hiring, we make a lot of mistakes. One mistake that we often make is if you're hiring a person to be a faculty member in a community college, they're going to come in, typically they're going to do an interview that lasts for an hour or so and a 10- to 15-minute teaching demonstration. So what they will be doing, most of them, when we hire them is teaching, and we don't even get to see that, nor do we even look at it in a way that's actually really in depth in terms of evaluating the quality of the teaching that they're bringing.

For example, we know that there are key elements to teaching our underserved students. Validation, conveying high expectations, appropriate disclosing,

understanding of microaggressions, being culturally relevant, collaborative learning, all these different things that we know are absolutely essential.

Jason Keist: Right.

J. Luke Wood: Well, shouldn't we be evaluating them for doing those practices that we know are central for our underserved students?

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: The next thing is in terms of the interview questions we ask. Everybody asks the diversity question. Anybody can answer the diversity question, but it's not because the diversity question isn't a good question, but it's typically because of how we ask it. Every interview it's something to the effect of 'Can you tell me about your experiences in working with diverse student populations?' Which only tells you about their exposure-

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: ... to diversity, not their commitment. Wouldn't it be better if we said, 'Hey, give me some tangible ways you changed your teaching and learning to accommodate the needs of diverse learners? Can you give me some examples of how when you run into this challenge with students how you basically address that?' So we could actually know what they're going to be doing-

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: ... to our students.

Jason Keist: That's a great point.

J. Luke Wood: Next thing, you have to have an early warning and an early alert system. Early warning is when they're coming in on the front end, we're using metrics to evaluate where they're at and providing students with the resources that they need. For example, if I have a student who is a returning student, hasn't been in college for 10 years, hasn't been in school for 10 years, has a family, is low-income, has transportation challenges—that student probably needs different resources than a kid who's transferring directly from high school to college, right?

Jason Keist: Right.

J. Luke Wood: Especially if that kid has come from maybe a family that's more affluent. If we're going to look at that, everybody needs something different. Identifying that on the front end and then giving people what they actually need. That's what equity is, right?

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: The second part of it is the early-alert system. Once they're in our classrooms, we have to be monitoring them to know when do we need to intercede so that we can connect them to the resources that we have on campus. Every campus has the resources to truly be able to help a student. We've got child care centers, financial aid, career center, tutoring, library, bookstore, cafeteria. We got all these different resources, but sometimes students just need to be connected to the right thing, and that's what an early-alert system helps you do. But if you have an early-alert system that contacts students halfway through the semester, all you're doing is essentially facilitating them dropping out.

Jason Keist: Exactly, right.

J. Luke Wood: Because we have an early drop system.

Jason Keist: Because of the early drop, exactly.

J. Luke Wood: So those are three things, or a few things, at least, that readily come to mind. I guess the last one that I would mention, again there's 10 but this is just a few of them, is intensive, intrusive, ongoing professional development for *all* full-time and part-time faculty and staff, so everybody.

Jason Keist: Right, exactly.

J. Luke Wood: When I say intensive and ongoing and intrusive, those things are important. On each campus, you'll have your demographic. You'll have your choir who really knows what to do and they're already doing it. You have your allies who don't necessarily know what to do, but they're committed to doing it, so we can provide them with training and development. We host a brown-bag training session or a flex-day training session or a convocation training session, whatever it's going to be, those folks are going to come.

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: But then you've got your pocket of resisters, your active resisters who are very vocal, and then your passive resisters who basically vote by just not showing up when it deals with equity or anything diversity related, right? So if you're going to reach them, hosting an optional session isn't going to do it. So you have to be intrusive. You have to go to the places and spaces that they're already at. Convocation, department meetings, division meetings, all-flex days, all-faculty days, all-staff days, places and spaces that are mandatory, and that's how you have to basically reach them. And then you have to know that for some of them, they're going to basically be able to grow and change, right?

Jason Keist: Right.

J. Luke Wood: Particularly those who might be passive, so maybe there's some concerns that we can address by just sharing some basic information, showing some data from the college, providing them with the resources, and giving them support.

Jason Keist: Right.

J. Luke Wood: But then, of course, you have those who are recalcitrant, who are what I refer to as the teacher bullies, faculty bullies, who aren't going to do it, because you know what, my job is to weed students out. But you know what? When they talk about weeding students out, typically they're talking about people who look like us, right?

Jason Keist: Yes.

J. Luke Wood: They're not talking about the white students, they're not talking about the students who aren't facing challenges.

Jason Keist: It looks like [inaudible].

J. Luke Wood: Exactly, right. Okay, one more, one more. You have to have an infrastructure of support to meet the needs of students who face extreme environmental pressures. We know that there are four big issues when we're talking about, in particular, like, the work we do in Men of Color, on black males. There's four big issues.

First, food insecurity. In our work, we find that about a quarter of black males experience the most extreme form of food insecurity, meaning they don't know where their next meal is going to come from.

We have to address housing insecurity. In our research in California, we found that 48 percent of black males in a state community college system experience some form of a housing insecurity. Now that can mean being homeless, right?

Jason Keist: Right.

J. Luke Wood: But that could also be a student who is sleeping in a car, sleeping in a closet-

Jason Keist: Friends.

J. Luke Wood: ... in between houses.

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: Some sort of untenable living situation, some form of housing instability.

Third, employment. Are we providing them with opportunities to work on campus? Are we providing them with good internships, so that when they're

done that they'll have something to be able to show for their time with us? Because we know from our work that they're concentrated into jobs with three characteristics. The jobs that typically are physically demanding, moving boxes, digging ditches, stocking shelves, do construction site cleanup. Second, they're in jobs that occur late at night, the late-night shift or the overnight shift. And the third is that they're in jobs that are temporary or transitory in nature. So they're going to one job, then they're out of that job, then another job. So you've got all these really tough work conditions, and so, when you think about it, if you represent the bottom rung of opportunity, right, you're not getting the best jobs. You're not getting the best, even if you're at a job that might have good opportunities, you're not getting those opportunities. You're not getting the best shift, you're getting the worst shift.

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: All that affects school. And then the last one is transportation. We know that a very large percentage of them also experience transportation concerns. So, you got food, you got housing, you got employment, you got transportation, and unless you're doing some comprehensive work to address that, all you're doing is putting a Band-Aid on an open wound.

Jason Keist: That's right. Nice, nice. One question on the Black Minds Matter public course that ran last fall, part of the larger Black Minds project, I can understand with your explanations before other questions why it was necessary at that time. I'm interested in what challenges arose when you were facilitating, or even in the brainstorming stages talking to fellow faculty, saying, 'Hey, we need to do this.' How did that play out?

J. Luke Wood: I'm glad you asked that. The Black Minds Matter course ran last fall, and basically it was an online course where we had people who were signed up as individuals and also people who were located at different sites, they were either watching it in real time or on replay while we talked about issues facing black boys and men. I know you helped with recording at your site, so thank you for doing that.

We had great speakers. Ilyasah Shabazz, the daughter of Dr. Betty Shabazz and Malcolm X. We had S. Lee Merrit, who does a lot of the Black Lives cases as an attorney. He's a civil right attorney. We had Pedro Noguera, Tyrone Howard, Shan Harper, Eboni Zamani-Gallaher, Donna Ford, Fred Bonner, Chance Lewis. I mean, we had the best scholars in the country who were willing to participate. We brought back Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, who really is the person who started black-meal studies, at least in terms of education, in terms of really looking at what are the issues. We think about who are the godfathers of this work, Jawanza Kunjufu and Na'im Akbar, obviously, would come up as two very prominent people. So it was cool. Now we also have Patrisse Cullors, who is the co-founder of Black Lives Matter.

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: So, what we were trying to do with the course is make and draw parallels between what happens in policing and what happens in education, and show that those patterns are the same. When I sat out to do the course, I did it through our doctoral program, our Ph.D. program. We have what's called an 895, which is basically on variable topics. We can offer the class, we can teach whatever we want in response to what students ask us.

It was actually a class that students asked for, because a few months earlier, before we decided to do the course, a gentleman named Alfred Olango, who was a Ugandan refugee living in San Diego, was shot and killed by police. He was unarmed, like many other black males: Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Oscar Grant III, and so he's among those names. There was a lot of resistance that took place in San Diego, protests on the streets. Our campus was really embroiled in racial movements.

Jason Keist: Right.

J. Luke Wood: And students asked for ... they wanted to have some way of addressing this, and we talked about, hey, the parallels that take place between policing and society. We said let's look at how black bodies are policed in the classroom. So, that's what we set out to do with the class.

In terms of the decision to make it open was, once like these great minds, all those people I mentioned, started saying, 'Yeah, I'll be part of the course.' Free of charge, none of those people got paid to do it.

Jason Keist: Right, right.

J. Luke Wood: And the one person who asked to be paid, we sent them a very, very small check, a very meager check, and they sent it back. So everyone did that for free.

But once we knew that these people were willing to do this and share that knowledge, we wanted to open it up, because it's like, you know, we sit in a classroom, great. Fifteen Ph.D. students and we're all going to hear ... and that's a big class for a Ph.D. class, fifteen Ph.D. students ... when this information needs to be heard by *everyone*. And so we decided to open it up, decided to stream it, asked my dean, he was very supportive. Now you asked about the fallout.

Jason Keist: Yeah.

J. Luke Wood: There was a lot of fallout. There were a number of people who were really unhappy. On my campus, the college Republicans were very active. They had a protest on campus. They wrote a number of different press releases protesting the class, saying that it was a misuse of taxpayer funds.

I received a lot of emails from people who were unhappy about the class, telling me that what the class was called, Black Minds Matter, is a form of reverse racism because all minds matter and we should be saying all minds. What I told them was that from my perspective, it wasn't about putting down all minds but elevating a group of minds that has been continuously downtrodden since the beginning of our nation. So we could agree to disagree.

Jason Keist: Right.

J. Luke Wood: We had donors to SDSU who wrote and threatened to pull funds. In fact, I was asked by our fundraising department to even respond to one particular donor who was very concerned about our use of campus resources to support a class that they viewed as being propaganda and nothing else but support for the Black Lives movement.

Jason Keist: Propaganda?

J. Luke Wood: Yeah. Their question that I was asked to respond to was this: How is Black Lives Matter any different than the KKK?

Jason Keist: Seriously, they were ...

J. Luke Wood: Yes, and the university, I think realizing that it wasn't necessarily a great question but wanting to treat our donors well, asked me if I would respond, and said sure. So, I said, well, to my knowledge, no one from Black Lives Matter has ever been convicted of hurting, harming, or doing anything wrong to anyone. That being said, I think the KKK's storied history of murdering and lynching thousands of people from the black community stands for itself. No comparison can be made between a group that is trying to *lift* up lives and a group that was trying to destroy lives.

Jason Keist: Right.

J. Luke Wood: I offered to meet with the funder. There was never a response. I also had people who were angry on Facebook, people who I grew up with. I grew up in an all-white town, from an all-white community, and there were some people who were really deeply affected by me teaching the class and felt like it was a way of putting down where we had come from.

Jason Keist: Interesting.

J. Luke Wood: Some of that's because I shared personal experiences and some of that did involve the town that I grew up in, which was a great town, but like all other places, had great teachers and had some really bad ones, and had some teacher bullies. I talked about my experience in fifth grade being suspended 42 times in one school year, most of those being in-school suspensions, but being restricted really from being able to engage in the classroom. I think there was some

concern about that, that maybe I wasn't making our town look good, but bad. I think there's a lot to be said that's very *good* for that same town.

Jason Keist: Right.

J. Luke Wood: So, I would say it was emotionally very difficult. I've been a person who does equity work. I go and do training, unconscious bias racial microaggressions, multiple times in a given week. This is the work that I do, but the pressure of that class was unparalleled to anything I had ever experienced before, and most of it was this emotional response that people were having around me, even people in my own family because I am African-American, but I was in foster care, and I am adopted, and I have a white family, and I love my family. But even for some of them, there was difficulty understanding.

That's the reason that I chose to respond to the donor. Because I know that if my family has questions, and I know that they love and care about me and my kids, then most everyone will have questions. That was, again, one of the reasons of making the course public, is to reach people who wouldn't normally be reached, and we did. We had over 10,000 people who were enrolled in the course. We had over 250 live replayed broadcast sites.

Jason Keist: Are there any other, let's see, any other suggestions that would come to mind for educators who want to work more equity work into their practice in the classroom? What would you consider that they should do or seek, what kind of training, what kind of experiences, et cetera?

J. Luke Wood: For educators to be effective in serving our underserved students in general, but of course in particular our black males, they have to have an understanding of unconscious bias, and they have to know their propensities to treat people in certain ways so that they can be aware of it, because you can't do anything about something you're not aware of and don't know about.

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: They need to be trained on racial microaggressions. They need to have the understanding of at least the big four, basically assumption of criminality, so viewing black men, black students, and students of color as criminals of deviance, an inscription of intelligence where students are inferior, pathologizing culture where we give these certain characteristics to black culture and then denigrate it. Then the fourth is athletic boundedness where we assume that every brother who is on campus must be there to play ball, and how that would come up so many times where educators who have gone through different trainings in wanting to create these positive relationships with black males will walk up to them like, ‘Hi, I see you walking every day. Just wanted to stop and chat with you. So what sport do you play? Or what team are you on?’ They say these things and make these assumptions, and you've got a student, ‘I don't play any sport.’

Jason Keist: I play chess.

J. Luke Wood: I play chess! I play chess. That actually reminds me there's a black male initiative in a community college in California and they went to, basically, this elite place to present their work and talk about the work that they did. And a person saw them and was like, 'Oh, well, what sport are you guys with? What sport do you play?' This is of course, assuming that they were with some of team. And the person said, 'No, no, these are the nuclear scientists. They're here to investigate the reactor.' The person was shocked because it was, I guess, in a place where there was something like that nearby. It was just a way of pushing back against these stereotypes.

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: But they have to have an understanding of those microaggressions. They have to have an understanding of culture competency.

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: And lastly, again, unconscious bias, racial microaggressions, cultural competency, and CRT. And I'm not talking about critical race theory, though I am talking about critical race theory. I'm talking about cultural relevant teaching.

Jason Keist: Exactly.

J. Luke Wood: They have to have an understanding of how to teach people who don't look like them, and that's hard. One of the things that my center is doing to try to ... and even pivoting to do more work like this, is we've created this rubric for assessing and evaluating teaching in the classroom. What we're doing now is we're going into schools, we're going into colleges, and for the faculty members who are truly advocates, who truly want the feedback, not the ones that are wasting our time, but the ones who really want feedback, we'll sit there in the classroom, we'll evaluate them and we'll provide them with some suggestions on what they can do based upon the fourteen different teaching learning practices that we know are successful.

Jason Keist: And that takes courage on their part, right? Because they know it's going to be an uncomfortable conversation.

J. Luke Wood: Yeah, they know they're being evaluated.

Jason Keist: That's right. That's good.

J. Luke Wood: Partly to do it right, because you are evaluating them, you know that first Hawthorne effect. They know they're being watched, so they're going to do something different in that space. So you have to be there a little bit longer,

right, so that they get to the point where they're letting down their guard and they're starting to be themselves, and you're starting to see some of the unconscious things that they don't recognize that they do. Because when you know you're being watched, the unconscious bias isn't going to be as prevalent as when you know you're not being watched and you're just kind of responding. It's kind of old system-one, system-two thinking.

Jason Keist: Okay.

J. Luke Wood: So those are some things.

Jason Keist: Excellent. Any closing remarks that you'd like to point out for your own work or questions that you have or interests that you want to get further into?

J. Luke Wood: Yeah, just an important closing remark. I talked about a lot of things, but all the work that I do, I do collaboratively. These are things that are derived from the work I've done with other people, as well as work from scholars who I respect. In particular, my colleague, Frank Harris III, who I co-direct the center with and do really almost all the research I do at this point with. He's my brother in this work, so I want to acknowledge that many of the ideas are ideas that we've co-developed.

Jason Keist: That's right.

J. Luke Wood: And also my wife, Idara, who's also on the faculty at San Diego State, who's in child development, who does work on racial microaggressions in early childhood education. That has also deeply informed my perspective because when we're talking about early learning, we're talking about preschool and kindergarten, and you're talking about black boys being downtrodden and pushed down and denigrated and controlled at such an early age, *that's* where the challenges begin, and that's, unfortunately, where there's too little research that's taken place.

The biggest gap areas in terms of the black-male research is in early childhood and in the community colleges and the for-profit colleges. Those are the three places where the biggest gaps are in terms of what we really know. There's something to be said that there's more work could be done looking up professional schools, like people who are getting a JD or business programs, but I think when we're talking about the dearth and where the attention needs to be, it's early childhood, it's community college, and one, it's where they begin, and for many, it's also where they begin.

Jason Keist: That's right.

J. Luke Wood: And so, it's for those reasons that we continue to push on this work and do the work we do.

Jason Keist: Comrade, I appreciate you so.

J. Luke Wood: Yeah, I appreciate it, too. All right, boss.

Jason Keist: All right.

Announcer: Tune in next month when Chauntee Thrill at OCCRL talks with Dr. Asif Wilson, associate dean of instruction at Harold Washington College, about asset based approaches to developmental education. Background music for this podcast is provided by Dub Lab. Thank you for listening and for your contributions to educational equity, justice, and excellence for all students.