

# Defining | US

## PODCAST LEARNING COMPANION

Our podcast companions expand learning beyond the walls of schools and organizations by bringing crucial conversations to the leaders, educators, and organizations that matter. Use this guide to promote critical reflection, deeper discussion and meaningful connections among adults and youth around the topics that are Defining US.

### VOICES OF CHANGE

*A Podcast with Stacey DeWitt*

#### INSIDE EPISODE 15:

#### "Leading with Equity"

Join the conversation as Alison Yoshimoto-Towery and Stacey DeWitt engage in a constructive discussion about post-pandemic school environments. Learn how she uses her leadership to support students and teachers by emphasizing trust and care in diverse educational settings.

[DOWNLOAD THE TRANSCRIPT](#)



# MEET ALISON YOSHIMOTO-TOWERY

Alison Yoshimoto-Towery is the former Chief Academic Officer of Los Angeles Unified, leading instructional strategies for almost 500,000 students in one of the nation's largest and most diverse school districts. In her role, she oversaw preschool to adult education, including specialized programs for English learners, Standard English learners, Gifted learners, Academic counseling, guiding post-secondary success, advanced placement programs, linked learning and career technical education within the Division of Instruction. Most important to Alison is leading from an equity lens and rethinking how "business as usual" is done to meet the needs of those students and communities traditionally underserved by public education. Alison served Los Angeles Unified for more than 25 years as a teacher, principal, director, and top administrator. She is a fierce advocate of high expectations for all students and believes it is up to educators to find a way to reach every child. The great-granddaughter of Japanese American migrant farmworkers, Alison learned the values of hard work and perseverance during her childhood in Boyle Heights and Monterey Park. Through her family's experience, she understands the importance of ensuring all students feel proud of their heritage and is dedicated to providing them with opportunities that celebrate biculturalism and bilingualism. Listen in as Alison converses with Stacey DeWitt on the post-pandemic environmental changes in schools, and the promise of trust and care in public schools. Alison currently serves as the Executive Director for the UC/CSU CA Collaborative.



## LISTENING AND REFLECTING

Use this learning companion to dive deeper into the episode topic, with suggestions for asynchronous listening, engagement and experiences that offer opportunities for reflection, connection and commitment.

## WAYS TO LISTEN

Use the podcast transcript to increase engagement by following along and highlighting words, phrases, or concepts that stand out in the conversation. Take notes in the margin of reflections, connections and questions and consider these three methods for listening:

1. Open Listening - Listen to the podcast to simply notice and note the words, phrases and moments in the conversation that spark emotion and connections
2. Focused Listening - Listen to the podcast with a focus on the Moments that Matter using the time stamp and topics from the "Podcast Notes"
3. Reflective Listening - Listen to the podcast with a focus on critical self-reflection, using any or all the reflection questions below

# CRITICAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

## BEFORE YOU LISTEN:

1. What experiences have you had that connect to this topic?
2. What do you hope to learn from listening to this episode?

## AS YOU LISTEN:

1. What do you anticipate will be the latent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational institutions and various industries?
2. What problems may arise as a result of the latent impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What solutions does Alison Yoshimoto-Towery propose? How can her proposed solutions inform your work in educational or industrial settings?
4. How have expectations shifted for educators and industry workers post-pandemic?
5. What work-related challenges have you faced post-pandemic?
6. How can leaders use emotional connections to support the performance and development of their employees and stakeholders?
7. What is the role and influence of trust among colleagues and leadership within your organization?
8. What types of collaborations may be beneficial to making the necessary shifts in our new educational and industrial landscapes?

## AFTERWARDS:

1. What about this discussion resonated with you?
2. What questions or ideas would you like to explore further?
3. What conversations will you have, or immediate actions will you take, to create change in your own sphere of influence?

## EXPERIENCES THAT ELEVATE THE LEARNING

The following experiences are intended for use with leaders, educators, parents and those working in educational organizations. The purpose is to promote critical reflection, connection and commitment toward action. They should be used and adapted based on the individuals, group dynamics and organizational context of the learning.

## EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE CRITICAL THINKING

### Reflect on Important Moments in the Conversation

Use the timestamps within our podcast notes to find and re-listen to the most powerful moments in this episode, then write about your own perspective, experience and insights.

- How do your identity, experiences and knowledge influence your understanding of this topic?
- How does this topic connect with your current context?
- What are the implications to your practice?
- How will you continue the conversation in your school/community/organizations?

## REFLECTIVE QUICKWRITE

Alison Yoshimoto-Towery discussed the challenges that students, teachers, and communities have faced since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yoshimoto-Towery emphasized the value of leadership that centers empathy and social connection. She explained how socially and emotionally conscious leadership has played a positive role in reorienting students, teachers and the broader community to the needs of all stakeholders within her educational community. It is essential for individuals in education and industry to examine how their experiences have impacted their personal lives and professional practice. A simple self-reflective practice is a quickwrite. A quickwrite is a draft of a short piece of writing that is similar to a journal entry. Use this quickwrite as an opportunity to consider the following prompts:

- How has the pandemic changed your personal and professional life? What struggles or triumphs can you identify?
- What tools have you used to successfully navigate your personal and professional spaces? Which of those tools may be useful for others?

## POUR FROM A FULL CUP

A leader's wellbeing is an often overlooked aspect of socially and emotionally focused leadership. Leadership in parenting, education, community building and industry require both self-reflection and self-care. The first activity in this guide, the reflective quickwrite, was an opportunity for self-reflection. You have examined how your experiences may inform your work, and now you will consider how you will maintain your health as you work towards creating equitable systems. Take a moment to consider the following prompts:

- What activities or interactions leave you feeling energized?
- What activities or interactions leave you feeling drained?
- How can you limit draining activities or interactions and maximize those that leave you feeling energized?
- What self-care practices will support your work as a leader? Consider how you will rest and rejuvenate your body, mind and spirit.

Yoshimoto-Towery's comments reinforce the idea that equitable practice in education applies to both teachers and students. After reviewing your aspirations for self-care, consider how you might extend opportunities for self-care to teachers, employees or co-workers within your professional environment.

# EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE BUILDING DEEPER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS AND THE LEARNING

## GO DEEPER WITH THE PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Select moments in the podcast to facilitate a silent discussion. Have each participant use a blank piece of paper. Display a transcript excerpt that includes a salient idea or theme from the podcast discussion and guide discussion participants through the followings steps:

1. Participants should use their papers to respond to the displayed excerpt and sign their response.
2. Instruct participants to rotate papers.
3. Participants should read the response on their new paper, then write a response and sign their name.
4. Rotate again and repeat the process 2-4 times per excerpt so that participants engage with each other's ideas and responses.
5. Post a new excerpt and repeat the rotation and writing process as many times as you like.

## THINK, PAIR AND SHARE

If schools are microcosms of society, then lessons learned in educational settings can transfer and translate to the broader society. Use the podcast notes to identify what has been learned in schools about responding to inequities for marginalized students post-pandemic, and identify how these solutions might inform procedures and policies in industries and communities. Use the timestamps below as guides for your inquiry. Select a timestamp, record your individual thoughts about transferable solutions, partner with someone to collaboratively discuss your ideas, then share your thoughts with the larger group.

- 10:10 Schools using restorative processes promoting equity
- 10:48 Community partnerships
- 12:00 Connection between leadership and using data well to meet student needs
- 12:50 Higher education partnerships
- 14:48 The change process that is happening right now
- 17:49 Educators and students must be at the forefront of the dialog to bring about solving today's problems

## EXPERIENCES TO PROMOTE TAKING ACTION

### PRIORITIZE CARE AND DEMAND

Zaretta Hammond's scholarship on culturally responsive education is discussed in the podcast. Yoshimoto-Towery describes Hammond's concept of "warm demanders" as teachers who successfully nurture students' social and emotional needs while simultaneously holding high expectations for learning and creating rigorous academic environments. Create a two-column list- in the left column record the actions you take to nurture students' social and emotional wellness and in the right column record the actions you take to create a rigorous learning environment. If you are not a classroom teacher, think of how you support social and emotional wellness, and stimulate creative and challenging opportunities with your employees/colleagues.

Exchange lists with a partner and give feedback by providing three compliments, two suggestions for growth, and asking one question to challenge or push their thinking.

## SELF-EVALUATE: CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION MODEL

Yoshimoto-Towery grounds her discussion of trust and the value of social relationships with students in the work Zaretta Hammond (2014) and Stephen Covey (2006), which is part of educational research on Culturally Responsive Education. The linked [article](#) provides a detailed explanation of the Culturally Responsive Education Model (CREM) which integrates Hammond and Covey's research with that of other educators and scholars who have contributed to furthering research and practice. Monica Manns, educator and K-12 administrator, writes about CREM more broadly and provides practical ways for teachers to support culturally and linguistically diverse students. CREM also promotes self-reflexivity and a culture of belongingness that are transferable beyond educational settings. In the article, Manns (2021) also shares details about her personal and professional experiences related to her development of this transformational pedagogy. The following steps are a guide to engagement with the reading:

1. Read the linked article.
2. Use the CREM framework illustrated on page 9 to evaluate your progress towards creating a culturally responsive environment in your school, community or workplace.
3. Identify one area for improvement and create a goal and action steps to move toward culturally responsiveness

### REFERENCES

Covey, S. R., & Merrill, R. R. (2006). *The speed of trust: The one thing that changes everything*. Simon and Schuster.

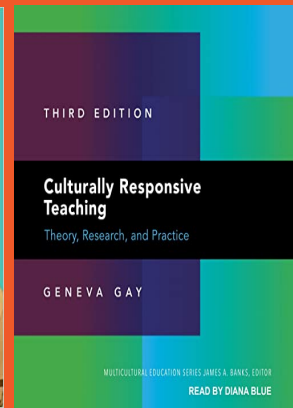
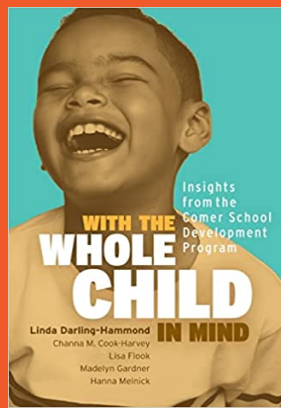
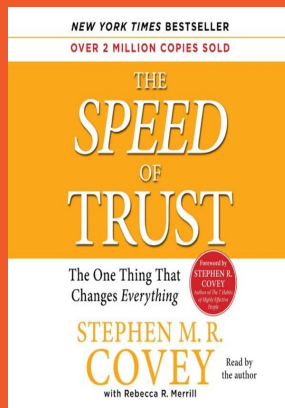
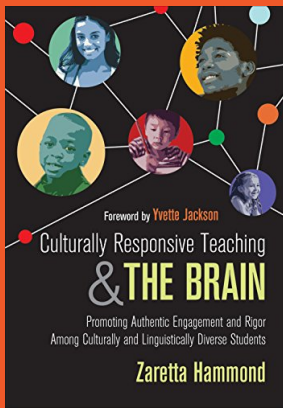
Hammond, Z. (2014). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin Press.

Manns, M. R. (2021). An Introduction to the Culturally Responsive Education Model (CREM): A Personal and Professional Journey to Reflective and Transformative Pedagogy. *Virginia English Journal*, 71(1), 2.

## DEEPENING THE LEARNING AND EXPANDING THE CONVERSATION

The following book recommendations are based on the discussion in this episode. Consider selecting a suggested text below to continue the conversation.

## INDEPENDENT READING AND BOOK CLUB RECOMMENDATIONS



## RELEVANT RESOURCES:

- [Success! The Marva Collins Approach \(1981\)](#)
- [An Introduction to the Culturally Responsive Education Model \(CREM\): A Personal and Professional Journey to Reflective and Transformative Pedagogy](#)

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