

**Transcript for Season One, Episode Seven:  
Tensions of Identity and Relationality: Teaching About Race, Class, and Gender**

**Nana Osei-Kofi 00:08**

Welcome to Transforming the College Classroom. This is a podcast for anyone who is interested in taking up teaching and learning in higher education from a social justice informed perspective in ways that are centered on a deep commitment to teaching all students. My name is Nana Osei-Kofi. I'm Director of the Difference, Power, and Discrimination program at Oregon State University. And I'm also Associate Professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

**Kali Furman 00:34**

I'm Kali Furman, I'm a postdoctoral scholar with the Difference, Power, and Discrimination Program.

**Bradley Boovy 00:39**

And I'm Bradley Boovy, associate professor in the School of Language, Culture, and Society at Oregon State. And co-facilitator with Nana of the DPD Summer Academy, where we work with faculty who are developing and teaching DPD courses.

We're recording this at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon, located within the traditional homelands of the Mary's River or Amphinefu Band of Kalapuya. Following the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855 Kalapuya people were forcibly removed to reservations in Western Oregon. Today living descendants of these people are a part of the Confederated tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon and the Confederated tribes of the Siletz Indians.

**Nana Osei-Kofi 01:16**

Bradley and I are here today with our guest, Dr. Marta Maldonado. Marta, why don't you introduce yourself to our listeners and tell them a little bit about the work you do.

**Marta Maldonado 01:27**

Yes, thank you for having me. I am an associate professor of Ethnic Studies. I am trained as a sociologist. My work is on the dynamics of inequality of race, gender, and class. A lot of my work is focused on Latinx populations, Latinx communities in relation to other ethnoracial groups in the United States.

**Bradley Boovy 01:54**

Great. Thanks, Marta. So glad you're here with us. So the title of your chapter is "Reflections on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Labor in the Latinx Studies Classroom." Could you tell us a little more about your chapter?

**Marta Maldonado 02:06**

Yeah. So this chapter was an opportunity to share some of the ways in which I tried to get students in introductory-level Latinx studies courses to think about the dynamics, the mutually-shaping dynamics of gender, race, and class and the connections between them and the ways in which our identities are intersectional, right? And, again, with a focus on the experiences of Latinx populations. The introductory classrooms are especially challenging for me. I just feel that you can't have any presumptions about what students already know. And in fact, your class might be the first one in which they face some of these concepts and some of these frameworks. So I find it especially challenging, but also especially interesting, right, under... interacting with students at that level and seeing what they bring to the classroom, what understandings, what ideas they bring to the classroom and how to engage them in conversation about these issues.

**Bradley Boovy 03:15**

Yeah. Great. And I think one of the things that I remember from your chapter and also from the work that you've done in the DPD academy with faculty is that you really, I think,... you really have a... you do an excellent job of kind of bringing some of these concepts, shall I say, to life or kind of making them real for students through activities, right? And so I think that's one of the things that, for me, the chapter just really stands out for me, also in your work again with faculty. And so I'm hoping we can kind of think through some of those ways, again, thinking through how the chapters in the volume really try to offer both a theoretical and a kind of application of the theory.

**Marta Maldonado 03:50**

Yeah.

**Bradley Boovy 03:51**

And some of the theories that you're talking about are really, really complex and... And I struggle myself in my teaching to kind of make those realities, the intersections of race, class, and gender, along with other intersections, real for students, right? And so I think the chapter does a great job of that.

**Nana Osei-Kofi 04:06**

Yeah. No, I definitely agree. And I was also thinking about, as you were talking about these intersectionality and identities and just trying to achieve this deep understanding among students, that you were very specific in talking about that this deals with Latinx populations. And so what I'm thinking about is, in one way, somebody could read the chapter and use a lot of what you provide to engage with other intersectional identities or intersectionality in different ways. But... So I'm curious with that, because we were talking about sort of concepts and sort of the theoretical undergirdings, if... Are there key elements or key theoretical constructs that come up in this class and in these types of classes, because it is specific to Latinx populations, to Latinx studies?

**Marta Maldonado 05:08**

Absolutely. I mean, I think that thinking about identities, for example, and the presumptions that we associate with different identities, the identities that are self-claimed or imposed, right. And talking about Latino populations and the ways in which they are racialized in the United States, we have to think about imposed... the way racialization is about imposing identities to people, right? So identities of "illegality" right, identities that... constructions of citizenship, right, and how we presume that people who are... that the nation sort of has a commitment to citizenships and to... citizenship and not to citizens and not to others who are not citizens, right?

So I think that the discussion of these issues in relation to Latinx populations allows us to look at specific sociopolitical constructions, right, about who belongs, who doesn't belong, who kind of allows for the opportunity to examine the social production of these categories, right, and how they get the... how power operates to include someone and exclude others. So, for sure, labor, talking about labor and how labor is racialized and class, a focus on Latino populations is very, very... it's a great illustration, right, because of the ways in which Latinos get routinely incorporated as sort of the... into the bottom rungs of the US economy, and the presumption is that that's kind of... there's a normalized assumption, right, that these are the folks who do these kinds of jobs. And so it's a good opportunity to get students to stop and interrogate why they think that way, where they have gotten ideas about... that normalized the locating of an entire group of people in certain kinds of places in the economy, right, in a certain kind of location.

And so... And it doesn't really matter if you are... where you are in the United States. I think those ideas are... students can easily locate those narratives that are racialized and gendered, and they can talk about what jobs they expect to see Latinos in, right, and they can easily, readily identify that there's a correspondence between this racialized group, right, and positioning in certain kinds of jobs and occupations and certain kinds of economic conditions. So in some ways, the focus on Latinos enables a concrete conversation about how race... at least race and class are connected, right?

**Bradley Boovy 08:27**

Mm-hmm.

**Marta Maldonado 08:28**

The gender thing, we have to sort of show other specific examples. Because they know where there are certain jobs where there are more where Latina women are more likely to be found than Latino men, right. So it's a very concrete case study, if you will, of the dynamics of race, class, and gender in relation to... in a context that people can... are more or less familiar with.

**Nana Osei-Kofi 09:02**

Absolutely. Yeah. That's incredibly powerful. As you were talking, I kept thinking about the term unlearning, which is something that you use in your chapter and actually where you start your chapter, talking about unlearning in the classroom and what you've learned through facing pedagogical challenges and how that then has allowed you construct a course or courses around these issues. So with that, shifting maybe a little bit away from students in the classroom, I'm thinking about us as educators, as faculty members, what is it that we need to unlearn in order to do the type of work that you discuss and in order to allow students to unlearn and have the types of realizations around the subject matter that you're sharing with us here today?

**Marta Maldonado 09:58**

Yeah. That is an amazing question. I... And a question that we don't necessarily ask ourselves all the time. I think that there are so many things that we, as academics and as professors situated within different disciplinary contexts that we have to unlearn, I think there are a lot of disciplinary boundaries that we have to unlearn in order to engage in this kind of critical pedagogy, right, that sort of situates us as humans and also as racialized, gendered, and classed beings in the classroom as well, and puts us in relation to students. I think that there are many things that we understand or that we incorporate in the process of becoming academics, right, that shape our interaction with students, that perhaps sort of make us imagine ourselves as removed from the very dynamics that we are discussing with students as if they had nothing to do with us and as if they were not at play in our classrooms.

And this notion of the conveying of all these concepts in the abstract, right, without sort of acknowledging that they might shape how we tell the message to our students, that our own positionality does not affect how we tell a message or what message we're willing to tell and how students receive that message, right? The sort of universalizing notions of students that we are encouraged to adhere to sometimes, that fail to acknowledge that there are different students in our classrooms with different histories and different understandings, different experiences, and that we have to engage that nuance, that it matters, right, who they are, and

that we have to sort of build connections and learning situations with a group of people who are so differentially positioned, right?

So, yeah. I think that the blinders of our disciplines, the ways in which we imagine the authority in the classroom, right, who is producing knowledge, right, all of these things that we acquire as we become academics, we have to sort of rethink if we are to really engage with students in real conversation and in honest ways about the dynamics of inequality, right, to acknowledge that they are at play also in the classroom and how that might affect how the messages circulate there and how they're received and what opportunities and challenges that offers too.

**Nana Osei-Kofi 13:18**

Yeah. So, so true and so powerful.

**Bradley Boovy 13:20**

Yeah, absolutely. I want to come back around, Marta, to something you were talking about earlier, and I think it connects a bit to what you were just saying, about kind of recognizing where students are coming from and how our disciplinary training kind of affects the way that we see and understand knowledge production. So kind of turning that a bit, I want to come back around to what you were saying earlier about identity, right. And sometimes... I think this is something you talk a little bit about in your chapter, and I know it's something that we've talked about before, but I think there's... Often, when we're working with students, to understand identity, there's a kind of, I want to say maybe, and perhaps this is because we're under the influence of kind of this neoliberal sense of a focus on the individual, right, there's a sense in which identity is reinforced, constantly reinforced as something that's very personal and very individual, right, which is not to say that it's not.

But I think a point that you make in the chapter that, for me, really was really kind of salient is this idea that identity is also connected to larger histories. It's connected to larger social and kind of cultural relations, right, that connects them back to economic questions, to questions of power and oppression. And so I wanted to ask, just because I think this is something that comes up a lot in social justice pedagogy, is how do you explain that relationship to students? How do you work with them to understand the relationship between identity as something, again, that's experienced individually, but that's also connected to larger social and cultural phenomena to larger forces of power and oppression?

**Marta Maldonado 15:03**

Yeah. It's one of the biggest challenges, I think, that we all face in this hyper-individualistic culture, right. And I think identity or a focus on identity is... it offers so much potential. It's a necessary starting point because it's so easy for people to say this is who I am. Everybody thinks... seems to know who they are, right, or seem to think they know who they are. And for students, that often translates into I'm very unique, I'm an individual, and they want everything

to be seen in individual terms. And a lot of what I try to do is iterations of, reminders of the ways in which our individuality is shaped and is really contextualized by our membership in different social groups, right, and the ways in which institutions and society and culture, right, also impose identities on us or have something to say about who we are that might or might not align with who we think we are, right, and yet have consequences for us.

So I play a lot with the idea of self-claimed identities and imposed identities, with the question of who imposes identities on us and with what consequences? Who imposes... And how identity... how scripts, how social and cultural scripts are about defining or confining identity or liberating identity, right? So that tension, I will always try to, if you will... It's like what is the dialectic here, right, the tension between who we claim to be and what others claim that we are, right, or what forces outside of us might think we are or might... And I get students that... I often invite them to think about what does it mean when ... How do you feel when someone represents you in a way that doesn't align with how you think of yourself?

Often I hear about, well, that's not right, or that's inaccurate, and students will then try to repair that or reconcile that and say, well, I'm not that because blah, blah, blah. And so I get them to think about the political content of identity claiming, right, versus imposing identity, how power is in that process, or who gets to define what, right? And it's not... It's always... It's like the default is for them to go back to identity as individual. But again, constantly sort of asking them to think about starting from the more micro-level groups, thinking about their own families, right, and the dynamics of identity in their family, right, to their identity in their communities to thinking about the nation state. Who do they... Do they feel like their... What is their relationship to the US or to their country of origin, right?

And always thinking about the tensions in all those levels of identity, right? And representations of identity. So all this to say that it's not easy. I know that the tendency is for the individual notions to kind of resettle or take root or for people to default to those. So I just try to have conversations all the time that are pointing to the tensions, pointing to the contradictions in our identities, and to identities as relational, right, and in that process, the tensions that power creates in that process.

**Bradley Boovy 19:37**

Yeah. Oh, I love the focus on kind of, I think what you term, liberation of identity. I think that was really

**Marta Maldonado 19:42**

Yeah.

**Bradley Boovy 19:43**

Really hits home in a lot of ways. And I think also, just focusing on the tension, right, the tension that you seek to kind of focus on in your discussions with students, right, and where that tension could then lead to liberation and where it could lead to resistance and where it could lead to social transformation, right, so that the relationships between the multiple levels of identity, right, as a place where we can really work with students on social transformations. Yeah, thank you for sharing that.

**Marta Maldonado 20:13**

Yeah, for sure. I think there are the imposed and the self-claimed aspects of identity, but also the multiplicity of identity, right? So the fact that we don't identify ourselves in just one singular way, but that aspects of our identity might be also in tension, right? And so just to always remind ourselves that we are not just one thing and that we always have to reconcile the relationality of it, who we are at multiple levels, right, and in relation to whom. It's some of the most challenging work, but also some of the most interesting work...

**Bradley Boovy 21:04**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Marta Maldonado 21:05**

... that happens in these intro-level classrooms.

**Nana Osei-Kofi 21:08**

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. So picking up on... So the tensions of identity and relationality, what you've shared is how you engage in the classroom with students around these issues. I'm now thinking about how did these things relate to faculty? So going back to those questions of sort of as educators, how we engage with these matters. And so part of what you do in your chapter is speak to what it means as a faculty member of color teaching at a predominantly white institution and teaching Latino studies at a predominantly white institution. Say something about this matter and the ways that we might engage this in, I guess, in striving for another form of liberation, right, as well. Maybe both/and.

**Marta Maldonado 22:04**

Yeah for sure. Yeah. Well, I think that that's another thing... Talking about unlearning, right? This is another thing that... a notion that we have to disabuse ourselves of, that we are all equally positioned to engage in these conversations and that the university and classroom spaces are neutral spaces, right? There's... I don't know maybe the legacy of the sciences within academic context or something, we're always sort of presumed to or encouraged to act

objectively and as if we were unaffected by our positionalities, right? And I think part of what I do in the classroom is I want my interaction with students to show that I believe, that I engage with them and with the university and with the learning process in full acknowledgement that we are all racialized and partial and subjective and that these subjectivities matter, right?

And we have conversations about who... the fact that the majority of my students might not have had people of color as teachers before or women of color as teachers before and that maybe the ways in which they think about the knowledge that is produced or that is... the things, the histories that are discussed in my classroom, in my Latino studies classroom, or in ethnic studies classrooms might contrast with the things that they... the experiences they have in other classrooms, in other fields, in, I don't know, in the sciences or in engineering or wherever, right? And I constantly call attention to the ways in which the university is racialized and classed and gendered, right, and knowledge is racialized and classed and gendered, and we are all implicated in it.

So for me, it's all like let's put it all out in the table, and let's think about how all of it is racialized and gendered and how we are implicated in it, whether we are aware of it or not. And I share with students examples of my own experiences as a woman of color in academic context, in a work context, right? I try to sort of acknowledge or make this visible for students, but also in every interaction I have with colleagues, right, in other fields, right? Questions about what knowledges are valuable or valued within the university and how that might be a reflection of race dynamics and gender dynamics and those sorts of things. So these are conversations that I think pertain to all of our... all of the spaces where we interact in the university, conversations with colleagues, conversations with students.

I think it's the only way in which we can change it, if we name it. If we name it, if we make it visible, it's all about making these invisible things visible and tangible. And so that... I don't know, that I kind of sort of went on a tangent there, but I feel that, again, the need is to name all these dynamics and to make them... to acknowledge their presence where our tendency might be to just look away from them or presume a certain normalcy about them.

**Nana Osei-Kofi 26:20**

Yeah. Yeah. You can never be silent.

**Bradley Boovy 26:25**

Yeah. Yeah. Thanks so much, Marta. So I think we have time for one more question. So in thinking about your chapter and about our conversation today, is there anything that we haven't touched on that you'd like to leave with the readers and the listeners to the podcast? And specifically, I'm thinking back to something that you said in the early part of our conversation today, where you were talking about things that you might want readers to know who aren't working in the context of a predominantly white institution in Oregon, for example, or in other educational contexts, whether that be K12, whether it be higher ed. And I'm also

thinking about it specifically, because I know that you yourself have experience in your research with doing that kind of work across multiple contexts, right, so working at previous institutions where you were working with a very different set of questions and different communities, right? And so thinking... kind of drawing on your experience and thinking about your chapter, what would you leave our listeners with in terms of how they can do some of this work in their contexts?

**Marta Maldonado 27:26**

I don't presume to know how people can... I think people are experts in their own contexts, and they can... I think that the key idea for me is, first of all, one of the things that working on this chapter sort of made me sort of solidify for my own approach to teaching, I think that the quest to transform ourselves through learning is a collective one where no one has... we have to recognize what we all bring to the table, right? And even thinking about we're often, in some fields, I know that in sociology that's been the case, where we are encouraged to think about intellectual property and sort of privatizing our tools. And I think that I would like to push for a different direction in conversations about how do we help one another grow and learn in our various contexts, and that we should do that by collectivizing this enterprise, by recognizing that there is that...

That the progress we want is rooted in collective thinking and strategizing and in the inclusion of more and more voices and the inclusion of other perspectives and knowledges that have been marginalized in many different ways, right? And so I think that would be the key thing is that the more I think about it, the more I am convinced that we need to commit ourselves to collective work and the creation of critical pedagogies that are collectively crafted, that we have to have more of these conversations, and even in spaces that transcend the university context, right, that include sort of notions of popular education, if you will, right, where the boundary between the formal context of the university and the non-academic context meet, right, because the university needs to be engaged with the world in which we live, right? And so I think that's what I would say, that we need to... I hope that we will all work in wherever we are to create spaces for dialogue, for sharing strategies, for sharing tools, failures and successes, so that we can make this collective enterprise move forward in very directed ways.

**Bradley Boovy 30:26**

Yeah. Well, what a powerful note to end on.

**Nana Osei-Kofi 30:29**

Yeah. True call to action.

**Bradley Boovy 30:31**

Absolutely.

**Nana Osei-Kofi 30:32**

Really appreciate that. Thank you for being with us today, Marta.

**Marta Maldonado 30:35**

Thank you so much for having me. Great to talk with you, always.

**Nana Osei-Kofi 30:38**

Wonderful. Please join us for the next episode of Transforming the College Classroom, when we'll be talking with Dr. Sharon Clough about her chapter "Peace, Literacy, Cognitive Bias, and Structural Injustice." Be sure to tune in.

**Bradley Boovy 30:54**

We'd like to thank Orange Media Network and their podcast director Jen Dirstine.

**Kali Furman 30:58**

This podcast is sponsored by the Difference, Power and Discrimination Program. More information on the DPD program, our book, and the transcripts for this podcast are available at [dpd.oregonstate.edu](http://dpd.oregonstate.edu).

**Nana Osei-Kofi 31:11**

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