

Democracy's College

Episode 7: Cultivating the gifts and talents of faculty of color

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 occrll.illinois.edu.

In this episode, Dr. Anjalé Welton from OCCRL talks with Dr. Linda Tillman, Professor Emerita of Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, about cultivating the gifts and talents of faculty of color.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: Hello, this is Anjalé Welton. I am Dean's Fellow for faculty development and diversity initiatives for the College of Education, here at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am here today chatting with Dr. Linda Tillman, Professor Emerita from the University North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Welcome.

Dr. Linda Tillman: Thank you.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: The first question that I have for you is: In your talk that you gave today at the University of Illinois, you defined racial equity in higher education; how would you define racial equity, especially as it pertains to faculty of color?

Dr. Linda Tillman: So if you consider race as being race and ethnicity, then you have white people, black people, Asian people, Asian being a very broad category, and Latino being a very broad category. If you have racial equity in higher education, it means that everyone in the higher ed. community is treated equally. Everyone in the higher education community is valued. There is no more value placed on one race than there is on another race. When you do that [place more value on one race], then that leaves faculty of color out in most predominantly white institutions. I am positing a theory of racial equity to say that if we have an equitable society as professors, as administrators, students, and members of the education community, then equity would mean that everyone is treated equally. Everyone has the same opportunities.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: In terms of equity, my next question for you: In your talk that you gave today about cultivating the gifts of faculty of color, you said that faculty of color have to work within white norms at predominantly white institutions. They have to work within white norms, and their scholarship is judged based on white norms. What do universities need to do to normalize their work to align with faculty of color? How do they need to change their structures to recognize the work of faculty of color?

Dr. Linda Tillman: Well, one thing they need to do is realize that, as Dr. Bill Trent has said, because a faculty member of color may choose to do a particular kind of work and center it around race, that doesn't mean that the field itself has changed. So, for instance, I am in K-12 educational leadership, but I choose to do my work based on the lives and experiences of black students, black teachers, black principals, and parents. That doesn't mean that I have abandoned my content knowledge of K-12 education and K-12 leadership. In order to sort of normalize that, there doesn't need to be a white norm. There shouldn't be anything called a white norm, or that other people have to conform to, to do their work. Because if they aren't white, then that is going to be a foreign territory for them in the first

place. Most of us write based on our racial and cultural biography, and that sort of influences our work. If you don't have a white norm as your racial and cultural biography, then you are not going to . . . most people are not going to write like that. The universities need to accept that there are multiple, multiple forms of how people can produce their scholarship, and it can be based on their racial and cultural norms of a particular group.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: So my next question for you is: How can white faculty advocate for and support faculty of color, especially at predominantly white institutions?

Dr. Linda Tillman: Well, I think it would probably be unrealistic to think that all white faculty will advocate and support faculty of color. Clearly on campuses there are white faculty who will not appreciate the gifts and talents of faculty of color and may not be used to working with faculty of color. There are white faculty on campuses who had students of color, they've collaborated with scholars of color, they served on committees, and they have a background of working with scholars of color. I believe it is incumbent upon them as well as everyone else to support faculty of color, advocate for them, and when they see that faculty of color are being treated less than humane, that they speak up about that. As should be expected, many junior faculty and graduate students will be afraid to challenge white faculty who are senior to them. They will be somewhat reticent about telling those faculty members that they are being treated less than kindly, because they may fear that it is going to hurt their career or down the tenure line they will get a bad review or something negative. I don't think that should be the case either. So if faculty really believe that people are human beings, then if you are treating them in inhumane ways, and if you are constantly throwing micro-aggressions at them, and if you are diminishing their work, and if you are criticizing how they do their work and what kind of work they do, and if you are making the college and the department an unwelcoming place for them, then those faculty who believe that it is wrong and know that it is wrong should speak up and support. Additionally, if white faculty or other faculty are in positions to help faculty of color in terms of publishing, in terms of service work, in terms of grants, in terms of committees on campus, or things that would bring attention to the faculty member and enhance their work, then certainly they ought to be a part of that as well. They ought to encourage faculty. They ought to recommend them. They may want to read drafts. They may want to ask them to participate in writing projects or on grants. There are various ways that they can enhance the productivity of faculty of color and make them feel that they are part of the scholarly community.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: What key advice do you have for graduate students of color who are interested in entering academia?

Dr. Linda Tillman: I would say that they need to do their research first. You can do [that] research sort of informally. I think the best way is to become involved in any graduate student activity that provides information for you about being a professor. For instance, with UCPA we have the Jackson Scholars in Division A, we have the graduate student dialogic sessions, we have Clark Seminars, and we have all kinds of committees that graduate students can serve on that all provide some information about being a professor. They need to be able to network effectively with scholars, both junior scholars and senior scholars. They need to attend any workshop that helps you write vitae, helps you with interviewing, because the interview is very non-traditional. It is not like you are going to work for the State of Illinois. You have to be able to talk to numerous people over a 2- or 3-day period. You have got to be able to present your work effectively in your job talk. You have got to be able to dialogue with the search

committee, other members of the faculty, and students. Any information and any training that a graduate student can get, prior to entering the job market, is going to be very valuable. That networking, that making connections, and getting a writing project under your belt before you enter the professorship are all things that will enhance how you start out. How you start out in the academy is so important and it is very important.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: I remember that you said to get those dissertation articles out . . . those first couple, before you start the faculty job.

Dr. Linda Tillman: Those first three. Right.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: So, once you get a faculty job, as a faculty of color, how do you stay sane and practice self-care as a faculty of color navigating the academy and the tenure and promotion process?

Dr. Linda Tillman: Well, I think all faculty, whether they are faculty of color or white faculty, once it becomes a big part of your personality, so it is a big part of your life, and most of us are going to stay sane when we get published. That is a big jolt of energy for us, and it is a big confidence booster. We got something published, and so now we know: "Okay, I can do this. I didn't think that I can do this, but I can do this." And so you stay sane by continuing to be in the scholarly community, continuing to network, and continuing to go to those meetings. I have been at it a while, and I have been full [professor] and have been full for a long time, and I just get so energized when I go to AERA. You see all your friends. You meet new people and hear about new and interesting research. Somebody asks you to be a part of their writing project, join them on a grant, or join them on a presentation. Those are the kind of things that keep you going and keep your confidence level up. I think working with students, if you like working with students, even though it is hard work, and you still have to balance that against your publishing. If you like working with students, then after you have had a summer's break, you are going to be energized about going back. The self-care aspect is that you have to make yourself take vacations, make yourself take time off and have something other to do than just be a faculty member. If your whole existence is being a faculty member, then I think most people will get burned out that way. You've got to have something else that interests you that you do on a regular basis. Whether that is being in a book club, being in a girls club, or you are in a fraternity, or sorority, or church, or you work in a community, whatever it is that you do, you still have to continue to do that so that you have something else that provides you with an outlet. Then when you feel like you are getting too stressed, then you just need to back off. Sometimes you have to take a writing break. Sometimes you really do. People write differently. I write and I can get up at 8 in the morning and stay up until 2 in the morning and maybe do that for five days at a time. Of course, then I am ready to fall over when it is over with, but that's just how I write. So then after that I go and do something [different].

Dr. Anjalé Welton: I go to bed early and I wake up at like 3:00 a.m. and I write.

Dr. Linda Tillman: Oh my goodness, I would never be able to do that. I tried to once but I never could do that. I'll do something like watch the "Godfather." You have to make sure that you've got a balance, that there's something out there you do.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: My final question for you: I know you always tell me your stories about starting out and what you wish you would have known starting out. So in hindsight, what advice would you give yourself when you started out in academia?

Dr. Linda Tillman: That I would have had publications when I got out of grad school, or at least one or two. When I got out of grad school there was not the emphasis on having publications going in. Methodologically I am a qualitative researcher, and I also wish that I had honed my skills in quantitative as well. People disagree on this. My theoretical or conceptual orientation is definitely qualitative. You still need quantitative data. I wish I had paid more attention to quantitative courses, so that I would have been a little more well rounded in terms of my methodological skills. And also that I had been forced to get an article out before I left [graduated]. The sooner you learn how to write for publishing the better you are. There is a big difference in writing a dissertation and writing a peer-reviewed journal article.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: That is true. And if you have things out already before you start that faculty job, when you get that faculty job there are so many other things that you have to worry about.

Dr. Linda Tillman: At least you have a head start on that. The time it takes you to get started on your writing and to figure out when you get your rhythm and when you can do it could be a long time.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: Is there anything else that I have not asked that you think needs to be discussed for this podcast?

Dr. Linda Tillman: I don't think so. I think people need to cultivate mentoring relationships. They need to take advantage of opportunities people give them, even though it may be something else to do. Think about the long-term goals of this. Even though it's one more thing for me to manage, it's one more thing to add to my vitae, to add to my promotion and tenure dossier, one more thing that makes me look really good if I should decide to look for a different job or when I am just starting out. A well rounded group of activities, publishing, service work, and networking.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: I know that interdisciplinary as well, having your work speak to other fields, seems to be more important now as well.

Dr. Linda Tillman: Yes. Right. So it's not just does it speak to leadership people but does it speak to people who are sociologists or school psychologists. My 2002 article, *Culturally Sensitive Research*, is used an awful lot in the health field. The first article that I noticed that was published was in a diabetes research study of African-Americans: How do you conduct studies in African-American communities doing diabetes research? Then some nurses in San Francisco State used it in a study of teen pregnancy.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: When you went up for promotion did you articulate that?

Dr. Linda Tillman: Yes. That has been interesting. Every now and then I will still get an article that was written by someone in the healthcare field: mental health, nursing, the EPA talking about doing research in the communities, diabetes research. So that has been interesting that it has been used in the healthcare field.

Dr. Anjalé Welton: Thank you very much Dr. Tillman. If you would like to watch and listen to my mentor Dr. Linda Tillman's talk, which was part of the Dean's Diversity Lecture Series, titled *Racial Equity in Higher Education: Cultivating the Gifts and Talents of Faculty of Color*, you can find the link to the video of her talk on the same page as this podcast. Thank you so much.

Dr. Linda Tillman: Thank you.

For more information about cultivating the gifts and talents of faculty of color. We recommend that you visit Dr. Linda Tillman's [website](#) at the University of North Carolina for a list of publications. For more podcasts, links to today's recommended resources, or to share your comments and suggestions, visit occril.illinois.edu/democracy or send them via Twitter @occril. Tune in for this month's bonus episode when Dr. Heather Fox from OCCRL talks with Dr. Helen Burn from Highland College about equity-minded approaches to mathematics education. Background music for this podcast is provided by DubLab. Thank you for listening and for your contributions to educational equity, justice, and excellence for all students.