

6.9 Creating Change in the Classroom with Patrick Harris II

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SPEAKERS

Jasmine Bradshaw, Patrick Harris

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:00

You're listening to the First Name Basis podcast, Season Six, Episode Nine: "Creating Change in the Classroom with Patrick Harris II." Teaching our children to be inclusive and anti-racist starts with us within the sacred walls of our home. First Name Basis is designed to empower you with the confidence you need to be a leader in your family and a change maker in your community. Together, we will wrestle with hard questions and use the answers to create the world we want: a world that reflects our values of inclusion, compassion, and courage. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw, and I am so excited to be on this journey with you. Hello, First Name Basis fam. I am so glad you are here. I'm so glad you're here because today you're going to hear an amazing interview with one of my teaching idols. His name is Patrick Harris, and I have been listening to him since before First Name Basis was even a thought. So as many of you know, I used to be a teacher, and I was in a program called Teach for America. Patrick also did Teach for America, and after I finished, I heard about this podcast where these two teachers were going to sit down every week for an entire school year and talk about their experience as teachers. So this podcast was called the Common Sense podcast. And you can actually still hear it today, and the two hosts were Patrick, who you will hear from in this interview, and Antonia, who has an amazing Instagram account where she reviews books. It's called Black Girl That Reads, and I when I tell you these two were my teacher idols... Have you ever seen that meme where it's like, "Me listening to a podcast," and it's like a little kid, it's like a little boy, I think, and he's like laughing next to a picture of these three girls laughing. These three girls are laughing in a photo and he's sitting at the base of the photo laughing with them. That's how I felt listening to this podcast because I loved it so much. I tuned in every week for the whole year, because I just felt like they were speaking my language. I felt like they totally understood, like, what I was going through and what it's really like to be a teacher in the classroom, especially someone who had done Teach for America. It was just really, really special to me that they took the time to put this out into the world. So now Patrick has actually written a book, it is called "The First Five: A Love Letter to Teachers." And I had an opportunity to read an advanced copy and get him on the show. Can you even believe it? Now y'all know that I'm no longer in the classroom. I do this; this is my job now. But being able to read a book about what it looks like to try to make change from within and the importance of creating school communities where our kids feel

safe, empowered, and loved and embraced and are encouraged to figure out who they are...Oh, man, it was so good. And I have to tell you, I am a parent, and I feel like this book was so influential to me as I'm thinking about what kind of school I want my children to attend, and how I want to be a positive influence on the school as a parent. So if you're a parent listening, this episode is absolutely for you, too. And this book is absolutely for you too, because it gives you such a good behind-the-scenes look at what teachers are going through, and how you can support them, and how we can work on the same team so that our children have the best education possible to them, and they're ready to be in this world and share their gifts with the world. So let me tell you a little bit about Patrick. Patrick Harris is a Black, queer writer, storyteller, and middle school humanities teacher. He has won multiple national teaching awards for his leadership and innovation in the classroom. Teaching and creating is only part of who Patrick is. He is a big brother, a cat dad, lover of all things horror and WWE fanatic, and is obsessed with scenic hikes. Now you can see why I'm so grateful for Patrick and his leadership, because I feel like in just his bio he is showing us that, yes: teaching, serving, being anti-racist is a really important piece of who he is. But it's not the entirety of who he is. And I feel like that's something that I'm really trying to figure out myself right now. So in this episode, you're going to hear us talking about his book, "The First Five: A Love Letter to Teachers." I loved it, I highly recommend it, and I will put the link in the show notes so that you can go and grab it for yourself. But we go into everything from what does it look like to try to make change in the classroom? How do you find a school that aligns with your values? And why is it important for all of us to know that teaching really is a political act? Now I have to give you a little bit of context for a piece of the episode that you'll hear. We talk about doing this pilot program with these walkie talkies in our ear. So when I was in TFA, Teach for America, there was this pilot program where they would have a consultant come into your classroom and support you with behavior management. And we were told, those of us who participated in the program, were told that we were selected because we were great teachers, and they wanted to help us the best way they could. And basically, it's literally like you feel like you're in the Secret Service. Like, they put this walkie talkie in your ear. And there's someone at the back of your classroom telling you what to do and say, and it turned out to be a horrible, horrible experience for me and my students. And I didn't know anyone else who had done it until I'm reading Patrick's book, and I got to that part. And I was like, "What? You had to do this too?" And in the interview, I'm asking him about why people are so obsessed with controlling Black and brown students, and where they go, and what they do, and how they speak, and how they dress. And I feel like that is very illustrative of the larger issue that we have here in this country. And so you'll hear me talk about the different ways that that was done in schools that I visited, and schools that I've taught in. There are literally schools where they put tape on the floor, and the children are only allowed to walk on the tape. I have been to a school like that. And it is very, very clear to me that when people are making children walk on tape, they really don't trust children. They do not trust children to make positive choices that feel in line with who they are and really give them the opportunity to become a full human being. And it's just, it's, it's...I could tell, I mean, I can make a whole episode just about this topic. So I will not make you wait any longer to hear from Patrick. But I wanted to give you a little bit of a heads up about that piece of the interview because it's one of my favorite pieces. But I want to make sure that you have some context so you understand why we're talking about it. So without further ado, here is "Creating Change in the Classroom With Patrick Harris." Okay. Patrick Harris, teacher, author, future horror film director. Welcome to First Name Basis!

P

Patrick Harris 07:32

Oh, I love that introduction now. Hi, First Name Basis! What's up everyone?

J Jasmine Bradshaw 07:42

Oh, my gosh. I'm so good. How are you? This has been such a long time coming. I'm so excited.

P Patrick Harris 07:47

I know. Yeah, I'm a big fan. So thank you for having me and answering my DM and my message and engaging with me. Like, it means so much.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 07:58

Well, let's start with the fact that you wrote a freaking book! Like, congratulations!

P Patrick Harris 08:03

Oh, my goodness, I can't... honestly, I can't believe it. When I think about younger Patrick, you know, like, this is like his dream and what he really, really wanted. And, you know, and to be able to write a book on my life and my experiences. I'm just like...I feel so lucky. So much of my journey has been about authenticity, and has just been about me sharing my experiences in a candid way. Very raw, you know. And so I think that I am just very grateful for this moment. And I am I am sitting in the weight of what this means for me and my family and my students and my teaching journey overall. Well, your post about your grandma, reading your book...Your grandma or your great-grandma? My great-grandmother.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 08:54

Your, great...! Yes, she's over 100! That got me in the feels.

P Patrick Harris 08:57

Yes. 102-years-old, man. She grew up on Del Mar Street, which I talked about in the book, and now she's living with my mom full-time. And I went over there last week and just, you know, brought a copy. She tried to give me money to pay for the book. I'm just like, "Girl, you did not need to pay for the book! Okay? Take the book for me." You know, because it's a love letter to her, too. It's...many of my family members. And so I was in the kitchen in you know, making me a little peanut butter and jelly sandwich. And I just looked over at her and she was just reading the book with her glasses on, and it really made me emotional. Because this book is just like pulling back the curtain on my life and myself. You know, one thing I also said in the book and what I believe, right, is that when you're growing up as a young adult, you know, when you are a first-generation college student, you're first to leave in your family or anything of that nature, right? Like, there's only so much your parents can really do to help, you know? And if you're, if you're like me, you don't share everything that happens to you, right? Like, you give a little bit of, "Here mom this happened, this is going on." When it's dire you will tell them, but I don't

think that my parents, my grandparents, my great-grandparents who really know all the things that I have had to face as a Black, queer, man, teacher in this profession today. And so if it just brings us closer, because now I can, you know, you can read all the things that I was too afraid to say, then I think I've done my job.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 08:58

Wow. Yeah. And it really does. It reads like a movie. It reads like a journal/movie. Like it was...I couldn't put it down. I couldn't put it down.

P Patrick Harris 10:39

Period. That was the whole goal. Right? Like, I think there are so many books out there for parents and educators that have a lot of jargon that's hard to sift through. And, you know, there's a reason why we are bingeing Netflix, you know what I'm saying? Like, there's a reason why, like, we are on HBO Max every night and Hulu and all these things, right? Because we want accessible content, and we want story-driven content.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 11:12

Yeah.

P Patrick Harris 11:12

So like, I knew when I was going to write this book, I said, "Five schools in five years sound like a movie to me. Sounds like a story to me. It's not like a book to me." Right? And I was like, "I got stories to tell," right? And I don't want people to have to sit through and have to really move through the language and struggle through it. I wanted it to be refreshing and enjoyable and funny and emotional. And all the feels that you would get when you're binge watching a show on Netflix.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 11:40

Yes, yes. I mean, I'm reading it. And my husband is like, "What, what?" Because I'm like, gasping. I'm laughing, he's laughing. I'm like, "You need to just get your own copy, okay?"

P Patrick Harris 11:52

Yes. Oh, my gosh.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 11:54

Well, one of the things that you said in the book was that liberation is your mission. That part

like, I wrote it down everywhere, and I kind of hung it up around my house so I can remember it for myself. I want you to talk about how teaching is political. I think that's something that a lot of people are uncomfortable with. But it's the truth. It's facts. So tell us like, why is it so important for everybody to understand that

P

Patrick Harris 12:19

It's crucial, because we are teaching and raising human beings, right? Like, I stopped seeing teaching as just like, a normal profession, right? Like, like, this is human work. We're dealing with human beings every day. And we're not just preparing them for the real world, we live in the real world with them. Right? And so this means that we are responding to them and preparing them to be active citizens in society, right? That means that we're taking risks, right? Like that means that we're having critical conversations with them, right. And so teaching is political, period. Whether you decide to talk about, you know, identity and, and hard history, or whether you choose to stay silent about it, right? Because of our digital world, students are exposed to so much content every day. And schools should be the community that they get to come in and process that so they can be people who make informed decisions for the betterment of humanity, right? Like, like, that is all of our goal: to ensure that this world that we live in is sustainable for all people to live and to breathe in. And to be able to just, you know, just to live, you know, the moves that we make as teachers directly influenced that. And so the more intentional we can be, the more confident we can feel creating, you know, students who are ready to be productive citizens and society that is a political act.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 14:06

Amen. I feel like a lot of people see something being political as like a bad thing. But when I was reading your book, I was taking it in as like, it's an empowered thing. It's a, it's a source of power that we can give to students.

P

Patrick Harris 14:20

And it's a responsibility. Yeah, like, like, like, it's a responsibility. I mean, I don't blame folks for feeling that way. Jasmine, for real, like, when you think about politics, you think about all of the negativity that happens with these grown old people who just cannot seem to have a conversation. You know, what I'm saying? Like this older generation of folks who are really struggling to compromise, which is the very one of the core values of our government, you know, and so, there's so much nastiness that happens in politics, and so, people want school to be a place of joy. So I understand why folks feel like being political is a bad thing. But, you know, when you think about it from the lens of school being a place where you can practice being different, right, like the school building, you know, like, you have the opportunity to create the conditions of a just society, you know what I mean? Like, it's a controlled environment, you know, people should be coming together who are agreeing on a shared vision and a shared philosophy, right, and like how we nurture our students through that, it should indeed make them productive citizens of society, right? And I think like, that should be empowering, right? Like, I don't have to wait on the world to change because I can see it happening right here in front of me, I can co-create the systems necessary for justice. I can co-create the system necessary for equity. They may not be doing it out in the streets all the time,

because there's so much out of our control, but we have the capability as educators in our schools to create the world that we want to see. Parents have the capability to create the systems at home, to simulate the world that we actually want to live in. There's this thing that folks say all the time, Jasmine, it's like, "We got to prepare students for the real world. And so we got to expose them to all of this trauma," you know what I'm saying? But what if, what if we didn't? Right? Like, what if we prepare students for the real world by simply showing them and talking about what justice is? Right? It's showing them what equity is, showing them with fairness, it's showing them what it means to belong, and to do all the things that I could talk all day. But I like, like, that's my biggest thing. You know, like, we don't have to wait on the world to change because our homes with our kids in our schools are opportunities for us to actualize that.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 17:01

Yes. And what better place to practice all that.

P Patrick Harris 17:04

What better place?

J Jasmine Bradshaw 17:06

Yeah. One of the things I loved about the book is that it's so interactive. Like you've got reflection questions and templates. And I know that your audience is primarily teachers; it's a love letter to teachers, but as a former teacher, as a parent, I'm reading this thinking, "This is good for me to think about, too, when I'm looking into, 'Okay, I have a daughter who is going to be in kindergarten in a couple of years. Like, what do I need to do to prepare for that? What do I need to be looking for in a school?'" So I wanted to ask you, you know what I mean?

P Patrick Harris 17:36

Yeah.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 17:37

So I wanted to ask you one of the questions from the book.

P Patrick Harris 17:40

Oh, okay!

J Jasmine Bradshaw 17:41

I want to know, yeah, I just want to know your answer.

P Patrick Harris 17:43

Yeah.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 17:44

Also, like, I want people to get a sense for kind of what it's like to go through it.

P Patrick Harris 17:47

Yeah. Okay. Come on out. Get me together.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 17:51

Okay. So the question is, "What does your Government believe about education? And how does this impact how you show up?"

P Patrick Harris 17:57

Mm hmm. I love that question. I don't think that they have a very core of, like, strong belief. Let me start there. Right? Like, I don't think that as a country, we have said it, you know, as a nation, this is what we believe to be true about education. We don't have a national vision for education in our country. So that's important to start. Also think that it's like strictly about meritocracy, right? It's about labor. So it's about go to school so that you can get a job, so that you can go to college, and just recently, you'll start hearing folks say, "So you can go back to your community and make a difference." Hmm, but I think the bulk of our education system from the government, you know, is all about cradle to career, right? Like, yeah, in what I'm saying, like, let me get you from the womb, I know, you're gonna work from the womb, I know, you're gonna kind of like, like, I know, you're gonna be laboring for us, you know, in a way that I think that I think, does not value the humanity of our kids, you know? And so, that impacts the ways in which I show up because I don't have a hyper focus on labor. I just had this thought the other day of like, you know, the jobs that we're even preparing students for today probably won't even exist by the time that they have matriculated through 12 years of school, you know? So what does timeless education look like? Right? What do students need to know, despite or regardless of what job they're trying to pursue? You know what I mean? Like, is it what you want to be when you grow up is like, or is it who do you want to be right now? Right, like, like, like, what, what decisions, or you know, what values are important to you? The question I asked my students in sixth grade, is "Who are you?" Right? Who are you? And they wrestle with that question all year long. And it's the hope that when students have a strong understanding of who they are and where they come from, and what they value, right, like, then that can stick with them. And, you know, can help them no matter what discipline they're studying next.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 20:27

Yes, because they...wow...Yeah. Oh, my gosh, yes. I hope everybody goes back and listens to that, again, because the values are really what's so important. And that's what people don't even understand about anti-racism, right? I'm like, this is about the fact that you are not living your life aligned with your values. Anti-racism says, "Figure out what your values are, and then figure out where you're misaligned and fix it." And I think that people instead of seeing it as that they see it as this like condemnation. And I feel like we've almost put that on our students of like, "What are you going to be? Who are you going to be," instead of, "Who are you right now?" Oh, yes. That's such a good question.

P Patrick Harris 21:01

Yeah. Who are you right now? Right. And like, just asking the students that question, like, gives them a starting point. We know they're going to change, right? But it's like, we want them to be introspective. We want them to be aware, self-aware, of like who they are and how they're showing up. Half the battle, I think of anti-racist work, is knowing your disposition. Like knowing how you're showing up in this conversation, and the more that we can help students do that, the more that we can help kids make that a part of their natural practice, right? I think the easier our work can become.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 21:36

Yes, yes. So in your school right now, one of the things you teach is queer studies, right?

P Patrick Harris 21:38

Yes.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 21:44

I mean, amazing. I live in Mesa, Arizona, the idea that that would even exist in a school feels very far away. So that's so like, encouraging to me to read about that, and know that you're doing that. I want to know, how did you prioritize finding a school that allowed you to teach your values? Like, do you have any tips for parents, caregivers, teachers who are looking to figure out a school that really is a good fit for them and their values in their family?

P Patrick Harris 22:10

Yeah. Well, first, let's sit sit down with your family, right? And like, figure out what is it that you truly value? What are your non-negotiables? Right? What are things you're willing to bend on? Or willing to be flexible with? Right, like a school won't be perfect for you. But it's important for you and your family to have like an intergenerational conversation about your values, right? Like, how do you feel about grading, right? Like, what kind of traditions are important for you?

What land, like, is it important to know like, what land your school sits on. Peoples try to try to like, you know, say this whole thing, but like, I think a school's mission, visionm and philosophy statement are important, you know what I'm saying? So like, figuring going out for yourself, if that if that is important for you. So now, step number one, sit down with yourself, be clear about your family values, and what you are looking for. Secondly, I would say that, you know, visit the school's website. That really matters. I don't know what people don't think that matters, but that honestly does. It says a whole lot, right? Like, what do you notice? What do you see? Right? What do they notice? Yes? What is that? Like? What do you notice about that? Read the the mission statement, read the philosophy statement. And check this out, because folks don't even realize this: read the history of your school. You got to know where this school has come from, who founded it, you know what I'm saying? Like how long it's been here. And if you don't know, who it's named after. That can be a big problem. Seriously, I didn't know until writing this book that my elementary school, Loving Elementary, was named after

J Jasmine Bradshaw 24:01

Yeah, yeah. I love that. Okay. Okay, okay. Okay, the walkie talkie, Richard and Mildred!

P Patrick Harris 24:01

No, the first African-American teacher. Like, the first African-American male teacher in Detroit, his name was William C. Loving. I tried so hard to get his face in the book. And he, like, they wouldn't approve it. But like I was, I never knew that right? So knowing that history of the place is important. And then you like you have to go and visit you know, you have to go and visit. On an open house night will be great, but a school a tour in the middle of the day, right? Like where you get to see students working, where you get to visit classrooms where students can shadow? Right? Like I think is also, will will also give you an opportunity to really see your school in action. So I think those would be like my current tips and then just make reflection a part of the process. Right? Like, what are you feeling right now? When you're in this building? How are you feeling when you're searching this website, right? Like, is it aligned to your values or not? Are you willing to bend on this or not? Or are they breaking a non-negotiable? So just stay in conversation? Oh my god,

J Jasmine Bradshaw 25:13

It took everything in me not to just start with this because we have to, we have to talk about this. I didn't know that there was anyone else on the planet who had to do this. So when I read...

P Patrick Harris 25:25

You did to? I don't know anyone else who...

J Jasmine Bradshaw 25:29

I was in Teach for America. And I did too. I was like "Yes!" So when I was reading chapter three

I was in Teach for America. And I did too. I was like, "Yes." So when I was reading chapter three, I was like, "Oh, my gosh!" I really did read out loud to my husband, because I'm like, "I didn't know there was anybody else." And it was the worst. It was the worst. I cried so much, so much. Okay. Okay. Let me give people context. Actually, let me let you give people context, tell us the story of the walkie talkie, and then we'll talk about it.

P Patrick Harris 25:55

Okay, so my first school, you know, the first line of that chapter is I didn't choose my first school, it chose me, right, I literally was placed in a school because of a policy called the "First Offer Policy." Anyway. It was a school that was an award-winning charter school in southeast DC. 100%, Black and brown kids. And I'm just gonna be honest with y'all, the school was off the chain. I mean, like, it was a lot going on, culturally. Students were just rebelling against a prison-like culture, you know. Pants folded, slant, single file...

J Jasmine Bradshaw 26:38

Tape on the floor?

P Patrick Harris 26:39

Tape on the floor. How about this, feet on the floor?

J Jasmine Bradshaw 26:43

Same, yes, yes.

P Patrick Harris 26:45

Put a bubble in your mouth, those those type of things. And so instead of like brainstorming with the staff, the school decided to hire a consultant. And so the consultant came in, and they wanted to pilot a new program with us that helps schools get their culture in order. And the way in which they did that y'all was they said, "Well, look, teachers are responsible. The reason why kids are not following direction is because teachers don't know how to give good directions." That was their philosophy. So what they did was they gave teachers a walkie talkie, and we put an earpiece in our ear, and then a principal or a consultant, or folks like that, would stay with, stand in the back of the room. And they would coach you, quote, unquote, "coach you" right there, aka micromanage you, as you were teaching. So here's what that looks like. I might tell students, "Okay, let me give an MVP direction. So when I say go, when I say go, you're going to pick up your pencil, write your name on your paper, and then you're going to put your pencil back down, put your feet on the floor silently." Right? "Go." And as students are doing this, someone will be in the walkie talkie and say, they they will say, "Give a praise to two students." Right. So I would say, "Jasmine is doing what I need her to do. She's writing her name. Patrick's writing his name." And then I would just move on, and then they would say, "Oh, no, give a consequence to one student." Right? And I'm like, which one? Right? Like,

"Jayshawn needs a consequence." And so I would flip their card yellow, red, or check, or whatever. And they would do that the entire lesson. It was so difficult for me to like...I don't even remember what the lesson was about. It was so difficult for me to facilitate because it was like...Jasmine! I couldn't breathe. Like it was so high stakes. It was crazy.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 29:05

I know. I really do know, I really do know, and I can't even tell you... Okay, so they come in my classroom, and they're...in the middle of the day. Apparently, I've been selected for this pilot program in the middle of my day at lunch. They come in, they tell me, they put all this stuff in my ear. Of course, the students are like, "Who is that in the back of the room?"

P Patrick Harris 29:23

Right?

J Jasmine Bradshaw 29:24

Yes.

P Patrick Harris 29:24

Drama

J Jasmine Bradshaw 29:24

And then I'm saying stuff. "Like, when I say go, you will silently stand up pushing your chair, walk around the table onto the carpet with your hands full." Like, there's just so much going on. It's literally like prison. And my question for you.

P Patrick Harris 29:38

Yeah.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 29:39

Is why are people so obsessed with controlling these kids, especially kids of color? Because, so my students were predominantly Latine, so it sounds like similar to your school, but very different in that sense. Yeah, but they were just absolutely obsessed with controlling every single thing they did, and it made it impossible for you to really create community because you're always moving clips up and down. And like, talking like a robot. It was...yeah, yeah.

P

Patrick Harris 30:08

I mean it truly is anti-Black to me. Like it is truly, just, I don't know really what it is, besides control. I'll tell you what they told me what their reasoning was they said, "Kids need to know how to follow directions." Right? "They need to be controlled, because when they get out in the real world, if they cannot do this, if they cannot do X, if they cannot do Y, then they will die. They will be killed by police, they will, you know..." Blame. They told me in a meeting once they said, "Patrick, if you don't give consequences for what's happening, if you don't, you know, enforce the importance of following directions, then when a student is face-to-face with a police officer, right? And they choose not to follow directions that could be a deadly consequence for them." And I don't know about you, but that sounds like manipulation and gaslighting?

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 31:10

Oh well yeah. The audacity of them to put that on you. Like, "If you don't do this, then you could have that on your hands."

P

Patrick Harris 31:17

Right. And so that just goes back to my point that I was making earlier. Right? It's like, we don't have to simulate oppressive structures, in schools or at home to prepare students to navigate oppressive structures, right? Like, one big piece of the book that I love, and just as a part of who I am, is I'm gonna tell you two words: "dream bigger." Right? Dream bigger. There is an opportunity for us to dream bigger about the world in which we live in. We don't have to, we don't have to simulate oppression to talk about oppression. We don't have to simulate oppression to talk about the ways in which we dismantle it. Right? I think that we can give students the tools necessary to be their most authentic selves to live, you know, in a state of joy, to be critically conscious, to answer and ask questions, right? To be defiant, right? Like, we can give students space and room to do that, because school is the place, and our homes are the place, the safe space, the safe place for students to imagine the world that they want to be to in, to make mistakes, right? But if we are creating this, like "do or die" structure, that's killing them before they even get out.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 31:43

Yes. Oh my gosh, yes. And like, okay, so when you talked about how it affected you as a teacher and how you cried, I was crying right there along with you, because I cried. But your next steps were so different from mine, and I want you to talk a little bit about that, because they came back in my classroom and did it again. And so before, before they came back, I said to them to my students, "None of this is real, just play along..."

P

Patrick Harris 33:06

Yes, Jasmine that was me, too!

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 33:11

"We're just gonna move on from it, okay? Like anybody who gets a consequence, anybody who gets clipped down, this is not real, right?" So they come in, we do it and they leave. And we're all like, I'm like, "Feel better guys?" because the first time they they were absolutely in shock, and I was too, and I was like, "That...what's happening." But in the book, you talk about how you talk to your administration, and you took that autonomy back for yourself. And that is something that I still struggle with, the guilt that I still struggle with. And so I really want you to talk about how when we don't give teachers autonomy, or when teachers aren't taking that autonomy for themselves. We cannot share autonomy with students. Like how can we...how can how can autonomy help our students develop and sharpen those critical thinking skills? Like why is it so important for them to have autonomy?

P

Patrick Harris 34:03

Right. So I want to first start by just answering your question about what I did. I don't know if I discussed this in the book. It's all blurring together. But I remember that moment because, specifically because, I knew that I always wanted to be an elementary school teacher. And the reason why I wanted to be an elementary school teacher is because I had a phenomenal elementary school experience. Right? And so I felt it in my body that when I did that experience with them, the in the ear, walkie talkie, I was like, "Oh, this is not reflective of the experience that I had in an elementary school." Like, "There is no joy here." There's a love in this, you know. And after I cried and after I, you know, worked through forgiving myself for that, I penned an email and was like, "I regret to inform you that I won't be doing this again. Let me let you know, because I went to an elementary school that that made me feel like this," And here I am, and I don't know, Jasmine, if you can relate to this, but I was giving consequences for things that I would never give consequences for. No, never. Never, ever, ever, ever, you know? And so I sent the email and I told them, I said, "Listen, I am not doing this." And they brought me in the next day, pulled me out of my classroom, told me, "You know, we believed in you, you were such a great teacher," and like you know, "Why wouldn't you want to do this? Do you really care about Black kids," etc, etc. And like through our conversations, I'm like, we really do have the same values, we really do want to see the liberation of Black folk, we want to see the joy and the success of Black students, right? Black and brown students. However, we just got two different ways of getting there.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 35:51

That is gracious of you. Because I don't think, oh, my gosh, I was like, "What are y'all doing? And why are you making us do this, get me out of here?"

P

Patrick Harris 35:59

Seriously. And I knew that, like, I had to say something, I had to do something, right, because what I was doing was directly impacting them, right? Like, if schools don't teach you anything goes, it's the power of interconnectedness. We are all interconnected, connected. What I do in my classroom directly impacts my students. The choices that my administrators make directly impact me, which directly impact my students. We are all interconnected in schools, you know?

And so the more that we can recognize that, the better decisions we can make for students, right, the purpose of autonomy is not just so that teachers can do whatever they want to do, or administrators can do whatever they want to do, it's so that we can meet the needs of our students in front of us. It's so crazy how folks will say "Yo, we need a personalized experience for this kid," right? Like, we got a student-driven education, a student-driven curriculum, etc, etc. But then they will "one-size-fits-all" students in a millisecond, you know. And so the more autonomy that teachers have, the more they should be able to directly meet the needs of the kids in front of them without having to jump through so many barriers. And when I realized that they were just putting up more barriers in front of me, I had to check in with myself and say, "Do I have the capacity to be my authentic self here? Do I have the capacity to make long lasting change?" The answer was no. And so I had to resign from that school and go someplace else.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 36:07

Just even just hearing your story about how you've resigned from different places is so empowering. And I hope if there are any teachers listening, that you will read, because you deserve to be in a place that supports you and your values and what you have to offer. And schools that make you put walkie talkies in your ear, like, come on now. It's just not it.

P

Patrick Harris 38:00

It's just not one of them. Nope. And, you know, I talk about in the book the importance of seeing school as a home, you know, schools, our homes, that we need to stay for a while, kick your shoes off at the door, sit still, you know, that's how we truly make the change that we want to see in our students and in our communities when we stay a while. And so like, do yourself the favor of finding the school where you can plant roots, and like truly see the blossoming of your flower. That's the first time I have been in a school where I have come back a second year, and now going on my third year. And I'm telling you, it makes a difference when it comes to building relationships with students when it comes to like helping teachers to onboard, right? Like, it has made the biggest difference, being able to say, "Oh, my goodness, look at look how tall, you're growing." You know, there are so many students who have a distrust of school simply because they have to build relationships, new relationships way too often. And so the more that we can do ourselves the favor of finding a school to call home, the better off our students will be.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 39:21

Yeah, yeah. And one of the things you just mentioned was like when you were reflecting on whether or not you should stay at the school was if you could really make the change that you wanted to see. And in the book, you outline this fantastic framework that we can use when creating change in a school community. And I'm wondering, like, what can parents do? What can parents and caregivers do to support teachers who are really trying to make change at school?

P

Patrick Harris 39:49

Yeah, my thoughts about change have grown so much. While like I go through a lot of reflection in the book, you know, it's a lot of, "I used to think this, but now I but now I see it as this," you know? There's so much that parents and caregivers can do to support teachers who are on the front lines. The first is just as much as you have the capacity to like being involved in like school events, you know, like, the more that like teachers see you, you know, like, the more that we have conversations with you, the more trust that we can build, you know. Change is really about trust, that's at the root of it, how much do we trust each other enough to make a decision that can impact people. you know, I think as a teacher, it would also just be like, really helpful to have parents to advocate on behalf of staff in, you know, when we feel voiceless and powerless, right? Like, there are so many things that happen to teachers, and we don't really have anyone to go to. And so like, you know, that parent sending that email and organizing, right, it'll make a difference. We shouldn't doubt the power of the PTA, you know? Yeah, like, like, we cannot doubt the power of the PTA. So as long as there is like, a lateral system of leadership in our schools, right, folks on the ground have to be organized, to, you know, create a system of checks and balances. So, you know, organize it, you know, and, and, and, you know, send that email check on that teacher, you know, what I'm saying, and engage with the content in the work, you know. One of my, some of my favorite emails to read are from parents who say, "Hey, you know, I talked to my kid about what you were learning, and it connects with me in this way." You know, show up and share your expertise, whether it's juggling, whether it's, you know, climate change, whether it's like anything, you know, like, we we want to build those partnerships with parents and caregivers. And I think that we can both do a better job on both sides to just open the lane for more dialogue.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 42:23

Yes, and I love what you said about organizing, because I think parents don't see that they already have so many of the skills they need to help make the change. Like I think they think, "Oh, when I, if I read this, or if I could achieve this..." but I'm like, "Look at what you do every day with your family, like you have what it takes."

42:41

Yes, you do. You You really do. Right. Like and your kids love you, you know, like, they love you as a parent. And they love us too. You know, and like kids want to see us talking and working together and, and vibing and like, doing all those things, and all you have to do is be yourself. But I understand why, you know, some parents and caregivers are, are hesitant, you know, and that's because schools are traumatizing, you know? And they're not always the most welcoming place for parents, you know. And I think that that has to also be addressed. There are some healing conversations that need to happen to let parents know, "Yo, this is your space. This is your school, too. And like what do you want to see? What do we need to do? What time of day should we be having these programs?" You know what I'm saying? Like, the more shared decision making that we can have, like the more parent involvement and caregiver involvement we like we'll have in our school. So yah, yah, you already got the tools. You know what I'm saying? Like, it's just about speaking up, you know, we're ready to listen.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 43:55

Yes, yes. Okay. So I want you to imagine somebody is like at the library. They just pulled you

yes, yes. Okay. So I want you to imagine somebody is like at the library. They just pulled your book off the shelf, and they're trying to decide whether or not they're going to take it home. Mm hmm. What is one thing that you would tell them about the book?

P

Patrick Harris 44:11

Oh, my goodness. It's visual, it's deeply visual. Ah, y'all gotta know, like, it's not just like a hardcover book of words. But it is a work of art. You know, there are maps in the book, there are full page photos and spreads. There are...

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 44:33

Your tweets are in there!

i

44:34

My tweets are in there! Right? Like, the book is an experience it's not your normal typical book. It's square, y'all. The book is square. And so I knew when I created this book that I wanted it to be deeply visual. I was trying to compete with Instagram. You know, I don't want folks to have to take a social media break. When you're reading my book, because there are so many different elements to grab onto. And so I know that you are going to be deeply engaged in this book just by flipping through it, because it's so beautiful. It's deeply visual it's deeply engaging. And I'm telling you, you're going to go on an emotional roller coaster. If you like bingeing shows on Netflix, you're gonna love "The First Five: A Love Letter to Teachers" whether you're a teacher or not. It's been so much fun hearing feedback from people who are like, not even in education at all. Like it's like, they're like, they're like, "We're learning so much" or like, "We cracked up hearing this." And so whether you get the audio book or the actual physical book, you're going to be engaged in an experience.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 45:43

Yes, yes, yes. Okay, everybody's gotta go get it. So tell them, where do they find your book, "The First Five: A Love Letter to Teachers" and where do they find you?

P

Patrick Harris 45:52

Oh, my gosh. So you can find my book anywhere you purchase books online. You know, you can go to heinemann.com and you can purchase it directly from the publisher. If you're into third party sites like Barnes and Noble the book is also there as well. Request it at your local bookshop, though too and they will gladly order it for you if it's not already there. You can follow me on all social media, @presidentpat, on Instagram and on Twitter is where I'm most active. And then if you want to learn more about me, and, you know, what I've been through, and my journey and all my other things where you want to get in contact with me, you can head to my website, www.itspatrickharris.com.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 46:41

Yes. And let me tell you, your Instagram stories, I live for them. The singing? I was like telling my dad, I was going to interview you. And I'm like, "You think he'll sing a little bit?"

46:51

Oh, you want me to sing? Listen, the thing that I have learned most from this book is that the journey that you were on, it's just not in vain. You know? I five, six schools in six years, let's be clear. Six schools in six years, public, private, charter, tuition-free, private, tuition-based, private, international, the richest of the rich, beneath the poverty line, overseas, Detroit, DC, you know, and like this Clark Sisters song just always pops up in my head and they say. "Is my livin' in vain? Is my givin' vain? Is my prayin vain? No, of course not. It's not all in vain. Because up the road is eternal gain." You know, so they say that?

J Jasmine Bradshaw 47:55

Oh, my gosh.

P Patrick Harris 48:00

You know, "because up the road is eternal gain." You know, the core of the book is reflection, the more that we reflect on our experiences and what we have, the better decisions that we can make for tomorrow. And I am just grateful for this opportunity. So thank you.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 48:17

Well, thank you for this book. It was so healing for me. It really was. And it really is a work of art. And thank you for coming on the podcast, taking the time. I'm just so grateful.

P Patrick Harris 48:28

I am a fan. So thank you. And I can't wait, you know, until we can have lunch.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 48:35

Oh, okay! Manifesting it.

P Patrick Harris 48:37

Manifesting it.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 48:38

Can you even believe that he sang for us? Can you believe that he sang for us? Y'all. This really feels like a full circle moment for me. Because when I started listening to Patrick and Antonia as podcasts, when I started following him on Instagram, and seeing all that he was creating, it was so inspiring to me. I needed his example and his leadership. I don't know if First Name Basis would be here without people like Patrick, without people like Antonia and I've shared with you how influential Britt Hawthorne, another anti-racist educator, has been on my journey. So being able to interview him just felt like, I don't know, like we made it, y'all! We made it. I'm just so grateful that you're here. I'm so grateful for Patrick and the time he took for this interview and that he would sing for us and leave us with such an important message of hope. I love you all and I'll talk to you soon. My friends, thank you for being here. I hope you can feel how much I believe in you, and how deeply I know that when we work together, we can make real change in our communities. Any of the books, podcasts, or articles that I reference will be linked in the show notes. If you are looking for more detailed notes, be sure to head over to our Patreon community. On our Patreon site. I provide all of the outlines that I use to make the episodes and everything is linked there. So you don't have to take furious notes while you are listening. And don't forget to join us over on Instagram at [firstname.basis](https://www.instagram.com/firstname.basis). If you're interested in partnering with First Name Basis or doing some kind of collaboration, please email us at hello@firstnamebasis.org. All right, have a great week my friends, and I will talk to you again soon.